

AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE TODAY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN



By Simon Tordjman

January 2006

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

In collaboration with  **ACTED**
Agency for technical cooperation and development.
web: www.acted.org
Project coordinator: Florent Le Duc

With the support of the Arts & Culture Network Programme
(Open Society Institute Budapest)
web: www.soros.org

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*Informal European Theatre Meeting aisbl

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An introduction to Theatre Today in Afghanistan and Central Asia

Central Asia : between openness and isolation

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

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

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

IETM and Central Asia

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

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

An introduction to Theatre Today in Central Asia and Afghanistan

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

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

The organizers of the second Central Asian Theatre Meeting wish to express their sincere gratitude to:

Open Society Institute Budapest – Arts & Culture Network Program
Open Society Institute - Tajikistan
The British Council (Tashkent and Kabul)
The European Commission office in Dushanbe
The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Dushanbe
The German Embassy in Dushanbe
The Foundation for Culture and Civil Society in Kabul
ACTED (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development) and
Bactria Cultural Center in Dushanbe, Tajikistan

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

Simon Tordjman
November 2005

Summary of discussions held in the Regional Theatre Meeting Dushanbe – September 2005

Mobility and networking

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

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

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

However, isolation of individual theatres in Central Asia (region, nation, and worldwide) is obviously the reality. For Mark Weil (Uzbekistan) or Ovlyakuli Hojakuliev (Turkmenistan), this Forum was the first occasion to come back to Tajikistan since the collapse of the USSR. And the former Soviet theatres' organization constituted a kind of landmark in most of the (formal and informal) discussions. As far as mobility among theatres in Central Asia is concerned, participants still seem to consider a network as a pyramidal structure, referring to this former institution, Soviet Theatre, which was responsible for the mobility of theatre professionals within (and outside, for some of them) the territory of the former Soviet Union. Very few of participants explicitly distinguished the philosophy of Western networks such as ITI (International Theatre Institute/UNESCO: <http://www.iti-worldwide.org/>) or IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting: www.ietm.org) from the ambition of the former Soviet structure.

Today, the only way for Central Asian theatres to maintain relations is through the Confederation of Theatres of CIS countries (more a virtual structure than an organization which gives concrete results) or the Moscow Chekhov Festival which provides opportunities to perform in a huge city in a language understood by the audience. The Central Asian Network for Arts and Culture (CANAK)¹ based in Bishkek also provides its support to the setting up of a performing arts network in Central Asia.

¹ Formerly known as the Central Asian Academy of Arts

Paradoxically, the artists who have already traveled and worked abroad had embraced a more self-aware view than those who insisted on the financial needs of their theatres and the crucial role of foreign organizations in the cultural life of their country. Nurlan Asanbekov (Kyrgyzstan), recently returned from a workshop in Chicago. When he spoke about this experience, he did not magnify the West at all and only insisted on the lesson he learned from it, "The future of theatre in Central Asia depends only on ourselves (...) and on the action of our ministries of culture". Mark Weil, Artistic Director of the *Ilkhom* theatre, the most famous Central Asian theatre worldwide, also says that the main problem faced by the Central Asian theatre concerns inspiration and artistic work, much more than financial support.

Education for artists and cultural operators

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

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

Sultan Usmonov, a Tajik stage director, stressed the gap between the current cultural isolation of Central Asia and what it used to be in the region. For instance, Tajik theatre achieved its professional aspects only due to foreign influences (notably from Russia and from Germany). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the new generation of actors lost the opportunity to benefit from high-level education and from the possibility to travel within the Union. According to him, the question of actors' education is also linked to the status of theatres: "Misunderstanding can occur between a director and actors who were trained in different places. When I came to my theatre, there weren't any actors. So the theatre-studio trained them and now we have a real, united band in our theatre. We need to educate actors within the theatres to avoid misunderstanding. (...) There is no Academy of Arts here good enough to prepare actors"².

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

According to Almash Naizabekova, in Kyrgyzstan, many actors decided to leave theatres, notably because of the bad reputation of theatre work. She also expressed concern about the lack of interest that the former Ministry of Culture

² For an overview of the situation in Uzbekistan, see: <http://www.culture.uzsci.net/theatre/txi/txi.html>

showed toward theatre, and the repercussions of such an attitude on the current theatre field: today, artistic workshops can be held only thanks to the support given by international organizations. However, she regarded the political changes in Kyrgyzstan as a great opportunity for the development of professional theatres.

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

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

The power of tradition & new tendencies

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

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

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

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

Ovlyakuli Hojakuliev pointed out that after independence, artists from Central Asia lost the direction common during Soviet times. If the national independences raised the question “what to do now?”, such an interrogation emerged in a framework of an intellectual vacuum. But, according to him, the reason for such situation is easy to understand, “There is no Uzbek theatre”. Such an assessment which would have been extremely controversial only five years before was unexpectedly largely accepted by the representatives of all the Central Asian countries. According to Habibullo Abdurazzakov, due to the fact that independence in Central Asia did not result from a struggle against the Russian authorities (contrary to the experience of the Baltic States), no specific oppositional culture emerged in these countries. He stated that only oppositional culture can provoke the development of specific forms. Moreover, Central Asia cannot have a specific culture; Indeed, culturally speaking,

Central Asia only exists as a place of passage, of coexistence between the East and the West. "Our theatre was created by the Russians and is still influenced by European theatre". For his son Barzu Abdurazzakov, one of the leading Tajik stage directors, "[Central Asian theatre professionals] are cheating themselves" in turning tradition into archaism. Zakhid, a young actor playing in Barzu's performance and attending the laboratory of young Central Asian directors (Ilkhom Theatre – Uzbekistan) underlined that "Tradition is not the point. If tradition is the result of experience, everyone has his own. What theatre should focus on is the human soul and current human problems."

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

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

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

Independence of theatre and liberty of expression

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

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

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

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

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

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



Afghanistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 26 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Kabul
- **Area:** 652,225 sq km (251,773 sq miles)
- **Major language:** Pashto, Dari (Persian)
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 46 years (men), 46 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Afghani = 100 puls
- **Main exports:** Fruit and nuts, carpets, wool, opium
- **GNI per capita:** n/a
- **Internet domain:** .af
- **International dialing code:** +93

General overview of the political situation

(source: BBC news Website)

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

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

After the Taliban's refusal to hand over bin Laden, the US initiated aerial attacks in October, paving the way for opposition groups to drive them from power. Infighting between local commanders over power and territory became a feature of the post-Taliban period. The authorities in Kabul have been able to exert little control beyond the capital and militant violence has continued.

Afghanistan's drugs industry makes up around 60% of the economy. The trade has boomed since the fall of the Taliban and the country is the world's leading producer of opium.

Afghanistan Cultural Profile : a History of Theatre in Afghanistan

(From *Visiting Arts*' Web-site:
http://www.culturalprofiles.org.uk/afghanistan/Directories/Afghanistan_Cultural_Profile/1.html)

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

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

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

Since its revival in 2002 the National Theatre Company (see below) has staged some 10 performances a year, including a number of moralistic short plays in a slapstick style by Afghan writers. Partly because of the lack of performance space

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

An Introduction to Theatre in Afghanistan

Compiled by Prof. Mohammad Azim Hussain Zadeh

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

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

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

1958 can be called a year of big change for Afghan Theatre: Muhammad Ali Raunaq revolutionized different aspects of theatre such as acting, directing, set and costume design, make up, light and sound. He continued his activities until 1960; from 1945 to the 1960s, theatre was highly appreciated and patronized by the whole of Afghan society. The staged plays ranged from tales about Afghan history and cultural epics to Shakespeare and plays by Anton Chekhov. In addition, Mrs. Zainab Saraj and Sayed Muqadas Negah established the Women's Theatre in 1958: plays were performed for women only : this was the first time and place in Afghanistan that women took part in theatre activities as actresses, for example, Mrs. Habiba Askar, Mrs. Zulaikha Negah, and Najiba Dina. In the beginning, the audience also consisted only of women, but after few years they successfully opened the theatre to a mixed audience. In 1960, the Tajik director Shams Qiamof became the first foreign director who came to Kabul and he started working with the Knowledge Theatre. Besides spreading and teaching drama theory, he did practical works with different Afghan artists. It was in these years that the Fine Arts Organization was established and started its activities in three sections: music, painting and sculpture and dramatic arts. Due to various problems, the activities of the City Theatre stopped in 1965. The

Knowledge Theatre and the Fine Arts Organization joined together from mid-1965 to 1966 and staged many new productions together.

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

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

International Theatre Initiatives

International festival:

2004/2005: The Kabul Theatre Summer Festival. Since 2004, Dramatic Arts Centre in cooperation with Kabul University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Foundation for Culture and Civil Society and the Ministry of Information and Culture have annually organized the Kabul Theatre Summer by the support of British Council, French Cultural Centre, Goethe-Institute and the U.S. Embassy. Both events are meant to stimulate and support the development of theatre in Afghanistan which, after a gap of recent years caused by the displacement of so many artists and intellectuals, requires a strict reinvestigation. During Kabul Theatre Summer 2005, ten international theatre teams (from France, Germany, UK, USA and Estonia) offered workshops and performances in various fields of theatre in order to train Afghan theatre makers and to strengthen intercultural exchange between Afghan and international artists.

