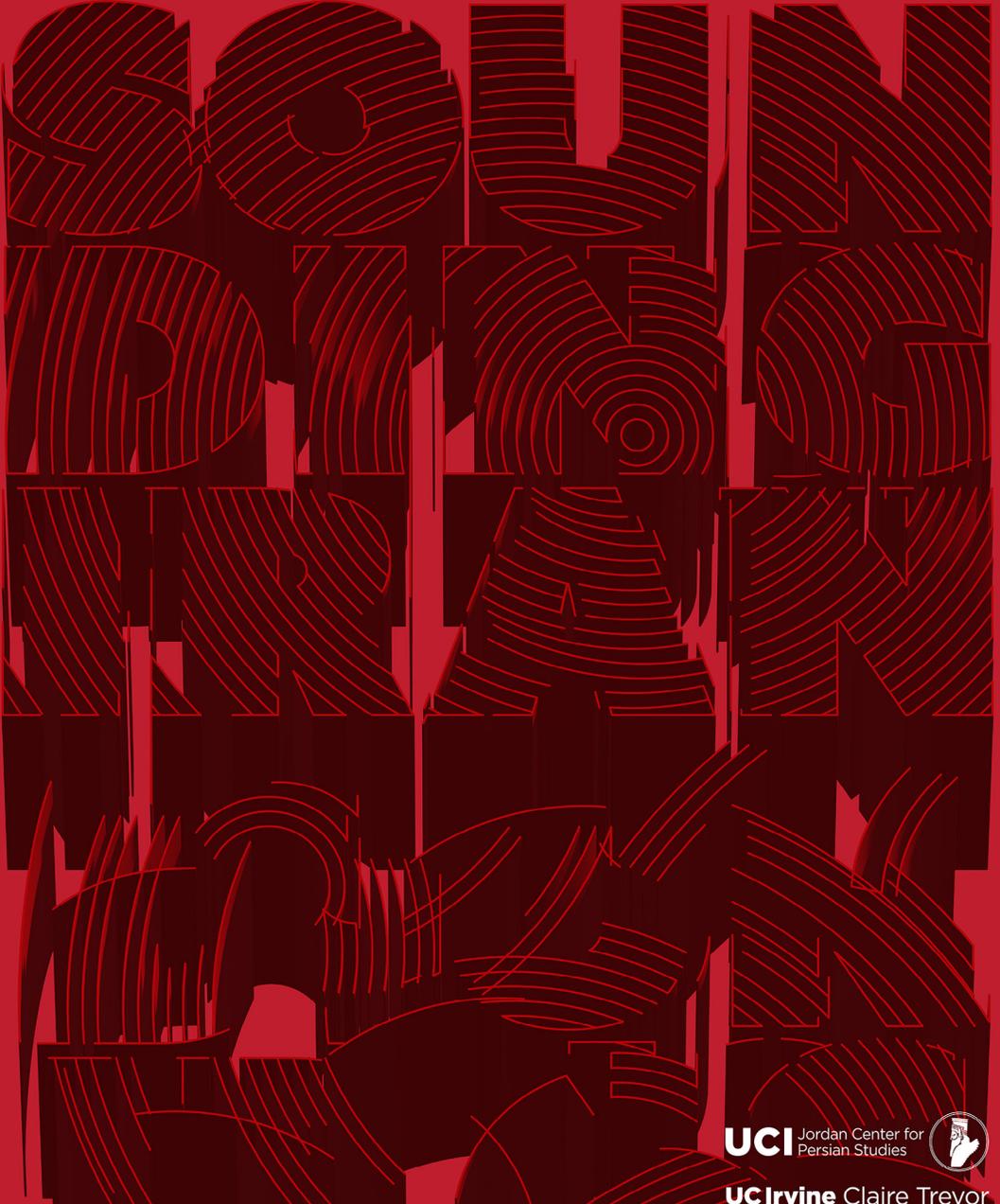


**MUSICAL PASTS, PRESENTS, AND FUTURES**



**SOUNDING IRAN**

**FEBRUARY 7-8, 2026 | UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE**

**UCI** Jordan Center for Persian Studies 

**UC Irvine** Claire Trevor School of the Arts  
Department of Music

This program is made possible by the generous support of the Maseeh Endowment Fund and the Marjorie and Robert Rawlins Endowment Fund, and sponsorship from the UC Irvine Department of Music and the UCI Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture.



## **WELCOME TO SOUNDING IRAN**

The task of writing welcome remarks for a conference on music in Iran today, on January 27, 2026, as I write, seems an impossible feat. To “welcome” necessitates feelings of delight, happiness, and pleasure. With the wounds of January 8–9, 2026, so fresh, I will refrain from uttering “welcome.” Instead, I express gratitude for your presence, for your faith in gathering, and for your contribution to the collective space we aim to cultivate.

So close to these horrific events, we do not yet know with what name history will refer to this catastrophic moment. Undoubtedly, given the evidence that continues to emerge daily from Iran, January 2026 will be remembered as one of the most horrific episodes of modern Iranian history. This is the moment in which we collectively stand—as humans, artists, academics, and community organizers. Irrespective of the papers and panels, this moment will shape the spirit of our gathering. As we convene, it is my sincere hope that each of us will find our own ways to be of service to the humanity all Iranians deserve.

*Sounding Iran: Musical Pasts, Presents, and Futures* set out to gather a latent potential in our field among a swiftly growing cohort of scholars and artists—an unprecedented number of thinkers and creatives in academia whose works center musics and sound in Iran. Many among us have, through a labor of love, dedicated their lives and careers to Iranian arts, culture, and history. Many have left Iran in the past 15 years as a result of unrest, persecution, and increasingly untenable circumstances. Serendipitously—or perhaps by fate—this dormant potential has gathered now, during a crisis of unrivaled proportion in modern Iranian history. I hope

we can remain present, gathered, and steadfast in our belief in our shared potential.

This gathering will not be easy. We share in disbelief, grief, anger, and shock. We also share in our humanity, our commitment to careful thought, our dedication to Iran, and our belief in the possibility of imagining better futures. The subtitle of this conference, **Pasts, Presents, and Futures**, offers a useful framework for dialogue as we attempt to understand how we arrived here, where we stand now, and where we might go. Attending carefully to the plurality of “pasts,” “presents,” and “futures” can sharpen our awareness, clarity, and intent as we work to untangle and dismantle the forces that shape our current moment. In this spirit, I humbly advocate for open discussion rooted in empathy, curiosity, patience, and grace, as we navigate uncertain and contested terrain in a collectively traumatic time.

In closing, I want to consider what it means to gather under the name *Sounding Iran* at this moment, and what such a gathering might make possible. While music may seem a trivial subject in moments such as these, it is one of many sites through which some clarity may emerge. Over a century ago, in 1925, Ali Naqi Vaziri described Iranian music as “a treasure trove that houses national emotions with precision, for it is a museum of our memories and emotions.” Remaining critical of overly romanticized framings, many of us would nonetheless agree that music, as a social practice, records lived realities—material, ideological, and affective alike. Within this capacity lies the potential to sense where the hearts of a people are, what they have endured, what they propose, and what they desire. In this spirit, I invite us to **sound Iran** as a form of amplification: to give resonance to the many voices, conversations, emotions, and ideas that can help us see more clearly and inform our interventions. It is my hope that this endeavor will move us toward the more ambitious meaning of *Sounding Iran*—one oriented not only toward diagnosis, but toward resolution and imagining **sound futures**.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to realizing this gathering and cultivating the conditions for it—especially at a moment when community and critical thought are needed most. We are especially grateful to the UC Irvine Samuel Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture for hosting and supporting this event. Persian studies at UCI has long served as a central site for inquiry into Iran—one that examines our shared histories, our present sociopolitical conditions, and the capacities of Iranian arts and culture to endure and persist through time. We invite you to

hold this space with the same care and nuance, as we continue to think together about how, as a scholarly and artistic community, we might contribute to the flourishing of Iran in the days ahead. Thank you all for your presence and your commitment to the potentiality of gathering.

Warm Regards,

Payam Yousefi, Hesam Abedini, and Hossein Omoumi  
*Conference Chairs*



## **CONFERENCE CHAIRS AND REVIEW COMMITTEE**



**Hossein Omoumi** was born in 1944, in Isfahân, Iran, and began his musical education singing with his father. At age 14, he started studying the Ney, the traditional reed flute of Iran. While studying architecture, he was accepted as a tutorial student at the Iran National Superior Conservatory of Music in Tehran, and worked with great masters Mahmud Karimi and Farhâd Fakhreddini. He then worked with the great master of Ney Hassan

Kassâie. Omoumi's performance career has included appearances at many of major festivals and concert halls in Europe and the United States, including San Francisco's World Music Festival, UCLA's Schoenberg Hall and Wadsworth Theater, the Getty Center in Los Angeles, the World Music Institute and Asia Society in New York and Theatre de la Ville in Paris. He is a noted scholar and teacher of Persian music, having served on the National Conservatory, Tehran University, Center for Conservation and Diffusion of Music (Iran National Television) in Tehran, Center for Oriental Music Studies (CEMO) of Sorbonne University in Paris, the Ethnomusicology departments of the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), and the University of Washington (UW) in Seattle. He is now Maseeh Professor in Persian Performing Arts of music at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). He has arranged and composed 11 lessons to teach the principles of classical Persian music under the title of Pish-Radif. His research on the making of the Ney and Iranian percussions has opened new possibilities and introduced significant innovations to the Ney, Tombak and Daf. A documentary film under the name of *Classical Persian Music – Hossein Omoumi from Isfahan*

to Irvine supported by NEA and the Roshan Institute was released in March 2016. Omoumi graduated from the faculty of architecture at the National University of Iran with honors and taught there for 10 years after receiving his doctorate degree from the University of Florence, Italy, using a scholarship awarded by the Italian government.



**Payam Yousefi** (PhD Harvard, 2023) is an assistant professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Florida specializing in the intersections of music and politics in the Middle East and the US. Currently Yousefi is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Yale Department of Music and a Long-term Fellow at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. His book project titled, *Subversive Sounds: Music and Authoritarianism in Modern Iran* tells multiple

stories of how Iranian musicians' have transcended authoritarian controls over the past 19 years. Presenting case studies in four genres—traditional, classical, sacred, and popular—the book argues for music's efficacy as a tool to inscribe material changes in authoritarian political contexts where explicit protest is violently suppressed. Importantly, Yousefi explores how musicians' ethically framed practices, not only mediate social movements, but also imagine and enact new socio-political futures. His past research on the musical resistance among female vocalists in Iran was awarded both the "Charles Seeger Prize (2019)" and the "James T. Koetting Prize (2018)" by the Society for Ethnomusicology. In 2023 he was awarded SEM's "Religion, Music, and Sound Section Paper Prize" for his research on Anti-Theocracy Protests in Iranian Shi'ite Chanting Rituals. Most recently, his solo album for the kamāncheh, *Songs of Hope* (2025) was awarded a Global Music Award, showcasing his improvisatory and compositional prowess in the Persian dastgāh tradition. His forthcoming scholarship includes a chapter in *Iran Amplified: One Hundred Years of Music and Society*, ed. Siamdoust & Chehabi, where he considers the non-coercive power of Iranian women's vocal performances in online and offline counter-publics—arguing that women's subversive musical performances play on "social poetics" to engender contrasting notions of respectability, in effect limiting the power of authorities to enforce restrictions. At the University of Florida Yousefi is also affiliate faculty in the Center for Global Islamic Studies and the Center for Arts, Migration, and Entrepreneurship. In addition to this he founded and directs UF's Persian Music Ensemble.



**Hesam Abedini** is an Iranian–American composer, performer, improviser, and educator whose work explores intersections of classical Persian music, jazz, Western contemporary traditions, and computer music. His works reflect a **polystylistic approach to intercultural music-making**, bringing diverse traditions into dialogue through improvisation and original composition. His music has been performed by ensembles such as the JACK

Quartet, Del Sol Quartet, Eclipse Quartet, Hypercube, loadbang, and Amalgama Ensemble. As the founding member of the **Sibarg Ensemble**, he has helped shape a distinctive intercultural voice combining classical Persian music and jazz. Hesam is also active as a curator, producer, and filmmaker. His interdisciplinary projects include the NEA- and Roshan-sponsored documentary *From Isfahan to Irvine*, archived at the Library of Congress, and several albums: *Cipher* (with Sibarg Ensemble), *Kooch-e Khamân* (co-produced with Del Sol Quartet, Billboard Classical Chart #5), *Ode to Love* (with Namâd Ensemble), and *Circadian Etudes* (with The Assembly for Distance Alchemy). He is a **writer for the Pish Radif website**, an educational platform created to make classical Persian music accessible to learners from all backgrounds. His curatorial projects include *Music of Exile* at the Thomas Mann House in Los Angeles and the Doornavâzi Festival, highlighting intercultural voices in performance and dialogue. His scholarship appears in *Iran Amplified: One Hundred Years of Music and Society* (Ilex/Harvard Univ. Press, 2025), and he has presented widely on intercultural music, improvisation, and inclusive approaches to music theory pedagogy. Educated at the Tehran Music Conservatory, the Yerevan State Conservatory, UC San Diego (B.A.), and UC Irvine (Ph.D. in Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology), Hesam studied with Lei Liang, Chinary Ung, Anthony Davis, Mark Dresser, Christopher Dobrian, Michael Dessen, and classical Persian music with Maestro Hossein Omoumi. He has taught at UC Irvine, Saddleback College, Soka University of America, and Butte College. In 2025 he joined the School of Music at California State University, Fullerton as Assistant Professor of Composition–Music Theory, where he also serves as Assistant Director of the CSUF New Music Series.





