

“AWILDA TOY” AND “AYDAR TOY” DANCES AS SYMBOLS OF NATIONAL
IMAGERY AND VALUES

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Abstract

This article examines the stage representation of national imagery and cultural values through the Karakalpak wedding dances “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy.” These dances, formed in the harmony of traditional customs and stage aesthetics, embody the cultural identity of the Karakalpak people, reflecting gender roles and social unity through movement, costume, musical rhythm, and dramaturgical composition. Based on the principles of the Polat Madreymov choreographic school, the study explores the artistic interpretation, stage development, and contemporary reimagining of these dance works within modern creative research.

Keywords

Karakalpak dance, wedding ceremony, stage interpretation, national imagery, cultural values, movement aesthetics, Madreymov school.

In Karakalpak wedding traditions, “Awilda” represents one of the most important stages in a girl’s life. This ritual takes place on the eve of the wedding, before the bride enters her new home, and is conducted exclusively by women. During Awilda, elder women offer the bride their advice and life lessons, speaking about modesty, honesty, family stability, and the harmony between husband and wife. This ceremony is not merely a form of oral instruction—it symbolizes the transmission of the collective experience and spiritual heritage of generations of women to the young bride, who is now entrusted with her new social roles as a bride, mistress of the household, and mother.

This traditional ritual was transformed into a stage dance by Polat Madreymov in 1987. Through the dance “Awilda Toy”, the place of women within national values, their social mission, and their perception as aesthetic ideals are artistically expressed. In this stage interpretation, the female image—the bride—is portrayed through her appearance, posture, gestures, clothing, and even her gaze.

The dancers performing in “Awilda Toy” typically appear in white traditional costumes decorated with delicate ornaments. In Karakalpak culture, white symbolizes purity, innocence, dignity, and sacredness. Here, the costume functions not only as an

aesthetic attribute but also as a symbolic element—representing the bride as an embodiment of purity and a new beginning. In ancient Turkic traditions, the color white was associated with divine power and respect toward women, a symbolic approach that continues to resonate in the stage performance.

In the plasticity of movement, the gestures of the woman are primarily constructed to express her inner state—emotions such as excitement, pride, modesty, humility, and attentiveness. For example, when the dancer places her hand over her heart and bows slightly, this is not merely a stage movement but a symbolic act signifying the bride's heartfelt sincerity and her respectful step into a new stage of life. Through this gesture, the dancer conveys not only movement but also the spiritual understanding of an entire people regarding family and society.

In the dramaturgy of the performance, the sequence depicting the bride entering the wedding house, her posture before relatives, their attentive gazes upon her, and her gradual transition into her new home — all are presented as a coherent chain of movements. Every bow, every glance, and every rhythm in her walk represents a living interpretation of ancient values through movement.

The musical background also plays a crucial role in reinforcing the emotional atmosphere of the scene. The dance is usually accompanied by string instruments such as the *dutor* and *chang*, whose elongated, soft, and tranquil tones draw the audience closer to the dancer's emotional state. The music creates a strong emotional foundation and establishes a spiritual bridge between the onstage image and the audience. In musicology, this phenomenon is referred to as “timbral-aesthetic correlation,” meaning that through sound, the audience becomes a participant in the dancer's inner experiences.

From this perspective, the “Awilda Toy” stage dance represents not only the external aesthetic expression of the female image but also serves as an artistic code embodying society's perception of womanhood—its reverence, trust, and sanctity. This code provides each generation not only with artistic pleasure but also with moral insight and inspiration.

In Karakalpak wedding traditions, “Aydar” is a ceremony performed by young men, symbolizing valor, strength, loyalty, and unity. This gathering, often held before the wedding, served as a test of the groom's physical and moral readiness to assume the responsibilities of head of the family and a respected member of society. The stage embodiment of this ancient ritual, the dance composition “Aydar Toy,” created by Polat Madreymov in 1992, stands today as one of the most vivid examples of modern Karakalpak stage art.

In this dance, the male image is expressed primarily through movement rhythm, collective synchronization, and centralized dynamics, symbolizing both social and physical strength as well as inner resilience. The dancers form a circular formation,

moving around a central point—this focus on the center alludes to the inner harmony, discipline, and hierarchical structure of male society. In ancient Turkic customs, the circular structure was revered as a perfect form, representing unity, balance, and the foundational strength of the community.

The dramatic climax of the dance occurs when two groups of young men stand opposite each other, expressing a test of strength through physical gestures such as striking motions, pushes, and symbolic blows. Movements in this section are sharp, rhythmic, accented, and at times involve jumps, highlighting the dancers' physical preparedness, bravery, teamwork, and mastery of controlled power. This part of the choreography can be viewed as a stage reconstruction of the “batir” (hero) archetype from Karakalpak epic folklore. The batir is not merely a warrior, but a protector of society—a man of strength, justice, and responsibility.

