

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE TODAY IN CENTRAL ASIA - 2015 EDITION



Author: Georgy Mamedov

Picture: Mo Nument street performance by Mesto D... in Avignon in 2013 (courtesy: [Mesto D...](#))



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An Introduction to Theatre Today in Central Asia - 2015 Edition

IETM Mapping

by **Georgy Mamedov**

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Foreword by IETM

Much water has flowed under the bridge since 2004, when IETM initiated the Central Asian Caravan Forum, an international meeting gathering performing art professionals from Central Asia, Europe and other parts of the world. The idea behind the Central Asian Caravan Forum was to promote the concept of networking among the theatre professionals of the region. Due to its mission and its responsibility as a large, representative network, IETM feels it is important to pro-actively facilitate professional meetings and productive exchanges between IETM member-organisations in Europe and those in other parts of the world.

The first meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (May 2004) was a unique opportunity for art professionals from the Central Asia region to meet again in the same room after the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of newly independent states – together with some European participants. The second Meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan (September 2005) gathered about 40 theatre professionals from Central Asia, Afghanistan and Europe and focused on the protection of freedom of expression, media and human rights, and the promotion

of regional cultural networks and regional dialogue. The Third Central Asian Theatre Meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (June 2006) gathered around 70 participants from 12 countries in Central Asia and Europe, discussing cultural diversity and theatre in Europe and Central Asia, arts management and cultural policy, experience and perspectives of cultural networking in Central Asia.

As part of its activities in Central Asia, IETM published two editions of a networking guide to the region – ‘An Introduction to Theatre Today in Central Asia’ (2005, 2007); the text you’re reading today is the third, significantly revised version of this ‘Introduction’. As water keeps flowing under the bridges, this new edition confirms IETM’s vocation to keep those bridges open, allowing paths to cross, people to meet, and ideas to spread.

Whether you already have established collaborations with theatre professionals from Central Asia or you’re just curious about the region, the following pages will provide you with general information about Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, a list of the most active

organisations and venues for contemporary performing arts, selected highlights from recent news and useful resources to continue your exploration.

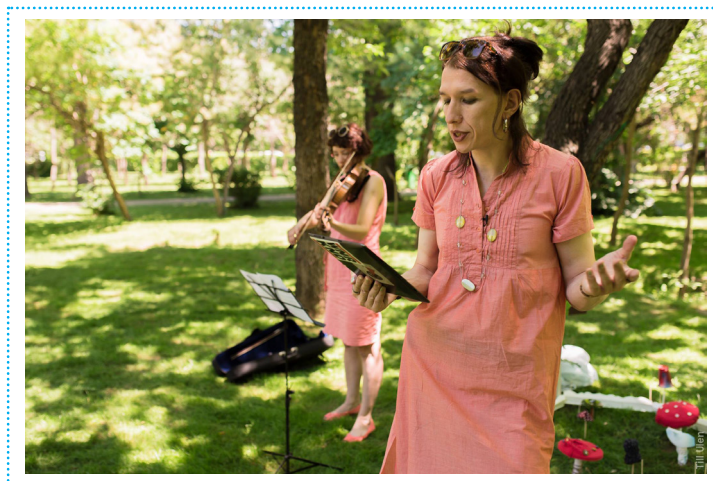
THEATRE TODAY IN CENTRAL ASIA: 10 YEARS LATER. INTRODUCTION TO THE 2015 EDITION

The first edition of 'An Introduction to Theatre Today in Central Asia' was published by IETM ten years ago, in 2005. In 2007 IETM published its second, updated edition. This publication is the third, significantly revised and updated edition of the text.

'An Introduction to Theatre Today in Central Asia' is a networking handbook allowing theatre professionals from Europe and elsewhere to get a very general idea of the state of theatre and performing arts in contemporary Central Asia. This 'Introduction' is not meant to be complete, but it provides enough information for readers to start exploring the fields of theatre and performing arts on the regional level or in a particular country.

The 'Introduction' reviews theatre and performing arts in four countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Each country profile opens with **general background information**, followed by the **timeline of the key political events** that took place between 2010 and 2015. The **News-stream** presents a selection of recent on-line publications and news related to the theatre field in each country. Each country profile includes a **list of theatres and cultural institutions** with detailed and updated contact information. These lists are not at all exhaustive, but they include the most active companies and institutions located in the capitals and large cities. The last rubric of each country profile is the **Spotlight**, which offers an insight into the independent cultural sector in Central Asia by means of a detailed review of one company or cultural institution¹. All the groups or organisations

¹ For the chapter on Tajikistan, there is no spotlight but there is an extended description of some key theatres and organisations.



John Cage Counter Monument Performance, Almaty, 2015 (photo: Till Ulen)

reviewed represent a new form of institutional entity which is different from the large repertoire theatres founded in Soviet times. These initiatives are precarious and often institutionally ephemeral; they exist on the enthusiasm and courage of their founders and participants. On the backdrop of the gigantic state-funded theatres and cultural institutions they may be almost invisible, however if we are to look for the contemporaneity in today's theatre and performance art in Central Asia, they are the ones to focus on. Despite their precarious financial and institutional situations these initiatives are aesthetically successful projects, well integrated in international cultural networks; they tour abroad, initiate regional projects and play at international festivals. The spotlighted communities also share another common feature: they all connect their artistic practice with political or social causes.

1.1. What is Central Asia?

As in the case of many other geographic regions there is no precise answer to the question of what constitutes Central Asia. In this 'Introduction' Central Asia is represented by four post-Soviet states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. A strictly geographical definition of Central Asia would include a much more vast territory including parts of Siberia, Mongolia, Afghanistan and China. However the geopolitical or cultural definition of the region would normally limit it to the five former Soviet republics. Turkmenistan is not included in this text because the country is closed to the external world. Unlike the rest of the former USSR the 'iron curtain' didn't fall in Turkmenistan after 1991; on the contrary, the country became almost inaccessible even to its closest neighbours.

A number of factors form the regional identity of Central Asia. First, a shared past (namely the Soviet period) shapes the commonality of experiences, values and worldviews of the Central Asian people of

different national backgrounds. Second, the Russian language plays the role of a *lingua franca*, a common language. Another important factor is the willingness for regional cooperation and integration, shared by the states and civil society alike. Finally there is a regular cultural and professional exchange between the cultural workers of the four Central Asian states.

1.2. Soviet Cultural Legacy in Central Asia

Modernity, in the context of Central Asia, to a very great extent equals Sovietisation. In terms of cultural policy Sovietisation meant the establishing of companies, theatres, institutes of culture and other cultural infrastructure - and this was emancipatory. The way cultural policy was realised and enacted, however, had a bleak colonial aspect. This became especially apparent in the late 1930s with the serious shift in the cultural politics of the Soviet Union under Stalin. From the revolutionary rhetoric of emancipation and anti-colonial struggles that involved people from Central Asia, the policy changed to an ideal of 'friendship of peoples' under the leadership of the Russian people, the so-called 'elder brother'. The cultural policy that was imposed represented each Soviet nation as part of a network of nation brothers or nation sisters. Paradoxically, this promoted nationalism—all forms of national culture that are so in demand in contemporary post-Soviet political regimes were actually promoted during the Soviet time. This shows clearly in the names of the state-funded repertoire theatres that are distinguished by the language of production or by affiliation to an ethnic community (e.g. Korean Music Comedy Theatre; Aitmatov National Russian Drama Theatre).

Today the cultural infrastructure and the general understanding of culture continue to show the influence of Soviet times. The way the cultural system operates in the countries of Central Asia, with state-funded theatres, museums, and other big institutions, including art academies or



Street Performance at the Osh Bazar in Bishkek. Mesto D... and Le Goules_2008 (courtesy: Mesto D...)

institutions of performing arts, is a legacy of the Soviet time. The Soviet cultural system was well resourced, well financed, and had its own logic. The system is still here, but it does not work as it used to. As far as a more independent cultural sector is concerned, there is little or no state support for independent art projects in the region. These activities are mainly funded through international donor organisations that allow for some kind of sustainable existence, but these instances are quite limited.

1.3. Contemporary Political Context: a Conservative Shift

Theatre and performing arts in Central Asia do not exist in a vacuum. The current political situation has a significant impact on the field of culture and arts, and has its own dynamics and peculiarities in each of the four countries in the region. While a glimpse of the political context in each country can be grasped from the timelines of key political events and from the entries in the News-stream rubric of this 'Introduction', one aspect which is common to each of the four countries, and is somehow an effect of the global political process, needs to be highlighted: the rise of right-wing and conservative politics.

