

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE TODAY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN

An IETM Publication



By Simon Tordjman

November 2005

Updated version February 2007

IETM (International network for contemporary performing arts – www.ietm.org) is a membership organisation which exists to stimulate the quality, development and contexts of contemporary performing arts in a global environment, by initiating and facilitating professional networking and communication, the dynamic exchange of information, know-how transfer and presentations of examples of good practice.

In collaboration with  **ACTED**

and [Central Asian Initiatives](#)
Coordinator: Florent Le Duc

With the support of the Arts & Culture Network Programme of



You may use and quote this document as long as the source and author are credited.

IETM*

international network for contemporary performing arts
réseau international pour le spectacle vivant

Central Asian Project coordinator : Michel Quéré

IETM - 19 Square Sainctelette, B – 1000 Brussels - Belgium
Tel: +32 2 201 0915 Fax: +32 2 203 0226 - Email: ietm@ietm.org
Websites: www.ietm.org and www.on-the-move.org

*Informal European Theatre Meeting

An introduction to Theatre today in Afghanistan and Central Asia

Central Asia : between openness and isolation

Situated at the crossroads of the Silk Road between East and West, the Central Asian countries have long been home to people representing a wide variety of cultures. Central Asia is a unique cultural area that has long witnessed encounters between ancient civilizations and cultures and where many religions and beliefs, tangible and intangible heritages and sedentary and nomadic people continue to intermingle.

In its contemporary history, the Soviet Period had a great impact on the cultural life of the region. Following the breakdown of the USSR and the Soviet Central Asian Republics' access to independence, cultural and artistic events were considered as the medium of independent national policies. This "rebirth" of national cultural identities was a way to counter the process of 'Sovietisation' which had greatly influenced the cultural landscape, and served as a basis for the affirmation of successful independence. Thus, the main orientation of artistic creation manifested itself in the valorisation of indigenous historical figures and symbols. However, ironically, in their quest for a new national consciousness, these artists inadvertently followed the path of the former regime: actors, directors, musicians and composers were restrained by the weight of their own histories, still paying homage to the past and thus, without real freedom of expression

Consequently, the drive for independence led to a type of cultural isolation which was intensified by the geographical seclusion of many parts of the region as well as political rivalries created by differences in power between neighbouring countries. Despite close cultural ties and influences (such as a common linguistic and historical heritage), the barriers between the different countries result largely from general mistrust, played out along political and religious lines, as well as differing mentalities, resulting from 70 years of separated histories due to the imposition of arbitrary borders. The weight of their double histories becomes, thus, an aggravating element of isolation shaped by Soviet influence as well as the traditional cultural heritage.

IETM and Central Asia

Due to its mission and its responsibility as a large, representative network, IETM feels it is important to pro-actively facilitate professional meeting and the productive exchange of professionals between IETM member-organisations in Europe and those in its priority countries. In May 2004, with the support of the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the help of the French Embassy, IETM organised the First Central Asian / European Theatre Forum in Tashkent. This meeting was conceived as the first of a series of international forums, aiming at bridging Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and Europe.

In 2005 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, collaboration with OSI brought a new partnership with ACTED/Bactria Cultural Center. The second Central Asian Theatre Meeting, which embodies the result of this partnership, focused on the protection of freedom of expression, media and human rights, and the promotion of regional cultural

networks and regional dialogue. In June 2006, the third Central Asian Theatre Meeting took place in Bishkek, thanks to the support of many international and local partners. This gathering brought together more than 50 theatre experts and professionals from Europe and Central Asia who discussed the most prominent issues which concern the theatre situation in Central Asia, such as: **cultural diversity and theatres in Europe and Central Asia, arts management and cultural policy, and experiences and perspectives of networking in the sphere of culture and arts in Central Asia.**

An introduction to Theatre today in Central Asia and Afghanistan

The *Introduction to Theatre today in Central Asia and Afghanistan* results from the common desire of both European and Central Asian professionals to have a more precise overview of theatre activity in the region. It aims at laying the foundations of a network connecting cultural operators from Central Asia and its neighbours (Afghanistan and Iran) with other parts of the world.

However, building such a platform for professional dialogue and exchange between performing arts professionals in these regions is a long-term process. To that end, the *Introduction to Theatre today in Central Asia and Afghanistan* aims at improving knowledge on the European side about Central Asia and hopes also to strengthen cultural connections between Central Asian countries. Given that such knowledge is in perpetual evolution, this handbook is only a starting point, which will highly benefit from all the contributions its readers might add to it.

All the organisers of the event want to express their sincere gratitude to:

Open Society Institute Budapest – Arts & Culture Network Program

ACTED (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development)

HIVOS

Open Society Institute in Tajikistan

The British Council in Tashkent and Kabul

The European Commission office in Dushanbe

The Foundation for Culture and Civil Society in Kabul

The French Embassy in Tashkent

The German Embassy in Dushanbe

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Dushanbe & Bishkek

UNESCO – Division for Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue

Ildar Mukhtarov, Kamaritddin Artykov, and Hussein Zadeh for their contribution to this publication.

Simon Tordjman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of discussions held in the second regional theatre meeting (Dushanbe - Tajikistan- September 2005)	6
Summary of discussions held in the third regional theatre forum (Bishkek – Kyrgyzstan - June 2006)	11
AFGHANISTAN	14
COUNTRY PROFILE	14
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION	15
CULTURAL PROFILE :	16
AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE IN AFGHANISTAN (PR. MOHAMMAD HUSSAIN ZADEH)	18
INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INITIATIVES	20
THEATRES IN AFGHANISTAN	20
IN AFGHANISTAN, COMEDIANS JOKE THEIR WAY TO CIVIC RENEWAL (LANE HARTILL)	22
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THEATRE PROJECTS	25
KAZAKHSTAN	27
COUNTRY PROFILE	27
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION	28
KAZAKHSTAN CULTURAL PROFILE	29
INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INITIATIVES	30
THEATRES IN ALMATY	31
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS DEALING WITH THEATRE PROJECTS	33
KYRGYZSTAN	34
COUNTRY PROFILE	34
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION	35
KYRGYZSTAN CULTURAL PROFILE	36
INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INITIATIVES	38
THEATRES IN KYRGYZSTAN	38
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THEATRE PROJECTS	40
TAJIKISTAN	41
COUNTRY PROFILE	41
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION	42
TAJIKISTAN CULTURAL PROFILE	43
INTERVIEW WITH BARZU ABDURAZZAKOV (STAGE DIRECTOR, SEPT. 2005)	44
INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INITIATIVES	45
THEATRES IN TAJIKISTAN	46
TAJIK THEATRES ON THE ROAD	49
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THEATRE PROJECTS	51
TURKMENISTAN	53
COUNTRY PROFILE	53
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION	54
THEATRES IN TURKMENISTAN	55
UZBEKISTAN	57
COUNTRY PROFILE	57
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION	58
A SMALL HISTORY OF THEATRE IN UZBEKISTAN	59
INTERVIEW WITH MARK WEIL (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE <i>ILKHOM</i> THEATRE, SEPT. 2005)	60
INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INITIATIVES	62

A SMALL THEATRE IN AN ANCIENT TOWN: A HISTORY OF THEATRE IN KARCHI (ILDAR MUKHTAROV)	63
WOMAN IN THE UZBEK THEATRE (ILDAR MUKHTAROV)	66
METAMORPHOSES OF THE CLASSIC IN THEATRE (ILDAR MUKHTAROV)	68
SOME THEATRES IN UZBEKISTAN	71
UZBEK THEATRES ON THE ROAD	76
INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN THEATRE PROJECTS	78
Updating information: Central Asia on the Web	79

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS HELD IN THE SECOND REGIONAL THEATRE MEETING (DUSHANBE - TAJIKISTAN- SEPTEMBER 2005)

Mobility and networking

In the discussion on mobility and networking, participants concluded that the meeting was a step forward in the creation of a Central Asian performing arts network. Participants insisted on the necessity to strengthen exchange and solidarity between art professionals in Central Asia through networking and mobility.

On the first day of the meeting, discussing mobility and networking led to the question of the aims of exchange itself. The exchange of skills and experiences is not sufficient by itself alone to justify networking in Central Asia. The issue raised by the Central Asian participants fundamentally concerns the means and the meaning of theatre in Central Asia, which can be related to the issue of relationships between artists and social and political actors.

According to most of Tajik participants, the development of theatre in their country involves not only artists but young businessmen and diplomatic organisations. It was notable that Ministries of Culture of the participating countries were almost never evoked during the discussions. And often, artists spoke about the support they received from diplomatic and foreign institutions, instead of national public institutions, for the realisation of their projects. The concept of mobility and networking thus must be understood in the framework of the difficulties Central Asian theatres face. The conceptual difference between mobility, networking and fund-raising appeared not to be so clear in this part of the world.

However, isolation of individual theatres in Central Asia (region, nation, and worldwide) is obviously the reality. For Mark Weil (Uzbekistan) or Ovyakuli Hodjakuliev (Turkmenistan), this Forum was the first occasion to come back to Tajikistan since the collapse of the USSR. And the former Soviet theatres' organisation constituted a kind of landmark in most of the (formal and informal) discussions. As far as mobility among theatres in Central Asia is concerned, participants still seem to consider a network as a pyramidal structure, referring to this former institution, Soviet Theatre, which was in charge of the mobility of theatre professionals within (and without, for some of them) the territory of the former Soviet Union. Very few of participants explicitly distinguished the philosophy of Western networks such as ITI (International Theatre Institute/UNESCO: <http://www.iti-worldwide.org/>) or IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting: www.ietm.org) from the ambition of the former Soviet structure.

Today, the only way for Central Asian theatres to maintain relations is through the Confederation of Theatres of CIS countries (more a virtual structure than an organisation which gives concrete results) or the Moscow Chekhov Festival which provides opportunities to perform in a huge city in a language understood by the audience. The Central Academy of Arts based in Bishkek also provides a great support devoted to the setting up of a performing arts network in Central Asia.

Paradoxically, the artists who have already travelled and worked abroad

embraced a more self-aware view than the ones who insisted on the financial needs of their theatres and the crucial role of foreign organisations in the cultural life of their country. Nurlan Aranbekov (Kyrgyzstan), was recently back from a workshop in Chicago. When he spoke about this experience, he did not magnify the West at all and only insisted on the lesson he learned from it, "The future of theatre in Central Asia depends only on ourselves (...) and on the action of our ministries of culture". Mark Weil, the artistic director of the *Ilkhom* theatre which is the most famous Central Asian theatre worldwide, also says that the main problem the Central Asian theatre faces, concerns inspiration and artistic work, much more than financial support.

Education for artists and cultural operators

This discussion raised the question of educational structures in the new Central Asian Republics, after the fall of the Soviet network that favoured the mobility and the touring of theatres in the former Soviet Union. Behind the problem of education of artists, many participants highlighted the issue of work opportunities for artists after their education: "Education is one point. But what after?"

As with other discussion themes, as far as the education for young actors and theatre managers is concerned, the current situation in Afghanistan seems to be quite particular. Since there is no tradition of professional theatre, Timor Hakimyar from the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society based in Kabul highlighted the necessity for young Afghans to be trained by foreign specialists. The question in Afghanistan is not to support a theatre scene damaged by the wars but to lay the foundations for the emergence of a professional performing arts sphere in Afghanistan, taking into account the lack of efficient public structures.

Sultan Usmonov, a Tajik stage director, stressed the gap between the current cultural isolation of Central Asia and what it used to be in the region. For instance, Tajik theatre achieved its professional aspects only due to foreign influences (notably from Russia and from Germany). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the new generation of actors lost the opportunity to benefit from high-level education and from the possibility to travelled within the Union. According to him, the question of actors' education is also linked to the status of theatres: "Misunderstanding can occur between a director and actors who were trained in different places. When I came to my theatre, there weren't any actors. So the theatre-studio trained them and now, we have a real united band in our theatre. We need to educate actors within the theatres to avoid misunderstanding. (...) There is no Academy of Arts here good enough to prepare actors"¹.

The question of the relationship between artistic structures and public institutions is also a big issue in Iran. The Iranian actor who attended the meeting underlined that "theatre in Iran is completely run by the government so that many actors don't even have the opportunity to use their power". He focused his intervention on the lack of buildings and sufficient public support from the authorities. Nevertheless, according to him, education in Iran is going quite well, not facing any kind of censorship from the government.

¹ To have an overview of the situation in Uzbekistan, see: <http://www.culture.uzsci.net/theatre/ttxi/ttxi.html>.

According to Almash Naizabekova, in Kyrgyzstan, many actors decided to leave theatres, notably because of the bad reputation of theatre work. She also expressed concern about the lack of interest that the former Ministry of Culture showed toward theatre, and the repercussions of such an attitude on the current theatre field: today, artistic workshops can be held only thanks to the support given by international organisations. However, she regarded the political changes in Kyrgyzstan as a great opportunity for the development of professional theatres.

The situation is much less optimistic in Tajikistan. A young actor who attended the meeting expressed the difficulties he faces in his day-to-day life as an actor. And like many other artists, he has to get a second job to earn money. According to him, such financial problems prevent him from focusing on theatrical issues and constitute the main obstacles to the creation of high-quality performances.

All the theatre experts who attended the meeting underlined the decreasing number of students entering the Arts Institutes. And, as Sultan Usmanov pointed out, such a situation seems to be linked to the whole social system and the lack of clear professional perspectives for the new generation.

The power of tradition & new tendencies

“The question is not to keep traditions but to keep modernity and theatre (...). An open-minded artist cannot only live through old legends and folk songs.”

Mark Weil, Artistic Director of the *Ikhom* theatre (Uzbekistan).

As an introduction, Alexander Djumaev stressed the ambivalent signification of tradition in Central-Asian countries where “everything which was yesterday – the Oriental history as well as the Soviet time - became tradition”. Moreover, the question of tradition is also linked with the meaning which the political authorities give to it. In a country like Uzbekistan, tradition is often a vague appeal for a so-called rebirth of national identity. Most of the artists underlined the fact that the only tradition which can make sense in the theatre sector consists of honesty and humanity. And even if most performances that were presented during the Forum were based upon traditional epic stories, such a manner of speaking about tradition in Central Asia embodies a change in the way artists consider themselves.

In the first days following the independence of the Central Asian States, separation from the Soviet age became the most important goal of political authority. Although the Soviet ideology supposed Art to combine the European tradition with “national” identity, today each national culture only focuses on distinguishing itself from each other. Paradoxically, using Art as a means to form a new common identity has led to a kind of “archaisation” of theatre art.

Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev pointed out that after independence, artists from Central Asia lost the direction that used to be common during the Soviet time. If the national independences raised the question “what to do now?”, such an interrogation emerged in a framework of an intellectual vacuum. But, according to him, the reason for such situation is easy to understand, “There is no Uzbek theatre”. Such an assessment which

would have been extremely controversial only five years before was unexpectedly largely accepted by the representatives of all the Central Asian countries. According to Habibullo Abdurazzakov, due to the fact that independence in Central Asia did not result from a struggle against the Russian authorities (contrary to the experience of the Baltic States), no specific oppositional culture emerged in these countries. He stated that only oppositional culture can provoke the development of specific forms. Moreover, Central Asia cannot have a specific culture; indeed, culturally speaking, Central Asia only exists as a place of passage, of coexistence between the East and the West. "Our theatre was created by the Russians and is still influenced by the European theatre". For his son Barzu Abdurazzakov, one of the best Tajik stage directors, "[Central Asian theatre professionals] are cheating themselves" in turning tradition into archaism. Zakhid, a young actor playing in Barzu's performance and attending the laboratory of young Central Asian directors (Ilkhom Theatre – Uzbekistan) underlined that "Tradition is not the point. If tradition is the result of experience, everyone has his own. What theatre should focus on is the human soul and current human problems."

The Tajik playwright Nur Tabarov considers that tradition is the wrong issue because "It existed before and it will be still with us for a long time". Timor Hakimyar (FCCS-Afghanistan) agreed with his assessment: the biggest problem the Central Asian and Afghan faces is the lack of playwrights and efficient producers. However, according to him, theatre in Afghanistan exists only as a consequence of the folk traditions of storytelling; it "needs traditions to progress".

But such a statement is linked to the question of the definition of tradition itself: Where does tradition lie? Does tradition as an identifiable entity even exist? According to Mark Weil, the terminology itself is problematic: "Which kind of link can Ibn Sino have with contemporary theatre? (...) The issue is not to keep tradition but to keep modernity of theatre. (...) An open-minded artist cannot only live through old legends and songs". Such an acknowledgment was implicitly confirmed by the majority of participants who seem to hesitate between speaking about theatre or "folk traditions".

Finally the word "tradition" seems to be used as a means of legitimacy more than a concrete concept which artists can precisely define. For instance, the Western classics were regarded as being as traditional as the old Central Asian legends. Following the standpoint Mark Weil made in an interview, the crucial issue for all the Central Asian theatres is to separate the history of the region (which constitutes the social basis of artistic creation) from political ideology its use of terms such as "tradition" or "national culture" in a nationalist perspective. "During the Soviet time, there was a maxim, 'Art lays in the people'; today I would prefer to say, 'Art should be made from and for the people'".

Independence of theatre and liberty of expression

According to Timor Hakimyar from the FCCS (Afghanistan), social pressure, which notably prevents women to become actresses, is the heaviest influence on theatrical creation in Afghanistan. Dependence on the audience was also evoked by other participants. Unexpectedly, political pressure was never mentioned as a difficulty for theatres, however some participants evoked a pernicious tendency which sees artists replace the former State censorship by a kind of auto-censorship.

Even the representatives of independent theatres did not consider the legal status of theatres as the main element of the question. Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev, who left Turkmenistan in order to maintain his liberty of artistic freedom and who now works as a freelance stage director, regards himself as a “dependent independent artist”. Mark Weil, who founded the first independent theatre in the USSR in 1973, considered that the main goal of cultural policy in Central Asia should be to keep State funded theatres alive.