The musical instruments—doira, nog'ora, and surnay—function not only as background accompaniment but also as dramaturgical drivers of the action. For instance, the beat of the nog'ora intensifies the movement, the doira regulates group synchronization, while the surnay melody creates a ceremonial and triumphant atmosphere. The percussive soundscape determines the rhythm of male movement, aligning it with the “social rhythm” of communal life. Every beat becomes a metaphor for vigor, motion, struggle, and determination.

The costumes further reinforce the aesthetic and symbolic dimension of the male image. The dancers typically appear in dark-toned garments—black, blue, or deep shades—tied with traditional belts. These colors symbolize endurance, determination, inner strength, and sacredness. Their costumes are often decorated with ancient ornamental patterns such as the “bird's wing,” “reed flower,” and “star motif.” The bird's wing represents men's protective and freedom-loving nature, while the reed flower symbolizes resilience and harmony with nature. These motifs reveal the deep cultural roots of the staged image, showing that the essence of masculinity in Karakalpak tradition has evolved in spiritual unity with the natural world.

In this dance, stage lighting carries a distinct semantic weight. The contrast and dynamism of light—the sharp alternation between darkness and brightness—intensifies the dramatic tension of the performance. As the movements grow more vigorous, the lighting shifts from warm yellow to deep blue and red hues, heightening the audience's perception of power and internal conflict. Light here serves as a tool for emphasizing the moments of confrontation and energy exchange on stage.

Another key aspect is the aesthetic expression of collectivity in the dance. Every movement is performed in harmony within the group; the rhythm of one cluster of dancers resonates with that of another. Through this synchronization, the choreography conveys the social relationships among men—respect, subordination, solidarity, and

male camaraderie—translated into artistic form. Each synchronized movement on stage becomes a manifestation of the collective heroism of the people.

Thus, through “Aydar Toy,” the Karakalpak people’s national concept of masculinity—strength, courage, responsibility, loyalty, protection, and cooperation—is artistically interpreted. This stage work explores the male image and its social roles not only through movement but also through color, costume, musical background, lighting, and dramaturgy. It can be regarded as a work of modern stage art that preserves national spirit while embracing contemporary aesthetics.

The dances “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy” are not merely artistic depictions of two different ritual contexts; rather, they represent the harmonious stage synthesis of the Karakalpak people’s gender-based value system. The images reflected in these two compositions complement and balance one another, forming an integrated set of culturally grounded worldviews. In modern dance studies, this phenomenon is examined within the framework of the “gender balance model,” where the stage expression of each gender symbolically and aesthetically mirrors its real social functions and roles.

For instance, the female dancer’s movements are built on quiet, inward plasticity—bending gestures and smooth transitions that embody inner emotion, contemplation, and humility. In contrast, the male dancers’ movements are strong, precise, rhythmic, and accentuated. These two poles—tranquility and strength, serenity and dynamism—create a visual equilibrium on stage, reflecting the harmony of male and female roles in society. This harmony, in turn, symbolizes the peace, stability, and generational continuity that sustain the social order.

In recent years, this artistic approach has been further enriched through the use of stage technologies and dramaturgical tools. A vivid example of this is the 2022 stage version of “Awilda Toy” presented by the “Nukus Yulduzlari” ensemble. Alongside traditional costumes and movements, this interpretation introduced interactive elements: the main dancer—the bride—carries a quilt (ko‘rpa), which bears profound symbolic meaning. The quilt represents the new home, domestic harmony, female honor, and responsibility. Meanwhile, other dancers perform live singing, merging movement and vocal expression in a unified emotional flow. This creative synthesis elevates the performance to what may be called a “third dimension” of the stage experience—the audience not only sees but also hears, feels, and becomes emotionally immersed in the performance.

This technique aligns with what is known in modern theater as “immersive aesthetics,” which transforms the spectator from a passive observer into an active perceiver and interpreter. Through this, the bride’s inner emotions, spiritual turmoil, and the profound transition in her life are directly transmitted to the audience.

Another contemporary innovation appeared in 2023, when the “Orol Guli” ensemble staged a new interpretation of “Aydar Toy.” This version incorporated

theatrical elements within the composition: the performance begins with an elder stepping onto the stage to recite a blessing (duo), strengthening the ritual's spiritual and moral foundation. This scene symbolizes generational continuity—the elder's blessing “purifies” the stage, after which groups of young men enter, displaying their strength. Their competition is not only a test of physical power but also a demonstration of collective unity, discipline, and internal harmony.

Through this dramaturgical structure, the transmission of values from generation to generation is artistically represented. The elder embodies experience and moral authority, while the young men symbolize active strength and the heirs of the future. This dramatic composition corresponds to the ancient Karakalpak tradition of “beginning every endeavor with the elders' blessing,” skillfully adapted into a modern stage context.