Autocracies like Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan witness the further strengthening of the personality cults of the aging leaders. The recent events in Kazakhstan (Zhanaozen 2011) and Tajikistan (Khorog 2012, 2014; Dushanbe 2015) showed that the authoritarian leaders in these countries, like Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan (Andizhan 2005), would not tolerate any civic and political dissent and would eagerly use armed forces against the protesting civilians. Not to mention the repressions against the political opposition and censorship of critical cultural production.

In Kyrgyzstan, which has shifted to a parliamentary democracy after the 'April Revolution' of 2010, politicians and political groups holding explicit nationalistic and xenophobic views have become more and more present in the public arena. The Kyrgyz Parliament initiates bills limiting the rights of LGBT people and creating obstacles for the activities of civil society organisations. In this political context the work and the very existence of independent cultural initiatives is very often perceived as dissident. This 'Introduction' tries to give a voice to some of these independent initiatives, featured in the Spotlight rubric.

01.

KAZAKHSTAN



1.1. Republic of Kazakhstan: Basic Facts

- **Population:** 17.4 million (www.stat.gov.kz)
- **Capital:** Astana
- **Area:** 2.7 million sq km (1 million sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Kazakh, Russian
- **Life expectancy:** 62 years (men), 73 years (women)
- **Currency:** Tenge
- **GDP per capita:** US \$ 12,276.4 (World Bank, 2014)
- **Internet domain:** .kz
- **International dialling code:** +7

Sources: www.bbc.com, <http://data.worldbank.org/>



1.2. Key Political Events 2010-2015

2010

January - Kazakhstan becomes the first former Soviet state to chair the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) security and rights group, despite criticism of its own democratic credentials. President Nazarbayev signals a change in emphasis from rights to security.

February - A court overturns an earlier ruling that banned the media from publishing criticism of President Nazarbaev's son-in-law Timur Kulibaev. The OSCE had criticised the ban.

May - Parliament approves a bill granting more powers to President Nazarbaev, granting him the title of 'leader of the nation' and immunity from prosecution.

July - A customs union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan comes into force after Belarus ratifies a key customs code.

2011

February - President Nazarbaev calls early presidential elections, after a planned referendum allowing him to remain in office unopposed until 2020 is ruled unconstitutional.

April - President Nazarbaev wins re-election in a vote boycotted by the opposition.

December - Clashes between striking workers and police in the western oil town of Zhanaozen leave 16 people dead. The government declares a state of emergency.

2012

January - Parliamentary elections - which international monitors say fail to meet basic democratic principles.

October - Vladimir Kozlov, leader of the unofficial opposition party Alga, is condemned to seven and a half years in jail after being found guilty of 'attempting to overthrow the government' in an alleged plot with exiled politician and businessman Mukhtar Ablyazov. The authorities accuse Mr. Kozlov of inciting violence during the Zhanaozen protests in December. Mr Kozlov says the sentence is politically motivated.

2013

June - David Cameron becomes the first serving British Prime Minister to pay an official visit to Kazakhstan. The UK is the third largest investor in the oil-rich central Asian nation.

July - Amnesty International accuses President Nazarbaev of making false promises to the international community about eradicating torture and says the Kazakh security services carry out torture with impunity.

2014

January - A French court approves the extradition of Kazakh tycoon and dissident Mukhtar Ablyazov, accused of massive fraud, to Russia or Ukraine. Ablyazov is accused of stealing billions of dollars from the Kazakh BTA Bank, which also operates in Russia and Ukraine. He denies the charges and says he will appeal.

May - Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus sign an agreement creating an economic union. The Eurasian Economic Union aims to create a shared market and integrate economic policy across the three former Soviet countries.

2015

January - Eurasian Economic Union between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus comes into force.

February - Kazakhstan's former ambassador to Austria, Rakhat Aliyev, is found dead in a prison cell in Vienna.

April - President Nazarbaev is re-elected with 97.7% of votes cast. Opposition parties do not support any candidates and the two other contenders were widely seen as pro-government.

July - Beijing defeats Almaty in bid to host 2022 Winter Olympics.

August - The official tenge exchange rate tumbles by 26.2% to 255.26 per dollar on the Kazakhstan Stock Exchange in response to the transition to a freely floating rate announced by the Central Bank.

Sources: www.bbc.com, www.nytimes.com, www.cnbc.com

1.3. Theatre and Performance Art: News-stream

- **Mongol drama theater artists to perform in Kazakhstan**

October 19, 2015, [AKIpress](#)

A group of 26 artists from the Bayan-Ölgii Province Music and Drama Theater leave on October 19 for Kazakhstan. The actors will take part in an international theater competition organized as a part of the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate celebrated in the Central Asian country in September - October 2015.

The event will take place in Atyrau city. The Mongolian group chose to perform 'Fariza and Mukhagali', a drama by Rakhymjan Otarbaev. The actors will spend a week abroad. All the costs of their stay will be covered by Kazakhstan. Apart from the above performance the group will also present traditional music of Mongolian Kazakhs, state news agency said.

- **Theatre Director Ersain Tapenov Says Kazakh Theatre Scene Changes Dramatically**

September 5, 2015, [The Astana Times](#)

Kazakhstan's classic theatre scene has changed quite a bit since the Soviet Union times, but the classical masterpieces of William Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov, Evgenii Brusilovskii, Murat Auezov, Gabit Musirepov and Beimbet Mailin can never become old.

Famed plays such as 'King Lear,' 'Sonnets,' 'Chaika,' 'Kyz Zhibek,' 'Karakoz,' 'Akan Seri - Aktokty,' 'Kozy Korpesh - Bayan Sulu' and 'Shuga' were directed by Ersain Tapenov, a state prize laureate and honoured arts worker who is now a professor in the acting skills and directing department of the city's Kazakh National University of Arts (KazNUA).

In a recent interview, the director spoke to The Astana Times about topics such as Kazakhstan's theatrical scene, how directing contributes to developing the theatrical arts and his experience in Russia.

- **The first play devoted to 550th anniversary of Kazakh khanate will be set in Astana**

February 27, 2015, [e-history.kz](#)

On February 27, actors of theater named after M. Gorky will show the play based on life of the great woman and the daughter of boundless Kazakh steppes Tomiris. The idea of creation of this play belongs to the theater director Yerkin Kasenov. It will be embodied by (...) production director Gulsina Mergaliyeva and artist director Kanat Maksutov. At today's press conference they discussed about creation of one of the most anticipated play.

For two hours the audience will have a chance to see the kingdom of majestic Sakas, complete military conflicts and rivalries, intrigue, combat, which will lie down on shoulders of the brittle woman. She will take such heavy burden responsibility for the single purpose – unity and independence of people.

The cult novel of the writer Bulat Zhandarbekov will be regenerated on a scene of drama theater. Writers and historians also participated in the creation of it. Throughout all preparation the production director and actors were advised by the famous Kazakhstan historian Ziyabek Kabuldinov. Research work over the historical and archeological materials was carried out and all exhibits of the National Museum were studied.

- **Kazakhstan: Theater with a Political Edge**

May 16, 2013, *Eurasia.net*

A group of villagers is held in thrall by omnipotent rulers, who warn that misfortune will befall the inhabitants if they defy authorities. And then, one day, the emperor is revealed to have no clothes.

On a recent Friday evening in Kazakhstan's cultural capital, Almaty, a small audience was transfixed by the story unfolding on the stage in *Avalanche*, a play by Turkish playwright Tuncer Cücenoglu.

Avalanche is a tale of a village whose inhabitants walk on eggshells because their rulers have convinced them that if they flout strict rules governing their everyday lives, they will spark an avalanche that will engulf them.

A childbirth breaks the spell: as the rulers order a woman buried alive for going into labor without authorization, the child is born. The commotion fails to bring down a disastrous avalanche, and the leaders are revealed to have lied and manipulated to keep the people in check.

The political parallels with Kazakhstan are unmistakable. A country led by an authoritarian president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has retained power for over two decades through methods that his critics say include sham elections, restrictions on political freedoms, and the silencing of dissent.



