

## Kazakh Symphonic Kuy - the Counterintuitive Convergence of Traditions

Marlena T. Kokisheva<sup>a</sup>, Diana Y. Mahmood<sup>a</sup>, Gulnar A. Begalinova<sup>b</sup>,  
Galiya Z. Begembetova<sup>a</sup> and Valeriya E. Nedlina<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN; <sup>b</sup>The Kazakh National Academy of Arts named after T.K. Zhurgenov, Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN

### ABSTRACT

The research is devoted to a particular genre of Kazakh classical music - Symphonic kuy. This article is the first attempt to understand not the phenomenon of kuy itself, but its belonging to a certain historical era and culture, therefore reflecting their characteristic properties. The area of Kazakh ethnic music is little studied yet, as is the issue of specific historical origins of the interaction between European and Kazakh traditions. Particular attention is paid to a number of controversial issues, such as the ambiguity of the genre of kuy, cultural complexity, the variety of forms of "Symphonic kuy". Still, the comparative analysis is of great scientific interest concerning the ways of development of the Kazakh traditional music. The appearance of kuy as a cultural phenomenon of musical and linguistic canons determined the "language" character of this study. It means it is not aimed at the search for individual uniqueness of music, but at the principles and code of kuy's musical organization.

### KEYWORDS

Kazakh music, symphonic kuy, symphonic music, orchestra, interaction of traditions

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### Introduction

Traditional music in the ethno-cultural context has always attracted the attention of scientists, recognizing syncretism as an integral feature of both genres of music and culture itself. It was the research in the field of musicology, art history, folklore and culture, that resulted in a new round of thinking about musical heritage from the perspective of nomadism as a decisive factor in determining the identity of its ideological and functional framework in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Mergal, 2007). The development of modern humanities in the new civil-graphic direction pushes the understanding of cultural context of traditional music, which is associated with many essential aspects of its history and theory (Omarova, 2002). In this sense, the Kazakh kuy is one of the most exciting cultural, historical and musical phenomena of Central Asian nomadic civilization.

In the 20th century, in Kazakh culture, through a process of Westernization, appeared a new tradition – the musical art of European (Western) model (Kuzbakova, 2013). The genre of kuy for the Kazakh dombra, along with traditional songs, attracts composers of the new formation as a

**CORRESPONDENCE** Marlena T. Kokisheva ✉ marlena\_07@mail.ru

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source of national style. Its methods of developing musical ideas are similar to the Western symphonic music (Omarova, 2015). Since the creation of symphonic kuy, called "Dairabai", by E. Rakhmadiyev (1973) has passed more than fifty years. During this time, composers have created more than a hundred songs of this genre (Muhambetova, 2002). However, the contradictory nature of this phenomenon, according to composer and musicologists in the period of its origin, has not yet received a theoretical understanding and, by and large, has not been overcome.

### Literature Review

The problem of studying the Kazakh instrumental music in general and its regional styles in the cultural and historical context in particular, is considered for the first time and requires the methodology of the system analysis.

The Kazakh ethno-music currently includes a number of important historical and theoretical problems of Kazakh traditional instrumental music. The scientists, who laid the foundation for musicological science of Kazakhstan (Zataevich, 1925; Karomatov & Slobin, 1972) have studied kuy and its language features from the point of view of the European musicology (Kuzbakova, 2013; Jumagaliyeva, 2015). Further research in the field of traditional instrumental music are connected with the methodology, synthesizing the foundations of European science and traditional Kazakh knowledge (Dzhanseitova & Rauandina, 2013), as well as the formation method of diachronic music studies and integrated approach to the phenomena of folklore and oral professional genres (Sadykova, 2013). Research paid special attention to the role and importance of the Kazakh folk music in the world (Omarova, Alpeissova & Kuseubay, 2015).

Many researchers expressed their opinion on symphonic potential of the Kazakh traditional kuy (Asafiev, 1959); researches were held on the similarity of kuy and symphony (Izmailov, 2000). According to the studied materials, kuy, like a symphony, is a music that has the impeccable logic of instrumental development. So impeccable, that is associated with no other than a symphonic process (Rouland, 2007). Indeed, all the originality and inconsistency extent of the traditional Kazakh and European academic genres, that can be seen in a number of features, makes a good impression of kuy's symphonization. First of all, it is his property to reflect people's life in its musical and philosophical reflection. Composition-wise, the combinatorial nature (Shegebaev, 2011) and intonation growth of thematism, characteristic of the Kazakh dombra, organically transforms into a motivic development method.