For the majority of people living in Central Asia, independent theatres embody modernity and the avant-garde in artistic creation. And even if they get mostly international subsidies and grants, they are still regarded vis-à-vis their financial difficulties. Indeed, all participants linked the question of independence with the financial pressures of all theatres. According to Mark Weil, who founded the first independent theatre in the USSR, legal status is not the only question: “Today, in Uzbekistan, everybody has the right to open his own private business and theatre. The only question is about money: where to find it? (...) What we have learnt about earning money is that the dictatorship of the market is much stronger than the power of the State”. Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev summarised this idea in three words: “I’m a dependent independent director”.

Generally speaking, Western organisations seem to misunderstand the reality of theatres in the Central Asian countries. Direct political pressure on theatres seems to be over and replaced by financial or social pressures. In Afghanistan, Timor Hakimyar put social strictures, which prevent artists to tackle gender or religion issues, in the first position. According to him, culture shouldn’t wait for social improvement, “Culture, in the first place, can help solve social issues”.

However, for some of the participants, State control is still a reality. A few weeks before the Forum, Barzu Abdurazzakov decided to resign from the artistic direction of the Khodjent theatre. He made this decision as soon as “the State put its hands in the theatre [by nominating a new administrative director]”, which made him to feel like a stranger in [his] own theatre”. According to him, there is a lack of legislation protecting the right of stage directors in Central Asian countries. However, he agreed that independent theatres are not a panacea. According to Mark Weil, the improvement of the situation lies in the artists themselves who should “promote dialogue with State authorities in order to prevent the new generation from living without State theatres”.

As a conclusion, Bolot Sadybakasov, Director of the Central Asian Academy of Arts, stressed that independence is alternative and it seems to lie not on the legal level but on a linguistic one. “As long as theatres refuse to speak the same language as the audience, the crisis of theatres will go on. Theatre has to build a new kind of relationship with society” (Barzu Abdurazzakov).

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS HELD IN THE THIRD REGIONAL THEATRE FORUM (BISHKEK – KYRGYZSTAN - JUNE 2006)

Two years after the first Central Asian theatre meeting (Tashkent, 2004), the theatrical situation in Central Asia has not significantly evolved. Public theatres still lack financial support from their ministries and independent theatres suffer from the harsh economic competition among cultural institutions and entertainment industries. However, some participants mentioned few improvements about theatre life in their country: among central-asian theatre professionals, if the theatre crisis is far from being over, optimism remains.

Cultural diversity and theatres in Europe and Central Asia

Even if Central Asia is commonly referred as a whole, the differences between theatrical situations in all Central Asian countries are significant. Directly bound to the economic and political context, theatre life is threatened by the privatisation of economies, by the lack of free public space of expression and by the conformism of public theatres. Contrary to a famous misunderstanding, theatrical experiences from Central Asia suggest that art does not need the pressure of difficult conditions to exist.

Altogether Uzbekistan has 43 state theatres. However, according to Kamaridin Artykov, an independent theatre expert from Uzbekistan, there are only 1 to 3 active theatres in Uzbekistan. These active theatres operate rather informally although public official theatres would represent “dead theatre”. According to him, the major problems of Uzbek theatres are still poverty and censure: innovation is not possible, partly because theatres are expected to support state politics, so that there is a tendency to be drawn back into the past through folklore, historical themes etc. For M. Artylov, escaping from conflicts as if they did not exist kills dramaturgy: “No conflict-no dramaturgy”, he deplored. Following this assessment, Ildar Muhtarov, theatre critic from Uzbekistan, expressed that there is an urgent need for an informational/analytical journal about theatre in Central Asia. This communication The inadequacy of theatres’ mediatisation is one of the causes of the poor cultural education of new generations: Although each theatre has its own school or studio which compensates a bit for the deficiencies, the Theatre Institute does not foster high quality works in new generations.

The 52 Kazakh theatres are facing similar problems. If some improvement has been achieved by master classes held by Western teachers, there is still a need for seminars designed for theatre workers as well as for an informative journal.

In a more optimistic way, Aygul Umuralieva, from Kyrgyzstan where 22 theatres are currently operating, highlighted the revival of theatre festivals in Central Asia. However, the Theatre Workers’ Unions remain very formal organisations, and no professional theatre managers are working in the field. Theatre workers could be perceived as kind of “creative missionaries”.

Nevenka Koprivsek, the Director of Bunker Productions (Slovenia), admitted that the issues raised by Central Asian colleagues are very familiar to the Eastern European experience where there are continuous discussions about the mission of art and about

how to bring an art work in touch with audiences. She underlined the tendency in Western theatre to become multidisciplinary and highlighted mobility and networking as the main trends in European theatre culture today.

Arts management and cultural policy

Theatre management is a quite new feature in Central Asian theatres, which are often under the bureaucratic control of State agencies and ministries. However, some current experiences of inter-cultural exchanges and festivals in Kyrgyzstan, in Caucasus or in Egypt underline the necessity and the need for strengthening cultural networking both at regional and at international levels.

Among the 17 theatres in Tajikistan, 16 of them are state theatres, and only 1, the Dance Theatre “Padida” is independent. In the past years, the reconstruction process of theatres began with an equal redistribution of public funds among theatres. Such an initiative is considered as vital for the rebirth of theatre life in Tajikistan. However, it can also lead to adverse effects for theatre directors whose fate is often decided by state bureaucrats.

Anna Mele as Turkmen actor from an independent theatre group “AWARA” outlined the Turkmen theatre context characterised by a strong control of the State among theatres’ repertoires: the repertoire of all Turkmen theatres has to be approved by the state authorities before put on stage, and a final approval is needed after a piece is staged. As a consequence, the plays which received this approval are usually historical and “patriotic”.

In Kyrgyzstan, according to Almash Naizabekova, the Arts and Culture Program Coordinator of the Soros Foundation, small experimental theatres were more successful than state theatres. Such structures were among the first to introduce a new efficient tendency in theatre management: the separation of the administrative director of the theatre from the artistic director.

Pavel Rudnev, theatre critic and manager of the Centre of Meyerhold from Russia, linked the issue of theatre management with the emergence of a new generation and a new repertoire. Theatre life is getting younger and travelling theatres and one-time-performances have led to the rejuvenation of theatre life. Another tendency is dependency on the theatre director. In this regard managerial education is very important: by training managers, actors themselves do not have to become “theatre administrators”. As far as management is concerned, the issue of cultural policy is worth being raised. Currently, there is no cultural policy as such in Russia and the existing one is rather an economic policy for culture. Even if sponsorship does exist, theatre funds are mainly provided by state.

Artur Ghukasyan, President of HIGHFEST Festival from Armenia (www.highfest.net) mentioned the story of his festival, which became successful within 3 years after its launch. Apart from performances, the event also includes seminars on cultural policy and art management gathering about 25 countries. Artur Ghukasyan emphasised that for festival organisers it is essential to be a member of all available networks such as the Caucasus Art Managers Network (www.camn.net).

Accross the Meditteranean sea, in Egypt, Ahmed El Attar, play writer, producer

and director of Studio *Emad Eddin* <http://www.seefoundation.org> gave an overview about the success of networking initiatives in Middle East. In the region, ties between theatres are strengthened by linguistic and religious similarities. However, at the same time Middle East countries present many differences: Networking is not a European concept but an answer to the need for global knowledge. That's why including the young generation in every network is a fundamental condition to prevent the network from disappearing. The network should also have a strong institutional structure for securing mobility of each member.

The necessity of networking was expressed by all participants. Continuing her presentation of theatre in Slovenia, Nevenka Koprivsek underlined the essential role of transmission between generations: transmission does not concern only artistic aspects but also administrative ones like understanding law or lobbying. The Slovenian association of independent artists and art companies currently serves as a forum for sharing knowledge and experiences. It also built the foundations of a dialogue between independent professionals and city leaders.

The question of networking was further explored through the success story of Dinara Chochunbaeva, President of the Central Asian Crafts Support Association (www.catgen.com/cacsa), describing the creation of this crafts network. In 1993 the Aid for Artisans (US) came to Central Asia, exploring the field and offering assistance. They started up a project in 1994 in order to build up the capacity of young artisan leaders. After 4 years, regular meetings started to take place and marketing structures as well as a market have been built up for artisans. Currently the Artisan Network covers 7 countries (Mongolia and Iran recently joined it) and 60 members – both organisations and individuals. In 4 years many members have opened workshops and boutiques and developed activities like seminars, exhibitions, sales, festivals and travel information centres to ensure equal involvement and benefit for all member countries.



Afghanistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 31 millions
- **Capital:** Kabul
- **Area:** 652,225 sq km (251,773 sq miles)
- **Major language:** Pashto, Dari (Persian)
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 46 years (men), 46 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Afghani = 100 puls
- **Main exports:** Fruit and nuts, carpets, wool, opium
- **GNI per capita:** n/a
- **Internet domain:** .af
- **International dialing code:** +93

General overview of the political situation

(source: BBC news Website)

Its strategic position sandwiched between the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent along the ancient "Silk Route" means that Afghanistan has long been fought over - despite its rugged and forbidding terrain. It was at the centre of the so-called "Great Game" in the 19th century when Imperial Russia and the British Empire in India vied for influence. And it became a key Cold War battleground after thousands of Soviet troops intervened in 1979 to prop up a pro-communist regime, leading to a major confrontation that drew in the US and Afghanistan's neighbours. But the outside world eventually lost interest after the withdrawal of Soviet forces, while the country's protracted civil war dragged on.

The emergence of the Taleban - originally a group of Islamic scholars - brought at least a measure of stability after nearly two decades of conflict. But their extreme version of Islam attracted widespread criticism. The Taleban - drawn from the Pashtun majority - were opposed by an alliance of factions drawn mainly from Afghanistan's minority communities and based in the north. In control of about 90% of Afghanistan until late 2001, the Taleban were recognised as the legitimate government by only three countries. They were at loggerheads with the international community over the presence on their soil of Osama bin Laden, accused by the US of masterminding the bombing of their embassies in Africa in 1998 and the attacks on the US on 11 September 2001.

Following the Taleban's refusal to hand over bin Laden, the US initiated aerial attacks in October 2001, paving the way for opposition groups to drive them from power. Internal fighting between local commanders over power and territory became a feature of the post-Taleban period. The authorities in Kabul have been able to exert little control beyond the capital where drugs industry makes up around 60% of the economy. Even though they have been removed from power, the Talebans are still present in small pockets. Particularly in the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan, the Taleban's groups have resorted to suicide bombings, and deadly attacks on innocent aid workers in order to get their message across.

Cultural Profile : a history of theatre in Afghanistan

(From the *Visiting Arts* Web-site:

http://www.culturalprofiles.org.uk/afghanistan/Directories/Afghanistan_Cultural_Profile/-1.html)

As in many early societies, proto-theatrical activity in Afghanistan took the form of storytelling, recounting heroic episodes from the past, events in the daily life of the community or the daily rituals of region. For some 2,500 years elderly men have wandered the streets with teacup and stick in hand, acting out such stories. However, such proto-theatrical performers worked only in their place of origin and did not tour to other regions

From the late 19th century onwards European colonial settlers organised performances of western plays and musicals, primarily for their own amusement, but the development of theatre as an Afghan art form may be traced back to the court sponsorship of King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929), who staged performances of European classics. Only in Kabul was this new form of theatre known. After he was deposed, perhaps because of his efforts to modernise the country, the western style of theatre was not heavily supported until the 1950s, when King Zahir (b 1933) began to introduce political reforms and tolerance. It was during this period that Turkish theatre practitioner Farouk Afandi arrived and taught various theatrical techniques. The first people to create homegrown Afghan plays were directors Rashid Latif, Jalia, Magadas Negah and Bashid (who still lives in Mazar e Sharif).

During the late 1950s two leading theatre practitioners, Dr Farhan and Khai Zoda, went to Germany and the USA respectively to study theatre. They returned to teach a generation of artists privately as there was no theatre school at that time. In the years, which followed, a National Theatre Company was established and provincial theatre companies were also set up in Mazar, Herat, Jalalabad, Kunduz and Faryab to bring theatre to the provinces. However, the purpose of theatre was always seen to be the promotion of traditional folklore and slapstick entertainment rather than intellectual stimulation. This period also witnessed the growth of small, private regional touring theatre groups known as sirkas, which featured acrobats and freak shows - more like a circus than a theatre. During the 1970s these groups also began to include music and singing by men and women, but still with social overtones intended to promote traditional values. At this time the National Theatre Company of Afghanistan staged plays by Shakespeare, Brecht and Chekhov. These and other foreign plays were usually 'Afghanised' to suit the tastes of local audiences, except on those occasions when foreign directors came to work with local theatre artists. Such plays met with mixed reviews and Benazir Hotaki in the Ministry of Information and Culture remembers that audiences were often loud in their approval or disdain. However, the perceived link between theatre and the promotion of traditional culture led many to argue that Afghan plays should receive more support. By all accounts this was an exciting time for the genre. Toorpekai Osna from Kabul acted in films and then transferred to the National Theatre Company. She learned her craft from her fellow actors, as there was no university course at that time. 'Thirty years ago Afghanistan was progressive' she says, 'Now it is more difficult, especially for actresses.'

Since its revival in 2002 the National Theatre Company (see below) has staged

some 10 performances a year, including a number of moralistic short plays in a slapstick style by Afghan writers. Partly because of the lack of performance space one of the most popular performance styles is currently a one-man 'monodrama' involving a lone actor talking about his war experiences. The provincial theatre companies in Mazar, Herat, Jalalabad, Kunduz and Faryab have also recently been revived. They perform plays about life in Afghanistan and moralistic tales to educate the youth in the traditional life and culture for television and in community halls, though each operate independently in their own locations, with very little contact with the Ministry of Information and Culture Theatre Department in Kabul.

Since its foundation in 2005, the *Aftab* Theatre Company has participated in several international workshops and has gathered a growing number of young actors from all the Afghan regions. The *Aftab* Theatre is today the leading actor for the rediscovery of the Afghan theatre in the international cultural scene.

An introduction to theatre in Afghanistan

Compiled by Prof. Mohammad Azim Hussain Zadeh

Theatre has had its origin and roots in religious rituals, ethnic and national customs and traditions. The content and structure of theatre plays and the way it was presented developed and widened to dealing with all kinds of human relations. That is the same with theatre in Afghanistan, which had its place in regional and religious rituals before Islam in Afghanistan spread. In history of Afghanistan's theatre, the *Madahan* (narrators and preachers) were the pioneers. These narrators usually appeared in crowded bazaars and gathering places, narrating epic, religious and mythological tales. They emphasised their narrative with gesture, mime, movements, and altering voices and accents. They used common and poetic language. The *Madahan* narrated and played all different roles of a tale on their own. The content of the tales were dedicated to Islamic characters, which later were partially replaced by mythological themes. *Sadhos* are the second group of pioneers of Afghanistan's theatre. Usually they narrated tales and stories of courageous behavior and of religious characters of Islam. Clowns are the primary group of theatre makers inspired by *Madahan* and *Sadhos*. They used exaggerated masks showing monsters, devils, fairies and others. They performed at weddings and birthday parties to entertain the people and to make them laugh. The famous painter Jabar managed to gather some clowns and people who were interested in theatre in a location, which became the first theatre in the country, in Lahor Gate, in old Kabul.

In these years, at the turn of the 20th century, the teacher Ali Afandi spread theatre to schools, from where the first performances could be watched in Afghanistan's fifth independent year in 1902. In 1944, the Knowledge Theatre was founded by Ghulam Muhammad Saljoqi and managed by Abdul Rashid Latifi and Abdul Ghafoor Breshna. In 1949, the City Theatre was established and managed by Abdul Rashid Jalia who was also the artistic director of this foundation. The staged plays were made up of common and simple language. (...)

In the history of Afghan theatre, the years from 1949 can be regarded as climax years. Both the theatre of Knowledge and the theatre of Orphanage held a healthy competition for the best plays and biggest audience. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali Raunaq came back from France, graduated in theatre and established the first Dramatic Arts Course and brought to Afghanistan the principles of modern theatre.

1958 can be called a year of big change for Afghan Theatre: Muhammad Ali Raunaq revolutionised different aspects of theatre such as acting, directing, set and costume designing, making up, light and sound. He continued his activities till 1960; from 1945 to the 1960s, theatre was highly appreciated and patronised by the whole Afghan society. The staged plays ranged from tales about Afghan history and cultural epics to Shakespeare and plays by Anton Chekhov. Besides, Mrs. Zainab Saraj and Sayed Muqadas Negah established the Women theatre in 1958: The plays were performed for women only and it was the first place and time in Afghanistan that women took part in theatre activities as actresses, like Mrs. Habiba Askar, Mrs. Zulaikha Negah, and Najiba Dina. In the beginning, the audience also consisted only of women, but after few years they successfully opened the theatre to a mixed audience. In 1960, the Tajik director Shams Qiamof became the first foreign director who came to Kabul and he started working with the Knowledge Theatre. Besides spreading and teaching drama theory, he did practical works with different Afghan artists. It was these years that the Fine Arts Organisation was established and started its activities in three sections: music, painting

and sculpture and dramatic arts. Due to some problems, the activities of the City Theatre stopped in 1965. The Knowledge Theatre and the Fine Arts Organisation joined together from mid-1965 to 1966 and staged many new productions together.

In 1973, the Afghan Nendari Theatre was established in Kabul, equipped with a big structure and endowed with many artists. It started performing after Afghanistan went through the first political changes [the communist period]. After the communist regime took over in 1978, many theatrical artists moved abroad. In 1993, when the civil war started among factions of the Mujjaheddin, the building of Kabul Theatre (Afghan Nendari) was destroyed and artists were displaced everywhere. And when Taliban came to power in 1995, theatre in Afghanistan was forced to go into a “deep sleep” for a long time. Only the Kabul University, Faculty of Fine Arts had theatre activities, like teaching and performing, using ingenious measures to survive those years. Some other theatres continued their activities in exile, such as the *Exile* Theatre and *Afghanica*, mostly facing difficult conditions.