Theatres in Afghanistan

National Theatre Company



Contact: Gul Makai Shah, Director

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

Telephone: 20888 (local dialing only)

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

Aftab Theatre Company

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Fax: +93 (0) 75 202 357 8

E-Mail: timor_hakimyar@yahoo.com, culture@afghanfcss.org

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

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

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

*Several of her Afghan students have now formed their own theatre troupe, named Aftab, the Dari word for "sun"--a clear reference to Mnouchkine's own company. Mnouchkine congratulated Aftab for electing its own director and expressed excitement about its upcoming performances at the Kabul Theatre Festival in September. A brief video spotlighted Arif, one of Aftab's most promising talents. Disowned by his family for pursuing the arts, Arif received the French director's unwavering support. Though theatre in Afghanistan has many obstacles, Mnouchkine applauded the actor: "He is formidable. He is the future. » (« The most revolutionary Art Form », in *The Nation*, August 15, 2005)*

Risky Revival of Afghan Theatre puts Women Centre Stage

By Maseeh Rahman

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN - Barely three years ago, at a time when women in Afghanistan were not permitted even to leave their homes, the idea of a woman performing on stage - and in mixed company! - seemed inconceivable. Any woman who did so risked life and limb.

All the more astonishing, then, that a theatre festival opening in Kabul will include a play written by a woman (a teenage schoolgirl, to be precise), with real actresses, about the brutal suppression of women under the country's now-ousted Taliban government. "To those people who want to keep us away from the stage, I say: You have no right to interfere," says 16-year-old playwright/director Naseeba Ghulam Mohammed, whose "Toward Brightness" is among the plays women will perform during the eight-day national festival. "In Afghanistan today, men and women are equal."



Her words hint that opposition to women on stage - and perhaps to live theatre in general - is not entirely a thing of the past. Indeed, the festival devotes a day to "women's theatre" which challenges Islamic fundamentalists who would block women's ascent to the stage - not to mention school, jobs, and other aspects of civic life. But the country's first theatre festival ever, and the participation of about two dozen newly formed dramatic companies from around the country, speaks to how quickly this Muslim country is evolving and to the role the arts are playing in its transformation. To those who support this flowering of Afghan theatre, drama is an effective way to spread the message of a modern, democratic Afghanistan.

"People may not listen to the mullah, but they will pick up good things when they come to the theatre," says Majid Ghiasi, director of the government-financed Kabul Theatre Company. "The message conveyed through drama or comedy is more easily absorbed." The Kabul Theatre Company has toured several provinces in the past year, presenting short plays on themes such as women's education and the importance of democracy. Audiences have greeted the troupe with enthusiasm, even in villages. Only once did trouble arise, when fundamentalist university students stormed a performance in Jalalabad.

Hostile reviews

Many Afghans, though, continue to regard theatre as inappropriate for women and some see it as in conflict with Islam. Female performers at the 45-play festival in Kabul will wear a *hijab*, the traditional head covering prescribed by Islam. But the audiences will be mixed and women's voices well represented. Naseeba's half-hour play, to be performed by the Mediothek Girls' Theatre from the northern city of Kunduz, is just part of her repertoire. The teenager has written, directed, or acted in 15 short plays for the German-sponsored girls' theatre company in the three years since a US-led coalition force swept the Taliban from power. Before that, she could

not even attend school in Afghanistan and received her education as a refugee in Iran.

"Theatre is an easy medium," says Nobert Spitz of Germany's Goethe Institute, which supports the Afghan theatre revival and is helping to organize the festival. "It travels by bus, it doesn't need electricity, it can go to the remotest region, and the audience needn't be literate."

Afghanistan has a long tradition of rustic theatre - storytellers enacting religious myths and legends, or vaudeville-type entertainers performing at weddings. But modern Afghan theatre was born less than a century ago, at the initiative of King Amanullah. The first production, about 1920, was of a patriotic play, "Mother of the Nation," performed in the royal garden retreat of Paghman, near Kabul. With Afghans' love for music and melodrama, theatre flourished in the cities. In the early 1960s, a state-of-the-art, German-designed National Theatre opened in Kabul, with a revolving stage, an orchestra pit, and seating for 700.

Theatre's underground resistance

The art form did not fade with the rise of the Communists in the 1970s: During the Soviet time, Kabul's police and firemen even had their own theatre groups. But the mujahedin militias who drove out the Communists in 1991 also dimmed the lights of theatre. The bombed-out hulk of Kabul's National Theatre stands as stark testimony to the assault on Afghan culture during the mujahideen civil war, and by the short, brutal reign of the Taliban. "Theatre was suppressed all over the country under the Taliban, but curiously, not in Kabul University," says Mohammed Azeem Hussainzada, head of the university's theatre department. "That's because the university head, though from the Taliban, loved theatre. So we continued to produce plays, but for a restricted audience - the university boss and his friends. He allowed women to appear on stage, but controlled the content of the plays. So we could do a play, for instance, showing photographers harassing people and making money [the Taliban considered photography "un-Islamic"], but we had to steer clear of romantic or religious themes."

The current revival is taking place in a climate of creative freedom. Many plays at the national festival have themes that are daring in Afghanistan - star-crossed lovers, hypocritical mullahs, corrupt provincial governors, smugglers of ancient cultural artifacts, and drug lords. But Afghans have not forgotten how to laugh - several plays take digs at doctors, policemen, and busybodies. "The aim is to establish theatre as a common cultural domain that not only provides entertainment but also reflects the country's problems," says Julia Afifi, an Afghan-German director who has returned to her homeland to produce plays, teach at Kabul University, and help establish a national theatre research center.

Infusion of Western influences

She is also introducing Afghans to Western plays and modern theatre techniques. Among her current productions are short adaptations in the Dari language of Chekov's "Three Sisters" and British playwright Sarah Kane's controversial "Blasted," a searing portrayal of violence. "Afghans tend to adopt a declamatory style of acting, so I try to help actors liberate their emotions and bodies," she says. "I even show them [Quentin] Tarantino's films ["Pulp Fiction," "Kill Bill"] to demonstrate how violence can flow from normal, relaxed situations." For advocates, theatre is a medium that can help Afghans not only to emerge from a dark period, but

also to examine and understand it. As Naseeba put it, "Theatre can help us find better ways to exist in the future."

From the November 26, 2004 edition: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1126/p01s04-alm.html>

In Afghanistan, Comedians Joke their Way to Civic Renewal

By Lane Hartill | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor



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

His spot-on impressions of everyone from a Taliban soldier to an Afghan drug addict would have even Mullah Omar giggling into his turban. At a recent impromptu performance, Mubariz wraps on a long black turban - a favorite Taliban accessory - and twists his face into a scowl. He grabs a Kalashnikov to complete the look.

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

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

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

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

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

Comedy as civic education

Before last October's presidential elections, a Kabul-based nongovernmental organization hired the actors to promote voting in some of the country's most remote southern villages. Hundreds of people saw each show; the message stuck. Women's

turnout in Paktia province, which borders Khost and is so traditional that women are rarely seen in public, was among the highest in the country.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Getting into character

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

International Organizations Involved in Theatre Projects

Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS)

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

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

E-mail: afghan_foundation@yahoo.com

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

Contact: Robert Kluyver Consultant

Telephone: 93 (0) 70 292322 (mobile)

Theatre Department, Ministry of Information and Culture

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

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

Proprietor: [Office of the Deputy Minister, Arts, Ministry of Information and Culture](#)

Contact: Gul Makai Shah Director

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

Goethe Institute

Contact Person: Julia Afifi, theatre consultant

E-mail: juliaafifi@web.de

Address: Shahmahmood Street

Wazir Akbar Khan

Kabul, Afghanistan

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

British Council

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

Contact person: Richard Weyers, Director

Email: richard.weyers@britishcouncil.org

Address: British Embassy

15th Street, Roundabout Wazir Akbar Khan

PO Box 334

Kabul, Afghanistan

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

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

Swiss Cooperation Office in Kabul

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

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

Phone: +93 (0) 20 230 15 65
Fax: +93 20 2302299
Mobile 1: +93 (0) 702 74 902
Mobile 2: +93 (0) 79 203 47
E-Mail: kabul@sdc.net

UNESCO Office in Kabul

Website: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1259&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
Contact person: Mr Malama Meleisea, Director of the office
E-Mail: m.meleisea@unesco.org
Work Phone: 9379344229
Fax 00873763468836; 004724126902
Address: Street UN Compound, P.O. Box 5 City Kabul , Afghanistan

Go There...

Due to security reasons, travels to Afghanistan are highly inadvisable. Before any travel to the country, you should contact your diplomatic representation in Kabul.



