



The precious CD you are holding in your hands is a selection of recordings from Munajat Yulchieva, a singer who reached a world fame out of her native Uzbekistan thanks to her many qualities: among all the constant inspired intensity of her interpretation and the rich, dark, timbre of her *mezzo-soprano* voice that you will appreciate in a while, undoubtedly falling under the spell of the diva.

The repertoire of this CD is mostly made of traditional classical music (*maqom*) except four modern compositions, three by Munajat master and mentor Shavkat Mirzaev and one by singer, musician and composer Jo'raxon Sultonov (1903-1965).

The musicians that accompany Munajat in this selection of recordings made between 2006 and 2011 are undoubtedly the best *maqom* soloists of nowadays Uzbekistan, among all the late Turgun Alimatov (1922-2008), so, dear listener, You've made a very good choice and we wish you a nice musical journey with the possible aid of the following road-signs.



Maqām music

Uzbek music is the result of a long cultural process that took place in Central Asia, an area that through millennia was a crossroads of peoples, traditions and cultures: if nowadays we tend to consider Central Asia as composed by the modern five former Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, yet, culturally, such an area comprehend the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Western Iran.

Musically, after the spreading of Islam, such a vast area was deeply influenced by the Arab/Persian/Ottoman music globally called *maqām*, heirs of Greek-Hellenistic and Byzantine musical knowledge. In its local variations, the same Arabic term *maqām* became *mugham* in Persian, Azeri and Armenian; *maqām* in Ottoman (*osmanlı*) and *makām* in Modern Turkish; *maqom*, in Central Asia; and *muqam* among the Uighurs in modern Xinjiang. All of these classical music traditions share many common features (the names of the modes, theoretical foundations, forms, genres, and instruments) that date back to the so-called golden age of Islamic music, which arose in Damascus and Baghdad and spans a period of time from the 7th to the 12th century. Yet, although sharing common roots, the individual traditions then developed in independent, different ways.

Out of musicology, a sociological approach may be useful: the term *maqām* defines the various "art" or "classical" music traditions that developed amongst the courts, the Dervish centres and the homes of music lovers in a geo-cultural space that went from Andalusia to Western China.

The term *maqām* and its implications

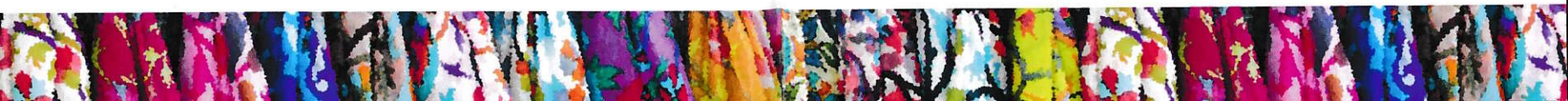
The term *maqām* is generally translated as “musical mode” with its musicological implications of “modal order” and therefore of “hierarchy of pitches”. Therefore, with Kudsi Erguner, a possible definition of *maqām* is that of a melodic journey on a musical scale made up of intervals that have precise ratios and that respect a well-defined internal hierarchy. Yet, another important meaning of *maqām*, immanent already in the so-called golden age of Islamic music, assumed a crucial importance in Central Asia and is that of a “cyclical form”, of a “suite”: single pieces with different forms and rhythms are ordered in large suites, grouped together according to a single standard musical mode (*maqām*). In this sense in Central Asia the term *maqom* means at the same time both the musical mode and the suite. As we will see, internally each suite (or “cyclical form”) is then subdivided in some sections, instrumental or vocal, varying the rhythm.

As many other non Western modal music, *maqām* is “microtonal”, and is thus based on different intervals, both smaller and larger than traditional Western classical music with its tones and semitones that have been equally tempered since the first half of the 18th century; “monophonic”, i.e. with a single melodic line and no simultaneous superimpositions of other sounds of different pitches (chords), thus the resultant Western concept of harmony does not exist in *maqām* music; “heterophonic”, the single melodic line is performed by several different instruments which play in unison. Last but not least, apart some unmetered, free-rhythm episodes *maqām* music is based on various and complex “rhythmic cycles” which are isochronous and most of the time beaten on a percussion instrument.

