

Doira: Traditional Elegance and Rhythm

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Abstract: This article analyzes the doira as a musical instrument, exploring its historical roots, structure, and performance techniques. The doira holds a significant place in Eastern music, particularly in Uzbek and Tajik traditional art, distinguished by its harmony of elegance and rhythm. The study highlights the role of the doira in both folk and professional music, the mastery of its performers, and its integration into contemporary musical contexts. Additionally, the cultural significance of the instrument and the issues surrounding its transmission to future generations are discussed.

Keywords: Doira, musical instrument, Membranophone, Autophone.

Introduction: Music is a universal human behavior and perception. Knowing the language of music means understanding the highly complex structure of sound interpretation rules—dividing them into units of time and explaining their meanings. Understanding musical expression in unfamiliar traditions can present similar challenges. Every culture studied by anthropologists has a specific time frame, with certain musical behaviors needing to be performed in real-time. The adaptability of musical information and the diverse musical behaviors present in different cultures reflect intercultural differences in melodic and rhythmic organization and practice.

Based on the information passed down to us, we must acknowledge the unparalleled role of the doira among the instruments used to systematically preserve one of the fundamental elements of music—rhythmic patterns (*usul*). The doira has become widely popular among people due to its convenience in expressing rhythmic patterns and its richness in intricate embellishments.

The doiras depicted on the pediments of Nisa Fortress, an ancient monument predating Central Asia, demonstrate that the initial structure of this musical instrument was very similar to our modern-day versions.

This instrument belongs to the percussion family and is known as "Doyra," "Chirmandi," "Childirma," and "Dap" in Uzbek and Tajik musical traditions. Among

Armenians, it is called "Dapp," while in Iran and Egypt, it is known as "Daff." Azerbaijanis refer to it as "Def," "Doyre," or "Gaval," and in some Eastern countries, it is widely recognized under names like "Dabu" and others.

In general, different types of doiras vary in size, structural components, additional elements, slight differences in shape, playing techniques, and tonal characteristics.

According to historical records, the doira, along with other percussion instruments such as *qayroq* (castanets) and *zang* (bells), was widely used by priests during *oymoma* (moon-related) rituals. The depictions on the pediments of Nisa Fortress indicate that the doira was considered a sacred instrument accompanying religious ceremonial dances. In some cases, it was played by the dancers themselves, while in others, it was performed by designated doira players. Additionally, the doira has long been an integral part of various ensembles featuring different categories of musical instruments and vocal performances.

The influence of dance art plays a significant role in shaping the solo performance style of the doira. This is because the process of playing the instrument is closely linked to expressing the beauty of movement, charm, grace, and gestures—all of which are intrinsic to our cultural traditions—through rhythmic patterns.

Moreover, for a doira performer, mastery goes beyond simply creating and skillfully executing diverse rhythmic sequences. It also requires an understanding

and deep appreciation of traditional dance art. In compositions formed from intricate and rhythmically diverse dance sequences, the ability to transition smoothly and logically from one rhythm to another is a key aspect of doira performance mastery.

Additionally, doira players play a crucial role in the creation, adaptation, and staging of new dance performances accompanied by this instrument.

The necessity of notating the rhythms played by master doira performers arose to preserve them accurately. Initially, doira notation was written on a single line, successfully recording many traditional rhythmic patterns. Later, various notation systems were developed, allowing for the detailed representation of each hand movement with separate notes.

To facilitate doira education, instructional books with notation were published, including the "Doyra Darsligi" (Doira Textbook) for music institutions. Notably, the doira was also incorporated into Uzbek symphonic music, finding a place in symphony orchestras. Several composers highlighted the instrument in their works, such as M. Tojiev in his 11th Symphony, T. Qurbonov in "To'yona" and "Askiya", and S. Jalil in "Tashkent Landscapes."

By the late 1990s, there was a renewed focus on traditional performance practices. Many academic lyceums and colleges introduced specialized programs for traditional music, attracting large numbers of students. Today, many students continue to study traditional doira performance, supported by educational materials adapted to heritage instruments. Among these publications is "An'anaviy Doyra Ijrochiligi" (Traditional Doira Performance) by Rahmatilla aka Samadov, a docent at the Uzbekistan State Conservatory and a leading instructor in the Department of Traditional Performance. This book was distributed to music institutions to support doira education.

In Central Asia, various types of drums have been widely recognized and used, including tabira, al-tabra, one-sided drum, chindoul, doul-paz, and katta nog'ora (large drum).

If we examine percussion instruments based on their original meaning, the word "Zarb" comes from Arabic, meaning "to strike" or "to hit." These instruments primarily produce sound through striking, tapping with fingers, shaking, and other similar actions.

As sound-producing elements, these instruments can utilize either a special membrane (drumhead) or the body (resonator) of the instrument itself. Based on this characteristic, they are divided into two types:

Membranophone (drumhead) instruments include

those covered with special leather or plastic, such as the baraban (drum), nog'ora (kettle drum), doira (frame drum), tom-tom, timpani, and various other types.

Autophone (self-sounding) instruments produce sound through their own body without the need for a membrane. These include various cymbals (jaras), castanets (qayroq), triangle (safoyil), and other similar instruments.

From a performance technique perspective, percussion instruments can be played using sticks, fingers, by striking them against each other, or by shaking. Additionally, they are classified into low, middle, and high registers based on their pitch range.

The doira is a percussion instrument rich in rhythmic and dynamic possibilities, played using all fingers of both hands as well as palm slaps. Over time, the doira has undergone some modifications compared to ancient depictions. For instance, older versions featured small holes in the rim for attaching jingles, whereas modern doiras have metal rings, called "shing'iroq," suspended from the inner side of the frame.

The doira is widely known by different names across various cultures. Among Uzbeks and Tajiks, it is called "doyra," "chirmanda," "childirma," or "dap." In Iran and Egypt, it is known as "daff," while Azerbaijanis refer to it as "def," "doyre," or "gaval." Among Turkmens, it is called "deprek," and in some Eastern countries, it is known as "dabu."

The rhythmic system of the doira has been established since ancient times, with masters using specific terminology such as "bum," "bak," "bakko," or "bakka." In Khorezm, these sounds were referred to as "gum," "taq," "taqqa."

"Bum" produces a lower-pitched sound, created by striking the center of the doira with four fingers together.

"Bak" is a sharper sound, played by striking near the rim of the doira with the fourth finger.

These rhythmic terms have been mentioned in ancient sources, including Khorezmian tanbur notation. By the mid-19th century, doira rhythms began to be notated on a single line, with "bum" written below the line and "bak" above it.

Historical records indicate that the doira was played alongside other percussion instruments such as qayroq (castanets) and zang (bells) in sacred ceremonies conducted by priests. Illustrations from Nisa depict the doira as an accompanying instrument for ritual dances, performed either by dancers themselves or by designated doira players. Over time, the doira has also

been widely performed in various instrumental and vocal ensembles.

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