

Dovit Davidov

Uzbekistan: musician and instrument maker

Object: tar lute

Искусство требует жертв.

(Russian)

[Art requires sacrifice.]

I was born in Tashkent. My father was a very famous Bukharian Jewish musician. He played the tanbur in shashmaqam groups in Uzbekistan. Shashmaqam is a poetic song tradition thousands of years old. Many people say the tanbur is, in fact, the father of all shashmaqam music. When I was young, I was always with my father at weddings and parties, watching all the musicians and learning to play tar (the instrument I am pictured with), without even knowing it.

I used to go with my father to instrument shops and look at how they made and fixed things. I had a knack for it. What I watched, I learned, and what I learned, I did. People came from all over to buy my instruments or have me fix theirs. Some people even want them just as decoration in their homes. I make tars, kamanchas, tanburs – all the stringed instruments from Central Asia. I make them in my home. For me, the tar is most important because it is what I play.

I came to New York City in 1992. What brought me to America was my son. He came in 1990, and my wife and I could not be without him. At that time it was fairly easy to come. Much easier than in the 1980s, when it was hard to get permission to leave the Soviet Union. My son requested a visa for us. Since my arrival, I have been playing with Ensemble Shashmaqam here in New York City. I am particularly surprised by how much Americans enjoy the music. I remember shortly after I arrived that we were going to play a concert, and I thought, “What are these American people going to listen to?” But it was like flies in the room buzzing. They were transfixed.



Bio:

Dovit Davidov was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on June 24th, 1946. He is a professional shashmaqam (classical and sacred music of Central Asia) musician specializing in the tar, and a highly regarded Central Asian string instrument maker. The son of another well known shashmaqam artist, he was exposed to the tradition since an early age, later attending the Uzbek state choreographic school in the 1960s, where he studied under the tutelage of Ari Babachanov, Suliman Takalov, and Professor Vasiliev. In 1992, he immigrated to New York City, where he continues to perform with Ensemble Shashmaqam and make instruments out of his home in Forest Hills, Queens. Davidov is an integral member of the Center for Traditional Music and Dance's Central Asian Community Cultural Initiative.