**Sareh Z Afshar** is a writer, translator, scholar, and storyteller. Their research and teaching interests reside at the intersection of performance and politics, with an emphasis on the aesthetics of everyday life, collective movements and new media, memory and trauma, and transnational queer feminist praxis. She received her PhD from the Department of Performance Studies at NYU, served as the 2023–24 Artemis A.W. and Martha

Joukowsky Postdoctoral Fellow in Gender Studies at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University, and is currently Associate Research Scholar at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies at Princeton University. She's completing her first monograph, *Authority and Ambiguity: Performances of Death and Power in Postrevolutionary Iran*, apropos the sociopolitical agency of Iranians born and raised during the Iran-Iraq War (1978–88) in conjuring alternative collective futures. Co-founding editor of the multilingual, multimedia platform, *Feminist Futures*, their writing has appeared in *TDR/The Drama Review*, *e-misférica*, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, *TPQ: Text & Performance Quarterly*, *Khayyam*, *Ravagh*, and edited book volumes. She has lost two cities—lovely ones, Montréal and Tehran—and spends her time in New York contemplating the balance between being too foreign for home and too foreign for here.



**Armaghan Fakhraeirad** is a PhD candidate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Pennsylvania whose research examines the entanglement of music, memory, and infrastructure in Iran's Persian Gulf port cities. Her dissertation, *Sounding Ports: Music, Memory, and Infrastructure on the Persian Gulf Coast, Iran*, analyzes how the material and symbolic infrastructures of port and oil shape urban life and sonic worlds, producing con-

tradictory legacies that range from cosmopolitan imaginaries to histories of racialized labor, displacement, and war. Her research is grounded in multi-sited fieldwork across southern Iranian port cities, primarily Abadan, Khorramshahr, and Bushehr, alongside shorter field trips to port towns in Hormozgan Province, including Kong and Lavan. Moving between ethnography and archival research, she examines musical practices as sonic rem-

nants that render the past both present and absent. Her work ranges from *sinj-o-dammām* drumming in Bushehr and its transoceanic genealogies, foregrounding a gendered analysis of how women negotiate ritual margins and regimes of audibility and visibility, to the sonic afterlives of petro-modern cultural infrastructures such as Abadan's abandoned cinemas, and to the circulation of *Bandari* music across media, labor, and mobility networks shaped by the changing fortunes of Persian Gulf port towns. Her scholarship engages theories of infrastructure, material culture, affect and memory, and the politics of race, gender, and ethnicity in the Gulf region. Before coming to Penn, she received her MA from the University of Art, Tehran. Her thesis examined the history of Iranian folk-music preservation, festivalization, and revival, focusing on how authenticity has been constructed and contested through socio-political ideologies such as nationalism, nativism, and revolutionary cultural discourses. Committed to multimodal scholarship, Fakhraeirad develops experimental ethnographic films composed from field recordings, interviews, and archival materials, treating sonic and visual fragments as forms of evidence and narration. She also values community-facing academic service and has been active in scholarly community-building as a co-organizer of the Sonic Tehran online sessions since 2021, a co-founder and co-organizer of the Iranian Ethnomusicology Network since 2023, and a co-chair of SIGMICA (the Society for Ethnomusicology's Iran and Central Asia Special Interest Group) since 2024.



## **THANK YOU NOTES**

This conference is made possible through the generous support of the Maseeh Endowment Fund and co-sponsorship of the Music Department at UC Irvine and UCI Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture and Marjorie and Robert Rawlins Endowment Fund.

## **SPECIAL THANKS TO**

Maseeh Professor in Persian Performing Arts Persian music Hossein Omoumi  
Robert & Marjorie Rawlins Chair of Music Professor Michael Dessen  
Associate Chair Professor Irene Messoloras  
Director of the Samuel Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture  
Professor Touraj Darayee  
Music Department Manager Peter Chang  
Associate Production Manager Alex Golden  
Designer Kourosh Beigpour  
Budget Manager Barry Alavi  
Graduate Student Assistants: Reed Wixson and Emma Houton  
Society of Iranian graduate students (SIGS)  
And all of our wonderful volunteers

UC Irvine Department of Music

PRESENTS

# SOUNDING IRAN

Musical Pasts, Presents and Futures

Two Evenings of Music in Remembrance and Solidarity



This two-day interdisciplinary conference is organized by UC Irvine ICIT Alumni Hesam Abedini and University of Florida Professor Payam Yousefi. Each night will be a different concert — highlighting the richness and diversity of music in Iran and its diaspora.

**Feb. 7:** An Evening of Musical Offerings in Commemoration of Lives Lost in Iran  
**Feb. 8:** Performance by Maestro Ali Akbar Moradi: Lamentations and Dance upon the Children of Kaveh Ahangar

Generous support is provided by the Maseeh Endowed Fund in Persian Performing Arts and the Robert and Marjorie Rawlins Endowed Fund in Music. This event is co-sponsored by the UC Irvine Department of Music and UC Irvine Jordan Center for Persian Studies and Culture.

**UC Irvine** Claire Trevor  
School of the Arts  
Department of Music

**UCI** Jordan Center for  
Persian Studies



Feb. 7-8, 2026 | 8 p.m.

**Winifred Smith Hall**

Tickets are \$10-20

BOX OFFICE: (949) 824-2787

[WWW.ARTS.UCI.EDU/TICKETS](http://WWW.ARTS.UCI.EDU/TICKETS)



## **CONFERENCE PROGRAM**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2026:** Online Conference Portion

\* All times are in Pacific Time

**7:00 – 7:30 AM – WELCOME**

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**PANEL 1 – CARTOGRAPHIES AND INNOVATIONS** (60 minutes)

Time: 7:30 – 8:30 AM

- \* Jafar Aghabararnia Goudarzi, Notation as Myth: Representations of Prestige and Mystery in the Pedagogy of Iranian Dastgāh Music
- \* Parmis Rahmani, Adapting the Violin: Iranian Musical Innovation and Cultural Negotiation in the 19th and 20th Centuries
- \* Sina Sanayei, Analyzing the Concept of Forūd as a Cadential Gesture in Iranian Classical Music

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**PANEL 2 – LECTURE-DEMONSTRATIONS** (20 minutes)

Time: 8:30 – 8:50 AM

- \* Rezvan Sayyad, Conversations Within Boundaries: How Structure Shapes Musical Dialogue

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**8:50 – 9:00 AM – BREAK**

### **PANEL 3 – HYBRIDITY AND NATIONALISM** (40 minutes)

Time: 9:00 – 9:40 AM

- \* Saba Esmaili & Keivan Aghamohseni, The Process of Acculturation of Music in Ports: A Case Study of Hybridity Musical Bands from Bandar Abbas
  - \* Sina Sedghi, “New Music” as a Possibility for Thinking “the National as such” as an Intersubjective World
- 

### **PANEL 4 – LECTURE-DEMONSTRATIONS** (20 minutes)

Time: 9:40 – 10:00 AM

- \* Negin Nazem Zomorrodi, Polgah: A Compositional Framework Rooted in Iranian Modal Thinking
- 

### **PANEL 5 – SOUND AND STATE POWER** (80 minutes)

Time: 10:00 – 11:20 AM

- \* Nahid Siamdoust, Iran’s “Hyperground”: How New Media Technology Unraveled the Binary of State-Sanctioned versus Underground Culture
  - \* Arash Ahmadzadeh, Music, Ideology, and Youth: A Case Study of the song “Salām Farmāndeh” and the Evolution of “Soruds” in Contemporary Iran
  - \* Yalda Yazdani, The Politics of Musical Participation: An Ethnographic Research on the Situation of Female Singers in Post-Revolutionary Iran
  - \* Mohammad Moridvand, The Hypothetical Concert: The Philosophy of Performance in the Absence of the Audience
- 

### **PANEL 6 – WHY COMMUNITY BUILDING MATTERS: IRANIAN MUSIC SCHOLARSHIP AND COMPOSITION ACROSS BORDERS** (60 minutes)

Time: 11:20 AM – 12:20 PM

- \* Armaghan Fakhraeirad, Iranian Ethnomusicology Network
  - \* Niloufar Nourbakhsh, Iranian Female Composers Association
  - \* Laudan Nooshin, Sonic Tehran
- 

**12:20 – 12:40 PM – CLOSING REMARKS**



# DAY ONE

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2026

### 8:00 - 8:30 AM – REGISTRATION, COFFEE & WELCOME

Location: MM 302

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### 8:30 - 9:00 AM – OPENING REMARKS

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

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### PANEL 1 – POLITICS, CONFLICT, AND SOUND (60 minutes)

Time: 9:00 – 10:00 AM

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

Chair: Sareh Z Afshar

- \* Ashkan Nazari, Subversive Timbre: Acoustic Oppression and Sonic Defiance Among Kurds in Iran
  - \* Hannaneh Akbarpour, “What does it mean for this sound to mean?” Reflection, Humor, and Resisting the Auditory Regime of War in the 12-Day Iran-Israel Conflict
  - \* Siavash Rokni, Making it as Musicians in Iran: Cadancemag and the Question of Necessity of Going through ERSHAD in Today’s Iran
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### 10:00 - 10:10 AM – BREAK

## **PANEL 2A – MUSIC AND VISUALIZATION ACROSS TIME AND MEDIA** (80 minutes)

Time: 10:10 – 11:30 AM

Location: MM 316

Chair: Kajwan Ziaoddini

- \* Nima Farzaneh, Sonic Performance in Safavid Monumental Architecture
  - \* Amirali Ardekanian, Visualizing Music: The Rise of Musicians as Public Figures in Iranian Postcards of the Early 20th Century
  - \* Mohammad Sahraei, Authors, Patrons, and Sound: Visualizing Music and Manuscript Culture in Iran
  - \* Ali Montazeri & Vahid Valikhani, Political Approaches within Music and Sound in Iranian War Films after 1979
- 

## **PANEL 2B – JEWISH MUSIC IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN: AESTHETIC, INTERCULTURAL, AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUES** (60 minutes)

Time: 10:10 – 11:10 AM

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

Chair: Hadas Bram

- \* Hadas Bram, “That together we would devise sweet counsel”: Younes Dardashti’s Monājāt and Musical Interfaith Dialogues
  - \* Edoardo Marcarini, The Shira of Esfahan: Locality, “Be-Longing”, and Palimpsestic Presents in a Regional Judeo-Persian Repertoire
  - \* Alan Niku, The Neydavoods: A Musical Family Story Beyond Morteza Khan
- 

## **11:30 AM – 12:00 PM – BREAK**

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## **PANEL 3 – LECTURE-PERFORMANCE** (60 minutes)

Time: 12:00 PM – 12:40 PM

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

Chair: Hesam Abedini

- \* Mohammad Sahraei, Khorāsānī Echoes: A Solo Dotār Performance and Introduction to Khorāsānī Musical Traditions
- \* Sirvan Manhoobi, The Last Pomegranate of the World

## **12:40 – 1:50 PM – LUNCH BREAK**

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### **PANEL 4A – WOMEN AND VOICE** (60 minutes)

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

Chair: Sareh Z Afshar

- \* Arya Tavallaei, The Politics of Sound and Sight: Popular Music, Visual Culture, and Modern Femininity on 1970s Iranian Television
  - \* Samane Paya, Whispers of Resistance: Reclaiming Female Voice through Lori Folk and Sonic Memory in Diaspora
  - \* Mahdis Bayat, Embodied Resistance and the Politics of Song Sharing in the “Woman, Life, Freedom” Movement
- 

### **PANEL 4B – MUSIC AND BORDERS** (60 minutes)

Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

Location: MM 316

Chair: Payam Yousefi

- \* Sara Feili, Soundscape of Iranian Music in New York City: Diaspora, Identity, and Cultural Transmission
  - \* Mohammad Geldi Geldi Nejad, Gürgen ýoly: Iranian Turkmens’ Cultural Identity
  - \* Behzad Namazi, Tehrangeles: A Glance at the Global Capital of Persian Pop Music
- 

## **3:00 – 3:10 PM – BREAK**

**PANEL 5 – REIMAGINING THE HISTORY OF IRANIAN  
MUSICS AND DANCE: UNEASY NARRATIVES OF  
RACE AND GENDER** (60 minutes)

Time: 3:10 – 4:10 PM

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

Chair: Armaghan Fakhraeirad

- \* Armaghan Fakhraeirad, *Between Sounds and Silences: Black Slavery, Abolition, and Public Sounding in Southern Iran*
- \* Hadi Milanloo, *Navigating Tenuous Ambiguities: New Directions in the Study of Women and Music in Iran*
- \* Hossein Zanganeh, *Semiotics, the Gaze, and the Adolescent Male Dancer in 19th Century Qajar Iran*

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**4:10 - 4:20 PM – BREAK**

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**KEYNOTE** (60 minutes)

**Dr. Houchang Chehabi, *Iranian Music between Religion(s) and Politics***

Time: 4:20 – 5:20 PM

Location: MM 218 (MoCap)

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**EVENING CONCERT I** (90 minutes)

**An Evening of Musical Offerings in Commemoration of Lives Lost in Iran**

Time: 8:00 – 9:30 PM

Location: Winifred Smith Hall

**Performers / Program:**

- \* *Earthly Exile* (2015), Hossein Omoumi
- \* *Sepideh* (2024), Parisa Sabet (Composer), Asal Iranmehr (Piano)
- \* *Narration Spaces: Pro(memo)mourning II* (2022), Payam Yousefi (Composer, Kamancheh and Vocals), Hesam Abedini (Piano)
- \* *Unseen Voice II* (2015), Jessika Kenney (Composer, Voice and Electronics), Eyvind Kang (Viola and Electronics)
- \* *This Unbending Creature* (2024), Hesam Abedini (Composer and Vocals), Payam Yousefi (Kamancheh), Siamak Barghi (Tombak)
- \* *Pish Radif* by Hossein Omoumi, Jessika Kenney (Voice), Hesam Abedini (Voice), Eyvind Kang (Viola), Amir Koushkani (Tar), Payam Yousefi (Kamancheh), Ali Ahmad Khostovan (Santur), Siamak Barghi (Tombak)

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**9:30 - 11 PM – RECEPTION & COMMUNITY GATHERING**

Location: Verano Place Community Center - Multipurpose Room



## DAY TWO

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2026**

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### **8:30 - 9:00 AM – COFFEE & INFORMAL GATHERING**

Location: MM 302

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#### **PANEL 6 – SIN ۰۰۰** (60 minutes)

Time: 9:00 – 10:00 AM

Location: Winifred Smith Hall

Chair: Hesam Abedini

- \* Amitis Motevalli, Babak Rahimi, Hesam Abedini

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### **10:00 - 10:10 AM – BREAK**