Kazakhstan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 15.4 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Astana
- **Area:** 2.7 million sq km (1 million sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Kazakh, Russian
- **Major religions:** Islam, Christianity
- **Life expectancy:** 61 years (men), 72 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Kazakh tenge = 100 tiyn
- **Main exports:** Oil, ferrous and nonferrous metals, machinery, chemicals, grain, wool, meat, coal
- **GNI per capita:** US \$1,780 (World Bank, 2003)
- **Internet domain:** .kz
- **International dialing code:** +7

General Overview of the Political Situation

(Source: BBC news website)

Ethnically, the country is diverse, with Kazakhs making up over half the population, Russians comprising just over a quarter, and smaller minorities of Ukrainians, Germans, Chechens, Kurds, Koreans and Central Asian ethnic groups accounting for the rest.

Since independence, there has been major foreign investment in the Caspian oil sector, which has brought rapid economic growth. An oil pipeline linking the Tengiz oil field in western Kazakhstan to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk opened in 2001. There are plans to escalate oil exports by linking Kazakh resources to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline which began operating in summer 2005. A pipeline to China is due for completion by the end of 2005 and various other routes are also being explored.

While some have grown very rich, corruption and poverty are serious problems and Kazakhstan continues to face daunting economic challenges. These include the need to tackle unemployment and control inflation. The people of Kazakhstan also have to live with the aftermath of Soviet-era nuclear testing and toxic waste dumping.

Kazakhstan Cultural Profile

(From: http://www.photius.com/countries/kazakhstan/society/kazakhstan_society_culture.html)

Sources: The Library of Congress Country Studies)

Before the Russian conquest, Kazakhs had a culture mainly based on their nomadic pastoral economy. Although Islam was introduced to most of the Kazakhs in the seventeenth and eighteenth Centuries, the religion was not fully assimilated until much later. As a result, it coexisted with earlier elements of shamanistic and animistic beliefs.

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

The Russian conquest wreaked havoc on Kazak traditional culture by making difficult the expression of the nomadic pastoralism upon which the culture was based. However, many individual elements survived the loss of the lifestyle as a whole.

Many practices that lost their original meanings are assuming value as symbols of post-Soviet national identity. That Russian cultural establishment nevertheless produced many of the most important figures of the early stages of Kazak nationalist self-assertion, including novelist Anuar Alimzhanov, or Suleymenov who became in 1975 a pan-Central Asian hero by publishing a book, *Az i la*, examining the Lay of Igor's Campaign, a medieval tale vital to the Russian national culture, from the perspective of the Turkic Pechenegs whom Igor defeated.

The collapse of the Soviet system with which so many of the Kazak cultural figures were identified left most of them in awkward positions. Even more damaging has been the collapse of public interest in most forms of higher culture. Kazakhstan's cultural elite is suffering the same decline affecting the elite of all the former Soviet republics.

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

International Theatre Initiatives

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

Some Theatres in Almaty³

The National Academic Theatre of Drama named after M. Auezov.



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

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

The National Academic Theatre of Russian Drama named after M. Lermontov



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

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

ART & SHOCK Experimental Theatre



Contact person: Veronika Nassaslakaya, Manager
Address: 49/68 Kunaev street, 480004 Almaty
Phone: +7 (3272) 736 954
Fax: +7 (3272) 799718
Email: art_shock@rambler.ru

Art & Shock Experimental Theatre was founded in July, 2001. Its work concentrates on improvisation and theatre. Its manager is now involved in a project aiming at building a performing art network in Central Asia. For several years, the Art and Shock Theatre Company has participated in a cooperation with the Markus Zohner Theatre Company (Switzerland).

³ Other theatres can be found on the Kazak territory. Due to publishing constraints, only theatres located in Almaty are mentioned here.

The National Theatre of German Drama



Contact person: *Bulat Atabaev, stage director*

Fax: *(+32 72) 754110,*

Mob: *(+8-333) 270 32 02*

E-Mail: atabaevb@rambler.ru

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

The Youth academic theatre named after G. Mousrepov.

Tel.: *(+32 72) 323 221*

Address: *38 Abylai Khan Ave. Almaty*

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

International Organizations dealing with Theatre Projects

Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation – Kazakhstan

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

UNESCO (regional office for Central Asia)

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

British Council

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

Goethe Institute

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

French Embassy in Almaty

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

Getting There

Travel

Almaty is rapidly gaining importance as an international hub. It has air links with many cities in the CIS. *British Airways* flies direct from London to Almaty three times a week. Connections from London can also be made on *Austrian Airlines* (via Vienna), *KLM* (via Amsterdam), *Lufthansa* (via Frankfurt/M) and *Turkish Airlines* (via Istanbul). There are no direct flights from Australia or the USA. Further connections are offered by *Aeroflot* from Almaty to Urumchi (China), from where there are connections to Beijing. New direct routes from Almaty to Delhi, Tehran and Tel Aviv are planned.

Approximate flight times: From *London* to Almaty is eight hours, from *Istanbul* is six hours, from *Ulgı* (Mongolia) is four hours and from *Hanover* and *Frankfurt/M* is 10 hours.

International airports: *Almaty (ALA)* is located 10km (6 miles) northeast of the city. Bus nos. 38, 446 and 492 connect the airport with the city centre (travel time – 20 minutes). Taxis are also available at the airport for transport into the city centre. Airport facilities include car hire, duty free shops, restaurant and post office.

Visa requirements

Under the new procedure of issuing visas of the Republic of Kazakhstan, from February 15, 2004, single entry business, tourist and private (up to one month) visas will be issued to citizens of 27 developed nations, including the United States of America, without invitations from Kazakhstan, on the basis of their personal or companies' written statements submitted to the Consular Section of the Embassy of Kazakhstan.

In order to apply for Kazakhstan single entry business, tourist and private visas, you will need to complete and send an application form and supply all of the following documents in original form:

1. A written statement with a request to issue a visa (please, indicate your trip purpose).
2. A completed visa application form (one per person).
3. A valid passport (a photocopy not accepted) which should have at least one clear page for a visa. Your passport must be valid for at least 60 days longer than the validity of the requested visa.
4. One passport size photo of the applicant which should be stapled to the marked space in the upper right-hand corner of the application form.
5. A money order or company check payable to the Embassy of Kazakhstan for visa processing fee (no cash or personal checks).

NOTE: Processing time is 5 working days.

Travel and tourism agencies

National Company of the Republic of Kazakhstan «Silk Road Kazakhstan»

Address: 98 Zheltoksan Street - Almaty 480091Kazakhstan
Tel: (327-2) 33-35-12, 62-91-00
Fax: (327-2) 62-91-06
e-mail: ncsilkroad@hotmail.com
Web: www.zzk.tourkz.com.

Central Asian Tourist Cooperation "SAT" LTD537

Address: Seifullina Street Almaty Kazakhstan
Tel: (327-2) 50-10-70
Fax: (327-2) 50-17-07
e-mail: CATFVK@online.ru, CAT-TRAVEL@ALARNET.com

Climate/Weather

Continental climate with cold winters and hot summers. Although Kazakhstan has some of the highest peaks in the CIS, the climate is fairly dry. The hottest month is July (August in mountain regions).

Money

Currency exchange: The national currency, the Tenge, may only be obtained within Kazakhstan. Conversion of the Tenge back into hard currency may prove difficult. Foreign currency should only be exchanged at official bureaus and all transactions must be recorded on the currency declaration form that is issued on arrival. It is wise to retain all exchange receipts, although they are seldom inspected. Unless travelling with a licensed tourist company (in which case accommodation, transport and meals are paid before departure), money should be brought in US Dollars in cash and exchanged when necessary.

Credit & debit cards: Major European and international credit cards, including Diners Club and Visa, are accepted in the larger hotels in Almaty and in major shops and restaurants. Facilities exist for credit card cash withdrawals in Kazakhstan.

Traveller's checks: To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's checks in US Dollars.

Electricity

220 volts AC, 50Hz. Round two-pin continental plugs are standard.

Time

Kazakhstan is divided into three time zones:

Eastern/Main Zone: GMT + 6 (GMT + 7 from 28 March to 26 October).

Central Zone: GMT + 5 (GMT + 6 from 28 March to 26 October).

Western Zone: GMT + 4 (GMT + 5 from 28 March to 26 October).

Embassies

In order to know the list of Foreign Embassies in Kazakhstan and the contact information of the Kazakh Embassies to Foreign countries, please consult the site below:

<http://www.embassyworld.com/embassy/Kazakhstan/Kazakhstan.html>



Kyrgyzstan

Country profile



Facts

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

General Overview of the Political Situation

(Source: BBC news website)

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

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

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

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

In 2005 a popular revolt, sparked by widespread allegations of government interference in parliamentary elections and fuelled by poverty and corruption, swept the former president, Askar Akayev, from power. He had led the country since independence.

Kurmanbek Bakiev won a landslide presidential election victory in July 2005, promising to root out corruption and nepotism and fight poverty. Foreign observers said the poll showed clear progress in democratic standards.