Kas-Kagym by Auezov Kazakh Drama Theater in Almaty, 2015 (courtesy Art-Ordo International Theater Festival)

- **Kazakhstan: Theatre director released after three weeks in prison**

July 11, 2012, *artsfreedom.org*²

Bolat Atabayev had been detained on 15 June 2012 and charged with 'inciting social hatred' in connection with protests by striking oil workers in the western city of Zhanaozen, where at least 16 people were shot dead during clashes with police in mid-December 2011.

In March 2012, Bolat Atabayev premiered a play that indirectly addressed the Zhanaozen events, and in June 2012, Amnesty International declared Atabayev a 'prisoner of conscience'.

At a press conference on 3 July, Bolat Atabayev told that his status has been changed from 'accused' to 'witness' as the legal fallout continued.

² <http://artsfreedom.org/?p=1917>

1.4. Some Theatres and Cultural Institutions in Kazakhstan

Astana Opera

010000 Astana, Kunayev str., 1
+7 7172 709 610
E-mail: astanaopera@gmail.com
www.astanaopera.kz

Abai Opera and Ballet Theatre

050000 Almaty, Kabanbai Batyr str., 110
+7 (727) 272-79-63
E-mail: theatreabay@gmail.com
www.gatob.kz

Auezov Kazakh Drama Theatre

Almaty, Abai ave., 103
+7(727)378-54-16

Lermontov Russian Drama Theatre

Almaty, Abai ave., 43
+7 (727) 267-31-45, 267-31-42
www.tl.kz

German Drama Theatre

Almaty, Satpaev str., 64d
+7 727 392 02 33, 392 02 34
www.dtk.kz

Korean Music Comedy Theatre

Almaty, Panin str., 70/1
+7 (727) 384 82 78 (76)
www.kortheatre.kz

Uighur Music Comedy Theatre

Almaty, Nauryzbai batyr str., 83
+7 (727) 272 82 76
www.uighur.kz/teatr.html

Theatre Art i Shock (ART и ШОК)

Almaty, Kunayev str., 49/68
+7 (727) 273 52 82
+7 (776) 628 26 25
E-mail: teatr.artishock@gmail.com
www.artishock.kz

Theatre Zhas Sahna (Жас Сахна)

Almaty, Abai ave., 117
+7 707 328 00 52
+7 727 259 65 98
www.teatromarova.kz

Mukanov Northern Kazakhstan Regional Kazakh Music Drama Theatre

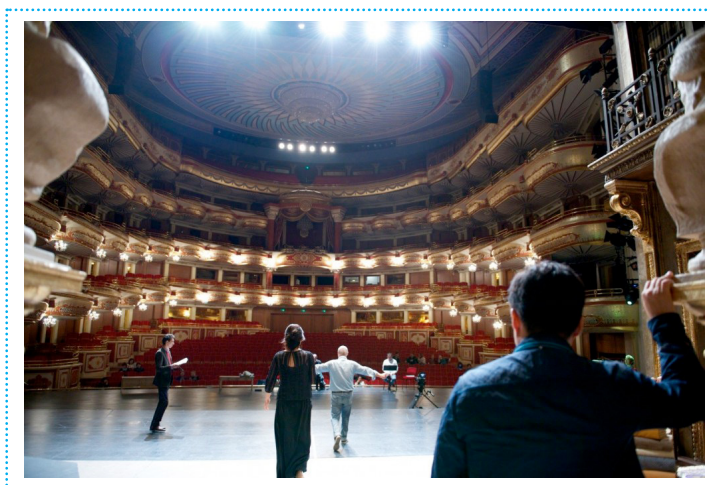
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+7 (7152) 41-25-32
E-mail: kmdt-smukanov@list.ru

Creoleak Cultural Centr

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E-mail: ruth.jenrbekova@gmail.com,
vilkmaria@gmail.com
Channel on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/user12571707>
YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz9K_iDz2QL-dROyhRo0Weyg
www.creoleaks.net

ArtBatFest (Festival of Contemporary arts)

+7 727 277 8181
E-mail: pr@cultura.kz
www.artbat.kz/en/



Actors rehearsing on stage of Astana Opera (courtesy: *The Astana Times*)

1.5. SPOTLIGHT: Creoleak Cultural Centr

A 'transinstitution'

Creoleak Centr, an artistic collective comprised of Ruth Jenrbekova and Maria Vilkovisky from Almaty, is best described with the prefix trans-. Creoleak Centr is a transgender, transnational and trans-disciplinary transinstitution. In their most recent performance 'Intermedia, or how to organise cultural production with one's own resources' the artists attempted to challenge the conventional frames through which the various social events such as a lecture, a panel discussion, a theatre performance, a poetry reading, a concert, a party, an informal gathering are conceived. The artists state that 'the boundaries between the categories and genres, similarly to the boundaries between genders, can become penetrable and subvert the traditional classifications and social hierarchies.'

Creoleak Centr describes itself as:

1. an imaginary institution and a real artistic collective
2. a provisional theoretical platform for contemporary cultural producers

'In opposition to local Central Asian cultural infrastructure that is grounded in the official mythology of 'national identity', Creoleak Centr is an attempt to give voice to the mixed, uncategorized, post-national 'global race', for which we use the metaphor of 'creole diaspora'. It doesn't refer to real Creole people from the New World, but to the notion of cultural creolization as it was used by Edouard Glissant, Stuart Hall and other theorists. We believe that transferring this notion from Caribbean to Central Asia can be relevant due to certain similarities in the colonial history of these two regions. This perspective gives us a possibility to reconsider the traditional division between West and East and to reconstruct a local version of Modernity, for which we tend to use the concept of 'transmodernity.'

'Our artistic credo is tied to blurring and questioning conventional delimitations. Creoleak Centr's public performances are often based on mixing various genres: sketches, poetry readings, songs, physical theatre, puppets and live music as well as fragments of lectures, presentations, screenings and discussions. The absence of any financial support gives us a perfect opportunity to demonstrate permeability of the border between professional and amateur, success and failure, fake and real, arts and life.'

Some projects by Creoleak Cultural Centr

- 'Lecture on John Cage' (Almaty, 2011-2015)

An educational project composed of the following three parts:

1. Musical Lecture-Happening, Art i Shock Theatre, 2011

The lecture-happening included a narration concerning John Cage's oeuvre and his influence on contemporary arts and music, as well as performing of some of Cage's pieces ('In A Landscape' (1948); 'Dream'

(1948); 'Water Music' (1952); 'Six Melodies For Violin & Keyboard' (1950); 'Solo For Voice #52 (Aria #2);' 'Experiences #2' (1948)), readings of literary works by John Cage, Igor Stravinsky, Vasilisk Gnedov, Edward Estlin Cummings. The event also included screenings, improvised choreographic pieces, physical theatre and sound improvisation with the audience involvement. The ending was not planned. The event should have come to an end spontaneously with the last spectator leaving the theatre.

2. Audio recordings

During 2011-2012 some audio material was recorded by Creoleak Centr and composed into a 32 min audio mix entitled 'Lecture on John Cage'

3. Street happening '100 years 33 months John Cage jubilee ceremonial event' (June 5 2015)

The ceremony, that took place in a city park, was about the opening of the unofficial counter-monument memorizing John Cage.



Creoleak Cultural Centr, John Cage Counter-Monument, Almaty 2015 (photo by Till Ulen)

- **'Phonation Musical Lecture'** (Bishkek, 2012; Baku, 2013; Dushanbe, 2013)

'Phonation' is a musical lecture on the history of the 20th century's emancipation movements and identity politics. It includes performing of songs, literary and sound-art pieces and elements of physical theatre.

The artists strive to answer the following questions: In which way is the structure of a society reflected in the music performed in this society? How did popular music develop? Can popular music be considered the lingua franca of our time capable to express current issues?

'Phonation' is a production of speech sounds, a process of acquiring a voice by an individual. Acquiring a voice often involves the fight with those who already speak; the right to a voice is the right to power. At the same time the human voice is the most widespread musical instrument. Is there a society in which everyone can use his voice? – is another question posed by Vilkovisly and Jenrbekova in their performance.

Approaching music as the voice of the oppressed, the artists blur the distinction lines between popular and avant-garde music. For Vilkovisky and Jenrbekova both John Cage and John Lennon are not only those who created and performed their music very differently, but who similarly viewed music as a powerful political means in the fight for freedom and equality.