When the Taliban regime was overwhelmed and the interim government was established, theatre revived like other aspects of life in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Information and Culture paid attention to the theatre scene and the first performances took place in the ruins of Kabul Theatre in front of hundreds of people, sitting on broken and burnt chairs. Most of artists returned to Afghanistan and for example the Kabul Theatre and the Mobile Mini Circus for Children started performing in the provinces after long time. Meanwhile individual theatre activities re-started in the provinces themselves and independent theatres came into existence.

International theatre initiatives

International festival:

The Kabul Festival of National Afghan Theatre: In 2003, the Center of Dramatic Arts has been established with the Department of Theatre and Cinema of the Faculty of Fine Arts. This initiative gave birth to the Afghan National Theatre Festival, supported by the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society, British Council, French Cultural Center, Goethe-Institute and the U.S. Embassy. Both events are meant to stimulate and support the development of theatre in Afghanistan, which after a gap of recent years, caused by the displacement of so many artists and intellectuals, strictly demands a reinvestigation. During Kabul Theatre Summer 2005 ten international theatre teams (from France, Germany, UK, USA and Estonia) offered workshops and performances in various fields of theatre in order to train Afghan theatre makers and to strengthen intercultural exchange between Afghan and international artists.

For the last edition, with Afghanistan still being in a transition situation, arts and culture still required particular attention within the context of reconstruction. In 2006, the festival celebrated its third edition and was exclusively national, aiming to encourage a stronger participation from a larger variety of Afghan provinces. Thus, the event also served as a forum to discuss collectively the problems facing Afghanistan during round-tables discussions: theatre and its audience, development of theatre in provinces, creation of a repertoire and the choice of a programming.

Theatres in Afghanistan

National Theatre Company



Contact: Gul Makai Shah, Director

Address: National Art Gallery, Asmaee Watt, Kabul, Kabul Province, Afghanistan

Telephone: 20888 (local dialing only)

Since the National Theatre building was completely destroyed in the fighting, this company currently has a small office in the National Art Gallery. Its members rehearse and perform in the Radio Afghanistan Theatre. The Group staged 15 performances in 2002. Over the past year the Goethe-Institut has sent a visiting artist from Hamburg as well as documentary filmmakers to assist them to film rehearsals and performances. The Norwegian Afghan Committee has given them funds for touring and in the spring of 2003 arranged fundraising performances in Oslo and Bergen attended by performers from Afghanistan. Two members of the Norwegian theatre will in exchange spend one month in Kabul.

Aftab Theatre Company

Contact: Sayed Mahmood Sharifi, Producer

Mobile: (+93) (0) 70268880

Email: sharifi@aftaab-theatre.

Web: <http://www.aftaab-theatre.com/>

The *Aftab* Theatre Company, founded in 2005, is made up of young students who participated in the workshop conducted by Ariane Mnouchkine in the framework of the Kabul Theatre Summer Festival, aiming at the resurrection of arts in Afghanistan.

« This resurrection, as far as Mnouchkine is concerned, begins, if not ends, with masks. She and her company made a very deliberate decision to tailor their workshops exclusively around forms of comedic theatre--from Italian comedia dell'arte to Japanese kabuki. (...)

When the Afghans attending the workshops were first exposed to these masks--most inspired by La Theatre du Soleil's foray into Balinese folk art--they were said to be struck with wonder. Mnouchkine said that her Afghan students "had never seen masks before," but "quickly became familiar with them." The masks helped them rediscover "a very ignored ancient memory," for theatre, Mnouchkine reminded her listeners, was "the first art mankind practiced." (...) According to Mnouchkine, the most "cathartic" moment of drama during the three weeks involved a "frenetic" improvised pantomime that ended with the ritualistic beating of a character based on a Taliban caricature. (...)

*Many of her Afghan students have now formed their own theatre troupe, named Aftab, the Dari word for "sun"--a clear reference to Mnouchkine's own company. Mnouchkine congratulated Aftab for electing its own director and expressed excitement about its upcoming performances at the Kabul Theatre Festival in September. A brief video spotlighted Arif, one of Aftab's most promising talents. Disowned by his family for pursuing the arts, Arif received the French director's unwavering support. Though theatre in Afghanistan has many obstacles, Mnouchkine applauded the actor: "He is formidable. He is the future. » (« The most revolutionary Art Form », in *The Nation*, August 15, 2005). In cooperation with the French *Théâtre du Soleil*, and in the framework of a workshop held in Afghanistan (2005) and in France (2006), the Aftab theatre company staged *Romeo and Juliet* by W. Shakespeare. The company toured in Tajikistan (Second Central Asian Theatre Meeting, September 2005) and in France (workshop held at the *Cartoucherie de Vincennes*, spring 2006). For the 3rd Afghan National Theatre Festival, the Company staged Moliere's *Tartuffe*. The Play was directed by Helene Cinque of Theatre Du Soleil. Music of the play was taken from J.J Lemetre. Half of the play was created in Paris, France during the 2 months workshop of Aftaab theatre with *Theatre Du Soleil* and the other half was created in Kabul.*

In Afghanistan, comedians joke their way to civic renewal

By Lane Hartill | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor



KHOST, AFGHANISTAN - Mubariz Bidar would give Robin Williams a run for his money. He's an Afghan comic who has this city - once ruled by severe Taliban - howling at their former oppressors.

His spot-on impressions of everyone from a Taliban soldier to an Afghan drug addict would have even Mullah Omar giggling into his turban. At a recent impromptu performance, Mubariz wraps on a long black turban - a favourite Taliban accessory - and

twists his face into a scowl. He grabs a Kalashnikov to complete the look.

Then he screams at the men to go to the mosque, physically prodding them with his rifle. He grabs one long-haired man and berates him for letting his locks grow - a Taliban pet peeve. His imitation is so precise that the audience can't stop laughing. It's a disturbing sight for outsiders, but for Afghans who remember the hard-line regime and can finally laugh at it, it's a welcome release.

In a country that had been stung by successive violent regimes, humor has long been a trusted coping mechanism. Even when in power, the Taliban were the butt of jokes - behind closed doors - that targeted everything from their spot checks for shaved armpits (a rule in Islam) to the radio call-in show where people dedicated songs by mullahs (minus the music, of course). Like others, Afghans have used humor to channel dissent, avoid aggression, and let people separate themselves from the ruling group, experts say.

From youth using humor to cope with - and eventually bring down - Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, to comedian Jay Leno's post 9/11 monologues of Osama bin Laden jokes, comedy is gaining legitimacy as a post-conflict healer. In fact, stand-up comedians from the Arab world, Israel, and the Palestinian territories plan to travel to both Palestinian and Israeli locations this year to give comedy performances promoting peace.

"Humor is especially important in conflict and post-conflict countries, because it is a way of transcending or disengaging from the difficulties," says Don Nilsen, a member of the International Society for Humor Studies and a historian at Arizona State University who used to work in Afghanistan. "The humor used by the Jews in Nazi concentration camps allowed the Jews to take a little bit of control of their own lives," he says. "Humor is a way of inverting the power system."

Back in Khost, Mubariz continues to thrill the crowd with impressions - this time with the fake, but flawless, twitter of a Chinese bride. Mubariz is one of the lead actors in Khost Theatre, a small band of dedicated actors in this conservative eastern city that is taking comedy to the masses.

Comedy as civic education

Before last October's presidential elections, a Kabul-based nongovernmental organisation hired the actors to promote voting in some of the country's most remote southern villages. Hundreds of people saw each show; the message stuck. Women's turnout in Paktia province, which borders Khost and is so traditional that women are rarely seen in public, was among the highest in the country.

The success of the shows, Afghan observers say, illustrates how effective humor and theatre is for educating a public with a low literacy rate (only 64 percent of Afghans can read). It may be, they say, the best way to unify the country's four major ethnic groups that are still quietly split along ethnic lines - one of the major obstacles to lasting peace.

"Theatre has a big role in the unifying the people in the country," says Mohammad Azim Hussain Zadah, the head of the theatre and cinema department in the Fine Arts Faculty at Kabul University. "It's like a guide for the people."

In fact, says Mr. Zadah, "If officials want reconciliation and rehabilitation in the country and want to bring peace and stop ethnic tensions ... they should strengthen cinema and theatre in the country." Reading about unity in a book is one thing, he says, but, "we see it in theatre. We reflect what unity means. We get better results when we see it."

Comedy in Afghanistan thrived from the 1800s until the 1960s, when Afghans held actors in high esteem, and Kabul's royal family frequented theatres. But after the Soviet invasion of 1979, actors slipped out of the country and comedy declined. During the factional fighting in the early 1990s, mujahideen literally blew the roof off the once-stately theatre that used to show Molière and Chekhov adaptations. And when the Taliban arrived in 1996, comedy came to a standstill. Now, with more than \$8 billion worth of reconstruction aid estimated to flow into the country during the next 3 years, comedy is finding its footing once again.

In fact, one of the most popular shows on Tolo TV, a private cable station in Kabul, is "Lahza Ha," (Moments). It's the Afghan equivalent of Candid Camera, where pranksters stop Kabulis on the street and con them with gags. The show is so well liked that some Afghans pray early so they don't miss it, and jokes are rehashed the next day.

Mubariz and his fellow unemployed actors in Khost City stick with comedy even though they aren't paid. They make do with fraying stick-on mustaches and ingenuity. Indeed, the Afghan version of "Desperate Housewives," requires Mubariz to be the only forced drag queen in the country. Because women are stowed behind walls in this staunchly conservative city, he's left to don a scarf and screech the falsetto whine of a desperate Afghan housewife.

Getting into character

To study women, he cooks at home - a job strictly reserved for women here - and grills his 10 sisters-in-law for material. "I learned a lot of acting from them," he says. He also watches Mr. Bean, Jackie Chan, and Charlie Chaplin films, then practices in front of a mirror.

Mubariz's muses help him and the other actors perfect their delivery to communicate educational messages to audiences - such as the dangers of opium and the benefits of voting. Mubariz speaks fluently both official Afghan languages, Dari and Pashtu, and uses both in performances, a subtle way of reaching across the ethnic divide. This is a challenge for many actors in the country.

"The problem is the people aren't educated," says Mohammad Sharif, one of the actors at Kabul Theatre, as he huddles around a tiny wood stove in the dank bowels of the complex. "They just think, 'this is a Pashtun. He's against me. I'm a Tajik. I'm against him.' The theatre explains for the people that we are all brothers and can work together."

But ethnic reconciliation after years of war isn't always easy. During the presidential election, Gulmaki Shah Ghiasi, the head of Kabul Theatre, put on plays encouraging people to vote. People flocked. She estimates that more than 1,000 people came to each of their 200 shows.

But in Jalalabad, a majority Pashtun city two hours from Kabul, angry locals attacked the actors during a performance, possibly because women were part of the cast.

"They're not going to kill me," Shah Ghiasi says, her nose ring winking in the afternoon light. "They just want to scare me. But I'm not afraid."

From the February 23, 2005 edition - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0223/p07s01-wosc.html>

International organisations involved in theatre projects

Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS)

Address: Across from Conservatory of Music and up hill, Salang Watt Street, Kabul, Kabul Province, Afghanistan

Mailing address: P O Box 5965, Central post office, Kabul, Kabul Province, Afghanistan

E-mail: culture@afghanfcss.org

Website: <http://www.afghanfcss.org>

Contact: Timor Hakyimiar, Cultural Director

Theatre Department, Ministry of Information and Culture

The Theatre Department of the Ministry of Information and Culture is responsible for planning and budgets for all theatres nationally. It currently has no contact with the five provincial theatre companies.

Street address: National Art Gallery, Asmaee Watt, Kabul, Kabul Province, Afghanistan

Proprietor: Office of the Deputy Minister, Arts, Ministry of Information and Culture

Contact: Gul Makai Shah Director

Telephone: 93 (0) 20 210 1324, 93 (0) 70 274595 (mobile)

Goethe Institute

Contact Person: Lien Heindenreich, Director

E-mail: li@kabul.goethe.org

Address: Shahmahmood Street, Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul, Afghanistan

Tel.: +93 (0) 70 - 27 46 06

British Council

Web-site: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/afghanistan.htm>

Contact person: Malcolm Jardine, Director

Email: Malcolm.jardine@britishcouncil.org

Address: British Embassy
15th Street, Roundabout Wazir Akbar Khan
PO Box 334

Kabul, Afghanistan

Phone: + (93) (0) 70 102 302 , 00 873 762 854 939 (Satphone)

Fax: + (93) (0) 70 102 250

Swiss Cooperation Office in Kabul

Web site: <http://www.sdc.org.af/index.php?userhash=31721953&>

Address: Street 13, Side Street 3, House 486, Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul

Phone: +93 (0) 20 230 15 65

Fax: +93 20 2302299

Mobile 1: +93 (0) 702 74 902

Mobile 2: +93 (0) 79 203 47

E-Mail: kabul@sdsc.net

UNESCO Office in Kabul

Website:

http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.phpURL_ID=1259&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

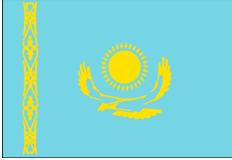
Contact person: Mr Malama Meleisea, Director of the office

E-Mail: m.meleisea@unesco.org

Work Phone: 9379344229

Fax 00873763468836; 004724126902

Address: Street UN Compound, P.O. Box 5 City Kabul , Afghanistan



Kazakhstan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 15 millions
- **Capital:** Astana
- **Area:** 2.7 million sq km (1 million sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Kazakh, Russian
- **Major religions:** Islam, Christianity
- **Life expectancy:** 61 years (men), 72 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Kazakh tenge = 100 tiyn
- **Main exports:** Oil, ferrous and nonferrous metals, machinery, chemicals, grain, wool, meat, coal
- **GNI per capita:** US \$1,780 (World Bank, 2003)
- **Internet domain:** .kz
- **International dialing code:** +7

General overview of the political situation

(Source: BBC news website & Library of Congress, Federal Research Division)

Ethnically, the country is as diverse, with the Kazakhs making up over half the population, the Russians comprising just over a quarter, and smaller minorities of Ukrainians, Germans, Chechens, Kurds, Koreans and Central Asian ethnic groups accounting for the rest. These groups generally live in harmony, though ethnic Russians resent the lack of dual citizenship and having to pass a Kazakh language test in order to work for government or State bodies.

In the post-Soviet era, Kazakhstan remained closely tied to Russia by energy supply lines, national defense, and the importance of Russian technologists in Kazakhstan's economy, but Nazarbayev also sought closer relations with the West. Beginning in the 1990s, the discovery of major new oil fields and subsequent international investment enabled Kazakhstan's economy to pull far ahead of its Central Asian neighbours.

Since his first election in 1991, Nazarbayev has maintained firm control of Kazakhstan's political and economic policy, removing all potential political rivals, including four prime ministers. A new constitution ratified in 1995 significantly expanded presidential power. After cancelling the 1996 presidential election, in 1999 Nazarbayev easily won an election that received international criticism. However, by the mid-1990s the ruling elite had already begun to show signs of factionalism. Beginning in 1999, a series of corruption scandals arose, and frequent changes of government disrupted economic policy. In 2002 the government arrested the leaders of the top opposition group, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK), and pressured the media to stop critical reporting. In 2004 corruption allegations against the Nazarbayev regime intensified as a U.S. oil executive was indicted on charges of bribing representatives of the Kazakhstan government. In 2004 and early 2005, a series of restrictions on opposition parties, including the liquidation of the DVK, brought accusations of a political crackdown in advance of the 2006 presidential election. The government advanced the election date by one year to December 2005, when Nazarbayev gained 91 percent of the vote in what international observers called an unfair election. In February 2006, Altynbek Sarsenbayev became the second major opposition leader in four months to suffer a violent death, prompting street protests. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's international diplomatic and economic positions continued to advance in 2006, despite domestic oppression, as the oil and natural gas extraction of Western oil companies in Kazakhstan increased substantially and Kazakhstan continued to support antiterrorism campaigns in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Kazakhstan cultural profile

(Sources: The Library of Congress Country Studies)

Before the Russian conquest, the Kazaks had a well-articulated culture based on their nomadic pastoral economy. Although Islam was introduced to most of the Kazaks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the religion was not fully assimilated until much later. As a result, it coexisted with earlier elements of shamanistic and animistic beliefs. Traditional Kazak belief held that separate spirits inhabited and animated the earth, sky, water, and fire, as well as domestic animals.

Since animal husbandry was central to the Kazaks' traditional lifestyle, most of their nomadic practices and customs relate in some way to livestock. Traditional curses and blessings invoked disease or fecundity among animals, and good manners required that a person ask first about the health of a man's livestock when greeting him and only afterward inquire about the human aspects of his life.

Because of the Kazaks' nomadic lifestyle and their lack of a written language until the mid-nineteenth century, their literary tradition relies upon oral histories. These histories were memorised and recited by the akyn, the elder responsible for remembering the legends and histories, and by jyrau, lyric poets who travelled with the high-placed khans. Most of the legends concern the activities of a batir, or hero-warrior. Among the tales that have survived are Koblandy-batir (fifteenth or sixteenth century), Er Sain (sixteenth century), and Er Targyn (sixteenth century), all of which concern the struggle against the Kalmyks; Kozy Korpesh and Bain sulu, both epics; and the love lyric Kiz-Jibek. Usually these tales were recited in a song-like chant, frequently to the accompaniment of such traditional instruments as drums and dombra, a mandolin-like string instrument.