Kyrgyzstan Cultural Profile

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

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

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

The great epic "Manas" is the biggest poetic narration in the world. It contains more than a million lines, is 20 times longer than the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* together and 2,5 times bigger than the Mahabharata. Although the epic is mentioned as early as the fifteenth Century, it was not written down until 1885. Most likely, it has been born in the Ala Too Mountains in the Talas region in North-Western Kyrgyzstan; a mausoleum in Talas city is believed to house his mortal remains.

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

Linked to the *Manas* art, Kyrgyzstan hosts the unique tradition of "manaschi", the professional *Manas* storytellers. People called "manaschi" are welcome and respected in any house. They usually remember not less than a hundred thousand lines of epics and share their knowledge in a very colourful way with the public on special feast occasions.

While improvising and telling parts of the epic, Manaschi fall into a trance when they experience and feel themselves a part of what they are telling. The voice of Manaschi turns into singing at most colourful parts and their gesticulations make listeners imagine themselves participants of the story as well.

The Decline of the Cultural Institutions

During the Soviet Union period, all republics received considerable subsidies for the development of arts and culture. Since Kyrgyzstan gained its independence, other priorities mean the theatre and arts in general have virtually no government funding. Many institutions, such as museums, theatres, and opera houses failed to adapt themselves to the new conditions.

Artists started to leave the country for Russia or go abroad in search for more motivating environments. Traditional arts and crafts became marginalized. The

diversity and the multiethnic dimension of Kyrgyz culture were affected. As a result, Kyrgyzstan risked and still risks losing much of its cultural wealth.

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

International Theatre Initiatives

International festivals:

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

Theatres in Kyrgyzstan

Bishkek City Drama Theatre



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

E-mail: bgdt@elcat.kg

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

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

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

The Sakhna theatre



Contact person: Asanbekov Nurlan, Artistic Director

Address: Street Shota Rustaveli 109 / 2, Bishkek

Phone: (+996 312) 42 65 08

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

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

State Academic Russian Drama Theatre



Contact Person: *Andrei Petukhov, Artistic Director*

Address: *Tynystanova Street 116*

Phone: *(+996 502) 621558, 664140*

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

International Organizations involved in Theatre Projects

Central Asian Network for Arts and Culture

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Contact Person: Almadan Chamichkeevna Naizabekova, Coordinator
Address: Frunze street, 364, 720301 Bishkek
Tel/Fax: (+996 312) 62-22-35
E-Mail: artacademy@users.kyrnet.kg, almash@soros.kg
Website: <http://artacademy.to.kg>

Soros Foundation – Kyrgyzstan

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

British Council

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

Goethe Institute

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

Swiss Cooperation Office in Bishkek

Contact person: Kanykei Mukhtarova, Arts & Culture Program Manager
Address: 144, Panfilova Str. (crossing Bokonbaeva), 720040 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
Tel: (+996 312) 66 64 80
Fax: (+996 312) 66 64 89
E-mail: bishkek@sdc.net

Getting There

Travel

Flight time schedule and routes are indicated in the following website:
http://www.centralasiatravel.com/bishkek_flights.html

Visa requirements

	Passport Required?	Visa Required?	Return Ticket Required?
British	Yes	Yes	No
Australian	Yes	Yes	No
Canadian	Yes	Yes	No
USA	Yes	Yes	No
Other EU	Yes	Yes	No
Japanese	Yes	No	No

VISAS are required by all except the following:

- (a) nationals of CIS countries (except Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan who *do* require a visa), provided residing in country of nationality;
- (b) Nationals of Malaysia and Turkey for stays of up to 30 days;
- (c) Nationals of Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Japan, Korea (Dem Rep), Macedonia, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Serbia & Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Vietnam travelling as tourists (provided they are permanent residents of their country);
- (d) Transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft within 48 hours provided holding onward or return documentation and not leaving the airport.

Note: Nationals of the following countries may apply for a visa valid for one month or less without providing a letter of support from Kyrgyzstan: nationals of countries referred to in the chart above (except countries who do not require a visa, as listed above, and nationals of Estonia, Hungary, Latvia who do need to provide an invitation letter), and nationals of Iceland, Israel, Korea (Rep), Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand and Norway.

Types of visa and cost: *Business, Private Trip, Tourist and Transit. Single-entry:* £40 (one month). *Multiple-entry:* £100 (six months); £125 (one year). *Transit:* £20 (one week). *Express:* double the price. Multiple-entry visas can only be issued with authorization from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Validity: Up to three months from date of issue. Multiple-entry visas are valid for six months.

Application to: Consulate (or Consular section at Embassy). Those living in the UK can also obtain visas from Russia House (for address, see *Russian Federation* section).

Application requirements: (a) Completed application form. (b) One passport-size photo. (c) Valid passport (must be an original, not a photocopy) with one blank page to affix visa. (d) Stamped self-addressed, registered envelope. (e) Fee, payable by cash, check or bank transfer. (f) Letter of support from Kyrgyzstan, authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (not required by certain nationals - see note above).

Travel and tourism agencies

ASIA SILK TOURS

Website: <http://www.centralasiatravel.com/>

E-mail: centralasia@sify.com

Address: Microdistrict 6, 34/1-29, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Telephone: 996-312-469923

TOURASIA

Website: <http://www.tourasia.kz/>

- Visa support for Kazakhstan and Republics of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan)
- Booking of the hotels
- Transport services and tickets
- Interpreter and guide services
- Tourist information and all the other services you may be interested in

GLOBAL TOURS

Website: <http://www.globaltours.elcat.kg>

Address: 199, Abdyrakhmanova street, office 3, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 720040

Tel: 996 (312) 66-69-39

E-mail: global-t@elcat.kg

Climate/Weather

Dry continental to polar in high Tien Shan; subtropical in southwest (Fergana Valley); temperate in northern foothill zone.

Electricity

220V 50HzHz

Time

GMT +5

Embassies

In order to know the list of foreign embassies in Kyrgyzstan and the contact information of the Kyrgyz Embassies to foreign countries, please consult the site below:

<http://www.embassyworld.com/dev/>



Tajikistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 6.3 million (UN, 2005)
- **Capital:** Dushanbe
- **Area:** 143,100 sq km (55,251 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Tajik, Russian
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 61 years (men), 66 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Tajik somoni = 100 dirams = 0.27 USD (average 2004)
- **Main exports:** Aluminum, electricity, cotton, fruit, textiles
- **GNI per capita:** US \$210 (World Bank, 2005)
- **Internet domain:** .tj
- **International dialing code:** +992

General Overview of the Political Situation

(Source: BBC news website)

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

The five-year civil war between the Moscow-backed government and the Islamist-led opposition, in which up to 50,000 people were killed and over one-tenth of the population fled the country, ended in 1997 with a United Nations-brokered peace agreement.

The republic has relied heavily on Russian assistance to counter continuing security problems and cope with the dire economic situation. Russian forces guarded sections of the border with Afghanistan until mid-2005 when their withdrawal was completed and the task handed over to Tajik border guards. Skirmishes with drug smugglers crossing illegally from Afghanistan occur regularly, as Tajikistan is the first stop on the drug route from there to Russia and the West.

In October 2004 Russia formally opened a military base in Dushanbe for several thousand troops to be stationed. It also took back control over a former Soviet space monitoring center at Nurek. These developments were widely seen as a sign of Russia's wish to counter increased US influence in Central Asia.

Tajikistan cultural profile

(From:

http://www.photius.com/countries/tajikistan/society/tajikistan_society_cultural_institution~11577.html

Sources: The Library of Congress Country Studies)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interview with Barzu Abdurazzakov, Stage Director, Tajikistan

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

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

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

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

Even before Perestroika, theatres started to speak a language which is made only for theatres. Stage directors, theatre directors, and all theatre professionals started to regard themselves as intelligent. The words pronounced on the stage were no longer understandable by the audience. And as soon as theatre lost authority, as soon as it became far from the audience's expectations, the crisis began.

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

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

International Theatre Initiatives

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

Theatres in Tajikistan

Tajik Academic Theatre named after Abulkasim Lohuti



Contact person: Bahodur Mirolibekov, Chief Director

Address: Dushanbe, Rudaki ave, 86

Phone: (+992 3422) 217843, 350559

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

National Experimental Theatre for Young Spectators "Akhurun"

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

Farukh Kasimov (b. 1948, Tajikistan) has brought renewal to theatre in Tajikistan through his approach to the creative reworking of an eclectic repertoire. Starting his career as an actor, he began his directing work in the 1970s with daring critiques of the totalitarian system which resulted in internal exile. With the social liberalization in the 1980s, he formed a first theatre group.

Farukh Kasimov draws inspiration from multiple cultures, readily adapting methods and concepts, and reinterpreting through the addition of new characters. He has created performances based on sources as varied as Rumi, Zoroastrian and Koranic texts, Sufi mystics and plays by Molière or Bulgakov.

His studio trains young actors and directors, and the *Akhurun* theatre regularly tours in the Middle East as well as in Eastern and Western Europe.