'Phonation Musical Lecture' was commissioned by STAB (School of Theory and Activism, Bishkek) and was first shown in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 2012. It was also shown in Baku, Azerbaijan and Dushanbe, Tajikistan in 2013.

Read more: http://www.en.art-initiatives.org/?page_id=5684



Creoleak Cultural Centr, 'Phonation Musical Lecture', Bishkek 2012 (courtesy: STAB)



Performance at the Poetry Festival in Almaty 2015 (courtesy: Creoleak Cultural Centr)

02.

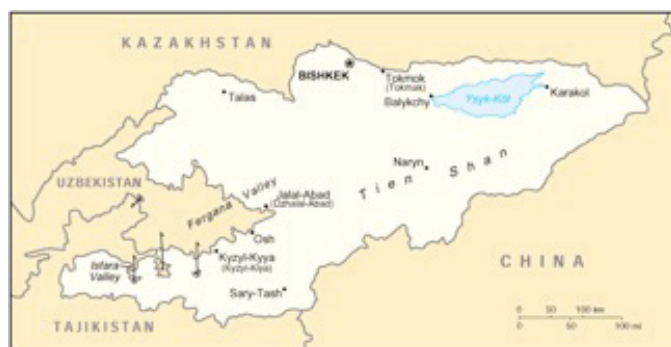
KYRGYZSTAN



2.1. Kyrgyz Republic: Basic Facts

- **Population:** 5.9 million (www.stat.kg)
- **Capital:** Bishkek
- **Area:** 199,900 sq km (77,182 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Kyrgyz, Russian, Uzbek
- **Life expectancy:** 64 years (men), 72 years (women)
- **Currency:** Kyrgyz Som (KGS)
- **GDP per capita:** US \$ 1,269.1 (World Bank, 2014)
- **Internet domain:** .kg
- **International dialling code:** +996

Sources: www.bbc.com, <http://data.world-bank.org/>



2.2. Key Political Events 2010-2015

2010

April - Opposition protests spread from northern Kyrgyzstan to capital Bishkek, sweeping President Kurmanbek Bakiyev from power. Opposition leaders form an interim government headed by former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva. President Bakiyev resigns and is given refuge in Belarus.

May - Roza Otunbaeva becomes interim president.

June - More than 400 (unofficial sources indicate more than a thousand) people are killed in clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic communities in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad. Hundreds of thousands of people flee their homes.

More than 90% of voters in a referendum approve a new constitution reducing the powers of the presidency and turning Kyrgyzstan into a parliamentary republic.

September - Uzbek rights activist Azimjon Askarov sentenced to life in prison. Kyrgyz ombudsman and international rights groups condemn case as fabricated and politically motivated.

October - The first parliamentary elections under the new constitution fail to produce an outright winner.

November - Exiled former President Kurmanbek Bakiyev goes on trial in absentia, along with 27 other officials, for shooting of protesters during his ouster in April.

December - Social Democratic, Republican and pro-Bakiyev Ata-Zhurt parties agree to form a coalition government led by Social Democrat and Otunbayeva ally Almazbek Atambayev following the October parliamentary elections.

2011

October - Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev wins the presidential elections with more than 60% of the votes. His two main challengers refuse to accept the result. OSCE observers report 'significant irregularities' in the election procedures.

2012

June - Kyrgyzstan agrees to allow NATO to use its territory for evacuating vehicles and military equipment from Afghanistan.

September - President Atambaev tells visiting Russian President Vladimir Putin that lease on US military base at Manas will not be renewed after it expires in 2014.

October - Three MPs from the opposition Ata-Zhurt party are arrested and charged with attempting a coup after joining a rally calling for the nationalisation of the Canadian-owned Kumtor gold mine. Supporters launch a protest campaign involving sit-ins and periodically blocking the main north-south road.

2013

February-March - Courts sentence former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev and his sons Maxim and Zhanysh to long prison terms in absentia for corruption and abuse of office. They all live abroad.

May - Protestors blockade the Canadian-owned Kumtor gold mine for several days, demanding a greater share in profits for Kyrgyzstan.

June - Ata-Zhurt protests force the governor of Jalalabad to flee his office as anti-government protests continue.

2014

March - conservative lawmakers announce a bill to outlaw 'the formation of a positive attitude towards non-traditional sexual relations.' The bill has passed two out of three parliamentary readings in 2015.

A parliamentary committee in Kyrgyzstan has approved a controversial bill that would impose 'foreign agent' status on nongovernmental organizations that receive funding from abroad. The bill has passed two parliamentary readings in 2015.

June - USA close their air base at Manas, which served as the main transit centre for military operations in Afghanistan.

2015

May - members of the right-wing nationalist groups Kalys and Kyrk Choro illegally break into the event of the LGBT organization Labrys, dedicated to the celebration of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

Kyrgyzstan joins Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union.

July - The General Prosecutor's Office detains the former head of the presidential administration, Daniyar Narymbaev, on suspicion of involvement in a corruption case.

August - Kyrgyzstan denounces the Cooperation Treaty with America. The diplomatic row between Kyrgyzstan and the United States breaks out after the State Department decides to give rights activist

Azimjan Askarov the 2014 Human Rights Defender Award.

October - The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan wins 38 seats in the 120-member national parliament. Four other parties also win the seats in the parliament: Respublika-Ata-Jurt, Onuguu-Progress, Bir Bol, and Ata-Meken.

Sources: www.bbc.com, www.eurasianet.org, www.nhc.no, www.labrys.kg, www.akipress.com, www.thediplomat.com

2.3. Theatre and Performance Art: News-stream

- **The Fifth Art-Ordo International Theater Festival to be held in Bishkek**

October 18, 2015, eurasia-online.com

The Fifth Art-Ordo International Theater Festival will be held in Bishkek from October 19-23.

Local theaters and theaters from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Tatarstan will take part in the festival with their performances.

The international jury will select winners from 14 participating theaters in the following nominations: grand prize for the best performance, best director's work, best play script, best actor and actress, best supporting actor and actress.

The festival is held by the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism of Kyrgyzstan, Union of Theater Figures together with local theaters.

More on Art-Ordo Festival 2015: <http://www.rferl.org/media/video/kyrgyz-theater/27316630.html>

- **Bishkek to host international opera festival**

September 8, 2015, inform.kz

The 2nd International Opera Festival named after People's Artist of the USSR Bulat Minjilkiyev will be held in Bishkek from 4 to 11 October to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the famous singer.

The fest will involve leading masters of opera from Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. They'll perform world opera classics, the best and loved by the audience songs.

The event will be opened by Kyrgyz artists, while the guests will perform during the rest of the days, according to arrangers of the event, Kazinform has learnt from AKI Press.

- **Public foundation launches theater project in Bishkek**

May 7, 2015, The Free Library

Theater Mesto D...has launched a theater project in Bishkek entitled 'The City, in Which I Am'.

Main goal of the project is to popularize the idea that a person's home can't be limited by four walls but extends far beyond, including 'yard, street, neighborhood, city, country which are all the house where one lives.'

'Based on personal stories and historical facts, we plan to create a play... about people living in the city. We want the creative youth of Kyrgyzstan to take part in this project, become authors and performers of the future performance,' according to the arrangers.

The project also suggests to learn to work in teams, formulate and defend one's position, dream on the proposed topic, write stories and speak in public.

Audition is expected to be started after 20 May.

- **Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek Theater Struggles amid Changing Times**

December 7, 2012, eurasianet.org

When Osh's Uzbek Music and Drama Theater opened its 94th season last month, the actors looked nervously into the audience. They had not celebrated an opening night for three years, since before the theater was partially burned amid 2010's ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan. From behind the curtains, they saw something unfamiliar: a full house, including prominent local officials in attendance to show their support.

Theater crowds these days are often thin. Thespians say the local community is too down-and-out to pay much attention to the arts. And the computer age is changing what people expect of entertainment. But the Uzbek Music and Drama Theater, the only Uzbek-language theater in Kyrgyzstan, still has its die-hard fans.

- **Bringing Peace Dialogue to a National Stage**

November 20, 2012, IREX

Recently, the Youth Leadership for Peace (YLP) Theater Troupe brought national attention to youth-led peacebuilding efforts in Kyrgyzstan with a forum theater performance in Bishkek. Performing for an audience of youth and adults at the annual Jashtar Camp youth conference, the Theater Troupe created dialogue around issues of rural unemployment and youth alcohol abuse while also showcasing the leadership role that youth are playing in conflict prevention.