The Russian conquest wreaked havoc on Kazak traditional culture by making impossible the nomadic pastoralism upon which the culture was based. However, many individual elements survived the loss of the lifestyle as a whole. Many practices that lost their original meanings are assuming value as symbols of post-Soviet national identity. That Russian cultural establishment nevertheless produced many of the most important figures of the early stages of Kazak nationalist self-assertion, including novelist Anuar Alimzhanov, or Suleymenov who became in 1975 a pan-Central Asian hero by publishing a book, *Az i la*, examining the Lay of Igor's Campaign, a medieval tale vital to the Russian national culture, from the perspective of the Turkic Pechenegs whom Igor defeated. The collapse of the Soviet system with which so many of the Kazak cultural figures were identified left most of them in awkward positions. Even more damaging has been the total collapse of public interest in most forms of higher culture. Most of the books that Kazaks buy are about business, astrology, or sex; the movies they see are nearly all American, Chinese, or Turkish adventure and action films; most concerts feature rock music, not infrequently accompanied by erotic dancing; and television provides a diet of old Soviet films and dubbed Mexican soap operas. Kazakhstan's cultural elite is suffering the same decline affecting the elite of all the former Soviet republics.

NOTE: *The information regarding Kazakhstan on this page is re-published from The Library of Congress Country Studies. No claims are made regarding the accuracy of Kazakhstan Cultural Institutions information contained here. All suggestions for corrections of any errors about Kazakhstan Cultural Institutions should be addressed to the Library of Congress.*

International theatre initiatives

- **2000:** Masterclasses on « Improvisation and development of creative potential of actors » (by Markus Zohner theatre company – Switzerland)
- **2000:** Creation of the festival of contemporary theatre/Almaty
- **2002:** Flying theatre academy organised by Markus Zohner theatre company (masterclasses, seminars, and workshops for actors, stage directors, stage designers, and theatre critics). The French director Jacques Burdeau conducted the opening workshop.
- **2002:** Markus Kuntz (theatre critic, Switzerland) – theoretical seminar on “European Theatre between 1960 and 2000”
- **2002:** Royal National Theatre (London) “Voice and singing in theatre performances”
- **2002:** National theatre (Theaterworks program) – master-class “Shakespeare and the foundation of theatre”
- **2003:** International festival of alternative theatres / Almaty
- **2004:** *Unity of Earths*, joint production of a theatre play under the direction of the French director Christophe Feutrier, with actors from Western Europe, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, in their original languages
- **2004:** François Clavier (France): workshops on the Moliere’s play “Tartuffe” with the French-speaking actors of the Karaganda theatre.
- **2004:** Creation of the *Art & Shock* international theatre festival /Almaty
- **2005:** Joint theatre production entitled ‘Mondes en passage’ and directed by Christophe Feutrier. This French stage director asked each group of artists (French, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik) to bring texts characterizing their culture to the rehearsals of the play. Artists, in particular, have selected the abstracts from James Joyce, Jalaladdin Rumi, Alfred Doblin, which compose the dramaturgy of the play.
- **2007:** Central Asian School of performing arts (project initiated by the *Art & Shock* theatre company)

Some theatres in Almaty

The national academic theatre of drama named after M. Aezov.



Contact person: Berik Aitjanov, actor
fax: (+32 72) 754110

It was founded in 1926 in Kzyl-Orda, before moving to Almaty. Its repertoire is made up of Kazakh plays and a Kazakh version of foreign classical and contemporary plays.

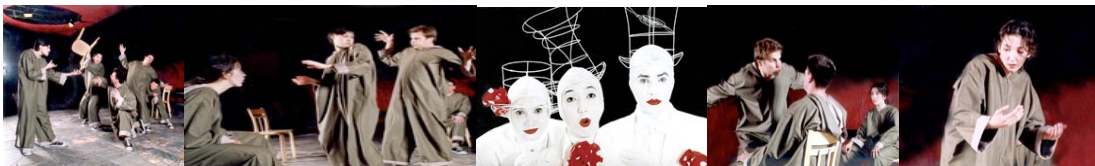
The national academic theatre of Russian drama named after M. Lermontov



Address: 43 Abai Street. Almaty
Tel.: (+32 72) 67-31-31.
Web: www.tl.kz.

Founded in 1933 in Almaty. Russian, Kazakh and foreign plays compose the repertoire of the national academia theatre of Russian Drama.

ART & SHOCK experimental theatre



Contact person: Veronika Nassalkaya, Manager
Address: 49/68 Kunaev street, 480004 Almaty
Phone: +7 (3272) 736 954
Fax: +7 (3272) 799718
Email: art_shock@rambler.ru
Web: <http://www.artishock.kz>

Art & Shock experimental Theatre was founded in July, 2001. Its work concentrates on improvisation and theatre. Since its foundation as an independent theatre, *Art & Shock* has extensively toured in Central Asia and Europe (Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain, Russia...). Its manager is now involved in a project aiming at building a performing art network

in Central Asia (CANAC).

The national theatre of German Drama



Contact person: *Bulat Atabaev, stage director*

Fax: (+32 72) 754110,

Mob: (+8-333) 270 32 02

E-Mail: atabaevb@rambler.ru

It was founded in 1980 in Temirtaou (near Karaganda) and was transferred in 1988 to Almaty. Former students of the theatre school Chtchoukine (Moscow) and from the German theatre academy compose the theatrical company. Its repertoire is made up of German-speaking playwrights.

The Youth academic theatre named after G. Mousrepov.

Tel.: (+32 72) 323 221

Address: 38 Abylai Khan Ave. Almaty

It was founded in 1944 in Almaty and has focused on national and foreign plays for the youth.

International organisations dealing with theatre projects

Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation – Kazakhstan

Address: ul. Furmanova, 117-20
Almaty, 480091
Kazakhstan
Phone: (7 3272) 503 811, 588 983, 509 850
Fax: (7 3272) 503 814
Executive Director: Mr. Dariusz Zietek
Email: dariusz_zietek@soros.kz
Website: <http://www.soros.kz/>

UNESCO (regional office for Central Asia)

Address: 67, Tole Bi Street. 480091. Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN
Tel.: 7-3272-582637/38/39/40/41/42
Fax: 7-3272-794853
E-mail: almaty@unesco.org
Website: <http://www.unesco.kz>

British Council

Address: 13 Republic Square, 050013 Almaty, Kazakhstan
Telephone +7 (3272) 720207/720111
Fax +7 (3272) 720113
E-mail general@kz.britishcouncil.org
Website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kazakhstan.htm>

Goethe Institute

Address: Dschandosowa 2 050040 Almaty, Kazakhstan
Phone: (007) 3272 47-2704
(007) 3272 47-6307
(007) 3272 47-8922
Fax: (007) 3272 47-2972
Website: <http://www.goethe.de/oe/alm/deindex.htm>

French Embassy in Almaty

Address: 173, ul. Fourmanova, 480091Almaty
Phone: 007.3272.58.25.04
Fax: 007.3272.58.25.09
François-Olivier Seys, Advisor for cooperation and cultural affairs
Email: François-Olivier.SEYS@diplomatie.gouv.fr
Website: <http://www.ambafrance-kz.kz/fr>



Kyrgyzstan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 5.3 million
- **Capital:** Bishkek
- **Area:** 199,900 sq km (77,182 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Kyrgyz, Russian
- **Major religions:** Islam, Christianity
- **Life expectancy:** 63 years (men), 71 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 som = 100 tyiyns
- **Main exports:** Fruit, vegetables, gold, tobacco
- **GNI per capita:** US \$340 (World Bank, 2005)
- **Internet domain:** .kg
- **International dialing code:** +996

General overview of the political situation

(Source: BBC news website)

Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic state comprising Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Russians, Ukrainians and Germans, and a small number of Uighur, Dungan (Chinese Muslims) and Koreans. If tension has repeatedly occurred between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities over access to land and housing, inter-ethnic relations generally have been aggravated by what is perceived to be discrimination in favour of Kyrgyz speakers.

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan's democratic credentials were regarded as relatively strong. This reputation was subsequently lost as corruption and nepotism took hold during President Akayev's years in office. Parliamentary and presidential elections were flawed, opposition figures faced harassment and imprisonment while opposition newspapers were closed.

Kyrgyzstan does not benefit from the wealth of natural resources possessed by some of its neighbours. The economic situation continues to be dire, particularly in the south of the country where unemployment is very high and poverty rife.

Following the 11 September attacks on the US, the Kyrgyz leadership agreed to allow US forces to use Bishkek's Manas airport as a base. In September 2003 agreement was reached with Moscow allowing Russian rapid reaction forces to deploy at the Kant airbase in the campaign against terrorism. The Russian forces are stationed just 30 km from their US counterparts.

In 2005 a popular revolt, sparked by widespread allegations of government interference in parliamentary elections and fuelled by poverty and corruption, swept the former president, Askar Akayev, from power. Following these events, many viewed Kyrgyzstan's newly adopted constitution as a triumph of democratic forces. But a closer scrutiny reveals that informal localism and kinship still play a crucial role in political changes. Since the "tulip revolution" in 2005, the Kyrgyzstan's democratisation has been a fragile process: A sustained protest in Bishkek's Ala-Too Square, lasting from November 2-9, 2006 has compelled the Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to accept constitutional changes that transferred some of his powers to the parliament. However, it is not clear how the provision of the new constitution will be put into practice. Observers worry that the implementation of the new provisions will soon create serious tensions between the president and parliament. The cold weather in Bishkek may prevent the opposition movement from gathering the supporters to protest the recent moves by the administration. However, if the President does not respect the clauses of the accords, he could face crowds of opposition protesters on Ala-Too square again who, this time, will demand more than just constitutional changes.

Kyrgyzstan cultural profile

Nearly everyone in Kyrgyzstan is Muslim, but Islam has sat relatively lightly on the Kyrgyz people. The geographically isolated southern provinces tend to be more conservative and Islamicised than the industrialised and Russified north. Ancient but still important tribal affiliations further reinforce the north-south differences. The Kyrgyz language has not been imposed on non-speakers in Kyrgyzstan (as Uzbek has in Uzbekistan), and the use of Russian persists, especially in the north.

Central Asian literature has traditionally been popularised in the form of songs, poems and stories by itinerant minstrels, called *akyn*. But the Kyrgyz are also associated with something rather more complex: an entire cycle of oral legends, 20 times longer than the *Odyssey*, about a hero-of-heroes called *Manas*.

The Great Tradition of "MANAS" (source: <http://www.fantasticasia.net/?p=144>)

The great epic "Manas" is the biggest poetic narration in the world. It contains more than a million lines and is 20 times bigger than *Odyssey* and *Iliad* together and 2,5 times bigger than Mahabharaty. Although the epic is mentioned as early as the fifteenth century, it was not written down until 1885. It is said to have been born in the Ala Too Mountains in Talas region in northwestern Kyrgyzstan; a mausoleum in Talas City is believed to house his mortal remains.

Manas reflects the entire history of the Kyrgyz people starting from the 10th century. The basis of the poem is description of valorous feats of the central hero called *Manas*, who united his nation against invasions of foreign tribes and federations. But content of the epic is much wider than traditional heroic narrative. In its texts along with main scenes describing peoples heroism exists peaceful everyday life of nation, its traditions, customs, colourful descriptions of feasts and funerals.

Linked to the *Manas* art, Kyrgyzstan hosts the unique tradition of "manaschi", the professional *Manas* storytellers. People called "manaschi" are welcome and respected in any house. They usually remember not less than a hundred thousand lines of epics and share their knowledge with public on special feast occasions in a very colourful way. While improvising and telling parts of the epic Manaschi fall trance when they experience and feel themselves a part of what they are telling about. Voice of Manaschi turns into singing at most colourful parts and their gesticulation makes listeners imagine themselves participants of the story as well.

The Decline of the Cultural Institutions

During the Soviet Union period, all republics received considerable subsidies for the development of arts and culture. Since Kyrgyzstan gained its independence, other priorities mean the theatre and arts in general have virtually no government funding. Many institutions, such as museums, theatres, and opera houses failed to adapt themselves to the new conditions. Artists started to leave the country for Russia or go abroad in search for more motivating environments. Traditional arts and crafts became marginalised. The diversity and the multiethnic dimension of Kyrgyz culture were affected. As a result, Kyrgyzstan risked and still risks losing much of its cultural wealth.

Regarding the fine arts situation in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the best indicator of its condition of the fine arts is the fate of the open-air sculpture museum in Bishkek, which began suffering a series of thefts in early 1993. Because the statues were made in bronze, they were presumably stolen for their value as metal, not as art. When a large statuary group commemorating Aitmatov's Ysyk-Köl Forum disappeared, the museum's remaining statues were removed to a more secure location.

(from: <http://www.mapzones.com/world/asia/kyrgyzstan/cultureindex.php>).

International theatre initiatives

International festivals:

June, 2006 : 3rd Central Asian Theatrical Forum : Following the two first editions held in Tashkent and Dushanbe, the third IETM Central Asian Theatrical Meeting was organised in Bishkek by the Central Asian Academy of Arts. It gathered about 50 theatre representatives and experts from Central Asian, Afghanistan and Europe.

2001: The first **Biennial Festival** entitled '**Peace and Respect**' was held in Osh city, at the eve of the city's 3000 year anniversary. The festival's main idea was to promote peace and understanding in the Fergana Valley, where Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have common borders. In 2004, the second festival was successfully held in Bishkek by the *Public Fund of Arsen Umuraliev*. Artists from Central Asia, Switzerland, Belgium, Russia, Japan and the USA participated in it. The festival agenda included theatrical performances, music, folk arts, fashion show, and discussions on the cultural development in the region. The next festival is planned to be held in 2006.

Other initiatives

2007: Sakhna artists were in New York in February and March 2007, working on a co-production of a Kyrgyz epic *Janyl* with Yara Arts Group of La MaMa Experimental Theatre.

Theatres in Kyrgyzstan

Bishkek City Drama Theatre



Address: Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, 242 Ogonbayev St.,
K. Bayalinov Library (former Chernishevskaya)

Contact person: Aigul Umuralieva, Director

E-mail: bgdt@elcat.kg

Phone: (+996 502) 66-56-81 (artistic manager Tsitsigma Umuraliyeva),
(+996 502) 66-54-24 (Chief Administrator Okusheva Asylgul)
(+996 502) 22-13-76 (Troupe Manager Askarova Nazira)

Web-site: <http://www.bcdt.in.kg>

The Bishkek City Drama Theatre has been established in 1993. Since its creation, the theatre headed by Arsen Umuraliyev has been following the following principles and ideas: to bring genuine stage values back to the stage, educating aesthetic criteria among the audience.

The Sakhna theatre



Contact person: *Asanbekov Nurlan, Artistic Director*

Address: *Street Shota Rustaveli 109 / 2, Bishkek*

Phone: *(+996 312) 42 65 08*

Mail: *nuras_64@mail.ru, Fund_sakhna@yahoo.com*

The *Sakhna Theatre* was founded in 2002. Its aim is to create new theatrical forms, focusing on the country's traditional epics. His main aim is to prevent ancient Kyrgyz cultures from fading into obscurity.

State Academic Russian Drama Theatre



Address: *Tynystanova Street 116*

Phone: *(+996 502) 261252*

One performance, 'Two in darkness' had been shown at the first Central Asian Theatre Meeting in Tashkent. The company performs a range of local and international plays in Russian.

International organisations involved in theatre projects

Central Asian Academy of Arts

Contact Person: Bolot Sadybakasov
Address: Frunze street, 364, 720301 Bishkek
Tel/Fax: (+996 312) 62-22-35
E-Mail: bolotkemel@mail.ru
Website: <http://artacademy.to.kg>

Soros Foundation – Kyrgyzstan

Address: 55A, Logvinenko St., Bishkek, 720040, Kyrgyzstan
Phone: (996 312) 66 34 75, 66 34 95, 66 42 40, 66 43 06, 66 43 46
Fax: (996 312) 66 34 48
Email: office@soros.kg
Executive Director: Mr. Medet Tiulegenov
Website: <http://www.soros.kg/>

British Council

Address: 13 Republic Square, 050013 Almaty, Kazakhstan
Telephone +7 (3272) 720207/720111
Fax +7 (3272) 720113
E-mail general@kz.britishcouncil.org
Website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/kazakhstan.htm>

Goethe Institute

Address: *Dschandosowa 2 050040 Almaty, Kasachstan*
Phone: (007) 3272 47-2704
(007) 3272 47-6307
(007) 3272 47-8922
Fax: (007) 3272 47-2972
Website: <http://www.goethe.de/oe/alm/deindex.htm>

Swiss Cooperation Office in Bishkek

Contact person: Emilia Saaliev, Arts & Culture Program Manager
Address: 144, Panfilova Str. (crossing Bokonbaeva), 720040 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
Tel: (+996 312) 66 64 80
Fax: (+996 312) 66 64 89
E-mail: bishkek@sdco.net
Website: <http://www.swisscoop.kg/>



Tajikistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 7.3 millions
- **Capital:** Dushanbe
- **Area:** 143,100 sq km (55,251 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Tajik, Russian
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 61 years (men), 66 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Tajik somoni = 100 dirams = 0.27 USD (average 2004)
- **Main exports:** Aluminum, electricity, cotton, fruit, textiles
- **GNI per capita:** US \$210 (World Bank, 2005)
- **Internet domain:** .tj
- **International dialing code:** +992

General overview of the political situation

(Source: BBC news website)

Nearly half of Tajikistan's population is under 14 years of age. Tajiks are the largest ethnic group, with Uzbeks making up a quarter of the population, over half of which is employed in agriculture and just one-fifth in industry. The Tajik language is very close to Persian, spoken in Iran, and to Dari, spoken in Afghanistan.

