

Kazakh Music Unit Plans: “Kozimnin Karasi”

Performing “Kozimnin Karasi” with your ensemble addresses several NAfME standards for music education. In addition to learning the appropriate musical criteria in order to evaluate and refine their performance, students from the United States are analyzing and interpreting a piece of music from a culture not their own. Students are connecting, synthesizing, and relating their knowledge of Kazakh music and culture in order to present an informed and appropriate performance of the piece. Students are relating musical ideas and works from the Kazakh cultures to their own knowledge and proficiency within Western art music, as well as understanding the relationship between music and culture in Kazakhstan.

Below is an introduction to the geography, history, culture, and language of present-day Kazakhstan, a brief overview of Kazakh traditional music, and a short list of resources for further information. Please feel free to use what information is appropriate for your course and grade level. Links to selected videos featuring performers of different traditional instruments and singers are also included.

The song “Kozimnin Karasi” is a famous Kazakh song. It is a love song, and the title translates literally as “Oh pupil of my eye.” The song is attributed to Abai Qunanbaiuly, Kazakhstan’s most well known cultural icon. Abai was a poet, composer, and philosopher who lived on the steppe in the second half of the 19th century. He translated many European and Russian poet’s works in to Kazakh, including works by Goethe, Lord Byron, and Pushkin. Abai’s major work is *The Book of Words* (*қара сөздері, Qara sózderi*), a philosophic treatise and collection of poems where he encourages his fellow Kazakhs to embrace education, literacy, and good moral character in order to escape poverty, enslavement and corruption.

The lyrics to “Kozimnin Karasi,” along with a translation, are below:

Kozimnin karasi	O pupil of my eyes
Kon’limnin sanasi	My conscious desire
Bitpeidi ishtegi	I am torn by passion
Gashiktik zharasi	Without end inside
Bitpeidi ishtegi	I am torn by passion
Gashitik zharasi	Without end inside.
Kazaktin danasi	The wise Kazakh,
Jas y-ulken agasi	The youth’s elder brother
Bar’ demes sendei bir	He cannot say “it is”
Adamnin balasi	For one of mankind’s children
Bar’ demes sendei bir	He cannot say “it is”
Adamnin balasi	For one of mankind’s children

Zhilayin, zhirlayin
Agihzip koz mayin
Aytuga kelgende
Kalkama swoz dayin
Aytuga kelgende
Kalkama swoz dayin.

Let me cry and chant poetry
As oil drips from my eyes
I will prepare precious words
To say at your coming.
I will prepare precious words
To say at your coming.

Jurekten kozgayin
Adepten ohzбайin
Wozi de bilmeime
Kwop coilep sozбайin
Wozi de bilmeime
Kwop coilep sozбайin

Let me move from the heart
Let me not cross these bounds
He also does not know
Let me not stretch words as these.
He also does not know
Let me not stretch words as these.

I. Overview of Kazakh geography, history, culture, and language

Geography

Kazakhstan is the world's largest landlocked country, and the ninth largest country in the world. It is in Central Asia, with Russia to the north and west, China to the east, and Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to the south. While most of Kazakhstan lies on the Asian continent, a small western portion is on the European continent.



One third of Kazakhstan's geography is steppe, along with deserts, taiga, mountains, hills, and delta regions. The steppe is a dry plain, with large areas of grasslands. The Kazakh steppe is the largest dry steppe region in the world. The Tian Shan Mountain range runs along the southern border between Kazakhstan, China, and Kyrgyzstan. The city of Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan and the former capital, lies adjacent to the Tian Shan mountains. The current capital, Astana, is more centrally located, on the steppe.

History

Kazakhstan has been inhabited since the Paleolithic, originally by the Scythians (Eurasian nomads). Archaeologists believe the horse was first domesticated in the Kazakh steppe. Turkic nomads, mainly Cumans, inhabited the territory starting around the 11th century. In the 13th century, the region joined the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan. By the 16th century, the Kazakh emerged as a distinct group, divided into three *jüz* (ancestor branches occupying specific territories). During this period, a nomadic lifestyle and livestock-based economy was dominant.