Theater Troupe member Dilshat Akhmetzhanov said, 'I feel honored to be selected from my school community for the YLP program. I understand the significance of my contribution to the program in showing the existing problems of Kyrgyzstan and bringing them to the society's attention for collective problem solving.'



'Deli's Dance' of the Ibraimov National Drama Theater in Osh, 2015

The performance told the story of a teenage girl from a rural village attempting to transition to life in a large city after her unemployed mother moves to Bishkek in search of a job. The girl does not cope well with new influences and becomes pregnant while abusing alcohol with friends, which leads to a conflict between the girl and her cousin over the pregnancy.

Audience members had the opportunity to 'intervene' to try to prevent the play's central conflict. After audience interventions the Joker, or facilitator, led a discussion of ways to prevent conflicts depicted in the performance at the family, community, and national levels.

2.4. Some Theatres and Cultural Institutions in Kyrgyzstan

Abdumomunov National Kyrgyz Drama Theatre

720000 Bishkek, Abdummunov str, 222
+996 (312) 66-57-17, 66-06-71

Aitmatov National Russian Drama Theatre

720000 Bishkek, Tynystanova str, 122
+996 312 66-44-11
E-mail: rtdbishkek@gmail.com

Maldybaev National Opera and Ballet Theatre

720011 Bishkek, Abdrahmanova str., 167
+996 (312) 621619
E-mail: operaballetkg@mail.ru
www.operaballet.lg.kg

Umuraliev Bishkek Drama Theatre

720000 Bishkek, Chui ave, 28
+996 312 53-04-42
www.bgdt.kg

Experimental Theatre Sahna

720011 Bishkek, Abdrahmanova str., 230
+996 (555) 96 17 85
E-mail: nuras_64@mail.ru
Director: Nurlan Asanbekov

Theatre Mesto D...

720000 Bishkek, 4th Microrayon, 6/2
+996 555 36 48 86, 555 38 06 37
E-mail: mesto.d@gmail.com
FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/teatrmestod>
www.mestod.kg

Art group 705

+996 778 705 701
E-mail: media705@gmail.com
www.705.kg

School of Theory and Activism, Bishkek (STAB)

720017 Bishkek Moskovskaya, 147, apt. 5
+996(312)97 68 03
E-mail: art-initiatives.bishkek@gmail.com
www.en.art-initiatives.org



'The Visit' by Friedrich Dürrenmatt at Abdumomunov Kyrgyz Drama Theater in Bishkek, 2015 (courtesy: Art-Ordo International Theater Festival)

Babur Osh Uzbek Music and Drama Theatre (est. 1914)

Osh, Lenin str., 326
+996 (3222) 2-12-41

Ibraimov National Drama Theatre

Osh, Kurmanjan Datka str., 162
+996 (322) 22 73 12

Art-Ordo International Theatre Festival

720040 Bishkek, Pushkin str., 78
+996 (312) 62-04-82
E-mail: minculture.kg@gmail.com
FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/artordo2015/?fref=ts>
www.minculture.gov.kg

2.5. SPOTLIGHT: Theatre Mesto D...

Mesto D...:

Comprehending Contemporaneity

Mesto D... is an independent contemporary theatre interested in experiment and research, established in 2007 by a group of young graduates of the Kyrgyz Institute of Arts that included the current leaders of the company, Sergey Lysenko and Alexandra Bagdasarova. The theatre was established following workshops led by Galina Pyanova from the Almaty Art i Shock Theatre, which were organized by the Swiss Cooperation Agency in Kyrgyzstan.

Today Mesto D... is one of the most creative cultural institutions in Bishkek. It actively tours abroad and initiates large-scale international projects. In 2009 and 2011 in collaboration with the French group Les Goules they organized an international festival of street theatres in Bishkek; the two editions of the festival gathered companies and individual performers from Central Asia, France, Germany, Belgium and Russia.

Street performances are an important part of Mesto D...’s aesthetics. As they state in their manifesto: ‘we like to create a theatre in the unconventional spaces and provoke our random viewers to think’. A signature performance by Mesto D... is ‘Stop and think’ which they play in Bishkek every year on May 9 – Victory Day in the former USSR. The actors move through the city in the Soviet military uniforms of the WWII. Soon it becomes apparent that a nurse assists a wounded soldier to move away from the front line under shelling. In 2009 this performance was shown at the Festival Lent in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

The theatre for Mesto D... is not just a craft; it is first of all a medium of research and reflection. The actors of Mesto D... state that they try to ‘comprehend the contemporaneity with the means of theatre’. In 2014 Mesto D... organised a series of play readings in its recently opened small venue, located in the residential neighbourhood of



Mesto D..., ‘Stop and to think’ performance in Ljubljana, 2009 (courtesy: Mesto D...)



Street Performance at the Osh Bazar in Bishkek, Mesto D... and Le Goules, 2008 (courtesy: Mesto D...)

Bishkek. One of the plays they selected for this series was ‘Maidan Diaries’, a verbatim play based on the stories of people who participated in the Maidan protests in Kiev in 2013-2014, recorded by the Ukrainian playwright Natalia Vorozhbit. The reading took place on April 7 and it was a symbolic act, as Mesto D...’s director Sergey Lysenko wanted to explore the events of the Ukrainian Maidan in connection to the Kyrgyz April revolution of 2010.

Their most recent project, ‘The City in which I...’, is a theatrical research of Bishkek in which the authors try to catch the rapidly changing cityscape, contexts and contents of urban life in the Kyrgyz capital. The project gives a voice to the present and former citizens of Pishpek-Frunze-Bishkek. The play involves a significant verbatim component, based on interviews and archival research undertaken by the project participants, most of whom are not professional actors.

03.

TAJIKISTAN



3.1. Republic of Tajikistan: Basic Facts

- **Population:** 8.4 million (www.stat.tj)
- **Capital:** Dushanbe
- **Area:** 143,100 sq km (55,251 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Tajik, Russian, Uzbek
- **Life expectancy:** 65 years (men), 71 years (women)
- **Currency:** Somoni
- **GDP per capita:** US \$ 1,114.0 (World Bank, 2014)
- **Internet domain:** .tj
- **International dialling code:** +992

Sources: www.bbc.com, <http://data.worldbank.org/>



3.2. Key Political Events 2010-2015

2010

February - President Rakhmon's People's Democratic Party wins with an overwhelming majority in parliamentary elections. International monitors say widespread fraud took place.

2011

January - Tajikistan settles a century-old border dispute with China by agreeing to cede some land.

2012

April - Tajikistan accuses Uzbekistan of an economic blockade, citing gas supply cuts and rail freight curbs. Tensions are high over a Tajik dam that Uzbekistan fears will restrict irrigation water supplies.

July - Tajikistan's government launches a military operation against an illegal armed group led by border-police commander Tolib Ayombekov, a former Islamist rebel whom authorities have accused of drug smuggling and brutal crimes. According to the official sources, during a military operation that involved regular army and aviation forces, 41 military officers and 18 civilians were killed.

October - Tajikistan grants Russia a 30-year extension on a Soviet-era military base seen as a bulwark against Islamist militancy and drug-trafficking. The lease on the base was due to expire in 2014.

2013

January - Several websites, including Facebook and Radio Free Europe, are blocked.

October - A coalition of local human rights groups issues a report on the military operation in Khorog in July 2012. Among its findings: the government withheld information about the operation, used disproportionate force, and failed to investigate the deaths of civilians, all in contravention of Tajikistani law.

November - President Rakhmon wins another seven years in office following elections.

December - Zayd Saidov - a businessman and former minister arrested in May after setting up an opposition party - is jailed for 26 years on charges of sexual relations with a minor, polygamy, fraud and corruption.

2014

January - A cross-border exchange of fire occurs on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The incident includes the use of mortars and grenade launchers, with eight border guards wounded.

May - Three people are killed and five more injured in massive riots that break out in the city of Khorog, an administrative centre of Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province. Violence flared up in the city after policemen killed two local residents in a special operation to detain suspected drug traffickers.

July - An exchange of fire on a disputed section of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border reportedly leaves at least seven border guards from both sides injured. One Tajik citizen

dies of gunshot wounds at the scene of the incident.