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#### **PANEL 7A – PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE IN PERSIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC** (80 minutes)

Time: 10:10 – 11:30 AM

Location: MM 316

Chair: Payam Yousefi

- \* Nima Janmohammadi, Inventing from Memory: Embodied Music-Making in Persian Classical Music
- \* Ali Hajmalek, Teaching Iranian Classical Music: Western Notation and Sine-be-sine
- \* Mehdi Rezaia, Radif Reconsidered: A Macro–Aesthetic and Phenomenological Inquiry into Persian Classical Music
- \* Kourosh Taghavi, Pedagogy, Process, and Identity: Teaching Classical Persian Music to Non-Persian Speaking Children in U.S. Public Schools

## **PANEL 7B – MUSIC AND MODERNITY IN 20TH CENTURY**

**IRAN** (60 minutes)

Time: 10:10 – 11:10 AM

Location: AITR 190

Chair: Mahdis Bayat

- \* Solmaz Shakerifard, Musical Values, Social Values: From the Constitutional Revolution to the COVID-19 Pandemic
- \* Majid Javdani Naddaf, Unconventional Violin Tunings in Iranian Classical Music: Transferring Historical Practices to the Kamancheh
- \* Siamak Barghi, The Iranian Violin in the Twentieth Century: Emergence, Flourishing, and Marginalization

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### **11:30 AM - 12:50 PM – LUNCH BREAK**

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## **PANEL 8A – RETHINKING ACCESS, PEDAGOGY, AND VOICE IN CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN MUSIC EDUCATION** (60 minutes)

Time: 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Location: AITR 190

Chair: Nasim Khorassani

- \* Nasim Khorassani, Pedram Diba, Sohrab Motabar, Bahar Royae

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## **PANEL 8B – MUSIC, IDENTITY, AND RESISTANCE IN THE ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SOUNDSCAPES OF IRAN** (60 minutes)

Time: 1:00 – 2:00 PM

Location: MM 316

Chair: Azadeh Vatanpour

- \* Azadeh Vatanpour, Echoes of the Divine: Yārsān Sacred Soundscapes and the Politics of Sacred Resistance in Iran
- \* Kajwan Ziaoddini, Theft Songs: Musical Ownership and Ethnonational Identity in Kurdish–Persian Relations
- \* Sirvan Manhoobi, Sacred Strings and Mundane Tides: The Transformation of Music and Society in Yārsān People of Kermanshah

## **2:00 - 2:10 PM – BREAK**

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### **PANEL 9 – PISH-RADIF: A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO CLASSICAL PERSIAN MUSIC** (80 minutes)

Time: 2:10 – 3:30 PM

Location: Winifred Smith Hall

- \* Hesam Abedini, Introduction to *Pish-Radif*
  - \* Amir Koushkani, *Pish-Radif* as an Introductory Pedagogical Method in Teaching Persian Classical Music
  - \* Jessika Kenney, The Unique Centering of Breath and Voice in *Pish-Radif* and its Affects in Internalization and Enactment
  - \* Eyvind Kang, *Pish-Radif* and Musical Imagination
  - \* Payam Yousefi, Teaching the System Before the Canon: The *Pish-Radif*, Early Structural Literacy in Persian Music, and its Long-Term Pedagogic Outcomes
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## **3:30 - 3:40 PM – BREAK**

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### **PANEL 10 – DEBRIEF & OPEN DISCUSSION: REFLECTIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND COLLABORATIVE FUTURES IN IRANIAN MUSIC STUDIES** (60 minutes)

Time: 3:40 – 4:40 PM

Location: Winifred Smith Hall

Chairs: Payam Yousefi, Hesam Abedini

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### **EVENING CONCERT II** (90 minutes)

#### **Keynote Performance by Maestro Ali Akbar Moradi Lamentations and Dance upon the Children of Kaveh Ahangar**

Time: 8:00 – 9:30 PM

Location: Winifred Smith Hall

#### Performers:

- \* Maestro Ali Akbar Moradi, tanbour, setar, vocals
- \* Kourosh Moradi, tanbour, daf
- \* Arash Moradi, tanbour, daf
- \* Mehdi Bagheri, kamancheh





## **ABSTRACTS AND BIOS**

### **CARTOGRAPHIES & INNOVATIONS**

**Notation as Myth: Representations of Prestige and Mystery in the Pedagogy of Iranian Dastgāh Music**

**Jafar Aghabararnia Goudarzi**

This paper offers a semiotic analysis of music notation in the context of Iranian Dastgāh music pedagogy, drawing on Roland Barthes's theory of myth. It approaches notation not as a neutral technical tool, but as a system of signs that produces cultural meaning and symbolic authority. Since the early modern period in Iran, each traditional instrument—such as the tār, santur, and others—has developed its own idiosyncratic notation practices. Rather than converging toward a unified system, notation for each instrument has followed separate trajectories, often marked by personalized symbols, differing logics, and interpretive ambiguity. While these practices may appear as natural byproducts of artistic individuality, they also function as mythic forms in Barthes's sense: signs that naturalize specific cultural ideologies. The study argues that despite its written form, notation in Iranian classical music often preserves a hidden reliance on oral authority and interpretive privilege. It claims to modernize and standardize, yet it often obscures musical knowledge behind cryptic codes that require personal access to a master or insider for full interpretation. In this sense, notation becomes a myth of prestige—a symbolic system

that elevates the status of authors and educators while reinforcing epistemological hierarchies. Ultimately, the paper suggests that music notation in this context plays a dual role: it simultaneously signifies modernity and expertise while masking its oral and hierarchical roots. Through this ambivalence, the act of writing music becomes a cultural performance that encodes power, legacy, and mystique, rather than transparency and accessibility.

## **Bio**

I am a PhD candidate in Cultural Sociology at Islamic Azad University, Tehran, with academic backgrounds in ethnomusicology and Iranian music performance. My research focuses on the pedagogy and semiotics of Iranian classical music, particularly the symbolic dimensions of notation systems. I have published instructional books for the santour and currently direct the Farabi Music Academy in Babol. I also teach music and culture-related courses at various universities. My current project examines the myth-making functions of notation in Iranian musical education.

## **Adapting the Violin: Iranian Musical Innovation and Cultural Negotiation in the 19th and 20th Centuries**

**Parmis Rahmani**

The introduction of the violin to Qajar-era Iran initiated a complex process of musical integration with significant ethnomusicological implications. This research examines how the violin was not merely adopted but fundamentally transformed within Iranian musical practice, creating hybrid forms that reveal the dynamic nature of cultural exchange. While Iranian musicians adapted the instrument to their artistic needs, the violin's presence simultaneously reshaped Persian musical expression, demonstrating the bidirectional nature of cultural adaptation. Through detailed analysis of recordings by three pivotal virtuosos—Parviz Yahaqi, Ali Tajvidi, and Habib-ollah Badiei—this study traces the development of distinctly Iranian violin techniques that diverge significantly from Western classical traditions. The research employs ethnomusicological methods, combining historical documentation with transcription analysis to understand both individual artistic agency and its broader societal impact on musical practices. Central to this “Iranization” process is the violin’s adaptation to the maqam system and microtonal structures fundamental to Persian music. These technical innovations represent more than mechanical adjustments;

they embody cultural negotiations between distinct musical worldviews. The study situates these developments within the broader context of Iranian modernism in the 19th and 20th centuries, exploring how musical transformation both reflected and contributed to wider cultural modernization. By examining how Persian musicians transformed the violin into a vehicle for Iranian musical identity, this research contributes to decolonial approaches in musicology while demonstrating that cultural adaptation is never unidirectional. The violin's Persian story reveals the creative agency of non-Western musicians in shaping their own musical modernities, challenging Western-centric narratives of musical development and offering insights into the complex dynamics of cross-cultural musical exchange.

## **Bio**

Parmis Rahmani (born Tehran, 1995) is an Iranian musician specializing in Persian classical music. She began her musical journey in 2005 with violin, later expanding to gheychak (Persian fiddle) from 2008. Rahmani completed her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Iranian Classical Music at Tehran Art University, specializing in gheychak performance. As an active performer, she has collaborated with renowned ensembles, while also releasing original compositions on international music platforms. Her academic contributions include authoring the instructional book "Mana for Gheychak." Since 2023, Rahmani has been based in Vienna, where she is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Ethnomusicology at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (MDW).

## **Analyzing the Concept of Forūd as a Cadential Gesture in Iranian Classical Music**

**Sina Sanayei**

This article investigates the concept of Forūd as a cadential gesture within the modal framework of Iranian classical music, particularly as articulated in the Radif repertoire. Building on the understanding that the Dastgāh system is a cyclic structure organized around modal and non-modal entities, the study explores how cadential gestures function to reinforce modal coherence and facilitate the return to the system's central modal core, often represented by the Darāmad. While Forūd literally denotes a "descent," its musical application varies in direction and function based on modal context. The study is grounded in a theoretical framework that includes the concept of mode, the structural and functional understanding of

Forūd, and the modal arrangement of the Dastgāh. These concepts provide the basis for analyzing cadential behavior and understanding how modal coherence is established and maintained within the Dastgāh system. Using a qualitative analytical approach, it draws upon selected performances and transcriptions of the Radif—especially those of Mirza Abdollah—as well as classical treatises and modern scholarship. The methodology involves the identification and typological classification of Forūd gestures based on their melodic progression, modal destination, and cadential function. The analysis reveals that Forūd occurs in two primary stages: (1) a return to the modal atmosphere of the base mode, and (2) its tonal reaffirmation. Furthermore, depending on the relative pitch level of the Forūd's origin and destination, three types are identified: descending (Farūd-e Nozulī), stationary (Farūd-e Darjā), and ascending (Farūd-e Şu'ūdī). Certain Gūshehs—such as Hazīn—are shown to serve explicitly cadential roles within this structure. By establishing a typology of Forūd gestures and contextualizing them within the modal and formal logic of the Dastgāh, this study bridges the gap between descriptive music theory and performance practice, contributing to a deeper understanding of cadential behavior in Iranian classical music.

### **Bio**

Sina Sanayei (b. June 26, 1995) is a Setār player and music researcher. He holds an MA in Ethnomusicology from the University of Tehran. His research focuses on Iranian classical music, particularly modal structures and the Dastgāh system. His scholarly work has been published in journals such as the Journal of Performing Arts and Music (University of Tehran) and Rast Musicology Journal.

## **LECTURE-DEMONSTRATION**

### **Conversations Within Boundaries – How Structure Shapes Musical Dialogue** **Rezvan Sayyad**

Conversations Within Boundaries is a lecture-performance that looks at the paradox of improvisation: the way freedom often emerges through structure. Using the Persian dastgah system as the main example, I explore how modes, rhythms, and stylistic rules act like a shared grammar for mu-

sical conversation. Through live kamancheh performance, I move between improvisations that follow these rules closely and those that stretch or break them, creating moments of tension, surprise, and transformation. The exchange, whether between two instruments, a player and a loop, or performer and audience, mirrors the give-and-take of spoken dialogue, where meaning is shaped by both agreement and divergence. With the audience's own prompts woven into the process, this session becomes a shared act of listening, responding, and creating. It is an invitation to hear how improvisation lives in the space between tradition and invention, discipline and play.

### **Bio**

Rezvan Sayyad is a musician originally from Iran and a graduate student of ethnomusicology in Würzburg university. She began learning Kamancheh at the age of 13 and completed her bachelor's degree in music performance before moving to Germany to continue her studies in ethnomusicology. Rezvan's research centers on musical identities shaped by migration and diaspora, particularly within Persian-speaking communities. Alongside her academic work, Rezvan is also a practicing kamancheh player, blending traditional music with contemporary sounds.

## **HYBRIDITY AND NATIONALISM**

### **The Process of Acculturation of Music in Ports: A Case Study of Hybridity Musical Bands from Bandar Abbas**

**Saba Esmaili & Keivan Aghamohseni**

Bandar Abbas, as one of Iran's most prominent port cities, has historically functioned as a hub of cultural exchange due to its unique geopolitical and geographical position. Throughout history, it has served as a point of contact between the locals and migrants from regions such as Africa, India, Portugal, and Spain. These interactions have not only fostered social and economic exchanges but have also facilitated the convergence of diverse musical elements, leading to the emergence of hybrid genres in the region. This study investigates the process of musical acculturation in Bandar Abbas and its role in shaping hybrid musical forms, focusing on musical bands such as Leiva, Mamboleiva, Damahi, Gargop, and Jalboat. Also, two

main questions have formed the study: (1) How has “Bandar Abbasi popular music” developed as a hybrid musical genre, and under what cultural, political, and social conditions has it maintained its continuity? (2) What is the relationship between “Bandar Abbasi popular music” and the mainstream popular music scene in Iran during the 2010s? Influenced by imported cultures and integrating global rhythms and instruments, popular music in Bandar Abbas has given rise to innovative genres that have entered the broader spectrum of Iranian popular music. For instance, Leiva and later Mamboleiva have successfully adapted the traditional rhythms of Leiva ceremonies onto global instruments, producing novel musical forms that maintain local identity while gaining international potential. Bandar Abbasi popular music characterized by distinctive rhythms and accents, this music has not only become a recognized genre within Iran but also exhibits potential for international dissemination. Furthermore, the findings can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of acculturation in the creation of musical genres, its impact on the preservation of cultural identity, and the introduction of new dimensions of Iranian popular music to the global stage.

### **Bio**

I am Saba Esmaili, born in 1998, Santoor player, and I have recently graduated with a master's degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Guilan. My thesis focused on *the process of musical acculturation in ports: a case study of hybrid bands from BandarAbbas*. I am currently a PhD student at Folkwang University of arts, and the topic of the PhD dissertation is: *Musical Hybridity and Identity in BandarAbbas*.

Keivan Aghamohseni (born 1981, Tehran) holds a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, Germany, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Guilan, Iran. He has taught at universities in Germany and Iran, served as Research Director at the Music Museum of Iran, and organized numerous international workshops. His publications explore applied ethnomusicology, Iranian popular and folk music, and musical identity in migration. He is the author of *Football Chants in Iran (2022)*, a study of fan singing culture, its social meanings, and its role in expressing ethnic and local identities.