The Russians began advancing into the Kazakh steppe in the 18th century, and by the mid-19th century, they nominally ruled all of Kazakhstan as part of the Russian Empire, imposing the Russian language and mandating Russian-style agriculture and a settled, urbanized life. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war, the territory of Kazakhstan was reorganized several times. In 1936, it was made the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, part of the Soviet Union and subject to its mandates.

Kazakhstan was the last of the Soviet republics to declare independence during the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The current President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has been leader of the country since then, and is characterized as authoritarian. Kazakhstan has worked to develop its economy, especially its hydrocarbon industry, and has become the dominant economy in Central Asia.

The current government of Kazakhstan is a unitary republic. The only president to date has been Nursultan Nazarbayev. The Prime Minister chairs the Cabinet of Ministers and serves as the head of government.

Culture

The name "Kazakh" comes from the ancient Turkic word *qaz*, "to wander," reflecting the nomadic cultural heritage of the Kazakh peoples. Before the Russian occupation, the Kazakhs had a highly developed culture based on their nomadic pastoral economy. Islam was introduced to the region in the 8th century, slowly working its way north from Turkestan and further propagated by the Golden Horde in the 14th century.

According to Chinese sources written in the 6th-8th centuries CE, the Kazakhs had a strong oral poetry tradition. These came from earlier periods, and were transmitted by professional storytellers and musicians. In national cuisine, livestock meats are

prepared a variety of ways and served with a wide assortment of bread products. Tea is culturally important, as is *shubat*, fermented camel's milk, and *kymyz*, fermented mare's milk.

Language

Kazakhstan is officially a bilingual country. Kazakh belongs to the Kipchak branch of Turkic languages and is the state language of Kazakhstan. Russian is also dominant, with equal official status for all administrative and institutional purposes. In 2015, the government announced that the Latin alphabet will replace the Cyrillic alphabet as the writing system for the Kazakh language by 2025. English is very popular and students are encouraged to learn English, to the extent of English-language schools and university.

Kazakh Glossary

Aruach: the spirits of the ancestors.

Asatayak: idiophone made from hooves



Aul: small village, usually the seat of a Kazakh feudal lord.

Baksés: Traditional spiritual medic, played kobyz to banish evil spirits.

Dauylpaz: Wood and hide drum, used in warfare and hunting to improve morale. The Kazakh people use a wide variety of drums of all shapes, sizes, and materials.



Dombra: Kazakh long-necked fretted lute with three strings. Dombra is extremely popular and the music can be quite virtuosic. Varieties in construction, shape, and size are common.



Jüz: ancestor branches occupying specific territories.

Keruish: Plucked harp string instrument, with many variations in shape and number of strings.



Kobyz: Bowed spike lute with two strings. The body is carved of wood, and the resonating chamber is covered with leather. Bows are made of horse hair. Traditionally used by shamans and baxes to help access the spirit world, the Kobyz was said to have the power to transform itself into other useful forms, such as bowls, camels, or horses. There are many tales within Kazakh folklore featuring the kobyz. Geographical variants of Kobyz are common.



Konyrau: multiple small bells, made from brass, silver, or gold, hung from a handle and shaken.



Kyu: Instrumental form revolving around the dombra.

Kyushi: a composer/performer of kyu.

Sal; sere: a composer/performer of Kazakh lyric song.

Sazsyrnai: A general term for a clay flute. Each type has its own name specific to geographic region, use, material, and performance technique. Children played small clay whistles, which were frequently shaped like animals.



Shankobyz: A small metal instrument played using the mouth as a resonating chamber. Related to the mouth harp, this instrument is often used by children.



Sherter: Three stringed plucked chordophone. The sherter is played like the dombra, but is constructed of hide-covered wood, similar to the kobyz. Sherter is often played to accompany the retelling of fables.



