

## HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF DRAMA IN THE KARAKALPAK THEATER

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**Annotation:** The article discusses the experiences gained over the years by the Berdaq named Karakalpak State Academic Musical Theatre, its achievements in acting, directing, and dramaturgy, as well as the characteristics of new performances and interpretations in the present day.

**Key words:** Theater, drama, actor, director, composition, artistic ideas.

**Theater is considered the spiritual mirror of every nation.** It reflects the spirit of the times, the results of great changes, and serves as a sacred space that provides spiritual strength and moral energy for future endeavors. Indeed, it is a fact that throughout history, the theater has expressed the dreams and aspirations, joys and sorrows, struggles and ambitions of the people, uniting them in shared experiences.

Since its establishment on December 30, 1930, the Berdakh Karakalpak State Musical Theater has been sincerely serving the cause of enhancing the spiritual and educational consciousness of the people. Over the years, the theater's direction, organizational structure, as well as the fields of acting, directing, and dramaturgy have undergone significant changes, leading to the emergence of new styles of performance and interpretation.

During its formation and development, the theater creatively absorbed the finest aspects of national cultural heritage. Over the years of progress, Karakalpak dramaturgy emerged as an independent literary genre, and the success of national theatrical art became closely tied to the growth of dramaturgy.

**Over the years, the theater, which has achieved artistic maturity, has participated in creative tours in many countries, proudly showcasing the rich cultural heritage of our people.** The Karakalpak theater's chamber orchestra and vocal artists took part in the international festival titled "Song and Music – the Spiritual Treasure of Humanity", held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The theater also represented Karakalpak performing arts at the 21st Century International Theater Festival in Cairo, the capital of the Arab Republic of Egypt, by staging S. Balgabayev's play "The Most Beautiful Bride."

At theater festivals held among the theaters of Uzbekistan, the Karakalpak theater has been awarded the title "Most Active Theater of the Year" several times. At the national festival "We Sing About You, Contemporary!" held in Tashkent, P. Aytmuratov's play "Fortune Favors the Brave" earned third place.

The theater troupe has taken significant steps in creating meaningful and artistically rich performances that reflect the economic, political, and spiritual changes in society, staying in tune with the times and aware of historical context. Thanks to years of accumulated experience and refined skill, the company continues to attract the attention of the wider public with its well-crafted, content-rich stage productions.

Today, it is impossible to imagine the theater's activity apart from the customs and traditions of the beautiful land which forms the core of national values. The plays staged here portray themes

of human dignity, honor, pride, love, ancient customs, and inherited traditions with deep artistic interpretation and grandeur. This demonstrates that the Berdakh Karakalpak State Academic Musical Theater has its own unique artistic direction and interpretive style, unmatched by any other creative collective.

The theater's current repertoire includes a wide range of works across different genres and themes, such as: "Alpomish" by N. Davqarayev, "Light Will Not Stay in the Shadow" by N. Qarkabil, "Fortune Favors the Brave" by P. Aytmuratov, "The Stubborn Ones" by O. Abdurakhmanov, "A Glimpse of the Beloved" by K. Rakhmonov, "The Most Beautiful Bride" by S. Balgabayev, "My Child – My Soul" by P. Uteniyazov, "Conscience" by P. Tilegenov, "Your Daughter – Your Honor" by A. Uteniyazova, "The Thief Beaten by a Robber" by K. Rakhmonov, "Dear Girls" by Q. Shangitbayev and Q. Bayseitov, "The Magic of Love" by K. Rakhmonov, "A Child Who Learned a Craft" by H. Muhammad

Each of these plays raises profound questions about human dignity, honor, and self-worth.

**In recent years, the theater troupe has focused special attention on reviving unexplored pages of our modern and national history, portraying themes such as patriotism, national pride, faith, interethnic friendship, compassion, morality, and ethics through artistic imagery.** They have also made efforts to depict the modern hero in a variety of character types. The creative outcomes of these endeavors are clearly reflected in productions such as "Alpomish," "Tumaris," and "Light Will Not Stay in the Shadow."

The theater company, which achieved great success by re-staging the epic "Alpomish" – a spiritual treasure of our people with a history stretching back a thousand years – has also brought to life the image of another great historical figure: Queen Tomiris. They staged the opera "Tumaris" by Q. Zaretdinov and I. Yusupov, which is recognized as the second Karakalpak opera in the theater's history after "Ajiniyaz", and a true source of national pride.

**Tumaris (Tomiris)** was the queen of the Amazons, a devoted woman who continued her husband's mission after his early death—he was the ruler of the land of Turan. A sorrowful mother who lost her only son, Sparganis, in war, she became the great mother of the Turan people. Known as the "She-Tiger", she united all the tribes of the Turan steppes, established the Massagetae treaty, and took up the sword to fight for her homeland. She emerged victorious over her enemies and became a legendary heroine. The courage and loyalty we see in the people of this land today are a heritage passed down from such great ancestors as Tumaris.