Tajikistan gained its independence during the breakup of the Soviet Union on September 9, 1991 and promptly fell into a civil war from 1992–1997 between old-guard regionally based ruling elites and disenfranchised regions, democratic liberal reformists, and Islamists loosely organised as the United Tajik Opposition. Other combatants and armed bands that flourished in this civil chaos simply reflected the breakdown of central authority rather than loyalty to a political faction. By 1997, the predominantly Kulyabi-led Tajik government and the UTO successfully negotiated a powersharing United Nations-brokered peace accord and implemented it by 2000.

Tajikistan is slowly rebuilding itself with an integrated government and during 2004-2005 permitted a Russian military presence to guard their border with Afghanistan. Most of these Russian-led forces, however, are local Tajik noncommissioned officers and soldiers.

Prior to the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the civil war in Afghanistan produced cross-border effects that threatened to destabilise Tajikistan's fragile and hard-won peace. In the summers of 1999 and 2000, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan used Tajikistan as a staging ground for an insurgency campaign against the government of Uzbekistan. At the same time, Taliban advances in northern Afghanistan threatened to inundate Tajikistan with thousands of refugees. A constant flow of illegal narcotics continues to transit Tajikistan from Afghanistan on its way to Russian and European markets, leaving widespread violent crime, corruption, increased HIV incidence, and economic distortions in its wake. During 2002, stability in the country continued to increase, and the year was largely free from the assassinations and outbreaks of violence perpetrated by unreformed opposition members that plagued the country in previous years.

Tajikistan cultural profile

(Sources: The Library of Congress Country Studies)

By the mid-1980s, more than 1,600 libraries were operating in Tajikistan. Of particular importance is the Firdavsi State Library, which houses a significant collection of Oriental manuscripts. In 1990 Tajikistan had twenty-seven museums, the fewest of any Soviet republic. Among the most notable are the Behzed Museum of History, Regional Studies, and Art, and the Ethnographic Museum of the Academy of Sciences, both in Dushanbe. There are also significant museums of history and regional studies in several other cities. The republic had fourteen theatres in 1990. Only the three Baltic republics, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan--all with smaller populations--had fewer. The republic's film studio, since 1958 called Tadjikfilm, opened in Dushanbe in 1930. By the mid-1980s, it was producing seven or eight feature films and thirty documentaries per year for cinema and television.

When Tajikistan was separated from Uzbekistan in 1929, the new nation-state was forced to leave behind its cultural baggage. The new Soviet order set about providing a replacement pantheon of arts, introducing modern drama, opera and ballet. The policy paid early dividends and the 1940s are considered a golden era of Tajik theatre.

Dushanbe's opera and ballet theatre was the first large public building in the city; its construction began in 1939. Dushanbe also has theatres devoted to Tajik and Russian drama, as well as a drama school. There are theatres for music, musical comedy, and drama in several other Tajik cities as well.

Films are shown in theatres in Tajikistan's cities and in villages on an irregular basis. In the last decade of Soviet rule and in the early 1990s, video and audiocassettes became increasingly popular sources of entertainment, as well as a means of disseminating information outside government control.

Since independence there has been something of a cultural revival in an attempt to foster a sense of national identity. The success of Tajikistan's most popular living writer, Taimur Zulfikarov, is attributed to his ability to mimic the ancient Persian style of writing and, in doing so, to appeal to nationalist sentiments. Taimur Zulfikarov is also a playwright, performed in all theatres of Central Asia. However, the political turmoil and economic problems of Tajikistan in the 1990s took a severe toll on the country's cultural life and on the elite that fostered it.

NOTE: *The information regarding Tajikistan on this page is re-published from The Library of Congress Country Studies. No claims are made regarding the accuracy of Tajikistan Cultural Institutions information contained here. All suggestions for corrections of any errors about Tajikistan Cultural Institutions should be addressed to the Library of Congress.*

Interview with Barzu Abdurazzakov (Stage Director, Tajikistan, September 2006)

« I was born in Moscow. My mother and my father were both great actors and even if they used to take me to theatre, I didn't want to devote my life to theatre. Each evening I used to go to theatre and see my mother acting. I saw so many performances that I decided to be a diplomat. And nowadays when I see awful performance, I remember this period of my life when I hated theatre. I decided to work in theatre to change it, to turn it into a beautiful a serious thing.

There is no point to speak about a common identity of Central Asian Theatre because the question of identity of Central Asia is highly problematic. The geographical region is defined like an 'in-between': between Asia and Europe. There is no strong conceptual framework of theatre in our countries. The only artistic path for a stage director in Central Asia is honesty. And unfortunately I almost never meet honesty in our theatre. I keep hearing complaints and regrets whereas the most dangerous threat for theatre is the lack of honesty. Maybe like everywhere else in the world, the reason of such a phenomenon is due to the fact that it is more comfortable to complain than to frankly express yourself. Actually, you can create a good performance without anything. Only a liar can say that he needs money to do a good spectacle.

But I don't think that the independence of a theatre is the point. Once again, the only reality of theatre is honesty and independence toward yourself. Even in the most oppressive situations under the Soviet control, Artists were alive. Pasternak or Akhmatova kept writing far from the question of independence; they were artists and they always have been.

When we speak about the crisis of the Central Asian Theatre, it is not a financial crisis but a crisis of honesty, which lies inside every artist. Theatre lies in everybody. That's why Theatre is not dead. As long as Mark (Weil) or Ovlyakuli (Hodjakuliev) exist, theatre in Central Asia is still alive. Nevertheless, the crisis started because of theatres themselves. It started when theatres regarded the audience stupid. People left theatres because they felt hurt in theatres.

Even before the Perestroika, theatres started to speak a language, which is made only for theatres. Stage directors, theatre directors, and all theatre professionals started to regard themselves intelligent. The words, which were pronounced on the stage were not understandable anymore by the audience. And as soon as theatre lost authority, as soon as it became far from the audience's expectations, the crisis began.

Moreover, the Tajik theatre started to withdraw into itself and the critic became impossible. If you didn't like a performance and if told so, the answer would sound something like: 'if you don't like such a performance, it is because you don't understand the actual Tajikway of thinking'. As soon as theatre stopped to address the human kind and focused on a so-called Tajik mentality, it stopped to speak to every people. Theatre should be synonymous of respect.

If I focus on the world, on the theatre life in the world, I'm sure that in Central Asia, we will soon have a genius. If he is not already alive, he will born soon. It is definitely not me but I can feel the Central Asian theatrical genius is just around me, here, in the region. »

International theatre initiatives

- **2003: “Un coeur deux mondes”**. Joint theatre production directed by the French stage director Christophe Feutrier with the actors of the Theatre named after Kamol Hujandi, in Khojent. The performance was based on texts by French authors from the twentieth century and classics of the Persian literature
- **2004: Mobile Academy – Berlin**. Two Tajik people participated in the summer session of the Mobile Academy in Berlin, which was devoted to ‘urban Folklore; Useless Solutions for Non-Existent Situations’:
 - **Samandar Pulodov**, 34, from Dushanbe: comparative musicologist, director, producer and director of a NGO for cultural development in mountain regions;
 - **Alisher Primkulov**, 22, director and journalist: He worked as translator at the Afghan- Tajik border, made different film clips for the UN Development Program and directed the documentary "CAIP in GARM" (2003).
- **2004: Joint production** between the French choreographer Laurence Levasseur and the *Padida* Theatre.
- **2005: “Mondes en passage”** is an international theatre project, based on a creative experiment of artists from different countries: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and France. Christophe Feutrier is the theatrical director of the project; he asked each group of artists (French, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik) to bring texts characterizing their culture to the rehearsals of the play. Artists, in particular, have selected the abstracts from James Joyce, Jalaladdin Rumi, Alfred Doblin. The dramaturgic composition of the play is based on the combination of these selected texts. All abstracts are performed in their original language, except for the parts from the novel Ulysses by James Joyce, which is interpreted in Russian. In Dushanbe, the performance took place on the stage of the “Padida” theatre.
- **2005: The second IETM Central Asian Theatre Meeting** was organised in Dushanbe. It gathered about 40 theatre representatives and experts from Central Asian and Afghanistan.

Theatres in Tajikistan

Tajik Academic Theatre named after Abulkasim Lohuti



Contact person: *Bahodur Mirolibekov, Chief Director*

Address: *Dushanbe, Pudaki ave, 86*

Phone: *(+992 3422) 217843, 350559*

The Academic Theatre named after A. Lohuti was created in 1929. With the Russian Drama Theatre named after V. Matakovsky, it shared the building of the Russian Theatre located in the main street of Dushanbe. Actors perform in Russian and in Tajik. In 1957, the theatre moved to a new building located not far from the old one. It still occupies it.

National Experimental Theatre for Young Spectators "Akhорun"

The 'Akhорun' theatre appeared in 1988. It was created by a group of actors from the Youth Theatre led by Farukh Kasimov. The new theatre started its work with the performance entitled "Arsonists" - a play based on M. Frish's novel. It represented the theatre at the second "Parastu" festival and got the Grand Prix as well as prizes for the best male and female performance, and the best stage direction. Following this success, the theatre formally registered on January 1, 1990, as the National Experimental Theatre for Young Spectators "Akhорun". Akhorun - is an ancient (IV c. B. C.) name of the Dushanbinka River and its surroundings; it is translated as "City of Gods".

Farukh Kasimov (b. 1948, Tajikistan) has brought renewal to theatre in Tajikistan through his approach to the creative reworking of an eclectic repertoire. Starting his career as an actor, he began his directing works in the 1970s with daring critiques of the totalitarian system, which resulted in internal exile. With social liberalisation in the 1980s, he formed a first theatre group. Farukh Kasimov draws inspiration from multiple cultures, readily adapting methods and concepts, and reinterpreting through the addition of new characters. He has created performances based on sources as varied as Rumi, Zoroastrian and Koranic texts, Sufi mystics and plays by Molière or Bulgakov. His studio trains young actors and directors, and the *Akhорun* theatre regularly tours in the Middle East as well as in Eastern and Western Europe.

Since 2006, the "Akhорun" Theater has been directed by Barzu Abdurazzakov, the former director of the Khodjent Theatre.

Padida Dance Theatre



Contact person: *Habibullo Abdurazzakov, Artistic Director*
Address: *Rudaki Prospekt 82, Dushanbe, Tajikistan*
Telephone: *(+992 3422) 247175, 274391*

Graduated from the Moscow University GITIS, Habibullo Abdurazzakov has staged about 70 films and 30 theatre performances in Khojent, Dushanbe, and Ashgabad. Nowadays, he is the director of the Tajik Union of theatres and the artistic director of the *Padida* Dance Theatre.

Dushanbe Puppet Theatre

Contact person: *Zafar Djabarov, Artistic Director*

The Dushanbe Puppet Theatre was created in early 1985 at the initiative of Zafar Djabarov. On September 7, 1985, the theatre was opened by "Muk's Adventures" by Sh. Kuliomov, directed by Zafar Djabarov. Since the first years of its existence, the theatre has staged over 40 plays - by Tajik as well as by foreign authors. The theatre opened a children's studio, and the young students often participate in some of the performances.

State Russian Drama Theatre after V.V. Mayakovsky



Contact person: *Sulton Usmanov, Chief Director*
Address: *Rudaki ave, 76*
Phone: *213133, 218123, 271434*

The Russian Drama Theatre was founded in 1937. From the very beginning of its activity, many actors of the Tajik Academic Drama Theatre after A. Lahuti have taken part in its plays. The earliest troupe consisted of the graduates of the Moscow theatre-studio and the students of the National Actor Academy.

During the war period, 1941-1945, this theatre didn't stop to work. Plays of the Red Army Theatre, evacuated from Moscow to Dushanbe, were also staged in this building. After the war this theatre became the best Russian Drama Theatre in Tajikistan. The troupe often was on the road in all the republics of the USSR, and their performances always met great success. Despite the departure of a large part of the troupe to Magnitogorsk during the civil war, the theatre managed to recreate its lost potential and it is still one of the cultural centres in the republic.

National Youth Theatre named after A. Vakhidov

Contact person: Abdulhofiz Kodirov, Artistic Director

In 1965, a team of 24 young promising people was sent from Tajikistan to the State Institute of Theatrical Art in Moscow. Upon graduation from the Acting Department, they all came back to Dushanbe and created the Youth Theatre. The theatre was given its name for two reasons. Firstly, the theatre repertoire was meant for a young audience, and the secondly, the troop was fairly young as well.

The Youth Theatre was formally opened on December 27, 1971. The first play on its stage was "Vassa Zheleznova" by Maxim Gorky. In 1977, it welcomed a new team of actors composed by Tajik students graduated from the same State Institute of Theatrical Art in Moscow. Today, the troop consists of 30 people produces 3-4 performances a year, in Tajik.

Tajik theatres on the road

National Experimental Theatre for Young Spectators "Akhорun"

In 1990, at the "Parastu - 90" festival in Khudjand, it was awarded by the Grand Prix and prizes for the best acting. Besides, the theatre constantly participates in the international festival named after A. Chekhov in Moscow.

- 1992** - Golden medal at the festival in Iran
- "Navruz - 92" festival of professional theatres of Central Asia: Grand Prix for the best male and female performance.
- 1993** - International Festival of Central Asia (Antwerp, Belgium): Grand Prix.
- 1994** - Participation in the Gala Night devoted to the 1,000 anniversary of Shah-Name", the great poem of Firdausi (Dushanbe).
- 1994/1995** - Two-month tour in Iran.
- 1995** - "Parastu - 95": Grand Prix for "Isfandiyor"
- Participation in the jubilee night devoted to the 90th anniversary of the Actor M. Kasimov: performance of the play "King Faridun" (based on "Shah-Name")
- 1996** - International Festival in Poland: performance of the play "Isfandiyor".
- 2000-2001** - Participation in Iranian festivals with the play "Chunin Guft Akhuromazdo Bazartusht"
- 2003** - The play "Dachol" has been invited for a performance in Belgium.
- Festivals in Belgium and France with "King Lear"

Tajik Academic Theatre named after Abulkasim Lohuti

In the 1960s, the theatre went for a tour in Afghanistan. During the years of the former Soviet Union, it visited almost all former Soviet republics.

In 1988, the theatre presented the play "Bakhrom Chubina" at the International Theatre Festival "Fajr" in Iran. The play got a high appreciation of the festival jury.

In 1990-1991, the theatre staged "Oedipus" based on the work of Sophocles. Khoshim Gadoev acted as a stage director and played the leading role. The play was shown in Moscow, where Kh. Gadoev became Laureate of the State Award.

The performance "Call of Love" by K. Abdullo (directed by Kh. Maibaliev) got the Grand Prix at "Parastu-99" in 1999 and 'Le Cid' by Corneille (directed by Kh. Maibaliev) got the State Rudaki Award in 2001.

Dushanbe Puppet Theatre

In 1986, the theatre was invited to the Federal Republic of Germany to participate in the "Days of Tajikistan" Festival. In 1988, it went for a tour to Mongolia and Chekoslovakia.

In 1991-1992, the theatre participated in the International Theatre Festival in Teheran. In September of 1995, it participated in the "Peace March" that took place in Paris. The troop also participated in the festivals in Lahore (Pakistan, 1998) and Italy (1998).

In Italy, the play "Speculation on War and Peace" (directors: A. Aminov and Z. Djavadov, artist: A. Geivandov) was performed. This play is devoted to the civil war and the after-war situation in the Republic. Puppets for the play were implemented in a traditional way, with ethnography motifs, folklore, and Tajik national music.

National Youth Theatre named after A. Vakhidov

In 1985, the Youth Theatre went on a tour to the Moscow Maly Theatre. It showed the following plays: "Much Ado About Nothing" (W. Shakespeare), "The Process of 17" (Y. Limnov), "How the Steel Hardened" (based on a N. Ostrovsky's novel), "Carnation" (M. Olamov), "Weeds" (S. Safarov). In 1993, "Safar Makhsum" staged by N. Djalolov got the First Prize at "Parastu - 93" festival. The same play got the first prize at the Ashgabat international festival (1993).

In 1994, the troop showed its performance "Rudaki" (S. Ulugzade) in Teheran and in 1997, "Zavoli Chambuli Maston" (by S. Ayubi) won the second first prize at "Parastu-97".

State Russian Drama Theatre after V.V. Mayakovsky

In April, 2001, the theatre took part in the third International feast of Russian theatres of the CIS Baltic states "Meetings in Russia", that was held in St. Petersburg. The play "The Sunset", which was performed there, was approved by the audience.

International organisations involved in theatre projects

Bactria Center – ACTED NGO

Address: Khalturin Street, 21, Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Telephone: +992 372 24 68 15/ 24 16 43
Fax: +992 372 51 01 12
E-mail Address: bactria@acted.org

Swiss Cooperation Office in Dushanbe

Address: 20, Pavlova Str., 734003 Dushanbe
Tel: (+992 372) 24 73 16
Fax: (+992 91) 901 50 40
E-Mail: dushanbe@cdc.net
Website: www.swisscoop.tj

Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation - Tajikistan

Address: 1 Firdavsi street, Dushanbe, 734003 Tajikistan
Phone: (992 372) 211 958, 243 081, 243 384
Fax: (992 372) 510 142
Email: zuhra.halimova@osi.tajik.net
Executive Director: Ms. Zuhra Halimova

Eurasia Foundation

Address: 31 Rudaki avenue, Apt. 11, Dushanbe
Phone: (992 372) 21 69 86, 23 33 75
Fax: (992 372) 21 21 78
Email: eurasia@eurasia.tajik.net

AKHPCA (Aga Khan Humanities, Project for Central Asia)

Contact person: Yasmin Lodi, Regional Coordinator
Address: 75, Tolstoy Street, Dushanbe
Phone: (992 372) 24 58 23, 24 07 02, 24 52 97
Fax: (992 372) 51 01 58
Email: info@akhp.org

French Embassy in Dushanbe

Address: Varzobskay Street, 17
Telephone: (992 372) 21 50 37, 21 74 05, 21 78 55, 24 67 23
Fax: (992 372) 51 00 82

German Embassy in Dushanbe

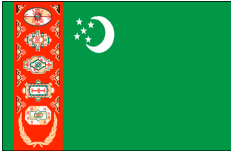
Contact person: Hubertus Klink - Culture section and Deputy Head of Mission

E-Mail: info@dusc.diplo.de

Address: Varzobskay Street, 16

Telephone: (992 372) 21 21 89, 21 21 98

Fax: (992 372) 21 22 45



Turkmenistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 5 million
- **Capital:** Ashgabat
- **Area:** 488,100 sq km (188,456 sq miles)
- **Major language:** Turkmen, Russian
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 58 years (men), 67 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Turkmen manat = 100 tenge
- **Main exports:** Oil, gas, textiles, raw cotton
- **GNI per capita:** US \$1,120 (World Bank, 2005)
- **Internet domain:** .tm
- **International dialing code:** +993

General overview of the political situation

Turkmenistan is made up mainly of desert and has the smallest population of the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia. It possesses the world's fifth largest reserves of natural gas, and has substantial deposits of oil. However, Turkmenistan has been unable to benefit fully from its oil and gas deposits due to the absence of export routes and because of a dispute between the Caspian Sea littoral states over the legal status of the sea where oil wells are to be found. With foreign investors shying away, its economy remains underdeveloped.