2015

May - The US-trained commander of Tajikistan's elite police force appears in a YouTube video announcing his defection to Islamic State.

August - Authorities ban their strongest political opponent - the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.

September - The rebellious general and former deputy defence minister Abdukhalim Nazarzoda, together with his supporters, stage two terrorist attacks in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe and Vahdat. He is killed in the course of the security sweep in Tajikistan's Ramit Gorge.

Sources: www.bbc.com, www.tass.ru, www.climateandsecurity.org, www.cacianalyst.org, www.eurasianet.org, www.theguardian.com

3.3. Theatre and Performance Art: News-stream

- **Theatre performances devoted to activism against gender-based violence in Tajikistan**

April 1, 2015, OSCE Office in Tajikistan

The OSCE Office in Tajikistan supported theatre performances in Tajikistan devoted to activism against gender-based violence, raising awareness and triggering action on this pervasive human rights violation.

The OSCE, several international and national partners such as the State Committee of Women and Family Affairs, engaged local theatre groups to raise awareness on importance of gender equality and certain concerns in rural parts of Tajikistan.

The theatre performances were conducted in Panj, Jilikul, Kabodiyon, Nosiri Khusrav,

Rumi, Kumsangir, Khuroson, Tavildara and Garm districts.

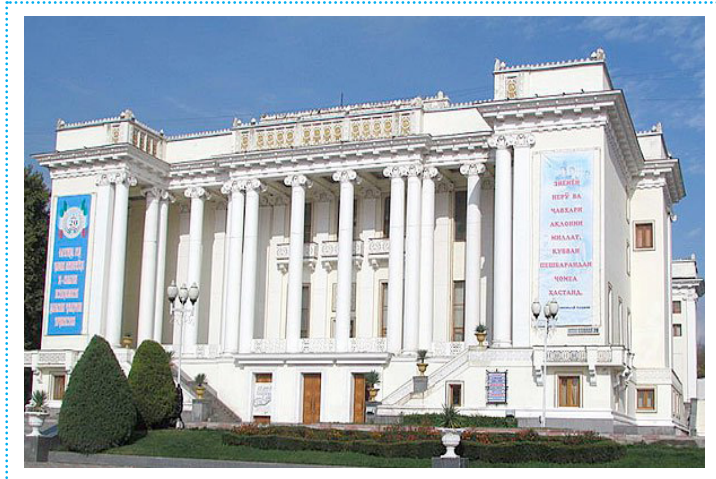
- **Theatre and community: a brief account of the work being done to revive the town theatre in Kanibadam (Tajikistan)**

March 22, 2015, Parliament of Dreams

Kanibadam is a town of about 50,000 people in the east of Tajikistan, close to the borders of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Like

many parts of the former Soviet Union it has experienced great economic, social and political pressures since 1991. Today, as many as one in four Tajik citizens have to seek work abroad, especially in Russia.

Two weeks ago, I was lucky to see the première of a new production in the town's State Musical Theatre named after T. Fozilova. The building is almost 100 years old and in desperate need of renovation: there are earth toilets at the back of the



Aini Opera and Ballet Theater in Dushanbe (source: www.curiosite.ru)



Maykovsky Russian Drama Theater in Dushanbe (source: www.openarium.ru)

yard. A first, crucial step has been made, with support from the Swiss Cooperation Office in Tajikistan, with the installation of modern light and sound equipment. The play I saw was the first presented with up to date technical facilities and the auditorium was packed for the afternoon performance. There were mothers with children, pensioners, teenagers at the back: only the working age men were few.

The play, 'Mother, Tomorrow I'm Getting Married', was adapted from a Russian text and told interlocking stories of families whose young people wanted to marry. Such romantic situations are the stock in trade of theatre, but this play focused also on the risks of early marriage, domestic violence and debt, as families overspend to show Tajik values of hospitality. This is such a problem that it is illegal to invite more than 150 guests to a wedding in Tajikistan.

The audience loved the play. It's a cliché but the atmosphere really did feel electric as the drama unfolded its alternating layers of comedy and tragedy, and the applause was long and enthusiastic. Everyone stayed to hear the President of the City Council praise the theatre for the excellence of the performance and particularly for having raised urgent problems faced by Tajik society. Then the director, Muhiddin Juraev, spoke passionately about his desire to revive Kanibadam's theatre and place it at the heart of the city's life. Fervent applause frequently interrupted both speeches.

Afterwards, I spent some time talking to Muhiddin Juraev and Dilbar Sulaymonova, the manager, about their hopes for the theatre. Juraev was born in the city and it was here that he discovered what drama could be. After his studies and an intensive, life-changing stage director's lab at Ilkhom Theatre in Tashkent, he accepted an offer to come home and revive the theatre in his home town. It was an exceptional chance for a director still in his twenties and he knows its value; he knows too what he must do to succeed. His task, he told me, is to win back the trust of local people. What I



Khujandi Music Comedy Theater in Khujand. Photo from the website [Russia for All](http://RussiaForAll)

saw on stage and the plans he outlined give confidence that Muhiddin, Dilbar and their colleagues will indeed renew the contract between this theatre and its community and so play a vital role in how the city meets its challenges.

- **Foundation stone laid for Central Asia's largest theater in Dushanbe**

March 18, 2015, Asia-Plus

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon yesterday performed the foundation-stone ceremony for the National Theater of Tajikistan in Dushanbe, which is expected to be the largest theater in the Central Asian region, according to the Tajik president's official website.

President Rahmon reportedly planted a time capsule in the foundation block of the National Theater that is being built near the National Museum of Tajikistan and the National Flag Park.

The theater building will have five surface floors and two underground floors. The building will be 34.5 meters in height. The theater's main auditorium will have 2,500 seats and two other auditoriums will have

1,200 and 1,000 seats respectively. There will be parking place for 250 cars and many technical premises and barns on the underground floors.

Specialists say the future National Theater of Tajikistan that will meet all modern standards will be the largest and most beautiful theater in Central Asia.

- **International Puppet Theatre Festival in Dushanbe**

October 17, 2014, NewEurasia

These days from 16th to 22nd of October the Fourth International Puppet Theatre Festival 'Chadory Khayol' is taking place in Dushanbe. The festival will present performances by puppet theatres from Tajikistan, Iran, Turkey, France, Russia, Spain, Belorussia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan. The conference called 'Problems of puppet theatres' will also take place in the framework of the festival.

3.4. Some Theatres and Cultural Institutions in Tajikistan

Aini Opera and Ballet Theatre

734025, Dushanbe,
Rudaki ave., 28
+992 (37) 221-59-41
www.operabalet.tj

Lohuti Tajik Drama Theatre

734025, Dushanbe,
Rudaki ave., 86
+992 (37) 221-37-51

Mayakovsky Russian Drama Theatre

734001, Dushanbe,
Rudaki ave., 76
+992 (37) 223-01-75
Director: Munira Dadaeva



Lohuti Tajik Drama Theater in Dushanbe (source: www.openarium.ru)

Mayakovskly Theatre was established in 1937. It is probably the most active theatre in Tajikistan. In 2009 the theatre was in the centre of the censorship scandal. The Tajik culture ministry banned the show 'Insanity. The Year of 93' staged by the famous director Barzu Abdurazzakov. The ministry had to withdraw its decision after the unprecedented negative reaction of the media and civil society.

In 2010 the building of the theatre was seriously damaged by fire. The fire also destroyed a lot of costumes and decorations. In the last several years a new generation of directors and managers came to the theatre. In 2015 actress Munira Dadaeva was appointed as a new managing director.

Vakhidov National Youth Theatre

734018, Dushanbe,
N. Karabaev str., 23
+992 (37) 233-00-48

Vakhidov Youth Theatre was founded by the group of the young graduates of the State Institute of Theatrical Art (GITIS) in Moscow (1971). The theatre was given its name for two reasons. Firstly, the theatre repertoire was meant for a young audience, and secondly, the troop was fairly young as well.

Dushanbe Puppet Theatre Luhtak

734002, Dushanbe,
Shotemur str., 54/1
+992 (37) 221-66-58
zafar_rizo@yahoo.com

Theatre-studio Padida

734003, Dushanbe,
Rudaki ave., 82
+992 (37) 224-71-75

Experimental Theatre Akhorun

734000, Dushanbe,
R. Nabiev str.