## “New Music” as a Possibility for Thinking “the National as such” as an Intersubjective World

**Sina Sedghi**

Prevailing scholarship often conceptualizes nationhood in static cultural terms, treating notions such as tradition, authenticity, and national identity in Iran as given. This paper provides a phenomenological framework that reconceives nationhood as a genetically constituted and historically unfolding horizon of meaning, grounded in subjective/intersubjective constitution. Focusing on the oeuvre of Alireza Mashayekhi, founder of “New Music” in Iran, it asks: How does Mashayekhi’s “New Music” constitute nationhood as an intersubjective world that reveals the meaning of modern Iran? Situated within a post-Kantian framework that traces transcendental idealism through Husserl’s phenomenology to Heidegger’s radicalization, this study employs the notion “human world,” denoting the correlation between the world, as embracing all experiences, and the subject, as constitutive meaning-making act. Employing Husserlian methodology, e.g. epoche, transcendental reduction, imaginative and eidetic variation, to bracket the natural attitude and run a philosophical approach to analyze the meaning of ‘the national as such’ and its relation to music, in a phenomenological sense. To achieve this objective, three works by Alireza Mashayekhi have been selected to elucidate the subject: *Shur Op. 15*, *East–West Op. 45*, *Symphony No. 9, Op. 201*. It addresses three interrelated questions: (1) how does *Shur Op. 15*, via imaginative variation, reframe the *Dastgah* and reveal Iranian music as a perspectival phenomenon demanding reflective reencounter? (2) In what ways does *East–West Op. 45*, analyzed through eidetic variation, manifest dialogic sound-gestalts, noise, and electronic techniques that articulate an intercultural nationhood as reciprocal and non-hierarchical? (3) How do novel development techniques in *Symphony No. 9* illuminate nationhood’s genetic constitution as an intercultural, historically evolving world? Findings demonstrate “New Music”, founded through Mashayekhi’s works, as a phenomenological intervention reconceiving nationhood as inseparable from ‘human world’ and revealing it as an ever-unfolding horizon of meaning of modern Iran, contributing rigorous philosophical methods and analysis to phenomenological music studies.

### **Bio**

Sina Sedghi, pianist and composer, was born in Sanandaj, Iran, in 1989. He studied composition under Alireza Mashayekhi and piano with Rozita Shaker. Since 2008 he has been a member of the Tehran Music Group and

the Iranian Orchestra for New Music, with which he developed his career as soloist and composer from 2013 onward. His chamber works premiered at the Hans Eisler Conservatory, Berlin, in 2014 and 2016. His book *Stained Window Glass* (2016) received the “Best Book of the Year” award from the Iran Music House. His current projects investigate music ontology, the ontological distinction between “New Music” and “Contemporary Music,” and the relation between music and thought in contemporary Iran. From 2016 to 2020 he also served as executive director of the “New Music in Iran” project alongside Alireza Mashayekhi.

## SOUND AND STATE POWER

Iran’s “Hyperground”: How New Media Technology Unraveled the Binary of State-Sanctioned versus Underground Culture

**Nahid Siamdoust**

This paper examines the process through which new digital technology and expatriate television networks combined in the early 2000s to enable the creation of a sort of a cultural space in Iran that I’m calling “hyperground.” This was a space that surpassed the binary registers of permitted cultural fare on the one hand and non-permitted underground culture on the other. In effect, this hyperground media space undid two decades of the state’s control on what it deemed acceptable culture for public consumption. In tracing the appearance of certain hyperground media content in the general public, I argue that this “third space” for the first time allowed – on a national level – the mass consumption of media productions that actively pushed the boundaries of the permissible within the structures of the Islamic Republic. Through centering my discussion on the pop band Barobax’s track “Soosan Khanoom,” my paper shows how these highly popular pieces surpassed state ministries’ inertia in giving permits, elucidating the complex ways in which the boundaries of the “permissible” were negotiated in post-revolutionary Iran’s complex media ecology.

### **Bio**

Nahid Siamdoust is Assistant Professor of Media and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran* (Stanford, 2017), and co-edited

tor of *Iran Amplified: One Hundred Years of Music and Society* (Ilex, HUP, 2025). Her recent commentaries have appeared in *The New York Times*, *New Lines Magazine*, *Foreign Policy*, *BBC*, and *NPR*. She runs the *Iranian Studies* podcast series titled *IranCast*.

## Music, Ideology, and Youth: A Case Study of the song “Salām Farmāndeh” and the Evolution of “Soruds” in Contemporary Iran

**Arash Ahmadzadeh**

This article examines “Salām Farmāndeh” as a case study of “soruds” (state-sponsored songs produced to advance ideological narratives and maintain cultural hegemony). It argues that “Salām Farmāndeh” represents a significant shift in the Islamic Republic’s cultural strategy: blending religious themes, nationalist sentiment, and popular music elements to mobilize younger generations, particularly Generations A and Z. Through qualitative analysis of its musical structure, lyrical content, and state-led promotional campaigns, the paper demonstrates how the song operates as an ideological state apparatus (ISA)—a tool for reinforcing loyalty to the principles of Velāyat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) and the Islamic Republic’s ideological foundations. Guided by Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and Althusser’s concept of ISAs, this study reveals how contemporary soruds like “Salām Farmāndeh” reflect the regime’s adaptation of propaganda techniques to secure consent, not merely through coercion, but via emotional, cultural, and generational appeal. The findings contribute to broader discussions of the intersection of music, power, and ideological reproduction in modern Iran.

### **Bio**

Arash Ahmadzadeh is a researcher, translator, and classical guitar and music history professor at the Conservatoire of Breuille, France. Since completing his master’s degree, his research has focused on the intersection of power and music in the Baroque era and in post-revolutionary Iran. He is also interested in language, translation, and the cultural and theoretical issues surrounding them.

# The Politics of Musical Participation: An Ethnographic Research on the Situation of Female Singers in Post-Revolutionary Iran

**Yalda Yazdani**

The position of female singers in Iran has been shaped by a combination of political regulation, cultural norms, family expectations, and socio-economic conditions. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the legal ban on solo female singing in public settings imposed significant restrictions on women's participation in music. However, these constraints interact with other influences, including family attitudes, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, education, social class, and regional differences, all of which affect access to musical training, performance opportunities, and audiences. This research draws on ethnographic fieldwork, including interviews, participant observation, and documentation of performance practices, to examine how female singers navigate these interrelated challenges. It identifies a range of strategies women employ to sustain their musical engagement: performing in private or women-only gatherings, embedding singing within socially approved events, sharing music through digital platforms, and participating in underground or cross-border collaborations. The research also addresses the involvement of female singers in recent protest movements, particularly those associated with the slogan "Woman–Life–Freedom." In these movements, music has served as both a medium of personal expression and an act of political resistance. By considering the interaction between legal prohibitions, social structures, and individual agency, this research demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of Iranian women who continue to sing despite multiple layers of restriction. It highlights how their voices challenge established boundaries, contributing to broader discussions on gender, cultural expression, and artistic resistance in post-revolutionary Iran.

## **Bio**

Dr. Yalda Yazdani is an Iranian ethnomusicologist, filmmaker, and curator based in Berlin. In 2025, she completed her PhD in Musicology at the University of Siegen, Germany. From 2017 to 2023, she founded and curated the music festivals Female Voice of Iran, Female Voice of Afghanistan, and Female Voice of Kurdistan in collaboration with Contemporary Opera Berlin. In 2024, she curated the Qashqai Female Voices event series in collaboration with the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne and, in 2024, Ukrainian Female Voices, in collaboration with the Ukrainian Institute in partnership with transmusikale e.V. Her primary work centers on highlighting female voices internationally, especially those from West Asia and North Africa.

# The Hypothetical Concert: The Philosophy of Performance in the Absence of the Audience

**Mohammad Moridvand**

In December 2024, a musical event titled the “Hypothetical Concert,” featuring vocalist Parastoo Ahmadi and several accompanying musicians, took place at a historic caravanserai in Iran. Unlike conventional performances, this concert took place without a physical audience present. The artists pre-recorded the performance and released it on YouTube, and the event simulated a live and collective experience through the active engagement of viewers on social media, who synchronized their viewing of the concert at the announced time. In this paper, I build on Heidegger’s account of presence and absence to argue that the “Hypothetical Concert” is not merely a musical event but a complex philosophical and social phenomenon in which the physical absence of the audience creates the foundation for a renewed, reconfigured mode of presence. The vocalist’s self-chosen attire, the selection of protest songs, and direct engagement with governmental restrictions turned the concert into a symbol of resistance and dissent. These choices, in turn, sparked wide-ranging legal and cultural responses, underscoring the event’s profound social impact. This audience-free staging reflects the contemporary condition of Iranian society. The “Hypothetical Concert” and reactions, such as judicial intervention and censorship, attempt to deny a reality that is already in effect. This absence stems from the ongoing prohibition of women’s singing in public concert settings. This ban on women’s vocal performances, alongside compulsory dress codes, has generated new vocabularies of performance that blur boundaries between live-streamed, non-attended events and offline releases.

## **Bio**

My name is Mohammad Moridvand, and I am a Master’s student in Ethnomusicology at Tehran University of Art.

## LECTURE-DEMONSTRATIONS

### Polgah: A Compositional Framework Rooted in Iranian Modal Thinking Negin Nazem Zomorodi

This lecture-performance presents PolGāh, an original compositional and theoretical framework that emerges from the modal intersections between Persian classical music and Spanish Flamenco. Drawing from five principal Persian Dastgāhs—Shur, Mahur, Homayoun, Chahargah, and Nava—and their expressive and structural affinities with selected Flamenco palos, this project proposes a new genre that bridges two rich oral traditions. PolGāh, a portmanteau of Palo and Dastgāh, offers a hybrid modal system in which melodic contour, tonal centers, cadential tones, and improvisatory potential are carefully synthesized. Grounded in both scholarly research and creative practice, the presentation integrates live piano excerpts and recorded materials to demonstrate the emotional, rhythmic, and scalar relationships across these traditions. Special attention is given to modal fluidity (modulation within dastgāhs), ornamentation (such as tahrir and Flamenco melismas), and rhythmic correspondences between Persian reng and Flamenco compás. Each PolGāh mode represents a new sonic identity—where Persian expressiveness meets Flamenco dynamism. By situating this work within the diasporic and intercultural experience, the project explores how hybrid musical identities can be both rooted and transformative. The lecture-performance invites audiences to hear, see, and feel how compositional innovation can arise through dialogical engagement between traditions, offering new directions for pedagogy, performance, and cross-cultural music creation.

#### Bio

Negin Zomorodi is an Iranian composer, improviser, and educator whose work fuses Persian musical traditions with contemporary innovation. Currently a PhD candidate at Universitat Politècnica de València, she also holds a Master's in Composition from Tehran University of Art, and degrees in Textile Engineering from Tehran Polytechnic. Her works have been performed internationally by ensembles such as the Prague Symphonic Orchestra, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, and Nordic Black Theatre. Founder of Gozar Music Academy in Tehran, Negin is also a published author and lecturer whose interdisciplinary research explores cross-cultural modality, improvisation, and the poetics of identity.

## ORGANIZED ROUNDTABLE

### Why Community Building Matters: Iranian Music Scholarship and Composition Across Borders

**Armaghan Fakhraeirad, Niloufar Nourbakhsh, Laudan Nooshin**

#### Roundtable Abstract

This panel brings together organizers of community-based initiatives in Iranian music scholarship and composition to reflect on why community-building, especially across borders and beyond formal institutions, matters and what it takes to sustain it, particularly for Iranians living through ongoing socio-political upheavals and collective traumas. Drawing on the formation and growth of the Sonic Tehran Project, Iranian Female Composers, and the Iranian Ethnomusicology Network, speakers share candid experiences of creating platforms for mentorship, collaboration, visibility, and resource-sharing. Rather than offering a prescriptive model, the conversation foregrounds community-building as intellectual and ethical labor, shaped by care and infrastructure and by the constant negotiation of challenges such as access, sustainability, and unequal conditions of participation. The session concludes with an open Q&A.

#### Bios

Laudan Nooshin is Professor of Music at City St George's, University London (UK). Her research interests include contemporary developments in Iranian traditional and popular musics, urban sound studies, with a focus on Tehran, music and sound in Iranian cinema, music and gender, and sound in museums and heritage sites. Laudan has published widely and was awarded the 2015 British Forum for Ethnomusicology Book Prize for her monograph *Iranian Classical Music: The Discourses and Practice of Creativity* (Ashgate). In 2021, Laudan established the Sonic Tehran Network (<https://www.sonictehran.com/>) and is currently writing a book on the sounds of Tehran. In 2023-24 she was seconded to the design consultancy Charcoalblue, working on a project on sound and equity in public space. Laudan is currently in receipt of a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship (2024-27) for a project exploring the musical and cultural lives of Polish exile-refugees in Iran during World War 2.

Niloufar Nourbakhsh: Described as “darkly lyrical” by the New York Times

and “séduisante” by Le Monde, an awardee of 2023 Chamber Music America Commissioning Grant, a winner of 2022 Beth Morrison Projects Next Generation Competition, and a 2019 recipient of Opera America’s Discovery Grant, Niloufar Nourbakhsh’s music has been performed at numerous festivals and venues including BBC Proms, Ojai Music Festival, Mostly Mozart at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and Philharmonie de Paris. A founding member and co-artistic director of Iranian Female Composers Association, Nourbakhsh is a strong advocate of music education and equal opportunities. She currently teaches theory and composition at Longy School of Music of Bard College and Berklee College of Music. Niloufar holds a doctorate degree from Stony Brook University and regularly performs with her Ensemble Decipher.

Armaghan Fakhraeirad is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation, *Sounding Port-Oil Encounters*, examines how the rise and decline of port and oil infrastructures have shaped musical traditions and sonic memory on Iran’s Persian Gulf coast. Based on multi-sited fieldwork in Bushehr, Abadan, and Khorramshahr, her work explores how music in these liminal urban spaces bears contradictory legacies of war, migration, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and the enduring impacts of Black slavery. Framed within the Indian Ocean world, she shows how Gulf musics act as vessels for entangled memories, connectivity, and cultural change.