The *maqom* in Central Asia

Through time, in Central Asia developed a corpus of long suites among the courts and cultural centres of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Qoqand, Kashgar, which basically was the central Silk Road route going from West to East, from the Mediterranean to China and Japan. In the global net of Silk Road trade routes we would like to remember also the musical cases of the *Sufyana Kalam* of Kashmir and of the court suites that developed in Herat in Timurid times leading to the formation of the suites divided in instrumental *naghma-ye kashal* and vocal *gazal* in 19th century Kabul. Each one of the above quoted long suites, if presented integrally, should last for hours so that everywhere for performance purposes musicians made a selection from a given suite, such as it happens here in tracks 1, 7, 8 and 11.

The tradition that developed among khanates of Bukhara and Samarkand is globally called *shash maqom* (“Six Suites”). Among the courts of Khwarezm developed a variant called *altiyarim maqom* (“Six-and-half *maqom*”) while in the Fergana valley, between Qoqand and Andijon, developed a variant called *chahor maqom* (“Four *maqom*”). Going to East, among Uighurs, in centres like Kashgar and Yarkend, in nowadays Chinese Xinjiang, developed a great corpus called *onikki muqam* (“Twelve *muqam*”) that the curious listener can appreciate in another beautiful CD published by Felmay label: Sanubar Tursun, *Arzu. Songs of the Uyghurs* (fy 8205).



Uzbek-Tajik *shash maqom*

The very peculiar Uzbek-Tajik tradition that developed among khanates of Bukhara and Samarkand is called *shash maqom* ("Six Suites"). Each suite begins with a first and strictly instrumental section called *mushkilot* ("difficulties") composed on different rhythmic cycles. A second vocal and instrumental section follows this purely instrumental section, and is called *nasr*. Such a long vocal section is subdivided in some sections called *shu'ba*:

- The first section (*shu'ba*), composed in a "high" and classical style, is the heart of the *maqom* itself and comprehends the most difficult pieces *sarakhbor* and *nasrin* rhythmic cycles *talqin* and *ufar*. The repertoire of our CD comes mostly from here.
- The second section (*shu'ba*) is made by a lighter repertoire made by vocal pieces called *savt* and *mugultcha*.

As it happens in Johann Sebastian Bach suites, a Central Asian *maqom* is generally closed by this section made by lighter and dance-beat tunes.

Gazal

The same observations made above about the musical Arab/Persian background of *maqom* can be applied to the texts that are sung here by Munajat, mostly composed in *gazal* form by Middle Age poets of Persian and Turkish Chagatai language. *Gazal* is an original Arabic/Persian poetic form in ten/twelve distiches, composed according to the rules of the classical metre called *arûz*, and is a genre at the same time poetic and musical, born-to-be-sung, diffused in all the vast Persian language culture area that stretches from

Persia to Afghanistan, North-western India, Ottoman empire lands, Central Asia and among Uighurs. A *gazal* is of erotic argument, describing the pains and joys of love, but, under the influence of Sufism (*tasawwuf*), such love poems became metaphors of the divine love ('*ishq*) and the longing of the lover for the Beloved thanks to a net of poetical metaphors (the cypress, the rose, the wine, the nightingale and so on). In particular, the *gazals* of erotic/mystic argument lies at the core of the Central Asian vocal *maqom* and, at the same time, they are the best example of Central Asian spirituality. In this sense, there are no words apt to describe Munajat the deep and spiritual interpretations of the texts.