Shyn: Gong, generally made of brass or copper and played with a wooden mallet.



Sybyzgy: end-blown reed flute



Terme: Improvised virtuoso song form with a complex structure.

Želdirme: Improvised virtuoso song form with a complex structure.

Žhetygen: 7 stringed plucked zither with adjustable tuning.



Žyr: Epic tales performed in a recitative form.

Žyrau: a composer/performer of žyr.

2. Music in Motion

Music throughout the world has always moved as people have moved, along trade and hunting routes, and through conflict, intermarriage, meetings of different culture groups, social interaction, ritual, and so on. Any time people of different cultures meet, there is an exchange of ideas, and musical ideas form an important component of culture, along with language, food, clothing, and spiritual beliefs. The musics of Central Asia are no different. The Silk Road, the important and influential trade route between Asia and Europe, traversed the steppes, mountains, and deserts of Central Asia, carrying not just trade goods but musical practices, ideas, and instruments back and forth. Central Asian cultures adopted the music of other cultures into their own rich musical heritage, adapting it to local needs, uses, and aesthetic preferences.

3. Traditional Kazakh Music

Traditional Kazakh music can be divided into two categories: instrumental music, *kyu*, performed by soloists, and vocal music, categorized by subject and function. *Kyu* were typically programmatic and titles often refer to specific stories. Vocal music is an important part of ceremonies, such as weddings, and feasts. Epic songs consisted of and taught tribal lore, history, and genealogy. Love songs, didactic verses, and songs sung in dialogue, (*aitys*) that are often comic or extremely frank and earthy in their content.

Kazakh musician of all types were highly educated and were obliged to have mastered speech and organizational abilities in addition to their musical demands. Singers had a deep knowledge of current events and the history and genealogy of the Kazakh tribes, as well as tribal legends, rituals, and the lives and compositions of past musicians. Musicians often knew the Koran, and were well versed in Arabic and

Persian poetry. Social consciousness and poetic expression were preserved and passed on by *kyushi*, who actively participated in the social lives of the people. In Kazakh cultures, however, musicians were more than just bearers of aesthetic and social values: their activities were perceived as the representation of the sacral. The shaman looked upon the bearer of creative gifts as chosen representatives of the spirits.¹ Because of this, the social status of the musician was very high.

Musicians' performances were generally combined with other socially meaningful forms of interchange, including ritual hospitality, intertribal competitions, rituals, and feasts. Musicians were considered the most honored guests at important events, and musical performance was combined with eating, small talk, and discussions of news and solutions to important problems.

In many oral musical cultures, authorship of a given musical work is often unknown. In Kazakh musical culture, however, authorship is acknowledged and individuality within genre bounds is celebrated. Kazakh music is unusual in that many individual composers and performers are well known, as are their contributions to the musical landscape in terms of style, musical language, individual melodic – rhythmic aspects, and compositional thinking. This emphasis on acknowledged authorship encouraged variety within a particular musician's works and the development of individual style systems.

At the beginning of the 20th century, half the Kazakh population led a semi-nomadic life, while another quarter lived pastorally. The special character of Kazakh pastoral life ensured that town and urban forms of life did not play a defining cultural role. Around 1900, towns in Kazakhstan were small seats of colonial government and trade, with only a very small percentage of the town's population being ethnically Kazakh. Thus, Kazakh music was wholly bound to a pastoral, nomadic lifestyle. The Kazakh peoples use many different types of instruments designed to be played while in motion, generally from horse- or camel-back. The strings of the *kobyz*, for example, run at a slant from top to bottom instead of being perfectly parallel between the sides of the instrument: this design feature ensured the instrument could be balanced on a saddle in front of a performer and leaned to one side.

Kazakh music, both professional and amateur, was orally transmitted. A student learned directly from a master musician, living with the master's family. Music was often passed along family lines, although musical learning was by no means restricted to immediate relatives. The music took root in their pastoral life, and functioned wholly within and was bound to that lifestyle. Yet, there were small villages, *aul-s*, of Kazakh feudal lords, which became focal points of Kazakh intellectual, poetic, and musical society.

