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Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology

The Dastgāh Concept in Persian Music

The tradition of Persian art music embodies twelve modal systems, known as *dastgāhs*. Each *dastgāh* represents a complex of skeletal melodic models on the basis of which a performer produces extemporised pieces. These unspecified nuclear models are no more than broad outlines which guide the combined arts of performance and composition.

It is a personal and illusive tradition of great subtlety and depth. Through extensive research, including interviews with leading musicians and recording over one hundred hours of music, Hormoz Farhat has unravelled the art of the *dastgāh*. In his study, Farhat analyses the intervallic structure, melodic patterns, modulations, improvisations within each *dastgāh*, and examines the composed pieces which have become a part of the classical repertoire in recent times.

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Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology

General Editor: John Blacking

Ethnomusicological research has shown that there are many different ingredients in musical systems. The core of this series will therefore be studies of the logics of different musics, analysed in the contexts of the societies in which they were composed and performed. The books will address specific problems related to potential musical ability and practice, such as how music is integrated with dance, theatre and the visual arts, how children develop musical perception and skills in different cultures and how musical activities affect the acquisition of other skills. Musical transcriptions will be included, sometimes introducing indigenous systems of notation. Cassettes will accompany most books.

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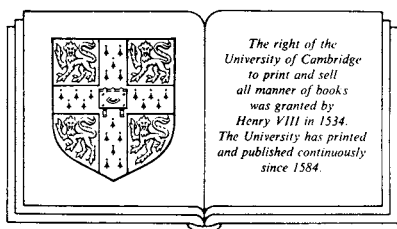
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To the memory of my son
Kâmrân

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Preface

Although I am of Persian birth and have lived my childhood and teenage years in Persia, my early musical outlook was mainly western. I remember some fascination with Persian music in my childhood when, on rare occasions, my father played the *tār*. He was an amateur musician who, like most nobility of the time, had learned how to play an instrument in his younger days. But from the coming of radio to Persia, I found myself much more drawn to western music. The first radio station was established in Tehran in 1939. Local musical broadcasts included both Persian and western musics. It was the popular western songs and dances (tangos, waltzes, foxtrots, etc.) which were more commonly heard, but there was also a limited broadcasting of classical recordings.

I was first drawn to the likes of ‘La Comparsita’, ‘J’attendrai’ and ‘The Blue Danube’. From there I moved up to the *Caucasian Sketches*, *Scheherazade* and the Second Hungarian Rhapsody. The next step was to Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, and so on. As my interest in western music grew and turned into a passion, what little place Persian music had within me was given up altogether. By the time, in my late teens, that I had decided to devote my life to the study of music, I had no feelings for Persian music other than contempt. As compared with the wealth, variety and range of expression in western music, Persian music seemed limited, frail and monotonous.

Several years later, having already completed a BA in Music at the University of California at Los Angeles and an MA in Composition, under Darius Milhaud, at Mills College, I returned to UCLA, to embark on study and research towards a Ph.D, and came in contact with Mantle Hood. Then, in 1955, he had just been appointed an Assistant Professor in the Music Department and was about to begin building a programme of ethnomusicological studies which rapidly, by the mid-sixties, became the most extensive in all American universities. It was Mantle Hood who eventually persuaded me to do my doctoral research on Persian music. I was initially disinclined to do so as I continued to regard Persian music – most non-western musics, for that matter – with some derision. However, I could not resist Hood’s argument that the musical heritage of such an ancient and distinguished culture as that of Persia must possess qualities of value and interest, and I could not fail to appreciate his point that being a native of that culture I am inevitably better equipped to grasp those qualities than a non-Persian. Furthermore, I was compelled by the suggestion that a study of Persian music, about which next to nothing was known, would constitute a more valuable contribution to musical knowledge than a research on an aspect of western art music, very little of which remains obscure.

Soon after settling on the aim of a definitive research on Persian classical music, I realised that a firsthand field study was necessary as there was hardly any material worthy of research available in the US. In the 1950s, as yet, no book or article of any sort had been published, in

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western languages, on Persian music. I was fortunate to receive a Ford Foundation Fellowship and returned, after eight years in the US, to my native land in 1957.

In Persia, I carried out extensive research for two years on the urban musical tradition. My approach to the study of the music was both practical and analytical. I took regular lessons in *setār* (long-necked lute) and *santur* (dulcimer). I collected whatever publications that were useful to my study and worked at several libraries. I interviewed most of the leading musicians of the old school and recorded more than one hundred hours of music. These recordings proved to be the most useful aspect of my research. In time, I was able to transcribe much of this recorded music into western notation for the purpose of study and analysis, a work which continued for a number of years after my return to the US in 1959. The thesis for my Ph.D, based on this research, was finally submitted in 1965, when the degree was conferred.