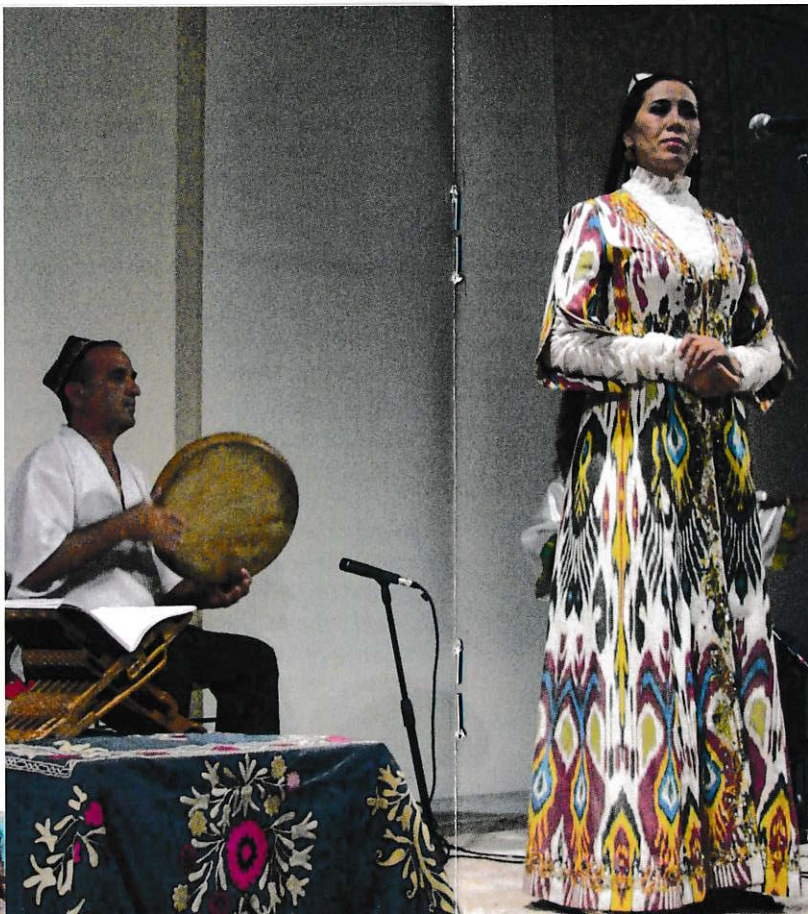
Monajat and Shavkat

Born in 1960 in the village of Sherman Bulak in Andijan district, Fergana Valley, at the East end of Uzbekistan, Munajat studied at the Tashkent State Conservatory from 1978 to 1985 under the guidance of *maestro* Shavkat Mirzaev, who since the first time was touched by the timbre of that strange young voice that remembered him the great Sufi singers of the past. Shavkat made her study the great works of traditional classical *shashmaqom* rather neglected these days, asking her to avoid performances at weddings (*toys*), a well known and well paid custom for musicians in Uzbekistan. In order to develop her style of singing, Shavkat combined the traditional singing techniques, with their nose, head and throat vocal emissions called *guligi* and *biligi*, with Western operatic singing techniques. At the same time, he carefully introduced songs from the simpler to the more difficult, developing her voice from the central to the peripheral and most powerful areas of her *tessitura*,



as the listener would appreciate during the *arwj* phases. Finally, all famous Sufi songs were included in the repertoire that made her and her master famous all over the world.

Her particular repertoire is made by the best examples of *shash maqom* music composed by Uzbek composers (*bastakors*) of traditional style. Thanks to her *mezzo soprano* voice stretching to two octaves and a half, and to the firm artistic direction of Shavkat Mirzaev, Munajat not only revived female well-known songs, but for the first time she performed many male songs. Her repertoire include music composed on Sufi inspired verses from poets as Alisher Navoi (XV), Fuzuli (XVI), Mashrab (d. 1711) and Huvaïdo (XVIII). It seems important to note that the time, this repertoire choice, instead of popular modern Uzbek poetry flattering Soviet ideology, was



rather significant: according to musicologist Razia Sultanova, the focus on Sufi music in her repertoire was crucially important for the Uzbek audience in the 1970.

After a remarkable 1978 concert on TV, she continued her career by avoiding weddings while performing uniquely for academic occasions and classical Festivals. She then sang with *Ensemble Maqam* at Uzbek Radio from 1980 to 1982 and later with the Uzbek State Philharmonic Ensemble. After the fall of USSR around 1991, she gained a great fame out of her native Uzbekistan, touring abroad in the USA, in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Her recordings for European labels as French Ocora-Radio France (*Ouzbékistan: Monajat Yulchieva*) and German Network (*Munadjat Yulchieva and Ensemble Shavkat Mirzaev: A Haunting Voice*) reinforced such a success. She was then rewarded as “Honoured Artist of Uzbekistan” (1991), and “People’s Artist of Uzbekistan” (1994). During her performing career she won many first prizes as 1997 “Golden Nightingale” at Samarkand International Festival *Sharq Taronalari* but her path is far from being over.