Particular attention is paid to the artificial nature of the musical language of the Soviet period (Muhambetova & Begalinova, 2002). Often the connection with traditions appears in a symphony kuy rather superficially, expressed by the application of the stereotypical methods of orchestration and harmonization. However, it is undeniable that many samples of the genre have high artistic and cultural value, proven in concert practice (Abazov, 2007).

Authors developed the theoretical problems of kuy's functioning, thematism and forms, as well as the structure of the ancient dombra and kobyz kuy (Tansuġ, 2009). Especially brightly these two different styles are reflected in the terms of dombra instrumental music, stated above - tokpe and shertpe. These two terms, in showing the style difference of sound manner of the instrument,

are basic in determining other musical and structural and even wider – typological levels of kuys (Muhambetova, 2002).

Firstly, there are problems of kuy meter-rhythmical organization (Adams, 2012). The comparative analysis of intonation and rhythmic structure, modal and compositional structures of various tools (dombra, kobyz, sybyzgy) and regional traditions of Kazakhstan was not an initial purpose (Mergaliyev, Popandopulo & Stepanskaya, 2013). The comparative, comparative-historical, historical and typological aspects of instrumental music are very promising both among national cultures and the whole of Central Asia.

Research gives definitions of general and specific features inherent to the musical culture of the settled and nomadic peoples (Mergal, 2007). For example, among the general features is a process of historical development of musical art that developed from collective, syncretic forms (folklore) into the individually author's and professionally musical. They are also closely related to the forms of making music and even to the types of musical activity of the society, which acquire a definite content, depending on the historical period and cultural type.

According to the authors of this article, Symphonic kuy is a unique phenomenon, organically included in the Kazakh culture. Kazakh society experienced the process of reinterpretation of cultural heritage in 1990-2000-ies (Dzhanseitova & Sakharbayeva, 2013); much of the culture of the Soviet period was currently unclaimed. But the genre of symphonic kuy still retains its value, and not accidentally. Originated as a creative experiment, it has quite convincingly proved its viability. Through this genre, in a concentrated form, the portrait of modern Kazakhstan society reflects its value priorities of preserving the age-old traditions and the participation in the achievements of world civilization.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to study the Kazakh national music and kuy in particular. Special emphasis is placed on the formation of the major paradoxes of the characterization and the concept etymology of symphonic kuy.

### **Research questions**

The study has the following tasks:

- relying on the latest current research in culturologists and historians, to describe new scientific paradigms in the study of the Kazakh traditional music;
- to study and identify the main paradoxical elements by comparing different interpretations of the Kazakh kuy concept;
- justify the cultural complexity (the dialogue of cultures, traditions, epochs) of separating from the traditional genre.

### **Method**

Methods are based on a comprehensive and systematic study of the phenomena and objects of traditional culture with, involving the methodology of historical sciences, cultural studies, ethnography, religion, folklore, art with the simultaneous application of the general for humanities genetic, structural, comparative and historical, comparative and typological methods of studying music, as well as its cultural and historical context. These basic methods have

been implemented in this paper. According to the identified regional instrumental traditions (dombra, kobyz) of Western and Eastern Kazakhstan, researches especially investigated the mode and composition structures of kuys that most clearly represent the features of the musical language (subsystem) of the instrumental traditions of Western and Eastern Kazakhstan.

Particularly important in this study is the method of comparing various structures and elements. Thus, the following facts were found: the ambiguity of genre definition of symphonic kuy, high social significance of the loss of native properties of professional art of oral tradition (improvisation, form of presentation, living environment etc.), as well as the postmodern essence of genre in the absence of Kazakh culture phase of modernism.

### Data, Analysis, and Results

The study of the major paradoxes' interaction of traditions had the following results.

The concept of "symphonic kuy" connects the phenomena of different order and a different nature. This genre definition is formal ("Formalism in music ordinance, 1948"). By joining the European word "kuy" or "mugham" we get a folk genre in a symphonic performance. In fact, it is not very different from the previously created "Balbrauna" by E. Brusilovsky, "Dance" from "Birzhan and Sarah" by M. Tulebaev, "Folk Dance" from "Legend of the white bird". Traditional genre has its essential features, and symphony orchestra-performed kuy cannot be regarded as an independent genre.