Turkmenistan is the most ethnically homogeneous of the Central Asian republics, the vast majority of its population consisting of Turkmens. There are also Uzbeks, Russians and smaller minorities of Kazakhs, Tatars, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians. In contrast to other former Soviet republics, it has been largely free of inter-ethnic hostilities. However, strong tribal allegiances can be a source of tension.

Saparmurad Niazov became head of Soviet Turkmenistan's Communist Party branch in 1985, and in 1992, a year after the country became independent, he ran unopposed for election the following year and won 99.5 percent of the vote, according to official figures. He crushed the nascent political opposition, so that his only vocal critics now are to be found in the diaspora, he created a subservient state media, and clamped down on non-government groups. In place of Communism, Niazov shaped a Turkmen nationalist ideology centred on himself, assuming the title Turkmenbashi or "leader of the Turkmens". Following President Niazov's death from heart failure early on December 21, it took only a few hours for Gurbanguly Berdymammedov to emerge as the elite's temporary leader, and then as their choice to become the next head of state.

Even if the path taken by the political transition remains unclear, some analysts believe that things would begin changing, albeit slowly. Some analysts and no doubt the country's interim rulers believe the system created by the late president Saparmurad Niazov can be changed through a process of gradual evolution. Others argue that stability is by no means assured, saying that in a country with a short history of statehood, there are centrifugal forces that could challenge Niazov's successors. In the absence of political parties and other kinds of formal social organisation, it is possible that informal regional groupings led by local power-brokers will attempt to challenge the Ashgabat-based elite which is now in charge. In terms of foreign relations, some experts suggest that Turkmenistan may make overtures to the West, which was strongly critical of Niazov's human rights record. But Russia will, if anything, be in a stronger position than ever to influence the country through its control of existing gas export pipelines. If the results of 11 February elections may be a foregone conclusion, it is far from clear how the situation will develop thereafter.

Theatres in Turkmenistan

The first theatre in Central Asia was built in Ashgabat in 1926 to stage plays in Russian. It housed an orchestra of 46 players and, since this date, music and opera have been regularly performed. The price of the theatre ticket, set as 'cheaper than beer' ensured a wide audience.

Since the collapse of the USSR, Turkmen theatre has faced many difficulties. Under the dictatorial regime of Saparmurat Niyazov, performing arts often serve as means of his cult of personality and independent theatres are severely controlled.

(Inspired by the *Turkmenistan Cultural Directory* Web-site: <http://www.turkmen.co.uk/>)

Pushkin Theatre



Contact person: Serdar Nepesov, Director

Address: 142 Magtymguly

Telephone: (+993 12) 34 75 33

Berdikuly Amansahatov, Stage director

Address: Ashgabad Azddi 25A

Phone: (+993 12) 34 75 33

The Pushkin Theatre presents both classical and contemporary repertoires, and hosts a school for actors, where experienced actors teach the younger students. Three mornings a week, a production of traditional tales for children directed by Berdikuly Amansahatov fills the theatre hall, while plays or concerts for adults are scheduled in the evening.

Puppet Theatre



Contact person: Jeren Durdieva, director

Address: Mir 9 Hudaiberdieva 1

Telephone: (+993 12) 41 80 02, 42 52 73

In 1992, following the Independence of Turkmenistan, Jeren Durdieva opened the first theatre for puppets in Turkmenistan. Indeed, such folkloric traditions had been discouraged during the days of Soviet occupation.

Jeren Durdieva studied in St Petersburg in the Theatrical Institute where she specialised in Puppet works. The Theatre gathers 20 actors she has trained herself. She creates the choreography and writes the scripts, while a resident artist makes the puppets. Regular performances on television and a nominal entry fee make the three weekly performances to meet a huge success among the Turkmen population.

Anna Mele and the Awara Theatre



Phone: (+993 12) 42 68 49

E-Mail: amele62@mail.ru

Anna Mele is born in 1962, in Kyzil Arbat. At 25, he is graduated from the Pedagogic Institute of Ashgabat. He was followed master classes with Jirzy Gratovsky, Tadasho Suzuki and with Markus Zohner. Since 1987, he has worked as an acting teacher in the Turkmen State Drama Theatre, in the Turkmen State Theatre for Children, and in the Youth Theatre. The theatre AWARA Anna Mele works with is an experimental company based on the nomadic tradition of travelling players within Central Asia. That's why theatre performances often use different languages from the region (The last solo play *Oedipus* performed by Anna Mele was spoken in Turkmen and Kyrgyz).

Since 1996, when he staged the play 'King Lear', Anna Mele has been frequently invited in theatre festivals in Central Asia and Europe (1996 Golden Lion, Lvov, Ukraine – 1997, International Festival of Arts, Ukraine – 1998, Theatre Festival, Tashkent – 2000, Festival of Central Asia, An der Ruhe, Germany - 2001 Moscow Theatre Olympiad - 2002 Festival Binari, Italy - 2003 International Theatre Festival, Bishkek). As consequences of the three theatrical forums which have been held in Central Asia since 2004, Anna Mele was invited to Germany (Hamburg, Kampnagel, *Polyzentral* Festival, 2006). He will perform *King Lear* in a French tour organised by Festival *Passages* (Nancy, May 2007) and he will stage, in collaboration with Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev, a new version of *Hamlet* by W. Shakespeare.



Uzbekistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 27.3 million
- **Capital:** Tashkent
- **Area:** 447,400 sq km (172,700 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Uzbek, Russian, Tajik
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 63 years (men), 70 years (women)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Uzbek som = 100 tiyins
- **Main exports:** Cotton, gold, natural gas, mineral fertilisers, ferrous metals, textiles, motor vehicles
- **GNI per capita:** US \$420 (World Bank, 2005)
- **Internet domain:** .uz
- **International dialing code:** +998

General Overview of the political situation

(Source: BBC news country profiles)

Positioned on the ancient Great Silk Road between Europe and Asia, majestic Uzbek cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand, famed for their architectural opulence, once flourished as trade and cultural centres. In the late 19th century Russia conquered Uzbekistan. Stiff resistance to the Red Army after World War I was eventually suppressed and a socialist republic set up in 1924. During the Soviet era, intensive production of "white gold" (cotton) and grain led to overuse of agrochemical and the depletion of water supplies, which have left the land poisoned and the Aral Sea and certain rivers half dry.

In 1991 Uzbekistan emerged as a sovereign country. Since its independence, it is the most populous Central Asian country and has the largest armed forces. There is no real internal opposition and the media is tightly controlled by the state. A UN report has described the use of torture as "systematic". The rigidity of political control is mirrored in the tightly centralised planning of the economy. Economic reform has been painfully slow to materialise.

Following the 11 September attacks on the US, the Uzbek authorities won favour with Washington by allowing its forces a base in Uzbekistan, affording ready access across the Afghan border. US aid increased for a time. Human rights observers voiced mounting fears that the international community was failing to respond adequately to the many reported cases of abuse and torture.

The most recent violence came in the eastern city of Andijan in May 2005. Protests against the jailing of several people charged with Islamic extremism turned violent and troops opened fire. Witnesses reported a bloodbath with hundreds of civilian deaths. The Uzbek authorities put the overall toll at over 180. Few weeks after the Andijan events, Uzbekistan formally evicted the United States from a military base that has served as a hub for combat and humanitarian missions to Afghanistan since shortly after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. In the wake of the Georgia's "Rose Revolution" at the end of 2003, the government launched a crackdown on independent NGOs and took many measures to bring Civil Society activity under its control. Showing more and more skepticism about cooperation with the USA, Islam Karimov has got closer to China and Russia which had strongly supported the Uzbek President for his reaction to the Andijan events.

A small history of theatre in Uzbekistan

by Ildar Mukhtarov



type.

European style came to Uzbek Theatre in the 20th century. It came in while the new urban culture was developing quite actively in Turkestan. Railway station, stock exchange, lawyer offices, "Cinematographs", auctions of antiques, printing houses which printed "thick" and "thin" newspapers and magazines, strange gramophones and telephones... All these were a breeding ground for idea of creating a theatre of a new

This idea appeared in minds of Uzbek educators called 'djadids', who stood for reforming and progress in politics and social life. The creation of a theatre inspired by the European model took the central place in their cultural program. Like educators of other western and eastern countries, djadids considered theatre as the most effective source for education.

Muhammadhodja Behbudi, the prominent representative of djadism, staged the first performance entitled "Patricide". The premiere was performed by an amateur troupe in Samarkand on January 15, 1914. This date is considered as the birthday of Uzbek new theatre. In a month period, "Patricide" play was staged by the amateur troupe "Turan" in Tashkent. The premiere was performed on February 27, 1914. Later, "Turan", renamed as "Turkestan", moved to the Academic Khamsa Theatre, which is the oldest theatre in the country.



Now, more than 36 professional theatres work in Uzbekistan, developing different genres: European drama, national music drama, opera, and ballet.... In addition to "adult" theatres, each region has its own puppet theatre. In Fergana City, Samarkand and Tashkent there are theatres of Russian Drama and musical theatres.

Tashkent plays the special role in theatrical life of the country. Indeed, for a long time, the capital of Uzbekistan has been considered as a theatrical city. Today, Tashkent concentrates third of all Uzbekistan theatres. Performances are staged in Uzbek and in Russian.

Uzbekistan modern theatrical life is diverse. Our theatres use every source to demonstrate the harmonious development of the Uzbek culture, which keeps its spiritual values and openness to the world theatre life.

Ildar Mukhtarov

(<http://www.timeout.orexca.com/february2004/3.shtml>)

Interview with Mark Weil

(Artistic Director of the *Ilkhom* Theatre (Uzbekistan),
September 2005)

Mark Weil is one of the most important figures of the theatre life in Central Asia. He came to Dushanbe from Moscow, where he was rehearsing a new play. Keeping taking pictures with his high-tech mobile phone, he's about 40, and due to the amazing history of the 'Ilkhom' theatre, located in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), he is obviously regarded as a living legend of the Central-Asian theatre.

“The Soviet time actually created the whole tradition of Theatre Company and professional theatre in Soviet Central Asia. Despite the existence of folk traditions in Central Asian, you cannot find actual professional theatre companies before Central Asian countries turn into communism. Even the religious *Jadids* began to trust the October revolution because it finally gave them the opportunity to build a professional theatre. The first theatre company named after Karl Marx was created in Uzbekistan in 1920. Since the time, the company, based in Tashkent, started to tour around the country in Samarkand, in the Ferghana Valley.

After that, another company was created whose actors were trained in Moscow. After 3 years studies in the Bakhtakov actor school they came back to Uzbekistan and set up the first group of professional actors who had benefited from a professional training. It is a very interesting detail that they have been in the Bakhtakov (a pupil of Stanislavskiy) theatre school and not in the Moscow school. Bakhtakov was the first to bring the idea of realist theatre and the actors who came back to Tashkent brought the concept of professional theatre school in Uzbekistan. In 1924, at the time of the creation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, they created the theatre company renamed after Khamza, just after the death of Khamza. They created the base of the Academic theatre named after Khamza and which still exists in Tashkent. The same appeared for Opera house in 1929 with Karii Yakubov who created with a group of musicians and singer the first musical theatre which created two different traditions: the traditional Uzbek Drama embodied by the Mukhimi theatre which was extremely popular in the 50s and which still exists. The second one is the classical opera. Then, the Soviet power took the decision to create theatres in all the regions of Uzbekistan. And theatre began to grow. After the Second World War, they created the Professional School of Drama, which gathered more and more artists.

Theatre in Central Asia does have a common identity; but an identity made of the Russian heritage. We can link this question of identity it with what it is just going on in Afghanistan. Central Asia was never a ground of theatre. There is no link between the Great old writers of Central Asia (such as Avicenna, Rumi...) and theatre. Even if they have written great Epics, which please all the artists, such texts have nothing to do with the Theatre culture. Everyone interested by culture in Central Asia must separate the old folk traditions as an historical object from the ideology, which nowadays uses them as a tool of nationalism.

However, Tashkent has a little but certain tradition of theatre, beginning from the 1950s by the history of the Tashkent Khamza Theatre. In the 50s, the Khamza Theatre was real a legend in the whole Soviet Union; Indeed, in Tashkent, the pressure on the artistic creations was much less heavy than in Moscow where the artistic activities were

severely controlled. Living in Uzbekistan was a great way to avoid the ideological pressure and that's why many artists lived in Tashkent to escape from the political pressure. And even if the performances were in Uzbek, they gained a huge popularity in Moscow.

The *Ilkhom* Theatre was created in the mid-70s, characterised by the emergence of a desire for alternative in theatre. Such a desire started in Moscow, with the creation of theatres called 'contemporary', such as the Taganka Theatre created in the mid60s. But the real alternative appeared in the mid70s, with the creation of the *Ilkhom* Theatre which was far away from Moscow and which became a legend in the whole Soviet Union. Indeed, The *Ilkhom* Theatre was the first theatre, which managed to be independent. If there were many attempts to create other independent theatre in Moscow and in Russia, they all failed. And it has been made possible thanks to the distance between Moscow and Tashkent.

Actually, the first problems the *Ilkhom* Theatre had to face occurred in Moscow during our first tour in 1982. Since this tour, the political control on our Theatre started. At this time, the *Ilkhom* Theatre was invited by a group of political dissidents who wanted to preserve a kind of cultural life in small clubs, such as *the Actors' house* or *the Cultural workers' house* where we performed. The day of the performance, more than 200 people just came to see our performance. It was really unexpected and amazing.

Contrary to what is commonly said, the crisis of the Central-Asian theatres did not start after the Perestroika. Actually, it started just after the 1966 earthquake in Tashkent, during the Brejnev time but of course, the *perestroika* fastened it. Many reasons can explain this crisis. First of all, just after the Perestroika, many theatres lost the opportunity to tour in Moscow, and in Russia where they used to meet other artists. During the Soviet time, every theatre performed for all the Soviet Republics. After the collapse of the USSR, the Central Asian theatres were limited to a very limited geographical area and lost a lot of audience. And a theatre can't be limited to just one city. Because of this reason, the artistic level of performances collapsed. It affected also the education system because best students from the Tashkent Theatre Institute used to go to the Moscow Drama school. During the Soviet time, it was the best drama school in the whole Central Asia. The change of the environment also affected the habits of the audience. If people were used to go to theatre during the Soviet regime, it changed a lot after the independence of Central Asian Republics. Of course the financial problems constitute a great part of this crisis but they are definitely not the only ones.

Even if now, the *Ilkhom* Theatre is obviously the most famous theatre in Central Asia, I don't wish to every theatre to be independent. Concerning my theatre, we just did not have other choice. On a one hand, I would not stand to see the young generation living in a country without State funded theatres. But on the other hand, the absence of subsidies forced us to focus on the artistic content. It gave us our honesty and forced us to always stay in contact with the society. Many theatres in Central Asia now face a lack of audience just because they missed the time when the audience started to leave theatre. The *Ilkhom* Theatre, as an independent theatre, had no other choice but to stay the closest we could to the social reality. The success always lies inside the society. As soon as theatre escape or avoid dealing with social issues, people will refuse to go to theatres, because we cannot speak other language but the language of the society. “

International theatre initiatives

2 Main Theatre Festivals:

- **'Ilkhom: East-West' Theatre Festival.** The Festival was created in 1993 by Mark Veil (The artistic Director of the Festival) and Bernard Kariev (General Director). Theatre companies from more than 25 countries have performed in this framework. (Contact: *Ilkhom* Theatre).
- **'Humo' Theatre Festival.** Nabi Abdurakhmanov and the Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan created the festival in 1998. Since this date, the event has welcomed many performances of Uzbek and foreign theatre companies. (Contact: Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan).

Other initiatives

- **1999-2001:** Joint theatre productions between the Russian State Drama Academic Theatre and the Italian stage director Sebastiano Salvato: 'Arlequino' by Goldoni, 'Mountains tops' by Pirandello, and 'Mandragora' by Machiavelli.
- **2000:** Masterclasses conducted by Kristil Hoffmann from Berlin at the second International Festival of youth theatres "Humo"
- **2002:** Joint International Project of the Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan and Dresden Theatre Junge Generation (Germany): Creation of the theatre performance "Krash - Bum - Tararam" - Rhythm helps us!"
- **2003:** Joint theatre production with Laurence Levasseur (French Choreographer) and Nabi Abdurakhmanov (Youth theatre of Uzbekistan): *Sharora the dancer* by Timur Zulfikarov
- **2003:** Workshops on silent theatre conducted by Guilda Chahverdi (France) in Bukhara, Samarkand, Tachkent and Rishton (Fergana Valley)
- **2004:** IETM Central-Asian theatre meeting (more information on the Website: www.ietm.org)
- **2004:** François Clavier (France): workshops on the Molière's play 'Tartuffe' with the actors of the *Ilkhom* theatre - more information available on the Website: http://www.ambafrance-uz.org/article.php3?id_article=281
- **2004:** Joint production of the theatre play *On Love* by the *Ilkhom* Theatre and the *On Theatre* (UK) – more information available on the British Council's website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/uzbekistan-arts-dance-and-drama-on-love.htm>
- **2005:** Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev – theatre production entitled 'the language of birth' with actors from the neighbouring Central-Asian countries
- **2005:** The Embassy of Switzerland in Uzbekistan and the *Ilkhom* Theatre present a joint project: 'Sexual neurosis of our parents' by the young Swiss playwright Lucas Berfus.