¹ Muhambetova, 68.

Professional musicians, both instrumentalists and singers, were clearly differentiated by the functions and genres of their creations or specializations. Genres of professional music are *žyr*, *terme*, *želdirme*, and *kyu*.

Žyr are epic tales performed in a recitative form. The *žyr* repertoire includes ancient tales as well as stories concerning current events with social, political, philosophical, and moral contents. Historically, the *žyrau*, the performer of the *žyr*, functioned as the Khan's wise men, foretellers of the future, and magicians who ensured victory in battle, assuring that the people were connected with the spirits of the ancestors (*aruach*). Within their compositions, *žyrau* concentrated the highest social and spiritual experience of the older generations of society.

The composers and performers of lyric songs, *sals* and *seres*, typically spent their time around young people. The themes of lyric songs revolved around topics important to that age group: happiness found in love and creative work, the beauty of nature, forced marriage, being separated from loved ones, their native lands, or horses. A *sal* or *sere* was the organizer of entertainments for young people, and, in their behavior and attire, embodied the idea of the "unrestricted" interactions of the youth. For example, it was a socially sanctioned norm for a *sal* to freely flirt with young women without restrictions of etiquette, a distinct and deliberate eroticism that Muhambetova links to latent remainders of fertility magic.²

Terme and *želdirme* are forms of improvised recitative songs. Improvised songs reached their height in Kazakh society during the 19th century. *Terme* and *želdirme* are complicated in structure and based on virtuoso vocal and performance techniques. These genres require a strong, trained voice with a wide range.

Kyu is an instrumental genre demanding virtuoso knowledge of the *dombra*. Instrumentalists in Kazakh society were mainly *dombra* players, and *dombra* remains a vitally important instrument and cultural marker in modern Kazakhstan. Before the performance of a *kyu*, a narrative story of a mythological, historical, epic, or everyday nature would be told. In most cases, a compositional and semantic relationship existed between the narrative and the *kyu*. The structure of a *kyu* is complex, with multiple parts and may last five to six minutes. *Kyushi*, composer/performers of *kyu*, were generally accomplished singers and poets as well as instrumentalists. Songs were commonly accompanied by *dombra*, and a singer generally also had a good command of *dombra*.

Traditionally, the *kobyz* (Kazakh: қобыз) or *kyl-kobyz*, was not for entertainment: the instrument was the perview of shamans and *baksės*, traditional spiritual medics.

² Muhambetova, Asiya Ibadullaeyna, "The Traditional Musical Culture of Kazakhs in the Social Context of the 20th Century," *The World of Music* 37, no. 3 (1995): 67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41699054>.

According to legends, the kobyz and its music could banish evil spirits, sickness, and death, or change form in order to help the shaman or bakses. The kobyz is a two stringed, upright, bowed fiddle, with a bowl shaped resonating cavity, which is generally covered with leather. The strings and the bow were made of horsehair, and there is often a carved horse head at the top (where the scroll would be on a violin). There are many types and variations of kobyz.

Archaeologists specializing in musical instruments and organologists believe bowed string instruments may have originated in the equestrian cultures of Central Asia. The kobyz is an ancient instrument originating with the Kazakh peoples and closely related to the Mongolian instrument *morin huur*. Kazakh, Turkic, and Mongolian horsemen from Central Asia were likely the world's earliest fiddlers. It is believed that these instruments eventually spread to China, India, the Byzantine Empire, and the Middle East, where they developed into instruments such as the *erhu* in China, the *rebab* in the Middle East, the *lyra* in the Byzantine Empire, and the *esrai* in India. The violin, in its present form, emerged in early 16th century northern Italy, where the port town of Venice and Genoa maintained extensive ties to Central Asia through trade routes and the Silk Road. The violins, violas, and cellos we play today, and whose bows are still strung with horsehair, are a legacy of the nomadic peoples of Central Asia.