## **POLITICS, CONFLICT, AND SOUND**

**Subversive Timbre: Acoustic Oppression and Sonic Defiance Among Kurds in Iran**

**Ashkan Nazari**

This article examines timbre as a site of defiance and resistance within the musical and political landscape of Kurdish communities in Iran. It argues that the sonic materiality of voice itself—its timbre beyond semantic content or lyrics—becomes a contested space under autocratic regimes. The Iranian government’s fixation on vocal timbre, as part of its broader acoustic oppression—the state’s multi-layered control over sonic life—reveals a deeper anxiety about sonic identity and its potential for political subver-

sion. Focusing on the banned Kurdish singer Naser Razazi, the study explores how his distinctive timbre functioned as a sonic symbol of defiance. Even under censorship, Razazi's timbre was neither silenced nor erased; instead, it was reproduced, imitated, and circulated, transforming vocal mimicry into a collective act of subversion. This phenomenon suggests that timbre itself can carry political agency and serve as a sonic counter-hegemony. Drawing on ethnomusicology, sound studies, and political anthropology, the article theorizes subversive timbre—a concept that highlights how material qualities of the voice exceed aesthetics to embody political struggle, cultural memory, and collective resistance. Through archival research, interviews, and sonic analysis, the study not only documents the state's attempts to suppress Kurdish vocal timbres but also illuminates how Kurdish singers and audiences subvert these efforts and create an aural space of solidarity. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on the entanglement of sound, power, and resistance, while offering new insights into the politics of timbre under authoritarian regimes.

## **Bio**

Ashkan, a Kurdish-Iranian musician, setar and tar player, composer and researcher, is a PhD student in ethnomusicology at Stanford. He holds a BA in music from the University of Tehran and an MA in ethnomusicology from Tehran University of Art. For over 15 years, his research has focused on Kurdish classical and folk musics as well as Iranian classical music. At Stanford, he explores intersections of music with genocide, war, violence, Islam, intellectual movements, and Kurdish identity.

**“What does it mean for this sound to mean?” Reflection, Humor, and Resisting the Auditory Regime of War in the 12-Day Iran-Israel Conflict**

**Hannaneh Akbarpour**

The summer 2025 Iran-Israel conflict created an unprecedented soundscape for young Iranians. Within a few hours, the sound of civil life gave way to the ear-shattering roar of small armed UAVs, anti-aircraft fire, and fighter jets. For civilians, who found themselves immersed in the sonic environment of war, sound detection became a crucial tool for unraveling the intensity of the unfolding danger. Amidst my digitally mediated war-time encounter with friends and acquaintances in Iran, I faced recurrent humorous remarks about their newly developed ability to understand war sounds; for example, “I hadn't penciled in ‘Distinguishing UAVs from an-

ti-aircraft' into my plans for the New Year!" Through a digital ethnography, this paper explores citizens' reflections on and frustrations with the rapid shift in their ability to interpret—their acoustemological engagement with—wartime sounds that surfaced through their humorous comments. While existing scholarship on sonic experience of war largely focuses on how wartime sounds elicit a range of affective reactions (e.g. Goodman, 2012 and Daughtry, 2015), I draw attention to the role of reflective responses to sonic experience of war and wartime acoustemological engagement. My ethnographic work reveals that beyond the immediate sonic encounter, the effect of the wartime sounds should be viewed as the result of reflecting on how certain sounds come to carry meaning in a rapidly changing soundscape — what I call, in conjunction with Althusser's epistemological rupture (1965), acoustemological rupture. This paper aligns with critiques of sound studies for privileging material—affective processes over representation and signification (Kane 2015).

## **Bio**

Hannaneh Akbarpour is a Ph.D. student in a combined Ethnomusicology and Film and Media Studies program. Her academic interests focus on the existential and affective dimensions of sound and music, exploring their capacity to articulate modes of existence and act as means of resistance within the nexus of power and religion. Her research explores how music-making functions as a potent tool for opposing extremism, analyzing its role in shaping the dynamics of the anti-ISIS conflict in Iraq.

## **Making it as Musicians in Iran: Cadancemag and the Question of Necessity of Going through ERSHAD in Today's Iran**

### **Siavash Rokni**

Cadancemag is an Iranian independent online music magazine that began its work as a Telegram channel and later Instagram in 2018. The magazine looks at what it now coins subaltern current (Jaryan-e Far-ie) in music in Iran. It covers diverse genres and types of music from those that are permitted to those that are not permitted by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic discipline (ERSHAD) in Iran as well as music produced by the Iranian diaspora. The magazine continued its work until 2022 and paused during the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising before returning online in 2023 with a new format of YouTube video interview with an actor in the subaltern current. This paper answers the following question: How did Cadancemag's DIY ethos change after the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising in terms of its

content and editorial direction? It begins by problematizing DIY in the context of the post 1979 revolution in Iran. It then looks at the evolution of the magazine through different types of content that it produced before its pause in 2022. I finally look at the new format of the magazine and its direction after the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising by analyzing the discourse of its opinion editorial pieces that it released on Youtube.

## **Bio**

Siavash Rokni is a postdoctoral researcher at McGill's Schulich school of Music. He holds a PhD. In Communication at Université de Québec à Montréal and is a lecturer in Communication History and Sociology at the same university. Siavash's research looks at the way cultural hybridity is used as a tool to negotiate with power in Iran. He is currently exploring the relationship between digital capitalism and DIY practices in Iran and the ways artists use digital media to create parallel economies and disconnect from the culture industry apparatus in the country.

# **MUSIC AND VISUALIZATION ACROSS TIME & MEDIA**

## **Sonic Performance in Safavid Monumental Architecture**

**Nima Farzaneh**

The Safavid era (1501–1736) represents a pivotal period in Iranian history, marked by significant achievements in art, architecture, and scientific innovation. Naqsh-e-Jahan Square in Isfahan, the apex of Safavid urban design, comprises four monumental structures that collectively define the spatial and sensory identity of the complex. On its southern edge, the Imam Mosque exemplifies an architectural environment with a tranquil and intelligible soundscape, enabling synchronized prayer rituals and public sermons for gatherings of up to 15,000 people. Ali Qapu Palace, with its renowned music room, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque as a space for teaching and contemplation, and the bazaar portal connecting the square to the urban core, each contribute distinct acoustic qualities to this ensemble. This study investigates the mechanisms of sound energy exchange and decay patterns shaped by the volumetric and spatial configurations of Safavid architectural typologies. Through the analysis of parameters such as scale, acoustic coupling, material selection, and ornamental design, the research

examines how these spaces were adaptively designed to produce specific sonic environments. By integrating architectural analysis with acoustic modeling, this work explores how soundscape design supported the functional, ritualistic, and social purposes of each structure. More broadly, the study aims to elucidate the relationship between architectural form, acoustic performance, and intended use in Safavid urban and sacred spaces, highlighting sound as a fundamental yet often overlooked dimension of historical architectural design.

## **Bio**

Nima Farzaneh is an architect who is now a PhD candidate at Stanford University's Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA), where his research sits at the intersection of architectural acoustics, psychoacoustics, and immersive media. His work explores how sound and spatial acoustics shape perception, emotion, and experiences of awe, particularly in monumental, sacred, and historical spaces. Combining experimental methods, virtual acoustics, and sound art, he studies auditory perceptual inference and self-transcendent states through sound alone. Nima's practice bridges scientific research and artistic experimentation, spanning laboratory studies, archaeological acoustics, and immersive audiovisual installations aimed at understanding—and designing—the sonic conditions that foster reflection, transformation, and well-being.

## **Visualizing Music: The Rise of Musicians as Public Figures in Iranian Postcards of the Early 20th Century**

### **Amirali Ardekanian**

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Iranian musicians—ranging from mutribs performing in public venues to Amale-ye Tarab attached to the royal court—emerged as one of the only artistic professions to achieve sustained visual presence in a rapidly modernizing media landscape. Their ascent to prominence coincided with the introduction of the picture postcard to Iran (c. 1900–1925), a mass-produced, highly portable medium that integrated local portraiture with global commercial photography practices. While the postcard's popularity is well documented, its role in constructing and disseminating the public identity of musicians has received no scholarly attention. These images situated musicians within multiple, and often overlapping, visual registers: as ethnographic “types” reflecting colonial and orientalist taxonomies; as recognizable characters em-

bedded in everyday life and ceremonial culture; and as proto-celebrities, whose likenesses circulated among middle- and upper-class consumers. In the process, postcards not only mirrored existing hierarchies of taste but actively participated in reshaping them—granting musicians a symbolic capital that exceeded their historically marginal or stigmatized social position. The result was a reframing of musicians as both cultural agents and political actors, particularly in the context of the Constitutional Revolution, when music functioned as a vehicle for civic engagement, political expression, and national identity formation. This phenomenon aligns with broader global patterns in the early twentieth century, in which new visual media enabled performers to transcend the physical limits of live performance and inhabit a mediated public sphere. In Iran, the postcard offered a rare platform through which musicians could be recognized as modern cultural figures, embedded in both national and transnational circuits of representation. As such, the visual archive of musicians in postcards not only illuminates the socio-political functions of music in late Qajar society but also situates Iranian musicians within a wider history of modern celebrity and the democratization of artistic visibility.

### **Bio**

Amirali Ardekanian is a Ph.D. student in the Visual Studies (Art History) program at the University of California, Irvine. His research explores the intertwined histories of image-making, cultural memory, and heritage in Iran, with a particular focus on Qajar-era visual culture, the history of photography, and the modern reception of ancient Iranian history, art, and architecture. His broader interests include archival practices, history of the music recording industry, material culture, and the role of visual media in shaping collective memory, national identity, and cultural historiography. Beyond his academic research, Amirali is an avid collector of Iranian ephemera and photographic materials.

### **Authors, Patrons, and Sound: Visualizing Music and Manuscript Culture in Iran** **Mohammad Sahraei**

This paper explores the visual representation of music in Iranian manuscripts from the 9th to the 19th century, focusing on the roles of authorship, patronage, and artistic expression across historical periods. Drawing from my master's thesis, *Iranian Music Manuscripts: Authors, Patrons, and Historical Changes in Illustration and Illumination*, this study investigates

how music was visually conceptualized—not through notation alone, but through diagrams, cycles, tables, and ornamental motifs that embody theoretical, pedagogical, and symbolic functions. Focusing on three major intellectual periods—the Scholastic, the Systematist, and the Khorāsāni-‘Erāqi schools—I analyze illustrations of intervals, rhythmic patterns, mode cycles (*adwār*), and instrumentation, alongside decorative illuminations that mark textual structure. These elements reveal a unique manuscript culture where sound is translated into visual language. Particular attention is given to the Systematist period, during which the most advanced forms of visual music theory emerged, including full-scale modal and rhythmic diagrams and early examples of legible notation. Rather than examining music performance or oral transmission, this study highlights the culture of Iranian music manuscripts: how knowledge was shaped by manuscript-making, how authors and scribes interacted with visual space, and how illustrations were adapted to reflect evolving musical thought. Through this lens, I argue that Iranian music manuscripts should be understood not only as vessels of content but also as active participants in the intellectual and artistic life of their time. This paper offers a multidisciplinary contribution to Persian manuscript studies, historical musicology, and the study of knowledge transmission in the Islamic world.

## **Bio**

Mohammad Sahraei is an Iranian musician, ethnomusicologist, and manuscript researcher based in Halifax, Canada. He holds Master’s degrees in Ethnomusicology (Art University of Tehran) and Manuscript Culture Arts (University of Hamburg). A classically trained tar player and Radif practitioner, he also specializes in Khorāsāni folk music as a *dotār* performer. Mohammad has performed internationally and leads intercultural ensembles including Open Borders and the International Music Project. He is the founder of the Miniature Music Museum and has composed music for film, festivals, and traditional ensembles. His work bridges scholarship, oral tradition, and creative expression across cultures and disciplines.

## **Political Approaches within Music and Sound in Iranian War Films after 1979** **Ali Montazeri & Vahid Valikhani**

This paper analyzes Iranian war films to show the ways in which political ideas have used music and sound to build common feelings and beliefs in Iranian society. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that bridges musi-

cology and film studies, the analysis brings together the nuances and poetics of sound and image. Particular attention is given to musical aspects such as compositional techniques, musical styles, and instrumentation. The study investigates the use and structure of sound in films produced over three decades after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. While most film scores of this period served to promote war, glorify martyrdom, and inspire youth toward militarized ideals, a smaller number of productions sought to employ music and sound as vehicles for reflection, critique, and subtle resistance to the glorification of war. The case studies include *Bashu*, the *Little Stranger* 1985, *Journey to Chazzabeh* 1996, and *Goodbye, Friend* 2003. These films were produced by three distinct institutions within Iran, which represent three different levels of proximity to the regime's ideology. At one extreme, *Bashu*, the *Little Stranger*, stands in clear opposition to the revolutionary government and faces censorship and prolonged bans despite its humanistic and anti-war messages. In contrast, *Goodbye, Friend*, produced nearly fifteen years after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, reflects a viewpoint more closely aligned with state ideology—continuing to promote war and reinforce radical narratives surrounding it. Meanwhile, *Journey to Chazzabeh* occupies a middle ground between these two extremes. The study illuminates the role of music and sound in Iranian cinema as both an artistic component and a cultural-political force that shapes collective memory and influences national consciousness.

## **Bio**

Ali Montazeri is an Iranian composer, *târ* player, and music teacher. He received a master's degree in composition from the Art University in Tehran in 2006. He was awarded the best thesis of the year at the Art University in 2006. After graduation, Ali worked as the instructor of "Harmony," "Theory of Music," and "Form in Iranian Music" in the music department of the Art University. In 2016, he received a DMA in composition from Texas Tech University. Since 2023, he has been working as the Director of the Hurley Music Library at Centenary College of Louisiana.

Vahid Valikhani is a lens-based artist and film studies scholar. He holds a Master of Arts in Film Studies from the University of South Florida, a Master of Fine Arts in Photography from the University of Florida, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from the Art University of Isfahan. Vahid's scholarly work centers on archival materials, including film and photography, to explore themes of shifting cultural identities and the marginalization of disenfranchised communities.

