

ON THE STAGE OF THE BERDAKH KARAKALPAK STATE MUSICAL THEATRE: THE BALLET “QIRIQQIZ” — HARMONY OF NATIONAL TRADITION AND STAGE CULTURE

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Abstract. This article analyzes the ballet “Qiriqqiz,” staged on the Berdakh Karakalpak State Musical Theatre, from the perspective of the artistic achievements that emerged during the process of reinterpreting Karakalpak national heritage through the medium of contemporary ballet. The study examines costumes, headdresses, color choices, the national characteristics of dance vocabulary, and their integration with ballet technique. In addition, stage decoration, the system of character portrayals, the symbolic meanings of women’s and girls’ clothing, and the ethnographic foundations of the costumes selected for male roles are discussed in detail. The paper offers a scholarly analysis of the synthesis of nationality and modernity in the ballet, the epic’s stage interpretation, and its artistic-aesthetic value.

Keywords. Qiriqqiz ballet, Karakalpak national costume, stage culture, dance vocabulary, national heritage, ballet art, ethnography, folk epics.

The rich oral heritage of the Karakalpak people—particularly their heroic epics—has long served as a source of inspiration for various branches of art. The epic “Qiriqqiz” is one of the brightest examples of this heritage, celebrating the bravery of forty courageous girls led by Gulayim in their struggle for the freedom of their homeland. Over centuries, the epic has taken shape in the collective consciousness as a symbol of patriotism, courage, female honor, and national pride.

Today, this epic has been reinterpreted through the art of ballet, transforming into a major artistic work that harmonizes national traditions with the demands of modern stage performance. During the creation of the ballet, in-depth study was conducted on Karakalpak national dress culture, the features of dance vocabulary, color aesthetics, traditional headdresses, and their symbolic meanings. The following section provides scholarly commentary on the ballet’s primary artistic components—costumes, dance vocabulary, male and female character portrayals, stage design, epic interpretation, and the expression of national identity within contemporary art.

The ballet “Qiriqqiz,” staged by the Berdakh Karakalpak State Musical Theatre, stands as a vivid expression of the Karakalpak people’s historical memory, national aesthetic outlook, and artistic heritage within modern performing arts. Based on the folk epic, the work brings to life—through the artistic means of ballet—the courage, patriotism, and resilience demonstrated by forty brave girls led by Gulayim in defense of their land. The creation of the ballet is the result of thorough exploration of folklore materials, ethnographic sources, Karakalpak national costume culture, musical rhythms, and the plastic vocabulary of folk dances. It is precisely these elements that enhance the aesthetic value and artistic merit of the performance.

In the ballet, the artistic meaning of the stage scenes is revealed primarily through national imagery and costumes. Karakalpak women’s clothing is rich in distinctive ornaments, color symbolism, headdress structures, and social meanings. For the stage, traditional headpieces such as *popikli taqiya*, *bas oraw*, and *sawkele* were reinterpreted while preserving their authentic forms. In the portrayal of Gulayim, the slight tilt of the *popikli taqiya* to the left signifies that she is an unmarried young girl. Moreover, the movement and gentle sway of the *popik* add aesthetic charm to the dance vocabulary, further enhancing the youthful, courageous, and determined nature of the character.

For the depiction of married women, the *bas oraw* (scarf) is used to symbolically express their status, wisdom, and resilience within stage culture. In the characters Aqsuliw and the elder women (*jengeler*), the wrapping style, color, and ornamentation of the scarf were chosen to match their age, status, and life experience. For Sarbinaz and the warrior girls, lightweight battle-inspired headpieces are used, adorned with jewelry, beads, and metal plates. These elements evoke the ancient martial heritage of the Karakalpak people and infuse the stage with an epic spirit. The garments worn by the female characters also carry symbolic meaning. Gulayim’s narrow red costume represents energy, bravery, and leadership; Aqsuliw’s deep green-red colors reflect her maturity and spiritual completeness; Sarbinaz appears in a blue-toned dress, symbolizing devotion, purity, compassion, and strength. Ordinary village women are portrayed in light, pastel-colored long dresses, representing sincerity, modest upbringing, and humility.

The costumes used in the ballet maintain traditional forms while being adapted to stage requirements—lightweight, flexible, and suitable for dance plasticity. Special fabrics and sewing techniques were employed to ensure freedom of movement during jumps and turns. As a result, the artistic value of national clothing is preserved while fully meeting the technical demands of ballet.

One of the strongest aspects of the production is the high-level synthesis of national dance elements with academic ballet technique. Karakalpak dances are characterized by deep bends, shoulder movements, soft hand gestures, and frequent stamping elements. These are skillfully blended with ballet techniques such as *adagio*, *allegro*, *pirouettes*, and others. The synchronized dancing of the warrior girls with swords and shields—especially the rhythmic harmony of their movements—adds dynamism, drama, and a distinctive epic quality to the ballet.

In the production, the stage costumes of the male characters are also selected with distinctive ethnographic precision. The character Arislan reflects the traditional clothing style of Khorezm young men: a white yaxtak, a turban on his head, black sharovar, a gold-embroidered belt, and a light outer garment. His white costume symbolizes purity, courage, and manliness. Allayer bay, on the other hand, represents wealth and authority; his status is emphasized through a luxurious chapon made of high-quality fabrics, a fur bo‘rik, and gold ornamentation.

In the characters Sayeke shonaq and Jurin’ taz, the simple lifestyle and everyday dress culture of the Karakalpak people are portrayed realistically through cotton shirts, wide sharovar, and sho‘girme headgear. The costumes of the Kalmyk soldiers in the ballet are created in a decorative stylized manner and are intentionally made to contrast sharply with the Karakalpak characters—they appear in garments made of curly leather, coarse headpieces, and battle cloaks. This visual differentiation through colors, shapes, and textures effectively conveys the historical conflict between the two peoples.

Overall, the ballet “Qiriqiz” not only brings the national heritage of the Karakalpak people back to the stage but also elevates it to a new level by interpreting it within the aesthetics of contemporary ballet. The harmony of costume, music, choreography, and dramaturgy creates a powerful impact on the audience. The performance’s complex stage solutions, the diversity of characters, the dynamism of the dance compositions, the unique rhythm and balance, and the national spirit are vividly, expressively, and artistically embodied on stage.

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