Through this production, the theater portrayed Queen Tumaris—the female ruler of the Massagetae tribe who lived around two and a half thousand years ago in the pastures between the Oxus (Amu Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr Darya) rivers near the Oksiana (Aral) Sea – as a modern-day hero.

In the historical opera Tumaris, staged by Jalg'asbay Sultabayev, the battles for homeland freedom among nomadic tribes that took place two and a half thousand years ago are depicted. The opera's overture serves to enhance the development of events, increase the emotional impact, and help the audience better understand the story.

As the events unfold, the cruelty of King Cyrus, who deceitfully captures Tumaris's son, is revealed, as well as the tragic fate of Saprangis (played by Abat Qalliyev), who takes his own life for the sake of honor, dignity, and the pride of his homeland. The image of Tumaris – the mother of the nation, a brave and heroic queen – is portrayed with credibility and emotional depth by Mirzagul Sapayeva, an Honored Artist of Uzbekistan. In the scene where Tumaris mourns the loss of her son, the audience witnesses the heartbreaking cry of a mother whose soul has been shattered. The actress powerfully conveys the character's pain and torment through

Tumaris's grand aria. In this very scene, her passionate cry and the sorrowful tones of the aria evoke feelings of hatred toward the enemy and compassion for the grieving mother.

As the story progresses, an enraged Tumaris prepares for battle to avenge her son. Prior to the battle, consultations with the Massagetæ people, joyful dances of young men and women, and the fortune-tellers' prophecy of victory seen in the stars awaken even more confidence and determination in Tumaris. This emotional transformation is reflected in the actress's brave and fiery stage presence and in the fierce hatred that blazes in her eyes toward the enemy. The arias performed by M. Sapayeva further enrich this moment and reveal Tumaris's valor. In the climactic battle, Tumaris, played by M. Sapayeva, leads the Massagetæ to a victorious triumph over the enemies. The opera concludes with a final aria in which all participants glorify Tumaris.

Throughout the opera, the composer masterfully created music that matches the emotional tone of each scene. The music aligned with the content of the librettos plays an essential role not only in the artistic quality of the work but also in unveiling the characters' personalities and bringing about a compelling resolution to the storyline. As a result, the arias performed by the cast captivated the audience's interest.

In ensuring the success of the opera and enhancing Tumaris's image of bravery and courage, the contributions of other performers were significant: Abat Qalliyev as the brave and sincere young warrior Saprangis; Dariboy Khojabergenov, an Honored Artist of Karakalpakstan, as the king's advisor and wise elder; Bazarbay Uzaqbergenov, People's Artist of Uzbekistan, as the evil king Cyrus; Farid Uzaqbergenov as Saprangis's loyal friend and horse caretaker; Marxabay Usenov as Tumaris's army commander; as well as Abat Ashirov and Bag'dat Abillayev in the roles of warriors and soldiers.

The efforts of the choir, led by choirmaster A. Tolepova, and the artists who recreated the atmosphere of ancient times through costumes and stage design were also instrumental in the success of the performance. These include Barliqboy Aytmuratov, Honored Art Worker of Karakalpakstan and recipient of the Berdaq State Prize, along with young artists Zaoqi Saypov and Raxat Asqarov.

Today, each performance staged by the Karakalpak State Academic Musical Theater reflects national ideology, patriotism, national pride, faith, interethnic friendship, compassion, and ethical values through artistic images, vividly portraying modern heroes with diverse characters. This can also be observed in P. Aytmurodov's drama "Intilganga tole yor" directed by N. Ansatbayev and in K. Rahimov's comedy "Kelin" staged by J. Sultangaliyev.

In the drama "Intilganga tole yor", the reforms implemented in our country during the years of independence, the vast opportunities provided to entrepreneurs and farmers, and the efforts to improve the standard of living in rural areas are discussed. The play serves as a lesson to some youth today who seek an easy life, encouraging them to be hardworking and strong-willed. The heroic image of Turdiboy (played by K. Allanazarov) is portrayed — a man who, after completing his postgraduate studies, commits himself to developing his village and improving living conditions through entrepreneurship. Despite facing numerous challenges and injustices, he overcomes them through relentless effort and eventually achieves happiness.

The play "Kelin" also has great educational value. Alongside highlighting the noble customs and traditions of our people, it expresses values such as respecting elders and regularly checking in on their well-being. Additionally, the performance emphasizes urgent social issues such as the development of sports in villages, encouraging youth to engage in physical activity, ensuring employment, and the advancement of farming. These themes are embodied in the

actions of the young bride Ayshaxan (played by S. Annaqulova), a graduate of the Institute of Physical Culture. She beautifully brings to life her character's dreams and aspirations, as well as her efforts to improve the village. Through her performance, Ayshaxan's character is elevated to the level of a modern-day hero.

Looking at the recent repertoire of the Berdakh Karakalpak State Academic Musical Theater, one can see that the works of Kenesbay Rakhmanov—People's Poet of Karakalpakstan and recipient of the Berdakh State Prize—have held a prominent place. His plays of various themes and genres, such as "Wounded Hearts," "Delayed Spring," and comedies like "Kelin," "Nine Knockings, One Clatter," "The Love of a Fussy One," and "Blabbermouths at the Hospital" have not only enriched the theater's repertoire but have also played an important role in defining modern creative trends.