Padida Dance Theatre

Contact person: Habibullo Abdurazzakov, Artistic Director

Address: Rudaki Prospekt 82, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Telephone: (+992 3422) 247175, 274391

Graduated from the Moscow University GITIS, Habibullo Abdurazzakov has staged about 70 films and 30 theatre performances in Khojent, Dushanbe, and

Ashgabad. Currently he is the Director of the Tajik Union of Theatres and the Artistic Director of the *Padida* Dance Theatre.

Dushanbe Puppet Theatre

Contact person: *Zafar Djabarov, Artistic Director*

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

State Russian Drama Theatre named after V.V. Mayakovsky



Contact person: *Sulton Usmanov, Chief Director*

Address: *Rudaki ave, 76*

Phone: *213133, 218123, 271434*

The Russian Drama Theatre was founded in 1937. From the very beginning of its activity, many actors from the Tajik Academic Drama Theatre named after A. Lohuti have taken part in its plays. The earliest troupe consisted of the graduates of the Moscow Theatre Studio and the students of the National Actors Academy.

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

National Youth Theatre named after A. Vakhidov

Contact person: *Abdulhofiz Kodirov, Artistic Director*

In 1965, a team of 24 promising young people was sent from Tajikistan to the State Institute of Theatrical Art in Moscow. Upon graduation from the Acting Department, they all came back to Dushanbe and created the Youth Theatre. The

theatre was given its name for two reasons: firstly, the theatre repertoire was meant for a young audience and secondly, the troupe was fairly young as well.

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

Tajik theatres on the Road

National Experimental Theatre for Young Spectators "Akhорun"

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

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

Tajik Academic Theatre named after Abulkasim Lohuti

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

In 1988, the theatre presented the play "Bakhrom Chubina" at the International Theatre Festival "Fadjr" in Iran. The play received high appreciation from the festival jury.

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

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

Dushanbe Puppet Theatre

In 1986, the theatre was invited to the Federal Republic of Germany to participate in the "Days of Tajikistan" Festival. In 1988, it toured in Mongolia and Czechoslovakia.

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

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

National Youth Theatre named after A. Vakhidov

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

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

State Russian Drama Theatre after V.V. Mayakovsky

In April, 2001, the theatre took part in the Third International Feast of Russian Theatres of the CIS Baltic States, "Meetings in Russia", held in St. Petersburg. The play "The Sunset", which was performed there, received high approval by the audience.

International Organizations involved in Theatre Projects

Bactria Center – ACTED NGO

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

Swiss Cooperation Office in Dushanbe

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

Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation - Tajikistan

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

Eurasia Foundation

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

AKHPCA (Aga Khan Humanities, Project for Central Asia)

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

French Embassy in Dushanbe

Contact person: Yves Manville, First Counselor
E-Mail: yves.MANVILLE@diplomatie.gouv.fr
Address: Varzobskay Street, 17
Telephone: (992 372) 21 50 37, 21 74 05, 21 78 55, 24 67 23
Fax: (992 372) 51 00 82

German Embassy in Dushanbe

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

E-Mail: info@dusc.diplo.de

Address: Varzobskay Street, 16

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

Fax: (992 372) 21 22 45

Getting There

Travel

- **Munich/Istanbul**

(At end 2005) , the timetables for the Munich-Dushanbe and Istanbul-Dushanbe flights are as follows:

Point of Departure	Destination	Day of flight	Departure time	Arrival time
Munich (MUC)	Dushanbe (DYU)	Sat	14.00	22.40
Dushanbe (DYU)	Munich (MUC)	Sat	07.20	10.45
Istanbul (IST)	Dushanbe (DYU)	Thu	01.55	07.55
Dushanbe (DYU)	Istanbul (IST)	Wed	21.15	23.55

- **Other routes**

Tajik Air have two flights daily from Moscow (DME) to Dushanbe. There are also connections between Dushanbe and the following cities: Almaty, Bishkek, Osh, Sharjah, Delhi, Tehran, Urumchi, Ekaterinburg, Samara, Novosibirsk. If you wish to book a ticket on one of these routes we recommend that you use a travel agent in the country of departure.

Note: There are no flights between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Visa requirements

The world's greatest bureaucratic machine came tumbling down with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, but its spirit lives on. Before you can enjoy the natural beauty, hospitality and adventure that Tajikistan has to offer, there are a few hurdles to jump over...

In 2003, Tajikistan introduced simplified procedures for visa support for citizens of the EU, USA and Japan, for tourist visas of up to one month. A visa support letter is still required, but it can be obtained more quickly than before.

There are two options for obtaining your visa: on arrival at Dushanbe airport, or at a Tajik Embassy. Tajik visas cannot be obtained at land borders, so if you are arriving overland you must obtain your visa in advance from an embassy.

If you are flying to Tajikistan, you will probably find it most convenient to obtain your visa on arrival at the airport: When you arrive at the airport, go to the consular office before you clear passport control. You will need to present your passport, your letter of invitation, and the appropriate fee. It will help if you bring the exact change. You should also carry a few passport photos, although in practice these are not usually asked for.

If you are entering Tajikistan at a land border, you must obtain your visa in advance. There are three possible options:

- Visit the Tajik embassy in your country or in a country near you and apply in person.

- Apply to a Tajik embassy by post. I have had good reports from people who have applied by post to the embassies in Europe.
- Wait until you are in Central Asia, and apply in the Tajik embassy in Tashkent, Bishkek or Almaty before you cross the border. Usually the embassies are willing to issue visas quite promptly, but you may want to contact them in advance of travel to check.

Travel agencies

TAJIKISTAN NATIONAL TRAVEL COMPANY "SAYOH"

Address: Pushkin str. 14, TJ - Dushanbe 734025
Phone: +992 (0)372 21 90 72
Fax: +992 (0)372 21 90 72 / +992 (372) 231401
E-Mail: sayoh@netrt.org ; sayoh@traveltajikistan.com
Web site: <http://sayoh.tojikiston.com/>, <http://traveltajikistan.com/sayoh>

TOUR COMPANY "TAHMINA"

Address: Rudaki str. 20, TJ - Dushanbe 734019
Phone: +992 (0)372 21 85 65
Fax: +992 (0)372 21 85 65

"INTOURIST-TOJIKISTON" CO

Address: Shotemur Str. 22, TJ - Dushanbe 734001
Phone: +992 (0)372 21 62 62
Fax: +992 (0)372 21 52 37, 21 80 80
E-Mail: hotel@tojikiston.com, intouristhotel@tajikstan.com

"PAMIR TRAVEL LTD"

Address: 734025, P.O. Box 173, Dushanbe
 Attention Mr.Vladimir Razikov,
Tel: (992 372) 21-69-46
Fax: (992 372) 51-00-73, 21-52-36
E-mail: noc@tajik.net
Web site: <Http://www.tajnet.com/~travel/>

THE GREAT GAME TRAVEL COMPANY LIMITED

Address: 19 Echo Hill, Royston Herts. SG8 9BB, Great Britain
Tel./Fax: +44 (1763) 220049
E-mail: aubyn@thegreatgame.co.uk
Web site: <http://greatgametravel.co.uk>

Climate/Weather

Despite its relatively small land area, the climate in Tajikistan varies widely, due to the country's mountainous topography. The climate in Spring (March-May) and Autumn (September-November) is moderate. In the cities, daytime temperatures average around 20-30°C. Spring is the most beautiful time of year. The hillsides are alive with blossom, before the scorching heat of summer. In Autumn, the bazaars are

loaded with melons, watermelons, grapes and other fruit. These are both good times to visit lowland Tajikistan.

Summer can be ferociously hot in the cities (daytime maximum temperature often exceeds 40°C). The southern cities of Qurghonteppa and Kulob are noticeably hotter than Dushanbe. Escape to the cool mountains! This is the best time to visit if you intend to go climbing or trekking.

Money

Tajikistan's unofficial currency is the US Dollar (USD). Euro (EUR) and Russian Rubles (RUB) are also accepted at most exchange points. Uzbek Sum and Kirgыз Som can be exchanged in some exchange kiosks in Dushanbe, Khujand, Penjikent and other border areas.

It is recommended that you bring money to Tajikistan as cash in US Dollars and/or Euros. US Dollar bills should be dated 1996 or later. Earlier versions of the US Dollar had fewer security features and will probably not be accepted. Bills should be clean, not marked, torn or worn looking.

Travelers' checks and credit cards

Travelers' Cheques are not accepted in Tajikistan.

It is possible to withdraw cash from ATMs in Dushanbe at the following locations:

- Dushanbe Airport (arrival hall)
- Hotel Tajikistan (24 hours)
- Hotel Avesto
- Central Department Store (Tsum)
- Internet Café (opposite Rohat Tea House)
- Agroinvest Bank Head Office

You can withdraw up to USD \$200 per day using Visa or Mastercard. Charges are 2.5% if withdrawing US dollars and 1.5% if withdrawing Tajik Somoni.

Electricity

Tajikistan's electricity supply is **220 V, 50 Hz**. Sockets are the [round European type, with two pins but no earth connection](#).

Time

Tajikistan's time zone is TJT, which is GMT+5 (five hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time/Universal Coordinated Time). There is no adjustment for daylight savings.