"Symphonic kuy" means different symphonic genres, such as an adaptation, a poem, a legend, an overture, a picture, "толғай" ("tolghau" – literally "musings") etc. In fact, this paradox is connected to the problem of the genre typology. On the one hand, the term "symphonic kuy" refers to compositions that are significantly different in both form and content. On the other hand, there are many compositions that do not have these genre definitions, but being thought of by the authors as a symphonic kuy.

Firstly, it is necessary to define what is considered to be a "symphonic kuy". If considering only those pieces of music, which are marked by the composer himself as a kuy, then many works, typologically similar to orchestral kuy, but not classified as the E. Rahmadiev's term, fall out of the context of research. Another issue is the use of the term "symphonic kuy" in compositions for folk instrument orchestra, chamber orchestra etc. The problem of genre definition expands due to the multi-levelness of the terms "symphonic" and "kuy". To approach the genre typology issue, one should consider the terminology.

The term "symphonic" can be understood both as a means (of a symphony orchestra, or even orchestral means of expression), and the artistic principle philosophically generalized dialectical reflection of life in music.

In understanding of the term "symphonic" as a synonym for "orchestral", appears the basis for the classification of symphonic kuy types by performing means. Thus, the concept of "symphonic kuy" on the one hand covers the kuy interpretations and the traditional and original compositions for symphony orchestra. These include kuys by such composers, as E. Rakhmadiyev, B. Kydyrbek, V. Strigotsky, Toksanbaev A., E. Khusainov etc. On the other hand, "symphonic" can also be called a kuy both for Kazakh folk instruments orchestra

(e.g., Symphonic Poem “Aral”, 1992 by E. Umirov), and for chamber orchestra (Murat Oskenbaev’s kuy adaptation for A. Toksanbaev’s string orchestra).

However, we cannot say that the symphony as an artistic principle and method is a fundamental feature of the studied genre. Not always in the works with the genre definition researchers can detect the signs of symphonic development. Often composers put in the “symphony” term only the first interpretation – as an instrument of the orchestra. The genetic bond with a traditional dombra kuy remains the main principle of the genre.

Despite the declared basis of the traditional genre, not all symphonic kuys have a composite structure of the dombra source. Similarly to the concept dyad of “symphony – symphonism”, we offer, in relation to the Kazakh symphonic music, to use the dyad “kuy – kuy-likeness”. Under the first part of it will be understood not only the genre, but also the form, moreover, not only a comprehensive study of the kuy tokpe composition, but also not fully theoretically understood laws of development kuy shertpe. The concept “kuy-likeness” will include such means of artistic expression, as dombra kuy thematism; dombra-imitating texture; rhythm; fourth and fifth chords (power chords or tone clusters), which is a kind of national music style code; and also the technical methods of performing, carried from traditional dombra over to the European orchestra instruments.

Therefore, all the symphonic kuys can be divided into two groups. The first will include the compositions, the basic formative principle are the canonical structure of kuy and the methods of its development. Above all, these include traditional kuy transcriptions (the majority of adaptations for folk instrument orchestra), as well as some author’s compositions.

The second group includes the compositions, written in the contrasting component form (often tripartite), in which kuy is performed within one or more partitions (usually first or last) in the thematism, harmony, performing means. This group is represented by a wide range of compositions. It is a rather common form, in which, contrasting to the first/last parts, the lyrical middle part with thematic song plan performs as a kuy genre (“Dairabai” by E. Rakhmadiyev). The contrasting component form is the basis of genre fusion of dombra kuy and poems (Kuy for String Orchestra “Quart-quint” by B. Daldenbai), dombra kuy and imagination (“Akku” by V. Strigotsky).

The desire to show the symphonic potential of traditional dombra kuy on the one hand, and the embodiment of national origin through kuy-likeness are manifested not only in the genre of symphonic kuy. Symphonization as a method of development and kuy-likeness as a basis for thematism and form of separate sections appear in a wide range of genres: a poem, overture, opera and ballet scenes, parts of cyclic compositions, a fantasy etc.