By this time my earlier misgivings about Persian music had been replaced by a deep appreciation of its unique aesthetic qualities. I no longer compared it, consciously or unconsciously, with western art music. It is a very different musical expression. It is monophonic; it employs a range of sound generally not exceeding two and a half octaves; it is fundamentally soloistic but not virtuosic; and it lacks grandeur and dramatic power. But it is rich in modal variety, in melodic subtlety, and is highly personal and intimate.

Since my first research, conducted during 1957–9, I had occasion to do further studies on Persian music, particularly in the period 1968–76 when I was back in Persia involved with various academic and educational projects. The present book is mainly the thesis of 1965 which has been in some respects revised. I remain convinced as to the conclusions reached then which have been reconfirmed by my more recent contacts with Persian music.

Both at the time of my original research, and in my more extended stay in Persia during the 1970s, I benefited from the friendship and help of many of the country's leading musicians, some of whom are no longer living. I must pay particular homage to the memory of Ruhollāh Xāleqi, a noble and learned musician, who gave me much help and guidance in my early studies. Also, I remain indebted to the generosity of the late Nasrollāh Zarrinpanje, who taught me a great deal, including how to play the *setār*. My *santur* teacher and gracious friend was Hoseyn Sabā who died when quite young. My grateful thanks also go to many others, including *Ostād* Ahmad Ebādi, *Ostād* Farāmarz Pāyvar, *Ostād* Asqar Bahāri, *Ostād* Jalil Šahnāz, Mehdi Meftāh, Zāven Hacobian, and all those who by the virtue of being the inheritors and the guardians of the treasury of Persian music, have been the instruments of its survival, most of whom I have known as good friends or worthy associates.

I must also express my appreciation to my dear and respected friend and colleague, Professor John Blacking who has given me the needed encouragement to submit this work for publication. My thanks also go to Miss Caroline Gillespie for her assiduous help in the typing and printing of the musical examples.

Note on transliterations

In the past few centuries countless books have been written on Persia in various European languages. However, Persian words and names, when their use in a text has been necessary, have not been transliterated into Latin alphabet with any uniformity. Early writers simply relied on their own ear and memory and made haphazard transliterations, the best they could. There was a natural tendency to adopt the existing sounds of the language in which the text was written. Early British writers often represented Persian words as if pronounced by Arabs or Indians; this was no doubt due to greater familiarity, through their Empire, with Arabic and Urdu.

What has complicated the issue further is the fact that, although an Indo-European tongue, Persian is written with the Arabic alphabet. This is a beautiful but cumbersome script, quite unsuited to Persian. A number of vowels are left out and there are duplicating letters for some of the consonants which in Arabic stand for slightly differing sounds, but are pronounced identically in Persian. In addition, there is the problem of Arabic words which have come into usage. Although these words are pronounced in a distinctly Persian way, and are subject to Persian syntax, the purists insist on their transliteration into Latin as if pronounced by Arabs. The use of the phonetic system, which has found a degree of frequency in more recent publications, in my view complicates the matter through the use of excessive diacritical marks, above and below the letters, signifying differences which are, at least for the Persian language, theoretical and not actual.

The system used in this book attempts to simplify the problem of transliteration and conveys as close a pronunciation to the Persian as possible. Admittedly Persian is subject to variations in many dialects within the country, as well as outside the present boundaries of Iran. My model is the pronunciation of the capital city, Tehran, which is by far the greatest urban centre of population in the Persian-speaking world.

In this system the doubling of letters has been avoided. There are seven distinct vowels in the Persian language, as represented by the following letters:

a	as in	apple
ā	as in	mark
e	as in	fence
i	as in	fierce
o	as in	hotel
ō	as in	role
u	as in	brute

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The consonants in Persian are represented by the following letters:

b	as in	English
č	as in	chair
d	as in	English
f	as in	English
g	as in	give
h	as in	English
j	as in	English
k	as in	English
l	as in	English
m	as in	English
n	as in	English
p	as in	English
q	as in	a guttural g similar to the German r
r	as in	English
s	as in	English
š	as in	shine
t	as in	English
v	as in	English
x	as in	a guttural k similar to German ch as in Bach
y	as in	yellow (never as a vowel)
z	as in	English
ž	as in	measure

An apostrophe (') after a vowel (as in Ma'sum) or after a consonant (as in Mas'ud) results in a slight halt, at that point, in the flow of the sound.