The theater troupe has long engaged with Kenesbay Rakhmanov's dramaturgy. His play "Invitation to the Other World" was first staged in 1976 by director Najmiddin Ansatbayev. In 2010, it was re-staged under the title "The Robber Caught the Thief." This tragicomedy was once again revived in 2024 under the title "The Abyss." What drew the creative team back to the work was the topical nature of its subject matter. The young director Marqabay Usenov staged the play under the new title "The Abyss," meeting the demands of dramatic genre. The play raises pressing issues of today such as parental neglect in child-rearing, the obsession with material wealth, and the fight against corruption among government officials. The responsibility for connecting the story to current realities and enhancing its relevance was undertaken by the author's daughter, Gavkhar Rahmanova. Given the passage of time, certain new events were added to the play, and the action now takes place in the present day.

The father, chasing after wealth, has gone to Dubai for vacation, while the mother left at home is portrayed as a suffering, oppressed woman, enduring her husband only for the sake of money. Their only son, Norpolat (Muhammedali Kenjeyev), is a spoiled heir, enjoying a carefree life in the shadow of his parents. The absence of affection, compassion, and human values in their family is clearly evident.

A turning point in the play occurs when Norpolat, driving his mother's car, gets into an accident. The story unfolds from this incident. Ulperi (M. Mambetmuratova) panics after hearing from family friend Sherniyaz (Ruslan Qaypnazarov), who is also looking for a way out of his own problems, that Norpolat hit a girl on a bicycle and fled the scene. As the story develops, a cascade of tragic events begins to rain down on the family.

Hoping that Sherniyaz will cover the store's accounting discrepancy, they call Toshpolat (Daniyar Qudaynazarov) back from Dubai. As if the son's trouble wasn't enough, another disaster strikes — a suitcase full of dollars is stolen. Not wanting the police to find out, the trio tries to cover one crime by committing another.

Suspecting their neighbor, Toshpolat and Sherniyaz persuade Ulperi to sneak into the neighbor's yard, thinking the money is hidden in the cowshed. But things don't go smoothly — Ulperi gets bitten by a dog. From this point on, the tangled events begin to unravel. It turns out Norpolat didn't hit anyone; he became a victim of his untrustworthy friends. The stolen suitcase of money was also taken by those same "friends." Unable to bear it all, Ulperi sets her house on fire and dies in the flames.

The pace of the plot is intense, though at the beginning, the storyline feels loosely connected, with many seemingly irrelevant events. These initially appear excessive and unclear in purpose. However, the investigative process ties all the crimes together. Only then does the meaning behind many previously confusing scenes become clear.



The play ends with two finales. In the first, Toshpolat, trying to bribe the police officer to cover up all his crimes, is shocked when the officer informs him of events he hadn't yet heard of. Realizing he has lost everything, Toshpolat breaks down. Then comes the second finale — his daughter returns from abroad and mourns at her mother's grave.

In his Poetics, Aristotle writes about resolution in tragedy: "Every tragedy must have a complication and a resolution. All events outside the drama, and some inside it, constitute the complication; the rest is the resolution." The part of the story leading up to the protagonist's fall is the complication; from there to the end is the resolution.

The stage design didn't fully serve the play's theme. In the prologue, a girl sits in front of a large mirror and is frightened by her reflection, but the mirror is scarcely used in later scenes. However, the large iron bars in the prologue foreshadow the characters' fate. The interior of Toshpolat's house looks more like a stage on a stage. The high stairs were awkward for actors to climb, making the audience worry they might fall.

As for the acting, Daniyar Qudaynazarov's portrayal of Toshpolat didn't quite fit the character. His version came off as a passive, indecisive man, whereas Toshpolat should be a cold-hearted, indifferent father who places wealth above everything. This character trait didn't fully come through. On the other hand, Miyrigul Mambetmuratova (Ulperi) and Zamira Yunusova (the mute servant Nurgul) gave strong performances.

Considering the modern-day relevance of the play, it touches on important issues: how some parents, obsessed with wealth, neglect their families and children, leading to distorted values and attempts to solve problems through corruption — all of which reflect real societal challenges.

In conclusion, the fact that a single play has remained in the theater's repertoire for years shows that its theme and idea transcend time and place. Though this new staging has altered the genre and slightly confused the composition, it has preserved the clarity of its message and educational value. If this performance opens the eyes of parents who prioritize money over love, care, and moral upbringing, then the theater has achieved its goal. As the great reformer Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy once said, "The theater is a place of moral instruction."

The Karakalpak theater ensemble, which has been creatively evolving for years, is now focused on producing artistically complete works that reflect the image of modern-day heroes and resonate with today's audience. What is especially heartening is the involvement of young actors alongside experienced masters, continuing the traditions of the theater. This signals a bright future for the Karakalpak stage.

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