It is difficult to discuss the symphonization degree or kuy implementation as the bases for the classification of orchestral kuy. However, thinking of the kuy origin incarnation leads to the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of the genre, especially to the idea of dialogue with tradition.

Referring to the old traditional genre, a contemporary composer inevitably enters into a dialogue (in Bakhtin’s understanding): the present and the past, Kazakh and European, tradition and innovation. Symphony kuy both as a genre and as a creative method a priori has an intertextual basis. In finding such

cultural layering, moved from traditional environment onto the concert stage, the genre loses touch with its original semantic context. The originally founded focus on public of the traditional kuy has grown in his orchestral incarnation, in many cases leads to the predominance of the outer concerto and the virtuosity over the inner content.

For example, the kuy composer E. Rakhmadiyev has become a trademark of Kazakhstan Symphony Orchestra. They make it possible to submit a national musical culture in language understandable to a wide global audience in a concentrated form. This tradition continues today, as evidenced by a number of works by B. Daldenbai, Toksanbaev A., B. Kydyrbek, Raimkulov A. et al., written specifically for performing abroad. The intertextual property of these opuses, to some extent reflects the identity of the Kazakh musical language by modern means.

The intertext in the structuralist sense, when as interacting “texts” act “cultural texts” of various historical and geographical origins in relation to the kuy genre, is not a new phenomenon. The genre of traditional instrumental compositions for dombra initially has the intertextual nature, as its appearance is due to the tradition of illustrating the verbal narration by playing the instrument. The kuy genre development branch in modern European tradition of orchestral music, in turn, refers to the traditional kuy as a primary text. Symphonic kuy, in this perspective, appears as a sort of quintessence of all the hypertext of modern Kazakh culture with its characteristic dialectically complex connection between the traditions of the past and the present.

Separated from the tradition, the original living environment, kuy genre in the orchestral sound turned out to be relevant, showing the opportunities for reflecting the phenomena of modern reality. We come to one of the most important aspects of studying the symphonic kuy – the sociology of the genre.

In the transition to a different system of thinking, the individual features of the used traditional material, embodied in improvisation and the style of playing, has faced complete disappearance. Indeed, many of the qualities of dombra kuy in orchestral compositions are either completely unembodiable, or are replaced by other means. The paradox lies within the fact that the isolation from the traditional art preserves the social significance of the genre, both in terms of form and content.

A number of artistic properties, characteristic of symphonic kuy, make it “convenient” for a composer, performers and audience. This is reflected in the concentration of creative thinking in different ways: a) small scale of form; b) bright thematism; c) shaped brevity (one or two subjects); d) rich orchestration; d) the rule of rhythmic beginning (a clear rhythm, reliance on one basic rhythmic pattern, characteristic of Western Kazakhstan kuy tokpe.) e) high emotional tone.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Undeniably, it is difficult to give a detailed picture of history, typology and theoretical aspects of the genre in the article. Through revealing the paradoxes of the genre we denote the set of problems associated with the symphonic kuy, and outline the ways to further study this phenomenon.

The authors repeatedly faced with a situation where the composer presents a composition of different genre definitions as a symphonic kuy (for example, the

“Orman” scene from the ballet “Peri of love” by B. Daldenbai, Concertino for Trumpet and Chamber Orchestra “Nauryz” by A. Toksanbaev). So the composers bind the concept of “symphonic kuy” not only with the genre, but also with a creative method. To some extent, this approach removes the contradiction, indicated by us in the first paradox (on the formalities of genre definition). At the same time, the dual understanding of symphonic kuy significantly expands the subject area of the study.

The explanation of the genre’s popularity can be found in the words of the composers themselves. V.A. Strigotsky-Pak says: “The genre itself is very interesting from the point of view of the composer’s craft. It is a very virtuosic instrumental music. To write such works, one should have a very good training. They say you can kill with a word. So, symphonic kuy is the word. Only a capacious one, musical. The whole life in three or four minutes” (Shegebaev, 2011). In addition, the composer notes the existence of competition spirit (“the desire to do better”, by another composer), characteristic of the original kuy, and moved into a new orchestral genre.

When comparing the musical principles of kuy and traditional genres of Central Asia, first of all, the differences and specificities of each are the brightest. Therefore, the study comes from the consideration of the most characteristic musical means, the area of which most clearly manifests these differences, and the most generalized factor in music.