Instruments

tanbur (long necked lute). The term can refer to various long-necked lutes throughout the world of Islamic music. Uzbek/Tajik *tanbur* has four metal strings that run over a small loose bridge to a bit of wood at the edge of the body. It is always played with a wire plectrum on the index-finger.

sato (fiddle). The *sato* is a bowed *tanbur* (see above) played by performers of Central Asian classical and folk music. The great Uzbek musician Turgun Alimatov (1922-2008), that You can listen throughout the recording, revived the art of the *sato*, as it had completely disappeared for a number of centuries before he took it up in 1957.

ghijjak (fiddle). The *ghijjak* is a spike fiddle with a bowl soundbox similar to Iranian *kamancheh*. Nowadays it is often replaced by European violin positioned upright.

dutor (long necked lute). As its Persian name implies, it's a two stringed long necked lute, strummed in Uzbek/Tajik technique, while plucked by Uighurs.



qonun (plucked zither). The *qanūn* is a large plucked zither played in and around the vast Middle East that arrived in Central Asia with Islam. No particular variant in Uzbek *qonun*, except its pronunciation.

chang (hammered zither). This instrument is better known elsewhere as *santūr*, but in Central Asia it is used the ancient Turkish term *çeng*, curiously close, through Silk Road, to Chinese terms for analogues zithers as the (*gu*)*zheng*.

qoshnay (single reed aerophone with two pipes). An instrument of the Arab *zamar* family mostly used in Folk music that was elevated to classical music repertoire: with its six holes it can play all the micro-intervallic nuances as the flute *nay*, giving a particular touch and timber to *shash maqom*; it's played here by its most famous interpret.

rubob (lute) *Rabab* is a complex term, designating a fiddle in Middle Orient and a plucked lute in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The Uzbek version is a long necked lute plucked and rather recently fretted, as is the "Kashgar *rubob*" variant played here by director Shavkat Mirzaev.

doira (frame drum). The *doira* is a round frame-drum. A membrane is stretched over a wooden hoop-shaped frame to form the body. On the inner face of the hoop are anything from 40 to 100 steel rings which make a variety of percussive rattles.

nay (transverse flute). The term *nay* is used for a great variety of the very ancient end-blown flutes of the vast world of *maqam*: the Central Asian version, made of wood, is radically different because it is played transversally, maybe by virtue of neighbours instruments as Indian *bansūrī*.

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The single tracks

1. **Chorgoh** – traditional; gazal by Nodira

The beautiful and deep tone of *sato* played by Turgun Alimatov introduce a traditional and anonym vocal tune extracted from the small song suite that represents the cultivated vocal tradition of Fergana valley. The composition in *maqom chorgoh* is marked by a very slow 4/4 marked by the typical and very essential *bum-takon* the *doyra*. The intense voice slowly and dramatically ascends on the text of a *gazal* by Nodira, a nom de plume (*taxallus*) of the Fergana poet Mohlaroyim (Мохларойим) (Andijon, 1792, - Qoqand, 1842) a famous poet and stateswoman. Yet, other sources attribute the text to Persian poet Hāfez of Shiraz (d. 1389) translated in Uzbek. The ensemble answers with instrumental refrains marked by the timber of the *qoshnay*.

2. **Etishdi** – music by Shavkat Mirzaev; gazal by Hofiz Khorazmiy

A more lively and modern tune composed by Shavkat Mirzaev. The instrumental sections are marked by the blending of *qoshnay*, *nay* and *ghijjak* over the clinging sound of *chang*. The voice of Munojot begins from the lowest note of her *tessitura* and slowly and dramatically ascends taking the listener with her on the text of a *gazal* composed by XV century poet in *turkî* language from Khwarezm, who took the pen name (*taxallus*) of Hāfez with the avowed aim of producing *turkî* verses equivalents to the poetry of the great XIV century Persian classic poet.

3. **Qayondur** – music by Shavkat Mirzaev; gazal by Miskin

The ensemble begins by playing a section on a lively rhythmic cycle. The intense voice slowly and dramatically ascends on the text of a *gazal* by Miskin, a pen name (*taxallus*) of the famous Uzbek/Chagatai poet Shair Miskin (1880-1937). The ensemble answers with instrumental refrains in which we taste the beautiful heterophony of the ensemble marked by the voice of *qoshnay*.