A small theatre in an ancient town: a history of theatre in Karchi by Ildar Mukhtarov

A mention of this theatre in a reference book would take up just one paragraph and would look something like: "The Eski Masjid theatre workshop is one of Uzbekistan's popular theatrical troupes. Organised in the mid - 1990s, it soon became well known thanks to its vivid and emotionally charged performances. The theatre's carefully selected repertoire is marked by its rich philosophical content and range of acute moral issues. Its productions include "Sheikh Sanan" from motifs in the poems of Attar and Navoi, "Nayman ona" ("Mother Nayman") from Chinghiz Aytmatov's novel "The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years", "Cain and Abel" after Byron's drama "Cain", and "My Darling" after the play "A Small Flat with a Big Balcony" by the Georgian playwright A. Shamanadze. The well-known producers Farrukh Kassimov, Barzu Abdurazzakov and Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev are invited to stage its performances. The theatre makes successful foreign tours. Its productions and actors have won prizes at various theatrical festivals and shows."

The theatre's brief history also had its prehistory. The *Muloqot* workshop split away from the M. Tashmukhamedov Theatre in Karshi Region in the late 1980s. The producer A. Abdunazarov suggested its creation and became its organiser. In mid - 1990s, this workshop gave rise to another one, named *Eski Masjid* (Old Mosque). The talented actor I. Turayev became the workshop's artistic director. At first, the name did not seem a very happy one, little suited to a theatre, a very secular institution. But people gradually became used to it. Now it has become a symbol. As with the names "Lenkom", "Taganka" and "Ilkhom", here too the original meaning has been lost, and what remains is an associative symbol, a kind of aesthetic impulse that momentarily awakens in the memory a chain of images, the features of an unmistakable creative identity.

At the turn of the century, the small theatres in the ancient town of Karshi came to be a phenomenon in the Uzbek theatre, one that has not yet been evaluated in terms of all its causes and effects. At a time when people in the capital, with all its advantages, could only dream of alternative theatrical forms, two theatre workshops were set up in Karshi.

The birth of the *Eski Masjid* Theatre and its creative development resulted from a renewal in theatrical thinking. The innovation affected both the organisational model of the private theatre workshop and the orientation towards a system of modern means of conveying expressiveness on the stage. Both called for traditions to be revised.

Theatre and tradition are twin brothers, especially in the East, where theatrical tradition is frequently seen not as theatrical routine, but as an example to follow. Fortunately, the Uzbek theatre has plenty of other examples showing how it has been possible to escape from the heavy chain of traditions that buries live thinking and feeling. *Eski Masjid*'s productions are among them. The production "Mehribonginam" ("My Darling") proved to be a success because of the genuineness of the moods and feelings it portrayed. The emotional unpredictability of the characters, the detailed aptness of the staging and rhythmical structure and the dynamics of the action rivet the audience's attention. And, of course, there is the actual message of the production, in which tenderness and love, resilience to adversity and hope for a better future emerge through the dissonance of family rows and life's customary disarray.

The Tajik producer Barzu Abdurazzakov transferred the action of the Georgian play to Uzbek soil. Previously, he had already staged the play in one of the Russian theatres. This fusion of different cultural experiences in one of the theatre's first productions proved decisive and was to be a vital element in its creative development. Farrukh Kassimov, a major producer from Tajikistan, would respond to the theatre's invitation, as would Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev, well known for his productions firstly in the theatres in Turkmenistan and now in Uzbekistan.

Receptivity to creative communication and cooperation with partners who bring a different cultural experience is the hallmark of the modern theatrical process, and the *Eski Masjid* Theatre espoused it from the outset. A further important development, ushered in by the stage directors, consists of new interpretation of classical literary material, whereby totally original stage versions of well-known texts are created. But mental fidelity to tradition is expressed in greater trust in the traditions of culture than in the theatrical traditions of staging classical works. This applies mainly to such plays as "Sheikh Sanan", produced by Kassimov, and "Cain and Abel", staged by Hodjakuliev.



Whether by chance or not, and probably because of a coincidence between the producers' interests within a single tendency, both productions exhibit, each in its own way, a currently important aspect of the interaction, outlook and views of the world that have developed in the East and the West. In "Sheikh Sanan", this theme forms a direct part of the content. The parable of the love of a Muslim man for a Christian woman, poetically interpreted by such major artists of the mediaeval East as Attar, Jami and Navoi, is given a tragic turn in Kasymov's production. This play about a love that overcomes national and religious boundaries is given a tough, sometimes cruel treatment. The cruelty may give rise to disagreement in the culminating scenes, in which the hero (I. Turayev), a priest at the Muslim shrine, the Kaaba, commits acts that are incompatible with Islam in order to earn the favour of the Roumelian (O. Khalilova) whom he loves. Hooted and jeered by the Christians, Sheikh Sanan burns the Koran, drinks wine and feeds pigs. The phantasmagoria of sacrilege evokes among the audience a protest that is programmed by the producer's intention: religious intolerance leads to unbridled cruelty, to the trampling of human dignity and to a chaos that destroys the harmony between people of different confessions.

The producer restores this harmony no less spectacularly in the play's finale. A belated emotional response brings the Christian woman to Sheikh Sanan's land, where, exhausted by their separation, the heroes die in one another's arms from the joy of their meeting. As they are accompanied on their last journey, they are laid on a massive black Christian cross and covered over in keeping with Muslim burial rites - a symbol of confessional reconciliation before a single Almighty, a symbol that is remarkably beautiful and intellectually satisfying.

The humanistic freedom of thought displayed by the great poets of the Middle Ages is particularly striking in the age of religious and national narrow-mindedness that looms today. This is the play's important historical and cultural message, which is indissolubly fused with its artistic and figurative treatment.



All in all, the ontological target of the present day is characteristic of Kassimov's stage direction when he is handling classical texts. It was also fully manifest in the play "Nayman ona", staged by Kassimov at the *Eski Masjid* theatre. The producer builds his parable about

the Mankurt from Aytmatov's novel on the contrast between the good beginning of cultural traditions and the barbarity of historical forgetfulness. The play "Cain and Abel", staged at the *Eski Masjid* theatre by Hodjakuliev (a version by G. Dongatarov from motifs in Byron's drama "Cain"), can be ranked among the most interesting events of recent times in the Uzbek theatre. The parable of the first fratricide is well known in both the Christian and the Muslim world. The playwright and the producer transform Byron's play substantially in keeping with Eastern tradition. The East makes its presence felt through the mournful melody, the details of the setting and the costumes, and the names, which have been changed to accord with Eastern tradition: Cain becomes Kobil, Abel is Hobil, Eve is Havva and Lucifer is Yelpek. Bringing the action of the play closer to the birthplace of the three religions is fairly conventional. It did not form part of Byron's

intention, but is attractive to the producer, Hodjakuliev, who is known to incline towards refined aesthetic form. Orientalizing the well-known Western drama is not just a matter of gratifying that inclination. The conflict and psychological reactions of the characters as seen by the Anglo - Saxon Byron are interpreted in the play from the standpoint of the Eastern, and more precisely, Muslim mentality.



The religious aspect is natural for a work based on a Biblical parable and Koranic tradition. But the social and moral results, which match the religious ones in the play, are no less important for the modern theatre and the modern audience. As handled by the theatre, the story of Cain's fall and repentance emerged as protest against fratricide and violence, an affirmation of harmony and creation as mankind's highest values.

The theatre's productions are interesting by virtue of their expressive, figurative treatment and the energy of the modern message. But the splendid corps of actors largely ensures the fruitfulness of the producers' endeavors here. They are the "veterans" of the workshop, such as I. Turayev and O. Khalilova, as well as those on whom the theatre draws for just one or several parts. Not all that many productions have been staged by *Eski Masjid*. But today it is impossible to imagine the modern Uzbek theatre without those few plays by the little theatre from Karshi.

Author: Ildar Mukhtarov

From the *Sana'at* journal: <http://www.sanat.orexca.com/eng/1-02/music1.shtml>

Woman in the Uzbek theatre

By Ildar Mukhtarov

For a long time, students of the Tashkent Institute of Arts, teaching the future producers, actors, and art-critics are representatives of the weaker sex for more than a half of students and teachers. And you may go in any theatre, on any performance, and there, in auditorium there is majority of the women. Probably, by virtue of the more sensitive and susceptible nature, just the women are the main spectators and judges of our theatre. This was so arisen and not today - The history keeps many episodes of deep love to art, true female, selfless of fidelity to theatre...

Tashkent, 1921. For the first time west European classic drama "Insi-diousness and love" by Shiller is put on the stage in the Uzbek language. The first Uzbek actress Maksuma Kariyeva plays the tragic role of Louisa, becoming an innocent victim of social injustice. In the auditorium filled with a lot of women, the faces are latent with paranjas from horsehair. Such rough paranja was not in the rest muslim world. But what gentle and susceptible souls disappeared behind a rough matter! According to the reviewer of those years, destiny of the heroine and game of the actress have excited the spectators so deeply, have caused such strong sympathy and empathy, that "many women cried, and most sensitive lost consciousness". The first Uzbek actress came to the theatre by different ways; their destinies have also developed differently. For the first time, Sara Ishanturaeva was noticed in children's home amateur performance, she was an absolutely young girl, and she quickly became an outstanding actress of the Uzbek theatre. Other outstanding actress Mariam Yakubova has lead the childhood at a courtyard of Bukhara emir.



Among the first professional actors that have received education in the Moscow theatrical studio in middle 20-s years was Tursunoy Saidazimova. Her teachers, colleagues on the stage, and spectators admired her talent. Her beautiful voice gave her the nickname of " the Uzbek nightingale". If a large future was predicted to her, the destiny has disposed in another way. Her husband, who believed to the slander of the relatives - religiously adjusted fanatics, killed her when she was only 18 years, in 1928.

Fortunately, there are much less similar sad, tragic episodes than joyful and light ones in the history of the Uzbek theatre. For example, three years after Tursunoy's death, Sara Ishanturaeva met a large success with the role of a young boy. With constant success Sara Ishanturaeva played on the stage of the Academic Theatre named after Khamza, performing roles of the world drama repertoire: Juliatt, Ophelia, Desde-mona, Gonerilia in tragedies "Romeo and Juliatt", "Hamlet", "Otello", "King Lear" by Shakespeare; Katerina in "Thunder-storm" by Ostrovsky, Iokasta in "King Oedipus" tragedy by Sophocles...



The theme of tragic female destiny always caused a hot response amongst the spectators of the Uzbek theatre. The Uzbek actresses like and can play the tragic roles. Not by any chance, even the simple drama images quite often get tragic shades in their performance. And at the same time, the Uzbek actresses embody

household and comic characters with large success. With unique charm and skill, they are able to create a special colour of the way of life on a stage. There is always improvisation and unpredictability in snatched out from the thick of national life images. The life of east woman is filled by reserves, necessity to observe steady traditions and customs. In comic images the Uzbek actresses revealed, besides " of prejudices of the past", that element of conscious game in these reserves, which makes one of attractive features of a female character.

So, for example, the indispensable recognition of a conducting role of the man in their game quite often is shaded by thin slyness, hardly ironic and kindly indulgent attitude to a man's priority. Whether by virtue of a complex of fault before the woman, which is incorporated in every man on the genetic level, whether to inborn a woman's charm, but most likely, because of mind, and talent of our actresses, they use the large and deserved respect today. "A strong half" of the figures of the Uzbek theatrical art listens to them very attentively.

The outstanding Uzbek ballerina Bernara Karieva headed the Union of the theatrical workers of Uzbekistan for more than ten years. For a long time she was the director of theatre of an opera and ballet named after Navoi, and now she became the adviser of the Minister on culture of Uzbekistan.



By Ildar Mukhtarov

From the *Time out Tashkent* journal: <http://www.timeout.orexca.com/march2004/3.shtml>

Metamorphoses of the Classic in Theatre

By Ildar Mukhtarov

The life of a classic text within environs it was created is important principle of the classic system. For the theatre, besides that, was very important to realise functions of old text within new socio - cultural environ. "Hamlet needs to be staged every ten years," Peter Brook stated.

Quickly growing receptivity of new forms coexisting with century old traditions more and more often promotes researches for new answers for an old question: How does "the imported" interact with the native and what kind of symbioses can occur at the result? To reveal sources and conflicting features in interaction of the West and East on the theatre stage is engrossing and useful task, which often gets intricate evaluation.

So, I am touching upon an important and interesting subject - a theme of oriental motifs in the staging of the Western dramaturgy in the modern Uzbek theatre. A number of plays, which contain this problem in this or that form, makes possible to say about the tendency. First of all, these are the plays "Mamura kampir" ("Old Woman Mamura") after the play of French dramatist, J. Sarman "Mamure", staged by B.Yuldashev in the Theatre of A. Khidoyatov and Gulistan Theatre, "Flying Doctor" of Molière staged by A. Salimov in the Theatre of Young Spectators, "Cain and Abel" of G. Byron staged by A. Hodjakuliev in the studio - theatre "Eski Masjid" as well as the plays at the Theatre of A.Khidoyatov - "King Lear" of W. Shakespeare staged by American producer D. Kaplan and "Electra" of Sophocles staged by F. Kasimov. In some cases the play is undergone of deep changes, in some - a translator and theatre change a place of events, names of personages and life reality, in the third cases - art director, artist or composer brings into the play typical elements of oriental culture.

At the end of the 20s - beginning of the 30s, in the pioneering period of Uzbek professional theatre was some experience in transformation, or "Uzbekisation" and "adaptation" of the comedies of Gogol and Molière. Local stories were often introduced into the plays. This phenomenon was typical not only of Uzbekistan and could be explained by different levels of national theatres in that period. Opponents of such practice often were right criticizing low level of theatre and, at the same time, culture of audience. In Uzbekistan, after the play "Hamlet" in 1935 such revising had been forgotten for a long time.



Modern plays much extend this problem, introducing it in the field of comparative study. If previously just some cases of text revising happened, now we have a tendency both regarding a number of such facts and their properties. But it is wrong to evaluate these current performances as primitive anachronism and as occasional element in the pioneering period of professional theatre.

As far as oriental elements in the modern plays of the Western drama put on the Uzbek theatre stages are concerned, we should not speak about differences in the development of national theatre cultures but, on the contrary, about integrity of the Uzbek theatre in the general cultural processes typical both of the Western and the Eastern art.

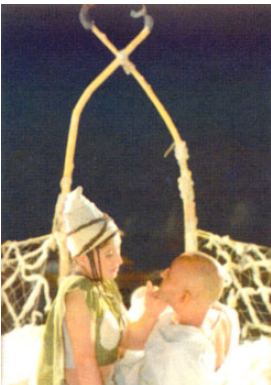
It was written a lot about the oriental trends in the Western art. This concerns the problem of influence of oriental theatre on the European stage art discussed by G. Crag, Vs. Meyerhold, A. Tairov, P. Brook and art challenges of modern theatre producers. It is also known that many subjects and characters as integral part of the Western art were taken from the East. This is not only "Divine Comedy" of Dante but, what is especially interesting for us, all European "Robinson circle" going back from the Arab philosopher and writer Ibn Tufeil to the treatise of Ibn Sino.

In the East, the interpretation of the same subject by different writers was usual and became a part of cultural tradition. The closest example is a legend about Sheih Sanan, which was staged in the theatres twice: first, in the studio - theatre "Eski Masjid" by F. Kasimov and then in the Youth Theatre by N. Abdurakhmanov. This legend came from the works of such famous masters of the medieval poetry as Attar, Djami and Navoy. Intentionally or unintentionally the translated works on the stage are more or less adapted to the mentality of spectators and psychological set of actors so that the spectators don't even guess the existence of any adaptation.

This phenomenon tends to take place essentially in the case of closed cultures. There are two examples: The translator of A. Ostrovsky into English, D. Magarshak worked on the plays of the Russian dramatist "attentively looking at the English theatre", as he said himself, and did everything possible to adapt the translation to the English actors and English spectators. The translations reserved author's emotional background and, according to the critics, idioms so numerous in the plays of Ostrovsky got "correct English equivalents". In his own turn, the biggest English critic K. Tinen specified the film "Hamlet" of G. Kozintsev with starring of I. Smoktunovsky as "Russian" and "non-Shakespeare" "Hamlet".

When translated works come to the theatre, the stage becomes a place of meeting of different cultures and direct dialogue of different national mentalities. The question about how much interesting and understandable this dialogue may be for spectators and the translation work promotes mutual understanding.

Atmosphere of "Electra" staged by F. Kasimov is rich of apprehensive signs: turned crescent direly sparkling on the copper disc - considered a bad sign in the East; sounding of classic Uzbek makoma transforming in the groan of Electra seems natural and harmonised with the power of the antique tragedy; dried branches of the tree covered with "bands of memory" are also a characteristic feature of eastern cemeteries. In the staging of the early farce of Molière "Flying Doctor", O. Salimov used a method "theatre within theatre" and closed up French farce men and Uzbek maskarabozes.



