

Principles of Transmission and Collective Composition in Turkmen *Dutar* Performance

David Fossum
Brown University, USA

In orally transmitted musics, what is the musical model that musicians pass on to their students? If there is room for variability in individual performers' hands, where does it lie, and what learned material must they preserve? In this paper, I explore these questions in a case study of *dutar* performance in Turkmenistan. The Turkmen *dutar* is a two-stringed, long-necked lute optimized for elaborate, virtuosic performance of instrumental pieces. The traditional compositions are through-composed and formally complex. Virtuosos negotiate contrasting demands: to preserve the basic model of the piece while adding original contributions to an ongoing, collective composition process that develops each piece over time. I argue that in the course of learning a traditional piece, *dutar* players internalize compositional principles, applying these to memorized melodic passages in order to further develop the constantly evolving, orally-transmitted composition. These compositional principles range from micro-level procedures (how to extend the logic of a short melodic motif) to more abstract levels of musical structure (how to bring a piece to a climax). I aim to show how *dutar* players employ the same abstract principles in divergent ways to create unique renderings of the same musical model.