The stage compositions are further enhanced by modern lighting technologies. Each scene is visually distinguished through color symbolism: in the elder's blessing scene, warm yellow lighting creates a sacred and tranquil atmosphere, while in the young men's strength-testing scene, blue and red tones intensify the sense of drama. In visual art theory, such lighting methods are known as “coloristic tension,” which exerts a direct emotional influence on the viewer.

In conclusion, the modern interpretations of “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy” exemplify the successful synthesis of national values with contemporary dramaturgical and technological approaches. These performances not only revitalize folklore elements but also serve as a powerful medium for transmitting cultural heritage to new generations through the expressive language of modern stage art.

In the development of contemporary Karakalpak dance art, compositions such as “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy” are analyzed not only as examples of folklore but also within the framework of a contextual art approach. This means that these dances are reinterpreted in harmony with the social, aesthetic, and technological demands of each era. In art studies, a contextual approach implies that an artwork exists in constant interaction with its surrounding social context—it preserves the past while assimilating the aesthetic language of the present.

For example, in the 2024 stage version of “Awilda Toy” performed at the Karakalpak State Philharmonic, innovative stage techniques were used. Through lighting design, the dance was divided into three main dramaturgical phases — introduction, core movement, and dramatic climax — each expressed through distinct color codes. In the introduction, warm golden light reflected the bride's emotions as she entered her new home; in the main section, pink and white hues conveyed her inner state; and in the climax, bright sunlight tones emphasized the sacredness of the ceremony. Here, light was not merely a decorative element but an active component of

stage semantics, deepening audience perception and fostering emotional empathy with the character.

The conceptual foundation of such stage productions is directly connected to the Polat Madreymov school of choreography. The central principle of this school is the organic unity of movement, costume, music, stage design, dramaturgy, and lighting within the dance. Every stage detail is interpreted as an element contributing to the overall artistic meaning. Madreymov viewed stage dance not as a mere sequence of movements, but as a multidisciplinary theatrical form—a synthesis of drama, plasticity, music, and folk values. Therefore, his creative school stands out in Karakalpak performing arts for its comprehensive and integrated approach.

Today, the traditions of this school are being consistently developed by several young choreographers. For instance, Bakhitgul Jangabayeva, the artistic director of the “Ayim” ensemble, has harmonized the female image in dance with contemporary trends in global plastic expression. In her version of “Awilda Toy”, women are portrayed not merely as participants in the ceremony but as “aesthetic subjects”—embodiments of cultural heritage. Through color and ornamentation in costumes, she unites ancient culture with the language of modern fashion.

Similarly, in Okbergen Mambetov’s staging of “Aydar Toy”, the portrayal of male figures emphasizes not only physical strength but also inner stability and spiritual introspection. In his works, the use of dramatic pauses and restrained movements grants each dancer individual expressive freedom. This transforms the stage into a space of psychological as well as dramatic expression.

Another notable contributor, Gulmira Allanova, has broadened the cultural context by staging “Awilda Toy” in a theatricalized format. In her compositions, the spacing between dancers, point-to-point movements on stage, and interspersed monologues enhance the “visual dramaturgy”. This approach turns the audience from mere spectators into emotional interpreters of the stage narrative.

Thus, the stage compositions “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy” are today recognized not only locally but also internationally as dance works in which national spirit, modern stage technologies, and dramaturgical thought are harmoniously united. This fact confirms that the methodological foundations, aesthetic principles, and artistic concept of the Polat Madreymov school continue to evolve in tune with the times.

Conclusion

The dances “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy” represent unique artistic expressions of the values inherent in the wedding traditions of the Karakalpak people. Through these compositions, the nation’s educational, moral, and aesthetic worldviews, as well as its gender roles and social balance, are conveyed through artistic imagery. These dances are not merely stage interpretations of traditional rituals but rather complex aesthetic

systems that reflect the people's worldview through movement, rhythm, costume, and dramaturgy.

The stage school founded by Polat Madreymov enriched these dances with contemporary techniques and dramatic approaches while preserving their ritual roots. Elements such as movement aesthetics, musical rhythm, costume semantics, lighting design, and stage composition merge into a cohesive artistic whole, creating a new paradigm of stage dance. Through this school, Karakalpak dance has evolved beyond its folkloric function to become an active medium of modern national theatrical expression.

Today, these dances are being reinterpreted and reimagined by the new generation through contemporary approaches. For instance, ensembles such as “Nukus Yulduzlari”, “Orol Guli”, and “Ayim” have presented stage versions enriched with interactivity, theatricalization, gender balance, and advanced lighting technologies, adapting them for the international stage. This process contributes significantly to the recognition of Karakalpak dance art within the global cultural arena.

Therefore, in the future, it is essential to develop methodological guides, stage-pedagogical programs, and educational theatre performances based on “Awilda Toy” and “Aydar Toy”. Furthermore, conducting in-depth scholarly research on the dramaturgical and aesthetic interpretations of these dances will not only ensure the preservation of Karakalpak dance art but also contribute to the formation of its modern developm

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