## ORGANIZED PANEL

### Jewish Music in 20th Century Iran: Aesthetic, Intercultural, and Interfaith Dialogues

#### Panel Abstract

Throughout their over 2500-years-long history in Persia, Jews have resourcefully contributed to Iranian musicking. Although their roles have been multiple and multifaceted, Neydavood family beyond the figure of Morteza, including Bala Khan, Musa Khan, and Khanomjan Studies on Jewish musical practices in Iran are in the single digits and wrongfully portray the community as insular and disconnected, their practices as derivative subsets of established styles rather than natural results of continuous cultural engagement with the wider community. This panel challenges these assumptions, proposing an alternative reading of Jewish musical activity in the 20th-century Iranian cultural sphere by highlighting intercultural and interfaith adaptations and aesthetic continuums through contextualised analyses, framed in a discussion that accounts for locality, trans-locality, transnationality, and diaspora. Based on mixed method analyses—including musical and textual analysis, ethnography, oral history, and family archives—and told through key figures like Younes Dardashti and the Neydavood family, our accounts highlight the fluidity of Jewish musical experiences and contributions; their relationships with Muslim, Zoroastrian, and global Jewish practices, aesthetics, and themes; and the role of geographical space and cultural contexts in musical meaning-making and identity performance. The first paper examines monājāt as a distinctly interfaith prayer in Iran by investigating the recording of the renowned ḥazzan (cantor) and musician Younes Dardashti performing monājāt as part of a Jewish Selihot (penitential prayers) service. The second scrutinises Esfahani performances of the para-liturgical Jewish Shirā (singing, poetry) repertoire, analysed cross-contextually and historically as a practice that—by blending Jewish, Persian, and Esfahani cultural tropes, recontextualised in the diaspora—exemplifies the complexity of Judeo-Persian belonging and identity. The last paper focuses on the musical contributions of the Neydavood family beyond the figure of Morteza, including Bala Khan, Musa Khan, and Khanomjan to assess Jewish contribution to Iranian cultural heritage from the early 20th century to the modern day.

## “That together we would devise sweet counsel”: Younes Dardashti’s Monājāt and Musical Interfaith Dialogues.

**Hadas Bram**

The direct and unmediated path to God has long been a subject of intellectual and spiritual interest in different religions. In the Book of Psalms, the verse “that together we would devise sweet counsel and walk unto the house of God in company (asher yaḥdāv namtiq sod, be-veit Elohim nehal-lech be-ragesh)” (Psalms 55:15) portrays an intimate, sensual communion with God. The phrase *hamtaqāt sod* (sweet counsel) can be understood as a poetic Hebrew equivalent to the Arabic-Persian term *monājāt*. *Monājāt* is a central notion in Islamic thought, mysticism, and prayer, literally translated as “intimate, confidential dialogue (with God)”. This lecture examines a rare recording of the renowned ḥazzan (cantor) and musician Younes Dardashti performing *monājāt* as part of a Jewish *Seliḥot* (penitential prayers) service. Through literary and musical analysis, this lecture examines the diffusion of *monājāt* into Iranian Jewish tradition. It also presents the first annotated translation of a Judeo-Persian performance of this genre. This case study highlights *monājāt* as a distinctly interfaith prayer in Iran, holding significance not only in Islam but also in Zoroastrianism and Judaism. The lecture further presents Dardashti as a key figure in interfaith exchanges of sacred music, highlighting his dual role as a performer of both Persian art music and Jewish sacred music. His mastery of the Persian *radīf* (Art Music) and his innovations within Jewish liturgical tradition reflect a dynamic process of cross-cultural adaptation, underscoring an aesthetic continuum among Persianate religious traditions. Finally, by analyzing Dardashti’s *monājāt*, the lecture contributes to broader discussions on intercultural and interfaith encounters among Persianate Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.

### **Bio**

Hadas H. Bram is an aspiring scholar, artist, and musician born in Jerusalem. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Ethnomusicology at Yale University. She holds a B.A. and M.A. in Arabic Language and Literature and Musicology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her work bridges ethnomusicology, sociolinguistics, philology, critical theory, and comparative religion. She is particularly interested in the intersections of cultural production, sound, language, and transcendence—especially in Muslim and Jewish contexts. Beyond academia, Hadas is a *santūr* player, a vocalist, and an independent music producer.

## The Shira of Esfahan: Locality, “Be-Longing”, and Palimpsestic Presents in a Regional Judeo-Persian Repertoire

**Edoardo Marcarini**

Diasporas inhabit complex timescapes where multiple presents, pasts, and possible futures collide. Similarly, locality is not anchored to a single geography, but is fluidly reproduced as memory, nostalgia, and embodied practice continually remake the grounds that define community. At different historical nodes, Iranian Jews have sonically negotiated presence and present, mobilising songs to signify cultural belonging to a palimpsestic layering of here and there, then and now. Through ethnographic data and music analysis, this study demonstrates that the resignifications of the para-liturgical Judeo-Efahani shira repertoire function as a framework to negotiate belonging between Iran, Esfahan, Israel, and transnational cultural and social networks. Through multiple sonic inscriptions of locality as a present, geographically bound affective structure on the repertoire, these songs articulate non-linear, palimpsestic temporalities in which traces of memories, practices, and past significations resurface in contemporary reimaginings. Examined at different spatial-temporal nodes, the repertoire’s musical structures, textual themes, and cultural contexts reveal overlapping desires of participation and emancipation that characterise the diasporic condition. Drawing on Appadurai’s phenomenological understanding of locality as a structure of feeling, this paper argues that sonic reimaginings produce feelings of “be-longing”, belonging in the present by being in longing for the past as the community re-gathers shaping new affinities. The study proposes a model for understanding how diasporic communities inhabit the present through sound, memory, and ritualised performance, mobilising nostalgia as a social force building community.

### **Bio**

Edoardo Marcarini is a PhD candidate in the Music Department of SOAS University of London with a background in ethnomusicology and popular music performance. His research explores the current musical repertoires of Iranian Jews in Israel, and their relevance in the performance of Iranian-ness and the expression of identity, memory, and nostalgia.

## The Neydavoods: A Musical Family Story Beyond Morteza Khan

**Alan Niku**

The study of the classical music of Iran has highlighted the contributions of many masters of the genre, among them the Jewish musician, composer, and tar player Morteza Neydavood. But less known are other members of his family, including Bala Khan, Musa Khan, and Khanomjan, all of whom were masters in their own right. Such an omission limits our understanding of Jewish contributions to Iranian classical music to a token individual—but with an examination of the stories, primary sources, and texts gathered through research and firsthand accounts, we can gain a better understanding of the expansive contributions of Jews to Iranian Classical Music, and to the fabric of Iranian society in general. By examining the accounts of other members of the musical Neydavood family, from their importance in the Qajar Court to their continued relevance to today's Iranian music and culture, which has been largely ignored, we will demonstrate that the important role of Iranian Jews in preserving the traditional music of Iran—and by extension its very cultural heritage—does not end in the early 20th century, but continues into the modern day.

### **Bio**

Alan Niku is a filmmaker, writer, and scholar of Mizrahi culture from San Luis Obispo, California. A native speaker of Persian, he speaks, deciphers, and translates Judeo-Persian manuscripts, Judeo-Median languages, and Jewish Neo-Aramaic, while eliciting and gathering field recordings. He is also a musician, playing the tar, setar, guitar, and violin/kamancheh, teaches history and Jewish heritage, and seeks to educate the world about the underrepresented Middle Eastern cultures through his writing and films. He is interested in the liturgies and paraliturgical poetry of Iranian and Kurdish Jews, along with their historical figures and connections with other communities in the region.

## LECTURE-PERFORMANCES

### Khorāsānī Echoes: A Solo Dotār Performance and Introduction to Khorāsānī Musical Traditions

**Mohammad Sahraei**

This solo performance features the dotār, a long-necked lute central to the musical life of northeastern Iran, especially in the Khorāsān region. As a practitioner of this tradition, I will present selected instrumental and vocal pieces that reflect the region's rich expressive language, including maqām-based melodies, narrative forms, and rhythmic idioms rooted in local folklore. The performance will be accompanied by a brief spoken introduction highlighting the cultural and musical characteristics of both Northern and Eastern Khorāsānī music, such as their oral transmission, poetic content, and improvisatory techniques. This offering aims to share a living musical heritage and invite reflection on regional identity, memory, and continuity.

#### **Bio**

Mohammad Sahraei is an Iranian musician, ethnomusicologist, and manuscript researcher based in Halifax, Canada. He holds Master's degrees in Ethnomusicology (Art University of Tehran) and Manuscript Culture Arts (University of Hamburg). A classically trained tar player and Radif practitioner, he also specializes in Khorāsānī folk music as a dotār performer. Mohammad has performed internationally and leads intercultural ensembles including Open Borders and the International Music Project. He is the founder of the Miniature Music Museum and has composed music for film, festivals, and traditional ensembles. His work bridges scholarship, oral tradition, and creative expression across cultures and disciplines.

### The Last Pomegranate of the World

**Sirvan Manhoobi**

Inspired by Baxtiar Ali's novel *The Last Pomegranate of the World*, I composed this piece as a musical reflection on its profound narrative. The novel tells the story of a Kurdish father who, after spending twenty years in pris-

on, is released and begins a desperate search for his only son. Along this journey, the reader encounters the tragedies and injustices endured by the Kurdish people. As a Kurd, the story resonated deeply with me, sparking the creation of this work, which draws heavily on the musical language of my heritage. The composition is based on the Garyan dance—a well-known Kurdish dance characterized by a distinctive 7-beat cycle (3-2-2)—and is arranged for Oud, fretless bass guitar, and percussion. It unfolds in three sections, each inspired by one of the three characters in the novel who share the same name: Serias Sobhdam. The piece begins with an introduction of free improvisation based on the Shour maqam. The first section is set in the Shour Maqam on G, with subtle references to the Joloshahi Maqam, part of the Tanbour Maqam repertoire of the Yaresan people of Kurdistan. The second section moves to the Dashti Maqam on D, resolving back to the Shour Maqam on G before making a sudden modulation to the Shour Maqam on A. The final section revisits the material from the opening, but in Shour Maqam on A, creating a transformed echo of the beginning. Through this structure, the piece mirrors the layered storytelling of the novel, weaving together themes of loss, identity, and resilience, while celebrating the rhythmic vitality and emotional depth of Kurdish music.

## **Bio**

Sirvan Manhoobi is a distinguished Kurdish Iranian multi-instrumentalist, composer, and educator specializing in Iranian classical and folk music. He studied Music at San Francisco State University under supervision of Hafez Modirzadeh and he is currently a PhD student of ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland with focus on Kurdish and Yaresan music. He has worked with prominent artists such as Bahram Beyzai, Shahram Nazeri, Bijan Kamkar, Shahrokh Moshkin-Ghalem and Mojgan Shajarian. He has collaborated with prestigious ensembles such as the Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Shams Ensemble, Sorvad Ensemble, and Ardeshir Kamkar Ensemble. His work as a composer, educator and performer continues to bridge cultural divides, bringing the rich heritage of Iranian music to audiences worldwide.

## WOMEN AND VOICE

### The Politics of Sound and Sight: Popular Music, Visual Culture, and Modern Femininity on 1970s Iranian Television

**Arya Tavallaei**

The establishment of Iranian National Radio and Television (NIRT) in the late 1960s played a crucial role in shaping modern popular music, reflecting the Pahlavi state's vision of Westernized modernization and promoting a selective image of modern Iranian culture. This included emphasizing the visibility of female performers in the public sphere by promoting Western-influenced pop music and marginalizing former types of popular music. Based on an analysis of archival musical TV shows and journal reports regarding television's role in Iranian modern society during the 1960s and 1970s, I argue that NIRT sought to elevate itself above traditional popular genres, like *Kouchehbazari*, by excluding their musical, dance, and visual elements and instead promoting a new Western-styled popular music. That means the rejection of traditional forms in favor of modern styles, and television music shows became the main venue for this cultural change. In addition to marginalizing traditional popular genres, NIRT introduced dozens of young female pop stars to normalize the presence of women in the public sphere. These music programs not only challenged gender norms but also emphasized women's visibility as a symbol of modernity. Googoosh, a young superstar in the early 1970s, embodied this image with exaggerated dance moves and a highly feminine appearance, portraying an idealized modern Iranian woman. Television strongly focused on the extravagant Iranian upper class, celebrating wealth, showcasing luxurious interiors, flamboyant fashion, and alternative social behaviors, particularly among women. However, this modernization project created a hierarchy among musicians, dividing them into radio and television musicians. It was not only met with resistance from both intellectuals and religious groups in society—who viewed musical TV shows as symbols of cultural decay and foreign influence—but also faced strong rejection from classical musicians, particularly popular female stars of radio.

#### **Bio**

Arya Tavallaei, is a PhD student in Cross-Cultural Musicology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. As a Santour player, he holds a Bachelor's de-

gree in Iranian Classical Music and a Master's degree in Ethnomusicology from the University of Tehran, Iran. His Master's research examined the urban and popular music of Guilan, a northern province of Iran, with a focus on processes of modernization, ethnic cultural identity, musical hybridity, and the ways rural and urban cultures intersect through music. His current research expands these interests to Iranian popular music more broadly, exploring questions of politics, modernity, femininity, and the role of music in forms of political ideology and cultural resistance both within Iran and across the Iranian diaspora.

## Whispers of Resistance: Reclaiming Female Voice through Lori Folk and Sonic Memory in Diaspora

**Samane Paya**

In post-revolutionary Iran, female solo singing in public is officially banned—a restriction that reflects deeper structures of gendered silencing. Drawing from personal experience as a vocalist who once sang Lori folk songs in the streets of Tehran, this paper explores how the female voice can become a site of resistance, memory, and identity within diasporic contexts. Central to the discussion is *Whisper in Wind* (2024), a composition for fixed media and live voice built around archival recordings of the author's street performances, remixed through contemporary electronic sound design. The piece stages three symbolic characters: the Past (represented by the archival singing), the Present (performed live by the composer), and the Future (voiced by another singer). Each character embodies a stage in the struggle for voice, presence, and agency. The Past longs for freedom under repression; the Present, despite apparent freedom, remains haunted by past wounds; and the Future beckons toward liberation and self-recognition. This presentation engages with feminist sound theory (McClary), diasporic media practices (Hamid Naficy), and the ethics of vulnerable sonic archives. It argues that through reclaiming and reworking the female voice in folk traditions, one can interrogate the politics of gender and displacement, while also constructing new transnational identities. *Whisper in Wind* serves not only as an artistic artifact but also as an autoethnographic testimony to the gendered politics of voice, memory, and exile. By situating this work within broader discourses of Iranian music, gender, and resistance, the paper contributes to a growing conversation around sound as a medium of political and cultural meaning. A brief excerpt of the piece will be performed live during the presentation, offering a multisensory entry point into the research.