4. **Nihon Etdi** – music by Shavkat Mirzaev; gazal by Uvaysiy

The bowed *sato* played by Turgun Alimatov introduce the melody over a 8/8 rhythmic cycle (*dumteketekdumtek*). Munajat enter singing verses by poet Jahon Otin written under his famous pen name “Uvaysiy” (? 1780—Margilon, 1845).

5. **Kim desun** – traditional; gazal by Muqimiy

The fiddle *ghijjak* leads the instrumental ensemble and introduces the melody sung by Munojot on the verses of poet Muhammad Aminxo'ja better known with his pen name Muqimiy (Qoqand, 1850-1903).

6. **Naylayin** - music by Jo'raxon Sultonov; gazal by S. Abdulla

A modern composition by Jo'raxon Sultonov (1903-1965) that became a classic, interpreted by many famous traditional singers like, for instance, Jurabek Nabiev. The verses singing “What Should I Do?” are credited here to S. Abdulla, while others sources consider the poet as Fuzuliy (1483-1556) or as Alisher Navoiy (1441-1501). Be that as it may, Munajat dramatically sings such verses here over the delicate, intimate duo composed only by lutes *rubab* and *dutor*, considered over the centuries as the core itself of *shashmaqom*.

7. **Nim cho`poni** - from the modal suite in maqom Segoh of the *shashmaqom* repertoire; gazal by Alishir Navoiy

Nimcho`poni is an anonym vocal composition on the verses of poet Alisher Navoiy (Herat, 1441-1501). The composition is extracted as a gem from the traditional long suite in mode *segoh* and presented here as a selected tune. As often happens throughout this CD Munajat slowly ascends toward the *awj* side by side with the fiddle *ghijak* that lead the ensemble over a lively rhythmic cycle.

8. **Musta`zodi navo qashqarchasi** - from the modal suite in maqom Navoof the *shash maqom* repertoire; gazal by Fuzuliy

The synthetic title indicates a particular vocal form called *mustazod* composed on the lively and fascinating rhythmic cycle called *qashqarcha* extracted from the long modal suite in mode (*maqom*) *navo*. The XVI century poet Fuzuliy is credited here as the author of the text. The whole ensemble in its heterophonic splendour, with *ghijak*, *nay* and *qoshnay* in front, introduces and comments with refrains Munajot singing.

9. **Ul kim jono** – Kattaashula; murabba by Muqimiy

This beautiful tune is an exception in a record all devoted to Classical music: the term *katta ashula* ("big composition") refers to a free-rhythm, unmetered Folk genre that became a semi classical genre. As You may listen, there is no rhythm here and Munajat voice stretches freely with *tanbur rubato* arpeggios over the drone made by *nay* and *ghijak*. The verses come from quatrains (*murabba*) composed by poet Muhammad Aminxo`ja better known with his pen name Muqimiy (Qoqand, 1850-1903).

10. **G`uncha yanglig`** - traditional music; gazal by Hamid Olimjon

This lively and Anonymous traditional tune is based on the modern verses of a gazal composed by Hamid Olimjon (ХАМИДОЛИМЖОН, 1909-1944). This time the ensemble is led by the wooden transverse flute *nay* and lute *tanbur*, Munajot superb voice slowly ascends to the powerful climax (*âwj*).

11. **Sarahbori Dugoh** - from the modal suite in maqom Dugoh of the *shash maqom* repertoire; gazal by A. Navoi

A beautiful and touching blend of transverse flute *nay* and fiddle *ghijak* on the rhythmic cycle marked by the *doira* introduce this well known and beautiful classic from the corpus of the modal suite in *maqom dugoh*. The *sarakhbor* is an introductive vocal piece out of the first section (*shu`ba*) of a *shashmaqom* suite composed in a "high" and classical style. The verses from a gazal composed by the great Persian and Chagatai language poet Alisher Navoiy (Herat, 1441-1501) reinforce such a "high" and classic style of the composition.

Giovanni De Zorzi,
University of Venice

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Munojat Yulcheva

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Elisabetta Sermenghi

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Giovanni de Zorzi

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Marzia Ardissono