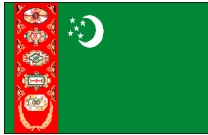
Embassies

List of Tajik embassies to foreign countries:

<http://www.geocities.com/tajikistanembassies/>

List of foreign countries' embassies to Tajikistan:

<http://www.traveltajikistan.com/practicalities/embassies.html>



Turkmenistan

Country profile



Facts

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

General Overview of the Political Situation

(source: BBC News Website)

Turkmenistan is made up mainly of desert and has the smallest population of the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia. It possesses the world's fifth largest reserves of natural gas, and has substantial deposits of oil. Yet it is still impoverished, and since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 has remained largely closed to the outside world.

Turkmenistan is the most ethnically homogeneous of the Central Asian republics, the vast majority of its population consisting of Turkmen. There are also Uzbeks, Russians and smaller minorities of Kazakhs, Tatars, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians. In contrast to other former Soviet republics, it has been largely free of inter-ethnic hostilities. However, strong tribal allegiances can be a source of tension. It is effectively a one-party state, the party being President Niyazov's Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, which comprises mostly former communists. There are no independent media.

Turkmenistan has been unable to benefit fully from its oil and gas deposits due to the absence of export routes and because of a dispute between the Caspian Sea littoral states over the legal status of the sea where oil wells are to be found. With foreign investors shying away, its economy remains underdeveloped.

A cult of personality is everywhere in evidence. Turkmen are expected to take spiritual guidance from his book, *Ruhnama*, a collection of thoughts on Turkmen culture and history. The president seeks to influence mundane aspects of people's lives as well. When he quit smoking after major heart surgery in 1997, Mr Niyazov ordered all his ministers to do likewise and banned smoking in public places. He later declared a ban on young men wearing beards and long hair.

Theatres in Turkmenistan

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

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

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

Russian Drama Theatre after the name of Alexander S. Pushkin



Contact person: Serdar Nepesov, Director
Address: 142 Magtymguly
Telephone: (+993 12) 34 75 33

Berdikuly Amansahatov, Stage designer
Address: Ashgabad Azadi 25A
Phone: (+993 12) 34 75 33

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

Puppet Theatre



Contact person: Jeren Durdieva, director
Address: Mir 9 Hudayberdieva 1
Telephone: (+993 12) 41 80 02, 42 52 73

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

Jeren Durdieva studied in St Petersburg in the Theatrical Institute where she specialized in Puppet works. The Theatre gathers 20 actors she has trained herself. She creates the choreography and writes the scripts, while a resident artist makes

the puppets. Regular performances on television and a nominal entry fee make the three weekly performances to meet a huge success among the Turkmen population.

Anna Mele and the Awara Theatre



Phone: (+993 12) 42 68 49

E-Mail: amele62@mail.ru

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

Since 1996, when he staged the play 'King Lear', Anna Mele has been frequently invited to theatre festivals in Central Asia and Europe (1996 Golden Lion, Lvov, Ukraine – 1997, International Festival of Arts, Ukraine – 1998, Theatre Festival, Tashkent – 2000, Festival of Central Asia, An der Ruhe, Germany - 2001 Moscow Theatre Olympiad - 2002 Festival Binari, Italy - 2003 International Theatre Festival, Bishkek – 2006 Polyzentral Kampnagel, Hamburg).

Getting There

Visa Requirements

Every foreign visitor is required to have a valid passport and a visa to enter Turkmenistan. Turkmen Consulates overseas issue visas. If travelling from a country that does not have a Turkmenistan Embassy or Consulate, a visa may be obtained on arrival at the airport, provided permission has been approved in advance. A visa issued at the airport is valid for a period not exceeding 10 days.

Visas can only be obtained after a *Letter of Invitation* is received from a sponsor in Turkmenistan and certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ashgabat.

Weather

Turkmenistan is very hot and the dry in the summer and can be cold, rainy, and muddy in the winter. Be prepared for the weather and for the lack of air conditioning or heating in most places. Also be aware that even though the weather might be tough, that is no excuse to dress down if you want to respect the local culture.

Time Zone

GMT/UTC +5

Tourist agencies

You can find all the registered tourist agencies in Turkmenistan by checking the following website: <http://www.tourism-sport.gov.tm/>



Uzbekistan

Country profile



Facts

- **Population:** 25 millions
- **Capital:** Tashkent
- **Area:** 447,400 sq km (172,700 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** Uzbek, Russian, Tajik
- **Major religion:** Islam
- **Life expectancy:** 63 years (men), 70 years (women)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 Uzbek som = 100 tiyins
- **Main exports:** Cotton, gold, natural gas, mineral fertilizers, ferrous metals, textiles, motor vehicles
- **GNI per capita:** US \$420 (World Bank, 2005)
- **Internet domain:** .uz
- **International dialing code:** +998

General Overview of the Political Situation

(Source: *BBC news* country profiles: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asiapacific/country_profiles/1238242.stm)

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

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

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

The most recent violence came in the eastern city of Andijan in May 2005. Protests against the jailing of several people charged with Islamic extremism turned violent and troops opened fire. Witnesses reported a bloodbath with hundreds of civilian deaths. The Uzbek authorities put the overall toll at over 180.

A few weeks after the Andijan events, Uzbekistan formally evicted the United States from a military base that had served as a hub for combat and humanitarian missions to Afghanistan since shortly after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Uzbekistan has been widely viewed as an important test for the Bush administration -- and whether anti-terrorism efforts or the promotion of democracy takes priority. "We all knew basically that if we really wanted to keep access to the base, the way to do it was to shut up about democracy and turn a blind eye to the refugees," said a senior official from the US Department of State, on the condition of anonymity. "We could have saved the base if we had wanted."

A Short History of Theatre in Uzbekistan

by Ildar Mukhtarov



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Interview with Mark Weil, Artistic Director of the *Ilkhom* Theatre (Uzbekistan)

Mark Weil is one of the most important figures of theatre life in Central Asia. He came to Dushanbe from Moscow, where he was rehearsing a new play. Constantly taking pictures with his high-tech mobile phone, he's about 50. Due to the amazing history of the 'Ilkhom' theatre, located in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), he is obviously regarded as a living legend of Central-Asian theatre.

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

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

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

However, Tashkent has a little but a certain tradition of theatre, beginning from the 1950s by the history of the Tashkent Khamza Theatre. In the 50s, the Khamza Theatre was real a legend in the whole of the Soviet Union. Indeed, in Tashkent, the pressure on artistic creations was much less heavy than in Moscow where artistic activities were severely controlled. Living in Uzbekistan was a great way to avoid the ideological pressure and that's why many artists lived in Tashkent - to escape from the political pressure. And even if the performances were in Uzbek, they gained a huge popularity in Moscow.

The *Ilkhom* Theatre was created in the mid-70s, characterized by the emergence of a desire for alternative theatre. Such a desire started in Moscow, with the creation of theatres called 'contemporary', such as the Taganka Theatre created in the mid-60s. But the real alternative appeared in the mid-70s, with the creation of the *Ilkhom* Theatre which was far away from Moscow and which became a legend in the whole Soviet Union. Indeed, The *Ilkhom* Theatre was the first theatre, which managed to be independent. If there were many attempts to create other independent theatres in Moscow and in Russia, they all failed. And it has been made possible thanks to the distance between Moscow and Tashkent.

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

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

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

International Theatre Initiatives

2 Main Theatre Festivals:

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

Other initiatives

- **1999-2001:** Joint theatre productions between the Russian State Drama Academic Theatre and the Italian stage director Sebastiano Salvato: 'Arlequino' by Goldoni, 'Mountain tops' by Pirandello, and 'Mandragora' by Machiavelli.
- **2000:** Masterclasses conducted by Kristil Hoffmann from Berlin at the second International Festival of youth theatres "Humo"
- **2002:** Joint International Project of the Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan and Dresden Theatre Junge Generation (Germany): Creation of the theatre performance "Krash - Bum - Tararam" - Rhythm helps us!"
- **2003:** Joint theatre production with Laurence Levasseur (French Choreographer) and Nabi Abdurakhmanov (Youth theatre of Uzbekistan): *Sharora the dancer* by Timur Zulfikarov
- **2003:** Workshops on silent theatre conducted by Guilda Chahverdi (France) in Bukhara, Samarkand, Tachkent and Rishton (Fergana Valley)
- **2004:** 1st IETM Central Asian Theatre Meeting (more information on the Website: www.ietm.org)
- **2004:** François Clavier (France): workshops on Molière's play 'Tartuffe' with the actors of the *Ilkhom* theatre - more information available on the Website: http://www.ambafrance-uz.org/article.php3?id_article=281
- **2004:** Joint production of the theatre play *On Love* by the *Ilkhom* Theatre and the *On Theatre* (UK) – more information available on the British Council's website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/uzbekistan-arts-dance-and-drama-on-love.htm>
- **2005:** Ovlyakuli Hodjakuliev – theatre production entitled 'The Language of Birth' with actors from the neighbouring Central Asian countries
- **2005:** The Embassy of Switzerland in Uzbekistan and the *Ilkhom* Theatre present a joint project: 'Sexual neurosis of our parents' by the young Swiss playwright, Lucas Berfus.