## Bio

Samane Paya is an Iranian composer, vocalist, and narrative artist whose music bridges traditional Iranian roots with contemporary expression. She holds a Master's in Composition from Binghamton University and is currently pursuing a PhD in Composition at UC Davis, where she is a fellow and Teaching Assistant. Her works span chamber, vocal, electronic, and operatic formats. Recent projects include *Whisper in Wind*, *Elegy for String Quartet*, and *Into Night for Pocket Opera*. A former soprano with Tonal Choir, Paya draws on her performance background to shape her compositional voice, often integrating live voice into her work.

## Embodied Resistance and the Politics of Song Sharing in the “Woman, Life, Freedom” Movement

### Mahdis Bayat

In 2022, the “Women, Life, Freedom” protests in Iran represented a pivotal moment of feminist resistance against governmental oppression. This paper specifically examines how various contexts and modes of sharing songs, including songs written on paper and passed to passers-by, public singing performances captured in spaces such as subways, widespread distribution via social media, and amplification by streaming platforms, served as potent forms of embodied protest. I demonstrate how media circulation creates a shared sense of identity and belonging among dispersed populations. These practices not only contested state censorship but also created new spaces for expression and ways of being, enabling participants to reimagine public space as a site of resistance and collective identity formation. Methodologically, I employ both autoethnographic insights derived from my participation in Tehran's protests during 2022, and digital ethnographic analysis of user-generated content shared across platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. This integrated approach enables a comprehensive examination of how song-sharing practices were performed, mediated, and transformed through digital circulation, extending their reach and amplifying their political significance beyond immediate protest contexts. Situating the 2022 movement historically in relation to the 2009 Green Movement's cautious, silent marches, this study underscores a notable shift towards audacious, feminine expression. By concentrating on music and its digital dissemination, this research illustrates how fleeting, embodied protest gestures were transformed into enduring symbols of sonic resistance, reshaping both physical public space

es and virtual communities, and expanding contemporary interpretations of musical activism and political engagement in Iran.

## **Bio**

Mahdis Bayat is a PhD student in Music and Sound Studies at Cornell University. She received her BA in Fine Arts from Al-Zahra University, Tehran, where she studied crafts and music instrument-making practices. She earned her MA in Ethnomusicology at Tehran University of Art. In her thesis, she focused on Iranian popular music in cinema and café performances. Her research examining music production and social contexts in 1950s-60s Tehran was partially published in *Mahoor Music Quarterly* (2022). Her scholarly interests include Iranian popular music, cinema, media, gender studies, and politics.

## **MUSIC AND BORDERS**

### **Soundscape of Iranian Music in New York City: Diaspora, Identity, and Cultural Transmission**

**Sara Feili**

This paper explores the soundscape of Iranian music in New York City, a global urban center known for its cultural plurality and vibrant diasporic communities. Despite political constraints and the absence of formal diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States, Iranian cultural expressions particularly music have found meaningful resonance within the city's diverse social fabric. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and diaspora theory, this study examines the ways in which Iranian musical events and performances function as both sites of cultural preservation and platforms for intercultural dialogue. New York's rich soundscape offers a microcosm of global cultural exchange, in which Iranian music is not only audible but actively experienced through concerts, informal gatherings, and Iranian parade. Through interviews with musicians and community organizers, as well as participant observation, I investigate how Iranian artists in New York navigate issues of identity, memory, and representation. Central to this inquiry are questions such as: How do musical practices and performances contribute to sustaining cultural identity among Iranian diasporic communities? In what ways is Iranian music adapted or transformed within

this diasporic setting? And how might Iranian music serve as a bridge between the Iranian community and the broader multicultural landscape of New York? By engaging with both sound studies and diaspora aspect, this paper situates Iranian music in New York as a dynamic and evolving form of cultural expression. It highlights the role of sound in mediating belonging, negotiating hybridity, and asserting visibility within a transnational urban context. Ultimately, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how music operates as a critical vehicle for diasporic identity and cultural continuity in exile.

## **Bio**

Sara Feili is a recent graduate with a master's degree in Ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University. Her thesis, "Diaspora and Iranian Music: The Activities of Iranian Women Musicians in New York City and Beyond", explores gender, Islam, politics, and diaspora through the lens of Iranian musical expression. As a setar player, she integrates performance with ethnographic research, focusing on cultural preservation and women's artistic agency in exile. She currently teaches with Afghan Female Student Outreach (AFSO), providing music education to Afghan women through virtual instruction.

## **Gürgen ýoly: Iranian Turkmens' Cultural Identity**

**Mohammad Geldi Geldi Nejad**

Ethnic Turkmen musicians in Iran identify their performance style, known as "Gürgen ýoly," as a distinct regional style. In contrast, musicians in neighboring Turkmenistan recognize several regional bardic styles but do not acknowledge a separate style among their Turkmen kin in Iran. What validates the emergence of "Gürgen ýoly" as a separate style? I argue that, especially after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iranian Turkmens began to define and promote a distinct regional style as a marker of their identity, setting themselves apart from their Soviet and post-Soviet Turkmen counterparts. Drawing on my experience as a bakhshi (epic bard) performing with many bards across Iran and Turkmenistan, a decade of study in Turkmen state schools (2009–2019), and fieldwork research in Iran in 2021 and 2022, I examine the musical distinctions of "Gürgen ýoly" that set this style apart from those within Turkmenistan. Furthermore, I underscore the role of musical ensembles in nurturing a sense of identity and belonging among Iranian Turkmens—particularly in the absence of formal music schools—by performing and curating repertoire that resonates with the community's collective longings and desires.

## **Bio**

Mohammad Geldi Geldi Nejad is a PhD candidate in Musicology & Ethnomusicology at Brown University. He holds an MA in Ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University. He performs and records under the name “Oghlan Bakhshi” (“child bard”), an honorary title bestowed upon him at the age of ten by a council of Turkmen musicians. He has performed Turkmen music at festivals and world music programs across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. His research focuses on the dutar (two stringed lute) and bardic performance in Iran and Central Asia, exploring themes of transmission, oral history, the relationship between borders and music, identity, sound, and voice studies.

## **Tehranginges: A Glance at the Global Capital of Persian Pop Music**

### **Behzad Namazi**

In the mid-1950s, a new genre of Western-influenced popular music emerged in Iran, catalyzed by Iranian-Armenian singer Viguen Derderian, the “King of Iranian Pop.” This style flourished amid the country’s modernization, and reached its apex in the 1970s, with stars such as Googoosh. The 1979 Islamic Revolution, however, displaced many of the leading singers and musicians, who resettled in Los Angeles—now home to the world’s largest Iranian diaspora, widely known as “Tehranginges.” This paper examines Persian Pop music through the lenses of migration, diaspora, and identity, as it draws upon interviews and textual analysis to trace its historical timeline, identify its key figures, and define its stylistic features. I argue that Tehranginges functions as the global center of Persian Pop production, enabling the genre’s continuity, despite the rupture of revolution, and sustaining cultural memory by connecting contemporary practices to their pre-revolutionary roots. As both a physical and virtual diasporic space, Tehranginges provides Iranians with a vital means for maintaining cultural identity beyond the homeland. This study contributes to the scholarship on popular music and diaspora studies, by demonstrating how displaced communities preserve and promote musical traditions of the homeland.

## **Bio**

Behzad Namazi (composer, ethnomusicologist, and multi-instrumentalist) earned his PhD in ethnomusicology & music composition from Ohio University in 2020. Dr. Namazi’s research and performance practice is centered around the modal system of Persian traditional music, and the

socio-cultural phenomena surrounding this musical tradition. His compositional works and essays in ethnomusicology have been presented at various national and international festivals, conferences, and symposia. Dr. Namazi's forthcoming book chapter, entitled "Tehrangeles: A Glance at the Global Capital of Persian Pop Music," will be included in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Popular Music*, and is set to be published in 2026.

## **REIMAGINING THE HISTORY OF IRANIAN MUSICS AND DANCE: UNEASY NARRATIVES OF RACE AND GENDER**

**Between Sounds and Silences: Black Slavery, Abolition, and Public Sounding in Southern Iran**

**Armaghan Fakhraeirad**

This paper examines a strand of Black music history in southern Iran from the late Qajar to early Pahlavi era, focusing on the entanglement of slavery, abolition, and the agency of Black musicians in shaping religious and non-religious music across public and semi-public spaces. Framed by the contemporary resonance of loud, collective, male-only *dammām* drumming during Muharram and Safar in Bushehr, it considers how this history is narrated today by local performers and scholars, and how these narratives intersect with, or diverge from, historical accounts. I draw on historical accounts in which the presence of Black people is most often described through musical moments. These sources reveal how music linked to marginalized communities circulated between religious and non-religious settings, often inhabiting liminal positions—between sound and silence, freedom and unfreedom, visibility and invisibility—especially in the years immediately after abolition, when former slaves navigated new social and economic roles. By rereading these fragmentary sources alongside contemporary oral histories, I discuss an alternative way of thinking about the past of this collective music, one that bears the history of life in a port city shaped by the Indian Ocean slave trade and layered with geopolitical upheavals. The paper concludes by returning to the present-day *dammām* drumming of Bushehr, which endures not only as an audible trace of the past but also as a vessel for its silences, erasures, and the shifting boundaries between what is remembered and what is forgotten.

## Bio

Armaghan Fakhraeirad is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation, *Sounding Port-Oil Encounters*, examines how the rise and decline of port and oil infrastructures have shaped musical traditions and sonic memory on Iran's Persian Gulf coast. Based on multi-sited fieldwork in Bushehr, Abadan, and Khorramshahr, her work explores how music in these liminal urban spaces bears contradictory legacies of war, migration, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and the enduring impacts of Black slavery. Framed within the Indian Ocean world, she shows how Gulf musics act as vessels for entangled memories, connectivity, and cultural change.

## Navigating Tenuous Ambiguities: New Directions in the Study of Women and Music in Iran

**Hadi Milanloo**

Historians like Afsaneh Najmabadi have long advocated for “writing women into the history of Iranian modernity and writing a gendered history of that experience” (1998: 9). This idea continues to reverberate today as efforts to include women in Iranian music scholarship gain traction in a flourishing subfield of inquiry. Building on my doctoral ethnographic study with female instrumentalists of Iranian classical music, this paper engages with Najmabadi's call and asks how ethnography, typically concerned with the recent past, could inform the future historiographies of women and music in Iran. For long, histories of Iranian music had assumed that female instrumentalists had always played marginal roles in developing Iranian classical music or were excluded altogether. Yet, a review of the historical studies of this tradition reveals that, at best, the historical records are ambiguous about women. Interpreting the male dominance of instrumental music during the late 20th and early 21st centuries in Iran as a continuation of a larger historical condition relies on a retroactive expansion of our knowledge of the present into an unknown past. My paper investigates how these historical ambiguities shape the contemporary ethnographies of women and music in Iran. It juxtaposes my ethnographic observations with recent historiographies of Iranian music (e.g., Pourjavady 2023) and material from Toronto's Tavakoli Archives to highlight how ethnography informs new questions that broaden historical inquiries into the role of women, gender, and sexuality in defining the aesthetics of Iranian classical music.

## **Bio**

Hadi Milanloo is an ethnomusicology Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto. Focusing on the music and lives of female instrumentalists who perform Iranian classical music in Tehran, Hadi's doctoral project explores the intersections of music, gender, and resistance/resilience in Iran. He works towards an ethnomusicological approach that accounts for both aesthetic contributions and social activism of Iranian female musicians. Hadi is also a musician (B.Mus., University of Tehran) and has studied Setar and the radif of Iranian Classical Music with Dariush Talai and Hamid Sorkuti, among others. Currently, he also serves as the Executive Director of Canadian Golha Orchestra.

## **Semiotics, the Gaze, and the Adolescent Male Dancer in 19th Century Qajar Iran Hossein Zanganeh**

This paper reads the adolescent dancer's body in early nineteenth-century Qajar Iran as a "living text" whose meanings emerge at the intersection of movement and the gaze. As expanding religious restrictions prompted women's withdrawal from public stages, beardless youths with delicate lines and seemingly feminine motions came to occupy a liminal position: bodies at the threshold of desire and anxiety, within musical gatherings that oscillated between aesthetic pleasure and moral unease. In the paper I use a social semiotics of movement, to show how these dances were constituted as texts in the act of watching, and how dominant discourses organized readings deemed acceptable. The analysis is framed through the concept of the gaze. Drawing on close readings of Persian poetic and prose sources, nineteenth-century visual representations, and European travelogues alongside Islamic legal and moral writings, it reconstructs the kinetic grammar of performance (shoulder glides, torso undulations, sustained glances) and situates these gestures within historically specific interpretive frameworks. This approach demonstrates how audiences formed at the intersection of discourses of power or domination, such as Sharia (Islamic jurisprudential) discourse and orientalist travel writing, translated these movements into registers of seduction, sanctity, or indecency. Rather than retrofitting anachronistic categories like "homosexuality" or "effeminacy" onto premodern subjects, the paper situates same-sex desire and male beauty within Islamic-Iranian traditions. By mapping intersecting economies of spectacle, desire, and religious authority, the paper calls for a rewriting of Iran's performance history that moves beyond

Eurocentric frames and centers the negotiated, embodied experiences of gender and eroticism in premodern Muslim societies.

### **Bio**

Hossein Zangeneh holds an MA in ethnomusicology from the Tehran University of Art. His research explores the intersections of music, gender, and cultural history in Iran, with a focus on marginalized performance traditions and queer aesthetics. He is particularly interested in the historical role of adolescent male performers in Qajar-era music culture. In 2025, he received the James T. Koetting Prize for the best graduate student paper from the Northeast Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology.