In the 1930s, when folk instrument orchestras were being established in Kazakhstan, the kobyz was adapted by adding four metal strings, making it similar to the violin. This adaptation allowed both Kazakh traditional music and Western violin music to be played on kobyz.

The early twentieth century was a difficult period for traditional Kazakh music. A totalitarian government, forced urbanization, famine, disease, war, and emigration during the 1920s through 1940s decimated the Kazakh population. By 1944, only 25% of the Kazakh population remained.³ A further blow was struck against Kazakh traditional music when the USSR gathered traditional musicians into urban areas, formed them into Westernized orchestra types by creating "improved" hybrids of Kazakh and Western European instruments, with voicings based on the symphonic orchestra: for example, the two horsehair stringed kobyz was given four violin strings and violin tunings. The government then declared these urban musical forms to be the highest achievement of Kazakh musical culture. In this way, traditional professionalism and folklore and cultural bearers were put on a level of amateurism. Folk musicians in the villages were declared non-professional and lost the ability to make a living with their art. From that time on, they had to earn their living by other trades in order to not break Soviet law of the general "right to work." Living as a freelance musician as before Soviet rule became impossible and, in legal terms, dangerous, as the musician could be accused of parasitism and imprisoned. Limitations in free movement caused by a settled way of life and the requirement to have permanent work limited the interaction and communication between

³ Muhambetova, 70.

musicians as well as the traditional teacher-pupil system of training. Family education remained in place as a way to train new musicians, but could not take over the system of training younger generations of musicians. Villages still gave birth to fine musicians, who, thanks to mass media, gained the people's love and acclaim, but, on the whole, the creative capacity of Kazakh musicianship decreased dramatically.

Traditional Kazakh music did not vanish completely, however. The Westernized, urban musical forms contradicted the needs of the villagers and the first generation of the urbanized populations, while, in both organized concerts and on the radio, traditional professionals continued to work. In the 1970s, concerns regarding the preservation of Kazakh culture, including music and language, were raised. Music scholars began studying Kazakh music and recreating instruments, performances of traditional music were organized, and young urban musicians began travelling to villages to learn from older generations of professional musicians. More recently, Kazakh music, generally *dombra* and the composition and performance of *kyu*, is taught in some Kazakh schools.

4. Modern influences

From the 1920s to the 1930s, Kazakh culture and society began a mass transition to a sedentary way of life. The rapid growth of urban Kazakh culture in the early mid twentieth century divided traditional Kazakh music into two branches: urban and village. The development of those branches went in different directions, but still closely interacted. Village and rural music was granted prestige by urban centers, while villages were the main consumers of urban art. Additionally, the main contingent of youth who played the urban type of traditional music typically came from the villages.

In addition to increasing urbanization, the totalitarian control exerted by the USSR on the country's cultural processes dealt a blow to traditional Kazakh lifestyles. Countering political control, social prescription had great influence as well, and the two systems brought about the unique system of balance between the internal (social) and external (political) factors of the urban branch of Kazakh music.

After Kazakhstan's independence, there was a marked resurgence of interest in Kazakh culture. New construction, notably in the new capital city of Astana, celebrates Kazakh cultural landscape, while schools are teaching Kazakh music and language to all ages. Support for Kazakh cultural products is strong, both from the government and among the people. Currently, there is an effort to rediscover the traditional music as it had been performed before the heavy influence of Western European music. Today, one can find traditional musical forms used in Kazakh popular music, with performers wearing traditional regalia and performing traditional musical forms. Most Kazakh youth are taught *dombra* at the very least, and it is a source of pride to be a musician.

Videos:

Kozimnin Karasi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWz0mnTz32w>

Qazaktin Haliq Eni

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3Vz_fHsnZU&index=7&list=RDeYU-IuQTD9U

Dombra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYU-IuQTD9U>

Kobyz:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_fRbaysGyU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWPDBbE8fIY>

Dombra used in pop music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76JqA1EenX0>

For further information:

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