The logic is obvious; both of them have a conditional and spontaneous character of the folk theatre, which fed the art of Molière. However, the specific and distinctive features caused by the place and time of the action are equally obvious: on the stage we cannot see Paris in the 17th century but Turkestan at the beginning of the 20th century. Molière himself, sitting in a comfortable armchair in the corner of the stage, is looking on all metamorphoses with curiosity.

The parable about Cain and Abel speaking on the first murder on earth is equally known in the Christian and Islamic worlds. The producer A. Hodjakuliev and dramatist G. Dongatarov interpreted the drama of an Englishman, Byron, in accordance with the oriental legend. The East specifies itself by a sad melody - the musician playing the violin, walking around the stage, holds it like ghidjak as well as by decorative details (artists Sh. Abdumalikov and M. Soshina): khurdjin, bent knife, colourful tyubeteikas, fine tattoo on women's shoulders, which are not just a switch on modern exotic but a sign of recent paganism. Moreover, the names gained eastern consonances: Cain into Kobil, Abel into Khobil, and Eva into Havva. These outer attributes are important in this case, but the main thing is that a conflict and psychological reactions of the characters from the drama of Byron are being interpreted in the play within the framework of oriental, even Muslim, mentality.

Thus, the recent plays are extending the problem of classic texts living in the time. Versification of these texts, changes in their interpretations in process of time became usual things in the theatre practice. Besides the vertical line of time, the problem is obtaining the horizontal - volume constant, on a basis of which the culture-recipient declares its own peculiarities not in spontaneous manner (through the psychological set of an actor) but intentionally. These facts exactly give evidence for the depth of transformation in the Uzbek theatre art in the post-Soviet period. The Soviet theatre culture was a holistic ideological and art structure with general criteria, which revealed themselves in the staging of translated dramaturgy, first of all, the Western classics, where "the theatre of the Soviet East" tried to approach in maximum extent to the textbook interpretation that was fixed in philological or theatre critic works. Staging the play, the theatre adapted "native" to "imported". An actor transmitted the national source. The break of holistic structure of "multi - national Soviet theatre" into pieces caused changes of approaches and criteria to the theatre art, including interpretations of the Western drama. At the time when a number of plays reduced because of growing interest to own cultural heritage, the spectrum of quality differences significantly extended: variety of approaches had enriched art challenges.

In a line of the staging finds, the orientalisation has occupied its own proper place, which seemed impossible from a point of previous criteria system. This tendency



combines striving to the new and orientation to the classic traditions of spiritual culture, both the Western and Eastern. Foretelling the vitality of this tendency in the 21st century we can state: having a deficit of modern dramaturgy, which is seen not only in the Uzbek theatre and sharpened by the problem that all existing literature subjects have been already used in general, the intensity of new attempts can grow. Essentially, the world art process has already faced the total secondary

interpretation of spiritual values accumulated before. In this background occur the needs to search for cultural dialogue in the theatre. In this case Central Asian theatres will obtain good opportunities of unique experiments synthesizing cultural values of the East and West.

Ildar Mukhtarov

(From the *Sana'at* journal: <http://www.sanat.orexca.com/eng/1-03/metamorphoses.shtml>)

Some theatres in Uzbekistan

Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre



Address: 34 Navoi St., Tashkent Uzbekistan

The theatre started its history in 1914, when Abdullah Avloniy created an amateur troupe "Turon". Later this amateur troupe became a professional drama theatre, which received the status of Academic Theatre in 1937, following the decision of the government. The Uzbek national drama theatre is located in its current building since 1967.

The staged plays are inspired by various every-day situations, use people's humor, techniques of a traditional street theatre, and modern interpretation of ancient customs. For instance, the play entitled "Ancient times fairy tales", based on short novels of the classic Uzbek literature, or the amusing comedy "Parable on red apple" embody such a creation mixing tradition and modernity.

Ilkhom Theatre



Contact person: Mark Weil, Artistic Director
Address: 5, Pakhtakorskaya Str, Tashkent
P.O.Box5789, Tashkent 700000, Uzbekistan
Tel: (+998712) 412241; (+99871)1440403
Fax: (+998712) 412252; 890046;
E-Mail: marikweil@hotmail.com
Web Site: <http://www.ilkhom.com>

The "ILKHOM" theatre was one of the first professional theatre not depending on any state institutions for cultural affairs in the history of the former USSR. It was founded in 1976 by the stage director Mark Weil, who is still artistic director of the theatre, and of the group of Tashkent Theatre Institute graduates. Today the "ILKHOM" is a cultural complex, which includes a theatre, a drama school and an exhibition hall. The last premieres are entitled: "Imitations of The Koran" by A. Pushkin; "Love's Labour's Lost" by W.Shakespeare, "The Portrait of Mademoiselle Tarjee" by I. Elagin, "The Brothers & Liza", by A. Kazatsev and a play, which includes several works of A. Pushkin, called "Romance Unleashed". Its last performance entitled « Flights of Mashrab » is a multimedia music project dedicated to the 250th anniversary of Wolfgang

Amadeus Mozart.

The *Ilkhom* theatre has toured abroad many times from Europe to the USA, and has developed international students' exchange programs with the Carroll College (Wisconsin, USA), the Jacques Lecoq school (Paris, France), the Yoram Loewenstein Studio in Tel Aviv (Israel), the Drama School of Seattle (USA), and the Folkwang-Hochschule Essen University (Germany). In 2003, an agreement for cultural, educational, and scientific cooperation was signed between the Washington school of drama (Washington, USA) and the *Ilkhom* Theatre: Each year, six students-participants of the Student Exchange program study in Tashkent for 2 semesters (9 months). Moreover, the *Ilkhom* Theatre host a Central-Asian Laboratory for young stage directors, which gathers young artists from every Republic of the region.

“Eski Masjid” Theatre-Studio (Karshi)



Contact person: *Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev, Stage director*
Address: *Chilanzar, Tashkent, Kvartal 5, dom 6, Kwartira 44*
Tel: (+998 712) 77 71 72, (+998 71) 380 18 13
E-Mail: Ovlyakuli@yandex.ru
Web: www.culture.uzsci.net

The “Eski Masjid” (Old Mosque) Theatre -Studio was founded in 1989. As an independent theatre, it does not receive any subsidies from the State. Fourteen actors work permanently in the theatre, while each invited stage director work for a specific performance. Arrived in Uzbekistan for the presentation of one of his film, the stage director Peter Brook met the “Eski Masjid” Theatre-Studio in 1991. As a result of the high estimation it got from him, the Karshi Theatre started to travel around the whole Europe. It participated in several international theatre festivals in Europe and in the CIS countries.

Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev is one of the most frequently invited directors of the theatre . He was born in 1959 in Turkmenistan and after having finished the Theatrical Institute of Tashkent, he moved to Tbilissy, where he pursued his studies under the direction of M. Tumanishvily. From 1986 to 1993, he was the main director of the Chordjou theatre (Turkmenistan) and of the Theatre of Young Spectators in Ashgabad. Since the beginning of his career, he has directed about fifty productions by Central Asian and foreign playwrights such as Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Alisher Navoi, or Tikomacu.

Youth theatre of Uzbekistan



Contact Person: Nabi Abdurakhmanov, Artistic Director

E-Mail: youth@globalnet.uz

Address: 56 Navoi St., Tashkent

Tel: (+998 71) 144 11 91

Fax: (+998 71) 144 10 87

Website: <http://youththeatre.chat.ru/>

The theatre was created in 1970 as the Tashkent State Russian Theatre of Young Spectator. Along with plays for children like "Puss in Boots", "Three Piglets", "The Wizard of the Oz", and "Stars in the Hand", the theatre presents some works for adult viewers. Among the most popular works are the plays "Constellation of Omar Khayam", "A Girl with Matches" based on a tale of Andersen, Tolstoy's "Kholstomer", "Fiddler of the Roof" and "Woman-Devil" by Merime. The play "The Girl with Matches" was well regarded among other plays from 52 countries at the 3rd Moscow International Chekhov's Festival in 1998. The last performance of the theatre entitled 'Sharora the dancer' by Timur Zulfikarov, was achieved in collaboration with the French choreographer Laurence Levasseur.

The Artistic Director of the Theatre was one of the organiser of the 2004 Tashkent IETM meeting.

Dance company "Theatre of movement"



Contact person: Lilia Sevastianova (French-speaking), Artistic Director,

E-Mail: visage_theatre@inbox.ru

More information: <http://enews.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=92417582417.042.1685.15367482>

Lilia Sevastianova, the choreographer of the Dance Company named 'Theatre of Movement', studied choreography in the Tashkent Institute of Culture from 1976 to 1981. From 1982 she has worked as the artistic director of the contemporary Dance Company. In 1992 her work "White Bluz" was presented at the Festival of New Forms SKIT in Paris and London. From 1993 to 1999 she worked as a choreographer and teacher in the studio at the Gor'kov's Russian Drama Theatre. She has collaborated with many theatre s in Tashkent and Moscow.

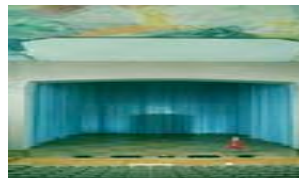
The Russian State Drama Academic Theatre



Contact person: Vladimir Shapiro, Artistic Director
Address: 28, Khamza St., Tashkent
Tel: (+998 712) 33-42-10

It was created in 1934 and has hosted plays by V. Vishnevskiy, A. Arbuzov, K. Simonov, V. Rozov, and M. Roshin. It played a considerable role in development of theatrical culture of Uzbekistan, enriching the repertoire with achievements of Uzbek dramaturgy. The plays of the famous drama masters Khamza, N. Safarov, A. Kakhhar, S. Azimov and others were showed on the stage of the theatre. The work of the Russian theatre is a sample of a creative cooperation of two national cultures. The nineties is the time of Bulgakov's "Zoika"s apartment", "Countess Julia" by A. Strindberg, "Everyone in the Garden" A. Olby, " The Eclipse or Plays of Emptiness", "Terrible Parents" by J. Cocteau. Since 1999, in the framework of a partnership with S. Salvato from Italy, Vladimir Shapiro, the artistic Director of the Theatre have worked on plays by Goldoni, Pirandello and Macchiavelli.

The Uzbek national Puppet theatre



Contact person: Dinara Yuldasheva
Address: Rejisser Prospekt Afrosiab 1, Tashkent
E-Mail: shofir@yandex.ru
Tel: (+998 71) 133 64 09

The Puppet Theatre was established in 1930. Among the first performances of the theatre were "Big Ivan" by Obraztsov and "Aldar Kose" by Aleksandrov. In the forties and in the fifties, the plays by Gairati "Little Ali" and "Adventures of Fatima" by Khabibullaev met a huge public success. The repertoire of the theatre in the 70s and in the 80s included the plays of Yakubov "Farkhad and Shirin", "Smile, Aikhon", the comedy of Khamza "Pranks of Maisara" and "Kachal Palvan" by Davshan. Classical plays for children and performances for adults are still showed in a 205-seat theatre hall.

The Uzbek Republic theatre of Young Spectators

Contact Person: Olimson Salimov, Artistic Director

E-Mail: osalmow@yandex.ru

Address: Tashkent Zarkaynar 8

Tel: (+998 712) 40 19 22

Fax: (+998 712) 90 50 54

Aladdin Theatre

Address: 5 Mustaqillik Sq., Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Phone: (+998 712) 139-1303, 139-4707

The Art-theatre "Aladdin" opened on June 18, 1998. Today the repertoire of the theatre includes "The Grumpy" of F. Webber, clown pantomime of O. Lugovskii "Life of the Masque", "Madness of Love" by S. Sheppard, the parody show "All Stars" and others. The cast of performance is comprised of the actors of "Aladdin" theatre as well as the actors of other theatres of Tashkent. The theatre is a platform for the cooperation of playwrights, directors and actors. The repertoire is based on the works of comedic genre.

Uzbek theatres on the road

Ilkhom Theatre

- 2006** - Moscow (Russia) in Vs.Mejerholda's Center: «Love's Labor Lost» by William Shakespeare, «White White Black Stork» by Abdulla Kadiri, «Chekhov LAB» by Anton Chekhov
- Vienna (Austria) HOLLENFAHRT International Off-Festival : «Flights of Mashrab» (world premiere) dedicated to the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- Barbican Centre (London, England) : «White White Black Stork» by Abdulla Kadiri
- 2004** - "Happy Beggars" by Carlo Gozzi, performed at the Second International Festival of Arts "Peace and Respect" in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan).
- Tour with the productions "Imitations of The Koran" and "Romance Unleashed" by A. Pushkin in Moscow on the stage of the Nations Theatre.
- Tour with the production "Imitations of The Koran" by A. Pushkin in the USA (Los Angeles) on the stage of the Skirball Cultural Center.
- 2002** - Retrospective of the *Ilkhom Theatre* productions in Moscow and St.Petersburg, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the theatre.
- Performances at the "Baltic House" Festival (St Petersburg) and in the Moscow Art Theatre called Chekhov.
- Festival *Passages* (Nancy, France): Guest tour of the theatre with the production "Ubu Rex" by A. Jarry.
- World Premiere of "Imitations of the Koran" by A. Pushkin on *Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen Europaisches Festival* (Germany).
- 2001** - "Love's Labours Lost" by W. Shakespeare was presented on *the Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen Europaisches Festival*. The play was a joint production between four schools of drama: Yoram Loewenstein Studio in Tel Aviv (Israel), University of Washington Drama School in Seattle (USA), Folkwang-Hochschule Essen University (Germany) and the *Ilkhom Theatre's Drama School* (Uzbekistan).
- 2000** - 'Medea' by Euripides was staged as an international joint production involving the *Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen Europaisches Festival* (Germany), the Vidy-Lausanne theatre (Switzerland) and the *Ilkhom Theatre* (Uzbekistan).
- European Premiere of "Ubu Rex" by A. Jarry, performed in the framework of the *Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen Europaisches Festival* (Germany).
- 1998** - "Babel Inn": Joint production between the *Ilkhom Theatre* and the *Shapiro&Smith Dance Company* (USA).
- 1996** - Tour in Germany (Recklinghausen, Mulheim, Saarbrucken) of the "Petty Bourgeois Wedding" by B. Brecht and "Happy Beggars" by C. Gozzi.

Youth theatre of Uzbekistan

- 2004** The Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan (Tashkent) performed "Princess Turandot" by

Karlo Gozzi and directed by Nabi Abdurakhmanov at the Sixth International Baltic and CIS Theatre Festival: "Meetings in Russia" (St Petersburg).

2001 Participation in the Chekhov Festival with the performance entitled «Sodom and Gomorrah XXI», directed by Nabi Abdurakhmanov.

1998 Invitation of the play entitled "The Girl with Matches" at the 3rd Moscow International Chekhov Festival.

“Eski Masjid” Theatre -Studio (Karshi)

2006 Kampnagel *Polyzentral* (Hamburg, Germany) ; The company performed « Raksu Samo » by A. Navoi and directed by Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev.

2005 Festival *Passages* (Nancy, France); The company performed “Raksu Samo” by Alisher Navoi and directed by Ovlyakli Hodjakuliev.

Dance company “Theatre of movement”

2004 The 50-min piece “Request” was performed in the framework of the Moscow Festival of Russian Dance Theatre TSEH.

International organisations involved in theatre projects

British Council

Address: 11, Kounaev Street, Tashkent
Telephone: (+ 998 71) 120 67 52, 120 67 53, 120 67 62
Fax: (+998 71) 120 63 71
Website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/uzbekistan.htm>

Goethe Institute

E-Mail: il@taschkent.goethe.org
Website: <http://www.goethe.de/oe/alm/deindex.htm>

French Cultural Center named after Victor Hugo

Contact Person: Hugues Baltzinger, Director
Address: 112, rue Zulfia Xonim (ex-Xurshid), Tashkent
Phone: (+99871) 144 94 09
Fax: (+998 71) 120 69 71
Email: hugues.BALTZINGER@diplomatie.gouv.fr, centre.culturel@tps.uz
Website: http://www.ambafrance-uz.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=54

Swiss Cooperation Office in Tashkent

Contact Person: Barno Turgunova, Arts and Culture Program Officer
Address: 15, 17 Ivlev Str., 700100 Tashkent
Tel: (+998 71) 120 54 54
Fax: (+998 71) 120 24 56
E-Mail: barno.turgunova@sdc.net
Website: <http://www.swisscoop.kg/index.php?userhash=31120508&navID=3201&IID=1>

UPDATING INFORMATION: CENTRAL ASIA ON THE WEB

News about political, economic, cultural, environmental and social developments in the countries of Central Asia

EurasiaNet (<http://www.eurasianet.org>) provides information and analysis about political, economic, environmental and social developments in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as in Russia, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia. The web site also offers additional features, including newsmaker interviews and book reviews. Based in New York, EurasiaNet advocates open and informed discussion of issues that concern countries in the region. The web site presents a variety of perspectives on contemporary developments, utilizing a network of correspondents based both in the West and in the region. The aim of EurasiaNet is to promote informed decision making among policy makers, as well as broadening interest in the region among the general public.

Registan.net (<http://www.registan.net>) covers Eurasian politics and news, seeking to draw more attention to issues and news rarely covered in much depth, if at all, by Western media. It was launched in 2003 in order to offer analysis and context to current events from the region as well as to offer original reporting. Its focus is primarily on the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, with an eye to domestic politics, relations with with rest of the world, and foreign policy as well as the occasional report on pop culture.

Ferghana.ru (<http://www.ferghana.ru>). Ferghana.Ru news agency was established in the fall 1998 when Ferghana Community web site was set up. Ferghana.Ru news agency is one of the most popular resources dealing with the life of Central Asian countries of the former USSR. With correspondents in every major city of the region, Ferghana.Ru news agency offers its clients the latest information on political, economic, cultural, and military issues from Central Asian countries.

Political and sociological analysis:

The Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst (<http://www.cacianalyst.org>) is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

The International Crisis Group (<http://www.crisisgroup.org>) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.