A Small Theatre in an Ancient Town

A history of theatre in Karchi, by Ildar Mukhtarov

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

parable about the Mankurt from Aytmatov's novel on the contrast between the good beginning of cultural tradition and the barbarity of historical forgetfulness. The play "Cain and Abel", staged at the *Eski Masjid* theatre by Hojakuliev (a version by G. Danatorov from motifs in Byron's drama "Cain"), can be ranked among the most interesting recent events in Uzbek theatre. The parable of the first fratricide is well known in both the Christian and the Muslim world. The playwright and the producer substantially transform Byron's play in keeping with Eastern tradition. The East makes its presence felt through the mournful melody, the details of the setting and the costumes, and the names, which have been changed to accord with Eastern tradition: Cain becomes Kobil, Abel is Hobil, Eve is Havva and Lucifer is Yelpek.



Bringing the action of the play closer to the birthplace of the three religions is fairly conventional. It did not form part of Byron's intention, but is attractive to the producer, Hojakuliev, who is known to incline towards refined aesthetic form. Orientalizing the well-known Western drama is not just a matter of gratifying that inclination. The conflict and psychological reactions of the characters as seen by the Anglo - Saxon Byron are interpreted in the play from the standpoint of the Eastern, and more precisely, Muslim mentality.

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

mankind's highest values.

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

Author: Ildar Mukhtarov

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

Woman in Uzbek theatre

By Ildar Mukhtarov

For quite some time women have made up over half of the students and teachers in Tashkent Institute of Arts, teaching future producers, actors, and art-critics. And you may go in any theatre, to any performance, and find in auditorium a majority of women. Probably, by virtue of their more sensitive and susceptible nature, women are the main spectators and judges of our theatre. History has many examples of women's deep love of art, selfless fidelity to theatre...

Tashkent, 1921. For the first time in Western European, Shiller's classic drama "Insidiousness and love" is put on stage in the Uzbek language. The first Uzbek actress, Maksuma Karieva, plays the tragic role of Louisa, becoming an innocent victim of social injustice. In an auditorium filled with many women, faces are hidden with paranjas of horsehair. Such rough paranja was not in the rest of the Muslim world. But what gentle and susceptible souls disappeared behind such rough matter! According to the reviewer of those years, the destiny of the heroine and the skill of the actress excited the spectators so deeply, causing such strong sympathy and empathy that "many women cried, and the most sensitive lost consciousness". The first Uzbek actresses came to the theatre by various ways; their destinies have also developed differently., Sara Ishanturaeva was noticed for the first time in an amateur performance in a children's home. She was a very young girl, and quickly became an outstanding actress of the Uzbek theatre. Another outstanding actress, Mariam Yakubova, had her childhood in the courtyard of an emir in Bukhara.



Among the first professional actors educated in Moscow's theatre studio in the middle 1920's was Tursunoy Saidazimova. Her teachers, colleagues on stage, and spectators equally admired her talent. Her beautiful voice gave her the nickname of "the Uzbek Nightingale". If a great future was predicted, destiny decreed it differently. Her husband, believing the slander of relatives - religious fanatics - killed her when she was only 18 years, in 1928.

Fortunately, there are far fewer similar sad, tragic episodes than joyful and light ones in the history of the Uzbek theatre. For example, three years after Tursunoy's death, Sara Ishanturaeva met with great success in the role of a young boy. Constantly successful, Sara Ishanturaeva played on the stage



of the Academic Theatre named after Khamza performing roles of world drama repertoire: Juliette, Ophelia, Desdemona, Goneril in the tragedies "Romeo and Juliette", "Hamlet", "Othello" and "King Lear" by Shakespeare; Katerina in "Thunderstorm" by Ostrovsky, Iokasta in "King Oedipus", the tragedy by Sophocles...

The theme of tragic female destiny has always caused a fiery response amongst spectators of the Uzbek theatre. Uzbek actresses like and can play tragic roles. Not by chance, even the simplest dramatic images quite often take on tragic shades in their performances. At the same time, Uzbek actresses embody household

and comic characters with much success. With unique charm and skill, they are able to create an especially colourful way of life on stage. There is always improvisation and unpredictability snatched out from the thickness of national life images. The life of the Eastern woman is characterised by reserve and the necessity to observe traditions and customs. Using comic images, Uzbek actresses have revealed, in addition to "past prejudices", a conscious element of play, an attractive feature in a female character.

So, for example, the indispensable recognition of the leading role of the man is quite often shaded by thin slyness, hardly ironic and kindly indulgent attitude to the man's priority. Whether it is by virtue of a complex or fault incorporated genetically in every man, or whether it is due to a women's inborn charm, our actresses today have a large and well-deserved respect. Most probably it is due to their intelligence and talent. "A strong half" of the figures of Uzbek's theatrical art watches them attentively.

The outstanding Uzbek ballerina, Bernara Karieva, led the Union of Uzbekistan Theatrical Workers for more than ten years. For a long time she was the Director of Theatre for the opera and ballet named after Navoi, and now she has become the adviser to the Uzbek Minister of Culture.



By Ildar Mukhtarov

From the *Time out Tashkent* journal:

<http://www.timeout.orexca.com/march2004/3.shtml>

Metamorphoses of the Classic in Theatre

By Ildar Mukhtarov

The life of a classic text within the environment where it was created is an important principle of the classic system. For theatre, it is also very important to realize old texts within new socio-cultural environments. "Hamlet needs to be staged every ten years," Peter Brook has stated.

A fast growing receptivity for new forms which coexist with century-old traditions is increasingly promoting research for new answers to an old question: How does "the imported" interact with the local, and what symbioses result? To reveal sources and conflicts in the interaction between West and East on the theatre stage is an engrossing and useful task which often is intricately evaluated.

So I am touching upon an important and interesting subject - a theme of oriental motifs in the staging of Western dramaturgy in modern Uzbek theatre. A number of plays which embody this problem in one way or other make it possible to discuss the tendency. First, these are the plays "Mamura kampir" ("Old Woman Mamura") after the play of French dramatist, J. Sarman, "Mamure", staged by B.Yuldashev in the Theatre of A. Khidoyatov and Gulistan Theatre; Moliere's "Flying Doctor" staged by O. Solimov in the Theatre of Young Spectators; Byron's "Cain and Abel" staged by O. Hojakuliev in the studio theatre "Eski Masjid" as well as the plays at the Theatre of A.Khidoyatov : Shakespeare's "King Lear" staged by American producer D. Kaplan and Sophocles' "Electra" staged by F. Kasimov. In some cases the play has undergone deep changes, in others, a translator and theatre change the place of the events, names of characters and life reality. In other cases the artistic director, artist or composer brings typical elements of oriental culture into the play.

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



Modern plays greatly extend this problematic, introducing it in the field of comparative study. If previously only a few cases of text-revising occurred, now we have a tendency, both regarding the number of such examples and their characteristics. But it would be wrong to evaluate these current performances as primitive anachronisms or as a merely occasional element in the pioneering period of professional theatre.

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

A lot has been written about oriental trends in Western art. This concerns the influence of oriental theatre on the European stage discussed by G. Craig, Vs. Meyerhold, A. Tairov, P. Brook as well as the artistic challenges of modern theatre producers. It is also well known that many subjects and characters, integral to Western art, were taken from the East. This is not only limited to Dante's "Divine Comedy" but, especially interesting, the Arab philosopher and writer Ibn Tufail, to the treatises of Ibn Sino.

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

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

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

The atmosphere of F. Kasimov's staging of "Electra" is rich with apprehensive signs: the crescent sparkling on a copper disc - considered a bad sign in the East; the sound of the classic Uzbek makom, transforming into the groan of Electra seems natural and harmonized with the power of the antique tragedy; dried branches of the tree covered with "bands of memory" are also a characteristic feature of eastern cemeteries. In the staging of the early Moliere farce, "Flying Doctor", O. Salimov used a method "theatre within theatre" and likened French comedies and Uzbek maskarabozes.



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

The parable of Cain and Abel speaking about the first murder on earth is equally known in Christian and Islamic worlds. Producer A. Hojakuliev and dramatist G. Danatorov interpreted the Englishman, Byron's, drama in accordance with the oriental legend. The East specifies itself by a sad melody - the musician playing the violin, walking around the stage, holding it like ghidjak - as well

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as by decorative details (artists Sh.Abdumalikov and M.Soshina): khurdjin, bent knife, colourful tyubeteikas, fine tattoo on women's shoulders, which are not just a switch on modern exotic but a sign of recent paganism. Moreover, the names acquired eastern consonances: Cain into Kobil, Abel into Khobil, and Eva into Havva. These outer attributes are important in this case, but the main thing is that a conflict and the psychological reactions of the characters from a drama by Byron are being interpreted in the play within the framework of an oriental, even Muslim, mentality.