Theatre Akhorun was established in 1988 as an experimental studio by Faruh Kasimov (1948 – 2010). In 2004 Faruh Kasimov became a laureate of the Prince Claus Award (Netherlands) for his creative contributions to performance art and literature in Tajikistan. In June 2014 experimental theatre 'Akhorun' finally acquired its own building. The abandoned cinema house was renovated to host the company.

Kamol Khujandi Music Comedy Theatre

735700, Khujand,
Firdousi str., 140
+992 (3422) 6-31-96

T. Fozilova Music Drama Theatre

735900, Kanibadam,
Aini str., 35
+992 (3467) 2-22-98

Bactria Cultural Centre

734000, Dushanbe,
Mirzo Tursunzoda str., 12a
+ 992 (37) 227-05-54
FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/BactriaCC>

Bactria Cultural Centre is an educational and cultural centre founded by the international NGO ACTED in 2001. Bactria aims to aid the development of culture by offering access to information through seminars and workshops, vocational language, computer training, and organizing art events such as exhibitions and concerts. The centre also strives to develop contemporary arts as well as to preserve cultural heritage and acts as one of the focal points for the development of Central Asian culture. In 2014 Bactria organized workshops on Forum Theatre (or the theatre of the oppressed).

04.

UZBEKISTAN



4.1. Republic of Uzbekistan: Basic Facts

- **Population:** 31.2 million (www.stat.uz)
- **Capital:** Tashkent
- **Area:** 447,400 sq km (172,700 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Uzbek, Russian, Tajik
- **Life expectancy:** 66 years (men), 72 years (women)
- **Currency:** Uzbek Som (UZS)
- **GDP per capita:** US \$ 2,037.7 (World Bank, 2014)
- **Internet domain:** .uz
- **International dialling code:** +998

Sources: www.bbc.com, <http://data.world-bank.org/>

4.2. Key Political Events 2010-2015

2010

February - Three men are convicted for murdering Uzbekistan's most prominent theatre director, Mark Weil, in 2007. They say they had killed him in response to his portrayal of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad in his play 'Imitating the Koran'.

June - Uzbekistan briefly accommodates ethnic Uzbek refugees fleeing communal violence in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, then closes refugee camps within weeks and forces refugees back across border.

2012

June - Government announces plans to sell off hundreds of state assets in a drive to expand the private sector.

Uzbekistan agrees to allow NATO to remove its military vehicles and equipment through its territory as NATO-led forces speed up their withdrawal from Afghanistan.

September - Government strips largest mobile phone operator, Russian-owned Uzdurobita, of its license to operate and arrests several managers. Swiss police begins an investigation on money-laundering that eventually involves President Karimov's elder daughter, Gulnara.

2013

October - The authorities begin closing down businesses and organisations linked to Gulnara Karimova, who responds by using Twitter to attack rivals in the Uzbek power structure.

Media rights groups express concern at the brief detention of journalist Sergey Naumov while investigating child labour in the cotton harvest in the north-western city of Urgench.

2014

January - Swiss prosecutors begin to investigate President Karimov's elder daughter Gulnara in a money-laundering probe.

February - Gulnara Karimova is placed under house arrest.

September - Uzbek prosecutors say Gulnara Karimova has been charged with belonging to a crime group that plundered £40bn (€57bn) in assets.

December - Four parties - all supporting President Karimov - compete in parliamentary elections.

2015

March - President Karimov is re-elected with 90% of the vote in presidential elections. International observers criticise the lack of genuine political alternatives.



4.3. Theatre and Performance Art: News-stream

- **The theater of Mark Weil 'Ilkhom' opens its 40th theater season on September 11**

September 10, 2015, *Ilkhom*

The theater of Mark Weil 'Ilkhom' opens its 40th theater season on September 11. And here comes the good news! All those who did not manage to get tickets for 'A Respectable Wedding' which is to be performed on September 10, can get on our traditional big open-air party making the opening of the season. The party will start immediately after the performance. So, you can buy tickets to the Ilkhom party only!

As always we have a couple of surprises for you: the 'soundlive' team has prepared a special gift to 'newlyweds', witnesses and guests of our 'wedding' – performance of music bands 'Cover Stars' and 'Flyin'UP! Those who are not familiar with their music, probably, have never left their houses. The rest people know that nobody will be bored this evening. The bands will perform the greatest rock hits, listed in Rolling Stone's TOP 100 rock songs, as well as their own songs.

Usually fall evenings are cool in Tashkent, however September 10th night promises to be hot. Hey, friends, are you ready for the opening?

- **Ilkhom Theatre Welcomes Young Directors**

October 18, 2014, *World Theater News*

The Ilkhom Theatre in Tashkent is marking its 39th season with an inaugural month-long workshop for aspiring young directors from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

As the Ilkhom Theatre in Tashkent launches its 39th season, management is trying an outreach programme to help expand its popularity.

The artistic troupe that went from being the first independent theatre in the USSR to Tashkent's Centre for Modern Art is looking to try some different things to expand its popularity this season.

'For Tashkent, the Ilkhom Theatre is more than a stage,' local art critic Lidiya Yeliseyeva said. 'It's a living organism, an integral part of our city's past and present.'

But the theatre is not content to sit back and reflect on past successes; rather, it wants to continue attracting audiences and allowing professional growth for stage artists.

It's a strategy that some say will help keep the Ilkhom vibrant. 'If you liken cultural life to seething, boiling water, then you could say that Ilkhom is now the only teapot in the city whose water remains hot,' Tashkent photographer Timur Karpov said.

- **The Seagull Project Takes Chekhov To Tashkent**

August 13, 2014, *American Theater*

Gavin Reub, a founder of the Seagull Project in Seattle, describes the company's experiences when they took their theatre to Uzbekistan.

- **Laboratory for Young Directors of Central Asia**

May 21, 2014, *Prince Claus Fund*

On 21st and 22nd of May the Ilkhom Theatre will feature the premier of several theatre performances from the 'Laboratory for Young Directors of Central Asia', a project supported by the Prince Claus Fund. In the 8th edition of this project, 17 young directors will attend workshops, lectures and rehearsals from the best theatre critics and specialists in Uzbekistan and Russia for 6 weeks.

The Ilkhom Theatre is a 2011 Prince Claus Laureate and the only professional independent performing arts organization in Uzbekistan. The theatre has always been

known as a destination for intellectuals, creating a progressive and modern cultural environment. Today the centre presents up to 200 performances for more than 25.000 spectators a year.

'The Laboratory for Young Directors of Central Asia' is based on the Ilkhom Theatre's collaborative artistic work with established international theatre directors. As a significant sphere of the Center's activities, the laboratory creates an artistic environment with the chance for students to develop professionally.

- **Rain outside the walls of 'Ilkhom'**

April 16, 2013, *NewEurasia*

Tashkent 'Ilkhom' theater has opened on 13 April the unique project – Laboratory of young directors of Central Asia. It is attended by directors from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Laboratory stage the play 'The rain outside the wall' with the famous Russian director Vladimir Pankov. Under ... leaking roof of the theater.

Goal of the Laboratory – to render assistance in the implementation of creative projects by young directors, who are only starting their way in the profession. This year's program is based on the practical involvement in the Laboratory during the staging of play, but also there will be a series of workshops and master classes with leading CIS theater experts.

Main Tutor of the Laboratory is the famous Russian director Vladimir Pankov (studio SounDrama, Moscow). Vladimir is well known in Tashkent. In 2010, he staged the brilliant performance 'Seven Moons' by the poem 'Seven Planets' of great poet Alisher Navoi in the 'Ilkhom' theater. Also Victor Ryzhakov, artistic director of the Moscow Theatre and Cultural Center named after Meyerhold, Mikhail Ugarov – Russian playwright, director and screenwriter and Helena Kowalska – art director of the Festival of Contemporary Drama 'Lyubimovka' will be tutors of the Laboratory.

Laboratory of the young directors supported by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, and the Prince Claus Fund (Netherlands).

- **Mark Weil, Tashkent Theater Director, Dies at 55**
September 8, 2007, The New York Times

Mark Weil, an internationally known theater director in Uzbekistan whose troupe, Ilkhom, caused controversy at home with its experimental productions, was fatally stabbed late Thursday night in Tashkent, the capital. He was 55.

Mr. Weil died in a hospital after being attacked in front of his apartment building, a spokesman for his troupe told The Associated Press. Neighbors saw two young men waiting for him, The A.P. reported.