For all the originality of the genre of symphonic kuy, by a number of features it is included in the global trends, especially postmodernism. Surely, we cannot say that in the academic art of modern Kazakhstan the features of this phenomenon consistently manifest themselves. From the findings of this study, it must be acknowledged that none of the three phenomena of world culture, such as avant-garde, modernism, postmodernism, are provided in its purest form in the Kazakh music. Still, such properties of symphonic kuy as secondariness, the connection of different cultural layers, intertextuality, paradoxicality reflect the postmodernist aesthetic principles.

Also the research explains the popularity of the genre among audience, which confirms the relevance of the study of the subject.

The focus on the external effect does not exclude the potential depth of expression, the philosophical approach to content. Symphonic kuy largely repeats the content side of the original source genre: holiday kuys (A. Meirbekov, “Shabyt”) initiation kuys (B. Kydyrbek “Balghabek”), tolghau kuy (T. Mukhamedzhanov, “Tolghau kuy” for symphony orchestra), kuys, reflecting images of nature (E. Umirov, “Auyly tabighaty”, 2007), pictures of folk life and customs (T. Kazhgaliyev, “Kyz kuu”) etc.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The scientific value of the article is that for the first time the Kazakh traditional and, in particular, instrumental music is explored in the context of the culture of the Kazakhs and Central Asian nomadic peoples; it actualizes its comprehensive study and review in terms of civilizational paradigm of nomadic culture. Also, special attention is paid to the genre differences and the main aspects of the Kazakh symphonic kuys.

Further studies of the kuy genre for orchestra will allow to fully reveal the questions of its genesis, history, typology and sociology. Interesting from a

scientific point of view, the results can give a comparative approach with the involvement of a material of other national cultures, both from the former Soviet Union and abroad. Such a comprehensive study would reveal the significance of the phenomenon of modern musical culture of Kazakhstan and perspectives of its development more fully.

The authors' attention attracted a number of contentious issues and contradictions of the genre, paradoxical in nature. These primarily include: the ambiguity of the genre definition of the variety of forms, united by the name "symphonic kuy"; duality of the concept of "symphonic" - as a means (of orchestra) and a method (symphonism); the breadth of the term "kuy" - as a form of traditional kuy, as dombra genre thematism, as a creative method; culturological complexity (the dialogue of cultures, traditions of dialogue, the dialogue of epochs) of separation from the traditional genre; high social significance of the loss of native properties of professional art of oral tradition (improvisation, form of presentation, living environment etc.); postmodern essence of the genre in the absence of phase of modernism in Kazakh culture.

In ethnomusicology, not only in Kazakhstan, but throughout Central Asia, it is necessary to conduct a comparative historical research, because many musical cultures of different peoples can be understood through the extraction of typological, historical and genetic origins of traditions and through the understanding of the role of contacts and mutual influences in the history of nations.

The comparative study can be very fruitful within the same culture. The relic phenomena in the music can be a valuable source of research of ethnogenesis, ethnic, historical and cultural parallels both the Turkic-Mongolian community (east) and the Turkic-Iranian (west).

The main ideas of the article can serve as a base for extended study of style and musical language features of instrumental traditions of the Kazakhs, the development issues in the history and theory of Kazakh traditional music, the study of civilizational bases of musical culture and the history of nomadic cultures in general, stimulate further research in the field of musical comparativistics and music Turkology.

Also, the materials of this research paper can be used in writing (or reprinting) textbooks and teaching materials on the history of Kazakh music, lectures and practical training courses in higher education (history and theory of Kazakh music, ethnosolfeggio, folklore analysis, monody theory ethnic instrument studies, eastern music etc.).

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

**Marlena T. Kokisheva** is a Masters of Arts, Lecturer of the Musicology and Composition Department, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

**Diana Y. Mahmood** is a Masters of Arts, Lecturer of the String Instruments Department, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, Almaty, Kazakhstan.



**Gulnar A. Begalinova** is a PhD, Associate Professor of the Instruments of Variety Orchestra and Piano Department, The Kazakh National Academy of Arts named after T. K. Zhurgenov, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

**Galiya Z. Begembetova** is a PhD, Associate Professor of the Musicology and Composition Department, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

**Valeriya E. Nedlina** is a Masters of Arts, Lecturer of the Musicology and Composition Department, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

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