Thus the recent plays are extending the problem of classic texts living in time. Versification of these texts, changes to their interpretations in the process of time have become usual in theatre practice. In addition to a vertical time-line, the problem encompasses the horizontal, the content in which the culture-recipient intentionally recognises its own particularities, not spontaneously (through the psychological set of an actor). This observation is evidence of the depth of transformation in Uzbek theatre art in the post-Soviet period. The Soviet theatre culture was a holistic ideological and artistic structure with general criteria revealed in the staging of translated dramaturgy. Firstly in the Western classics, where "the theatre of the Soviet East" attempted as much as possible, textbook interpretations fixed in philological or theatre critic's works. Staging the play, the theatre adapted "native" to "imported". An actor transmitted the local elements.

The break up of the holistic "multi-national Soviet theatre" structure caused changes of approaches and criteria to theatre art, including interpretations of Western drama. At the time when the number of plays was reduced because of growing interest in own cultural heritages, the quality spectrum significantly expanded: the variety of approaches had enriched artistic challenges.

In the line of staging, orientalization has occupied its own proper place, which seemed impossible in the previous criteria system. This tendency combines striving



towards the new with an orientation to the classic traditions of spiritual culture, both Western and Eastern. Foretelling the vitality of this tendency in the 21st century we can state: with a deficit of modern dramaturgy not only in Uzbek theatre, sharpened with the problem that all existing literature subjects have been already used, it is possible for the intensity of new attempts to grow. Essentially the global art process has already faced the total secondary interpretation of accumulated spiritual values. Against this background occurs the need to search for cultural dialogue in theatre. In this case Central Asian theatres have good opportunities for unique experiments synthesizing cultural values of East and West.

Author: Ildar Mukhtarov

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

Some theatres in Uzbekistan

Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre



Address: 34 Navoi St., Tashkent Uzbekistan

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

The staged plays are inspired by various everyday situations, use people's humour, the techniques of traditional street theatre and modern interpretations of ancient customs. For instance, the play entitled "Ancient Times Fairy Tales", based on short novels of classical Uzbek literature, or the amusing comedy, "Parable on Red Apple" embody such creations mixing tradition and modernity.

Ilkhom Theatre



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The "ILKHOM" Theatre was one of the first professional theatres in the history of the former USSR which were independent of any state institutions for cultural affairs. It was founded in 1976 by the stage director Mark Weil, who is still Artistic Director of the theatre and of the group of Tashkent Theatre Institute graduates. Today the "ILKHOM" is a cultural complex, which includes a theatre, a drama school and an exhibition hall. The last premieres were: "Imitations of The Koran" by A. Pushkin; "Love's Labour's Lost" by W. Shakespeare, "The Portrait of Mademoiselle

Tarjee" by I. Elagin, "The Brothers & Liza", by A. Kazatsev and a play which includes several works of A. Pushkin, called "Romance Unleashed".

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

"Eski Masjid" Theatre-Studio (Karshi)



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The "Eski Masjid" (Old Mosque) Theatre Studio was founded in 1989. As an independent theatre, it does not receive any subsidies from the State. Fourteen actors work permanently in the theatre, while each invited stage director works for a specific performance. In Uzbekistan for the presentation of one of his films, the stage director, Peter Brook, met the "Eski Masjid" Theatre Studio in 1991. As a result of the high estimation he gave it, the Karshi Theatre started to travel around all of Europe. It participated in several international theatre festivals in Europe and in the CIS countries (one of his latest tour will bring him to Hamburg for Polyzentral in Kampnagel).

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

Youth theatre of Uzbekistan



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

The Artistic Director of the theatre was one of the organizers of the 2004 Tashkent IETM meeting.

Dance Company "Theatre of movement"



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

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More information:

<http://enews.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=92417582417.042,1685,15367482>

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

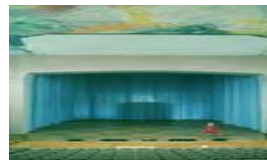
The Russian State Drama Academic Theatre



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

The Uzbek National Puppet Theatre



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

The Uzbek Republic Theatre of Young Spectators

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Alladin Theatre

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

Uzbek theatres on the road

Ilkhom Theatre

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

Youth theatre of Uzbekistan

- 2004** The Youth Theatre of Uzbekistan (Tashkent) performed "Princess Turandot" by Karlo Gozzi and directed by Nabi Abdurakhmanov at the Sixth

International Baltic and CIS Theatre Festival: "Meetings in Russia" (St Petersburg).

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

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

“Eski Masjid” Theatre Studio (Karshi)

2006 Polyzentral at Kampnagel, Hamburg (Germany)

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

Dance Company “Theatre of Movement”

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

International organizations involved in theatre projects

British Council

Contact Person: Neville Mc Bain, Director
Address: 11, Kounaev Street, Tashkent
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Fax: (+998 71) 120 63 71
E-mail: Neville.McBain@britishcouncil.uz
Website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/uzbekistan.htm>

Goethe Institute

Contact Person: Dr. Christiane Günther, Director
E-Mail: il@taschkent.goethe.org
Website: <http://www.goethe.de/oe/alm/deindex.htm>

French Cultural Center “Victor Hugo”

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

Swiss Cooperation Office in Tashkent

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

Getting there

Travel

Uzbekistan Airlines, Air France, Turkish Airlines and British Airways link Western Europe to Tashkent. It's possible to travel via Moscow as well, but connecting time is not convenient and a visa is needed to exit from the transit area.

Fares depends on flights/companies: between 550 and 1100 Euros.

Visa requirements

In general all foreign nationals are required to have business or tourist visas to enter the Republic of Uzbekistan. To obtain the tourist visa all foreign nationals, except citizens of USA, France, Italy, Belgium, UK, Northern Ireland, Japan, Germany, Austria, Spain, and Switzerland, need a visa support from a licensed travel agency in Uzbekistan. A visa support application is submitted by the travel agency to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent. The approval period is about 10 days. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reserves the right to deny any application for a visa support without providing further explanations. Approved visa support is faxed directly to the embassy or consulate of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the country where the traveler is receiving the visa.

Requirements For Foreign Citizens To Enter Uzbekistan

1. Passport must be valid 3 months beyond intended stay
2. Tickets and Documents for return or onward travel
3. Visa is required
4. Vaccination - None Required

Requirements For Foreign Citizens To Obtain Visa To Uzbekistan

1. Your valid signed Passport
2. Visa application form fully completed and signed
3. Passport-type photographs

Travel and tourism agencies

DOLORES TOUR (Hotel booking, visa support, tour in the country)

The travel Agency **DOLORES-TUR** was established in 1997. Nowadays, it is one of the leading travel agencies in Uzbekistan, working for inbound as well as for outbound tourism. **DOLORES TUR** is a partner of the Hotel Group in Tashkent for tourism and business purposes: ORZU Hotel (consists of 24 rooms) and GRAND ORZU Hotel (50 rooms) both located in Tashkent. **SEMURG** Bukhara Hotel (75 rooms) located in Bukhara, Fayz Hotel (45 rooms) located in Gazalkent area, which is only 40 km off Tashkent. Each hotel is managed separately but is under the centralized financial system of the Agency. Professional and experienced English speaking personnel in all four hotels welcome everyone who wishes to come and visit Uzbekistan, whether on business or as a tourist and will make your stay enjoyable and colourful.

Contact Information:

Web-site: <http://www.sambuh.com/>

M.Torobi str. 27
Tashkent 700090, Uzbekistan
Tel: 998 (71) 1208883
Fax: 998(71) 1208873
E-mail: info@sambuh.com

Moscow (trusted partner):
SamBuh Tour
Gzhelskiy pereulok 3/7, str. 2
Moscow 105120, Russian Federation
Tel: +7 (095) 6784451
Fax: +7 (095) 6784451
E-mail: info@sambuh.ru

TOURISM.UZ (Hotel booking, visa support, tour in the country)

45, Musakhanova street,
(Hotel Uzbekistan), rooms 914-916
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
postal code 700047.
Tel: +998(71)1205741, 1205733, 1205729
Fax: +998(71)1152886
e-mail: info@tourism.uz
web-site: www.tourism.uz

ADVANTOUR (Hotel booking, visa support, tour in the country)

Mirobod kochasi 116
Tashkent 700090
Uzbekistan
Tel: 998 71 152 4200
Fax: 998 712 54 8612
E-mail: info@advantour.com
<http://www.advantour.com/>

Climate/Weather

Varies from dry and arid, with warm summers and cool winters in the west to moderate rainfall, with temperate summers and bitterly cold winters in the east. Temperature in Uzbekistan ranges during the year, from +40°C in summer (July and August) and -20°C in the middle of winter (January and February). In spring and fall temperatures are more moderate (mid 20°C to 30°C)

Credit Cards

Credit cards VISA, MASTER CARD are rarely acceptable. Some ATMs can be found in the major banks and hotels.

Electricity

220 volts AC, 50 Hz. Round 2 pin continental plugs are standard.

Time

GMT +5 hours

Embassies

In order to know the list of foreign Embassies in Uzbekistan and the contact information of the Uzbek Embassies to foreign countries, please consult the site below:

<http://www.embassyworld.com/embassy/uzbekistan.html>

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