Omnibus Music Academy in Bishkek, 2015 (photo by Sukhrob Nazimov)

4.4. Some Theatres and Cultural Institutions in Uzbekistan

Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre

100029 Tashkent, Ataturk str., 28
+998(71) 234-95-46
E-mail: gabtuzb@mail.ru
www.gabtuzb.uz

National Drama Theatre of Uzbekistan

Tashkent, Navoi str., 34
+998 (71) 244 17 51, 244 33 75

Russian Drama Theatre of Uzbekistan

100029 Tashkent, Ataturk str., 24
+998 (71) 233 81 65, 233 42 10
E-mail: ardtuz@rambler.ru
www.ardt.uz

Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan

700011 Tashkent, Navoi str., 55
+998 (71) 244 10 89
E-mail: info@mtu.uz
www.mtu.uz

Ilkhom Theatre of Mark Weil

100011 Tashkent, Pakhtakorskaya str., 5
+ 998 (71) 241 22 41
E-mail: info@ilkhom.com
www.ilkhom.com

Omnibus Ensemble

100011 Tashkent, Pakhtakorskaya str., 5
+998 97 729 11 79 (manager's mobile)
E-mail: omnibusensemble@gmail.com
Channel on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/user11351935>
FB Page: <https://www.facebook.com/OmnibusEnsemble/timeline>
Playing Together Project Blog: <https://playingtogether2015.wordpress.com/>
www.omnibus-ensemble.asia

4.5. SPOTLIGHT: Omnibus Ensemble

The Omnibus Ensemble is a well-recognized regional leader in concert performance, education and information in the field of contemporary music and visual and performing arts. It was founded in the summer of 2004 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. During the last ten years the Omnibus presented over 100 unique concert programs. The repertoire of the ensemble mostly includes works by the key composers of the 20th century. Almost all the works performed by the ensemble have been presented for the first time in Central Asia. This approach is the ensemble's signature concept - to play music which has never been presented before in the region and to present the widest spectrum of phenomena and processes within the new music. This approach also explains the name of the group: in Latin *omnibus* means multiple, capable of moving in different directions.

Currently the Omnibus Ensemble is a well-recognized regional leader, not only in concert performance, but also in education and information. The International Master-Class for Young Composers Omnibus Laboratorium which takes place in October each year has been initiated to fill in the gap in information and education in the area of contemporary music.

'Playing Together: Sharing Central Asian Musical Heritage'

'Playing Together: Sharing Central Asian Musical Heritage' - the Ensemble's most recent Project - is a two-year music program which brings together young musicians from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan under the leadership of Central Asian, US, and Indian musical experts. The program activities include: the Central Asian Academy of Contemporary Music in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in July - August 2015, a Central Asian concert tour by the young musicians in November 2015, the creation of a Central Asian music website, and residencies and concerts by Central Asian musicians in the US. Through



Omnibus Music Academy, Workshop by Omnibus' Artistic Director Artyom Kim, Bishkek 2015 (photo by Sukhrob Nazimov)

these activities, the Playing Together program helps to build a strong network for musicians in Central Asia and encourages on-going creative exchange while developing a platform to promote Central Asian art in the region and abroad.

The Central Asian Academy of Contemporary Music is an intensive program designed by the founders of the Omnibus Ensemble - Artyom Kim, a leading composer from Uzbekistan, and Tashkent musician and video artist Sukhrob Nazimov. More than twenty young Central Asian musicians from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan gathered to participate in a unique educational program focusing on contemporary music. The Central Asian Academy of Contemporary Music ran from July 16 till August 6, 2015 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The Academy taught new skills while creating links between musicians and musical cultures.

'Playing Together' is organised by Omnibus Ensemble and CEC ArtsLink in collaboration with Ustashakirt Plus (Kyrgyzstan) and National Conservatories of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Interview with Sukhrob Nazimov, General Manager of Omnibus Ensemble

Sukhrob Nazimov (1979, Dushanbe, Tajikistan) is one of the founders of the Omnibus Ensemble and its general manager. He is a graduate of the Tashkent Conservatory (2001), initiator and producer of the Black Box Music and Visual Arts Festival and a video artist.

Georgy Mamedov: *Omnibus seems to be much more than just an ensemble. Educational projects, international festivals, numerous workshops are regular part of what you do. So, the Omnibus functions not just as a group of musicians playing concerts together, but as an active cultural institution. Was this the idea behind the ensemble from the very beginning?*

Sukhrob Nazimov: No, not at all. At the very beginning, when we were just starting the ensemble in 2004 we were very much focused on the concert activities. In a way, it remains our priority. We are actively touring as an ensemble and take part in the international workshops and festivals such as International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt, Germany, for example. Even more festivals and venues would be

happy to invite us, but often they can afford to fly in only a group of four or five musicians. However for us it is important that the entire ensemble is invited. It's important because of the specificity of our sound, which is a unique fusion of Uzbek traditional and classical European instruments.

Coming back to your question about our non-concert activities, very soon we realised that we had occupied a unique niche – the niche of the new, avant-garde music. This music was not played by anyone else not only in Uzbekistan, but in Central Asia and probably in the whole post-Soviet space. So, we came to understand that we have to consolidate musicians and spread the knowledge about this music. The first project of this kind was Omnibus Laboratorium – an international workshop for young Central Asian composers. The first edition of the Laboratorium took place in 2005 and since then we organize these workshops every year and sometimes several times a year. Later our educational efforts developed into the mobile Academy of Contemporary Music. This Academy travels to different cities where we organise intensive workshops for the musicians and composers and then present a concert program. It is our second Academy here in Bishkek and ideally we would love to organise such workshops in every Central Asian capital.

GM: *An important part of the Omnibus' activities are its transdisciplinary projects in which the boundaries between music, visual art and theatre are blurred and transcend.*

SN: Yes, it is indeed an important part of what we do. The first project of this kind took place in 2006. That year we collaborated with the Dutch composer Peter Adriaansz and proposed to the three young directors and actors from the Ilkhom Theater to make three films visualizing the three minimalist pieces of Adriaansz. Next year this experiment developed into the three-day, and later week-long, festival of music and visual arts Black Box. At this festival we experiment with sound and

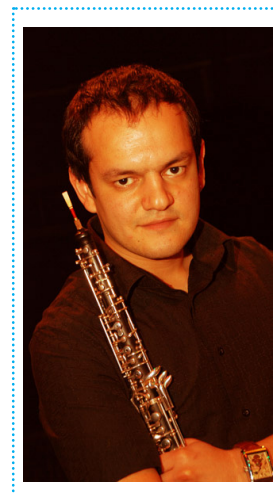
image. New soundtracks are created for the old and known films and performances as well as for the new productions and these soundtracks are played live. The festival traditionally takes place on the Ilkhom Theater of Mark Weil.

GM: *Do I get it right that the Omnibus is not the only job for most of the musicians who play in it? Can you tell us more about the institutional and material aspects of the ensemble?*

SN: Yes, this is right. All our musicians also work somewhere else to earn their living. We have our own technical equipment and a rehearsal base at the Tashkent Conservatory, but in general our status is very precarious, nomadic. We don't have any official, legal status as an ensemble or a cultural institution of any sorts. Uzbek legislation is very complicated and official registration will cause us more bureaucratic obstacles than we have now as an ephemeral legal structure.

GM: *Does this ephemeral status have anything to do with the political situation in Uzbekistan?*

SN: I wouldn't politicise this situation. We haven't had any political problems with the government or any other structures so far. Nobody has attempted to close us or somehow prevent us from active work. Sure, there are some difficulties. For example, there are people who would see us as those who propagate something western, something not needed in Uzbekistan. But this is rather an aesthetic, not a political dispute and the views of these individuals are not the mainstream, at least for now.



Sukhrob Nazimov (courtesy: Omnibus Ensemble)

GM: *I noticed on your website a special page: Network. It included a list of individuals but not many institutions are there. Do you have any plans to further develop your regional network?*

SN: We actually have big hopes for the further development of the network aspect of our work within the Playing Together project. It's our second Academy that we organize here in Bishkek and this time it gathered musicians from the four countries of the region. As part of the project we will create a website which will function as a social network for the participants of the Academy and other music professionals who would be willing to join. We see this website as a forum at which all the participants will be able to share their ideas and experiences and initiate collaborative projects.