## **KEYNOTE**

### **Iranian Music between Religion(s) and Politics**

#### **Houchang Chehabi**

As a constitutive element of Iran's culture, music has always interacted with social, political, and religious developments; as such it is an arena in which the tensions between temporal and spiritual authorities, between modernizers and traditionalists, and between proponents of different types of modernization have played themselves out. In this talk I will provide first an overview of the interface between music and Iran's religious traditions and then trace the development of music against the backdrop of religious norms and the state's cultural policies.

### **Bio**

Houchang E. Chehai is a professor of international relations and history emeritus at Boston University. He is the author of three books, most recently *Onomastic Reforms: Family Names and State Building in Iran* (2020); editor or coeditor of twelve books, most recently *Political, Social and Cultural History of Iran: Essays in Honour of Ervand Abrahamian* (2025); and numerous refereed articles, book chapters, essays, and encyclopedia entries.

## ORGANIZED ROUNDTABLE

گناه *Sin*

**Amitis Motevalli, Babak Rahimi, Hesam Abedini**

### Roundtable Abstract

This roundtable centers on *Sin*, an experimental sonic performance by artist Amitis Motevalli in collaboration with composer Hesam Abedini, first performed live on December 6, 2024 in New York City. The program will begin with a screening of selected moments from the performance, followed by a collective conversation between Motevalli, Abedini, and Dr. Babak Rahimi. *Sin* is a reinterpretation of a Persianate elegy, created in dedication to a 20-year-old trans femme, Hanar Ibrahim. The work draws from the religious and populist genre of Shia *nohē*, traditionally live public performances with crowds of men chanting in chorus and beating their chests. It brings together the poetics of a *marzieh* (spiritual poem) and the style of *rosēh* (emotive recitation) within a *nohē*-like chorus. The artists use the sounds of mourning and the body itself as percussion. This musicalized lamentation is inspired by *nohē*'s intention: to summon grief, to allow the release of loss and grievance. In *Sin*, that grief is directed toward Hanar Ibrahim, a young trans femme caught in multi-layered political tensions and community expectations. On February 6, 2022, in Marwan, occupied Kurdistan (Iran), she chose to end her own life; she was then buried abruptly and quietly in men's clothing, under her dead name, denying her community and chosen family the chance to mourn and say goodbye. Through this performance, the artists call her by her name, grieve her, and create a space to testify to gendered erasure, state and social violence, and the urgent need to speak for and with the dead. The conversation among Motevalli, Abedini, and Rahimi will turn to the cultural, personal, access and political stakes of work like *Sin*: how grief, liturgy, and sound act as tools of memory and resistance; how artists navigate identity, representation, and cultural exoticism in U.S. art contexts; and what it means to carry sacred communal ritual into contemporary experimental practice.

### Bios

Amitis Motevalli is an artist who explores the cultural resistance and survival of people living in poverty, conflict, catastrophe and/or war. Her experiences as a trans-national migrant and in community organizing are found

dational in her work and research. Through many media, digital, analog, static and live, her work juxtaposes and contrasts iconography with iconoclasm, memorials with monuments, archive methodologies with canon. Through her practice, Motevalli intends to ask questions about archiving, documentation and canonization of histories, in particular related to violence. In this line of questioning she subverts populism by invoking the significance of a secular grassroots struggle. She is primarily based in Los Angeles, exhibiting art internationally as well as organizing to create an active and critical cultural discourse through information exchange, in art and pedagogy with cultural producers and educators.

Babak Rahimi holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the European University Institute (2004) and an M.A. in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy from the University of Nottingham (1997). He has been a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics (2000–2001) and the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania (2011–2012). His monograph *Theater-State and the Formation of the Early Modern Public Sphere in Iran* (2011) examines Safavid Muharram rituals. His forthcoming book, *Senses of Mourning* (2026), explores sensory religion in Iran. Rahimi has edited volumes on performance, media, and Islam, and his research centers on culture, religion, technology, and the Global South.

Hesam Abedini is an Iranian–American composer, performer, and educator whose work interweaves classical Persian music, jazz, computer music, and contemporary composition through polystylistic and improvisatory approaches. His music has been performed by ensembles including the JACK Quartet, Del Sol Quartet, and Hypercube. As the founding member of the Sibarg Ensemble, he explores new models of intercultural music-making. His scholarship appears in *Iran Amplified: One Hundred Years of Music and Society* (Ilex/Harvard University Press, 2026). He holds a Ph.D. in Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology from UC Irvine and is Assistant Professor of Composition and Assistant Director of the New Music Series at California State University, Fullerton.

# PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE IN PERSIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

## Inventing from Memory: Embodied Music-Making in Persian Classical Music

**Nima Janmohammadi**

This presentation examines the frequently invoked yet under-theorized concept of creativity in Persian classical music through the lens of memory, pedagogy, and embodiment. I begin by situating the discussion within the tradition of the Medieval art of rhetoric, focusing on the organization of memory through techniques such as the memory palace. In this framework, the process of inventio—the Medieval act of music making—was deeply tied to the structured storage of memory in emotionally charged memory-spaces. Drawing parallels to this Medieval practice of retrieval, recombination and transformation of preexisting material, I will explore how music-making in Persian music emerges as an act rooted in the interplay between stored knowledge and historical, as well as cultural embodiment. In Persian classical music, pedagogy and repertoire are structured around sophisticated systems of memorization, imitation, and transformation. The learning process functions like a palimpsest, where layers of musical material are continually reinterpreted and re-performed, resulting in an evolving archeology of sound grounded in memory, archive, and the inherent contingency of performance. Drawing on my own experience in both Persian classical music and contemporary avant-garde music, I will examine the nuanced treatment of phrasing, intonation, timbre, and temporality in selected performances of the masters of Persian music. I will argue that these parameters are not merely technical considerations, but integral components of a deeply embodied creative practice, one in which memory serves as both a repository and a generative force.

### **Bio**

Nima Janmohammadi is a composer, improviser, and multi-instrumentalist. As a performer of Persian classical music, he has studied with great masters of Persian Music, including legendary Mohammad Reza Lotfi and Hossein Alizadeh. He has performed in numerous recordings and concerts including solo recitals in venues such as Boston's historic Jordan Hall, MIT, Harvard University, Tuft University, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY. He has recorded two solo Setar albums, *The Kiss Belongs to Nobody* (2017), and *Night of Lilac in the Absence of Language* (2023). As a com-

poser, Nima has written for symphony orchestra, chamber music of various large and small ensembles, string quartet, and saxophone orchestra. Nima is a full-time professor of Music Theory, Musicology, and Contemporary Musical Arts at New England Conservatory. Nima holds a bachelor's degree in the performance of Persian classical music from Tehran School of Music, a master's degree and a graduate diploma in Contemporary Improvisation, as well as a doctorate in Composition with a minor in Music Theory from New England Conservatory.

## Pedagogy, Process, and Identity: Teaching Classical Persian Music to Non- Persian Speaking Children in U.S. Public Schools

**Kourosh Taghavi**

This paper examines the pedagogical design and cultural implications of teaching classical Persian music to children in U.S. public schools, where over 98% of students are non-Persian speakers. Drawing on my work as Artist in Residence with the Center for World Music, I present a case study of a 10–15 sessions curriculum integrating rhythm, melody, and language to develop musical skills while fostering cultural awareness and identity exploration. Since its founding in 1999, the Center has brought 22 distinct cultural arts from around the world to over 130 schools, providing the institutional context for this work. Students in grades K–6 begin with foundational drumming on the daf, progressing from basic patterns to Persian rhythmic cycles. Melodic instruction on the setar and xylophone enables students to connect rhythmic structures with modal frameworks while exploring a broader range of timbral possibilities. Vocal instruction includes singing in multiple modes of the Radif, the repertoire of the classical Persian Music, using a phonetic transcription in the English alphabet to ensure accessibility while preserving the authenticity of the original Persian text. As students progress, they engage with more complex tunes of the repertoire reinforcing the concept of learning as an incremental, process-driven endeavor. This approach equips students with technical proficiency while cultivating confidence, resilience, and openness to unfamiliar cultural forms. It also aligns with scholarly calls to decolonize music education by challenging Eurocentric norms and validating diverse epistemologies (De Lissovoy, 2010; Nakata, 2012). By embedding classical Persian music within a diverse classroom context, this work illustrates how music education can serve simultaneously as artistic training and cultural diplomacy. The deliberate pairing of accessibility-oriented pedagogy with respect for tra-

dition enables children to connect meaningfully with a heritage outside their own, contributing to the development of what can be understood as “global musical citizenship.”

## **Bio**

Kourosh Taghavi is an Iranian setar teacher, composer, and educator based in San Diego, California. A student of master musicians Mohammad Reza Lotfi and Hossein Alizadeh, he has taught setar, composed original music, led music workshops, and served as a guest lecturer. As an Artist in Residence with the Center for World Music, he brings Persian classical music and singing to San Diego schools through, hands-on curricula that foster both musical skill and cross-cultural understanding. A founding member of the Namâd Ensemble, he has toured internationally and collaborated with artists and institutions dedicated to preserving and promoting Classical Persian music.

## **Teaching Iranian Classical Music: Western Notation and Sine-be-sine Ali Hajmalek**

Music notation serves as a transmission tool for musical traditions, showcasing the distinct pedagogical values of each culture. Iranian classical musicians were primarily taught through the oral/aural “Sine-be-sine” approach, which developed strong musical memory, improvisational abilities, and interval sensitivity through extended one-on-one learning with a master. Modernization efforts and military band implementation brought Western staff notation to Iran in the Qajar era, which created both opportunities and challenges. The prescriptive nature of Western notation fails to represent essential musical elements of the radif repertoire because it is metric-based and cannot accurately capture non-metric gushes, temporal elasticity, ornamentation, and microtonal nuances. The absence of standardized symbols for Iranian performance techniques and excessive dependence on scores also create two major problems that affect both aural skills and musical expression. However, Western notation continues to serve important purposes in documentation, theoretical instruction, comparative research, and scholarly communication through its universal language, which works best with audio recordings. The current study aims to answer what an Iranian classical music student might gain or lose if they use Western notation and whether oral teaching traditions conflict with Western notation. This paper employs a descriptive research method

and relies on library research. The research based on historical documents, musicological frameworks, and master musician insights argues that Iranian classical music educators should use the “Sine-be-sine” approach as a core method while Western notation functions as a supporting tool. The paper concludes that combining traditional “Sine-be-sine” method with Western notation systems preserves Iranian music’s intangible aspects and enables documentation and worldwide accessibility. These methods do not inherently conflict with each other because their proper application in context can improve teaching efficiency, quality, and continuity of Iranian classical music.

## **Bio**

Ali Hajmalek is a PhD student in Ethnomusicology at Boston University. He earned his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Iranian Classical Music from the University of Tehran. From childhood, he studied Iranian classical music under the guidance of master musicians such as Hossein Alizadeh, Keivan Saket, and Dariush Pirniakan. His current research focuses on the intersection of gender and Sufi music in Iran, as well as pedagogy in Iranian music.

## **Radif Reconsidered: A Macro–Aesthetic and Phenomenological Inquiry into Persian Classical Music**

**Mehdi Rezania**

Research has shown that one of the most complex and nuanced approaches to analyzing artistic reality is the hermeneutical analysis of music (Hrinchenko et al. 2020, 281). The fundamental process of hermeneutical methods of communication with works of art involves the subjective empathy, objective reconstruction of the cultural and historical world, and use of the performer in the author’s spiritual world. Over the last century, there has been a notable rise in the analysis of many facets of musical interpretation within philosophy; yet, this has seldom been explored in the field of Iranian music. This paper is the hermeneutic analysis of “Bidād,” an instrumental piece by Parviz Meshkatian. It is argued that “Bidād” is the sonic manifestation of the concept of *bazm-o-razm*. It is an ancient pre-Islamic concept that represents the intertwined contrasting concepts of *bazm* (‘feast’) and *razm* (‘fighting’) as essential factors for creation and development. This concept can be traced back to Mithraism, which predates Zoroastrianism in the Iranian plateau and has been an ongoing in-

fluent factor in the history of culture and specially arts in Iran (Jorjani 2019). Drawing from Levi-Strauss's (1990, 627) theory that all individual works are prospective mythologies, Gadamer's (2004, 305-341) "fusion of horizons," and Ricoeur's (1976, 88) concept of "surplus of meaning" this analysis borrows the semiotic concepts in Persian poetry and employs both musical and philosophical techniques to elucidate the various ways in which the concept of *bazm-o-razm* is manifested through the "Bidād." Further, as music lacks a literal linguistic meaning but evokes profound symbolic and affective layers this study introduces a new term labelled *es-hāreh*, akin to *talmih* ('allusion') in Persian literature, to delineate the distinctive characteristics of the "Bidād."

### **Bio**

Mehdi Rezaia is a santur player, composer and scholar. He holds an MA in music composition, an MA and a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at the University of Alberta. He has received several grants for his projects from the federal, provincial and municipal art councils in Canada. He has published five music albums in Persian classical and Western classical music and two music scores. He has published papers in Persian and English in historical, theoretical and cultural aspect of Iranian music. He is the winner of bi-annual Robert M Stevenson Prize in composition from SEM the Edmonton Artist Trust Fund.

## **MUSIC AND MODERNITY IN 20TH CENTURY IRAN**

**Musical Values, Social Values: From the Constitutional Revolution to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Solmaz Shakerifard**

In 1980, Bruno Nettl published "Musical Values, Social Values: Symbols in Iran" in *Asian Music*, drawing on his fieldwork in Iran during the 1960s. Nettl argued that musical and social values were deeply intertwined, a claim he maintained was still valid in post-revolutionary Iran (Nettl 1980). Nearly half a century later, I revisit this question: do transformations in musical and social values within Iranian society continue to reflect one another? This paper pays tribute to Nettl's insight by examining musical and social values during two periods of acute volatility and change. The

first case considers the writings and speeches of Ali-Naqi Vaziri, one of the most prolific Iranian musicians, educators, and theorists of the early 20th century. Around the time of the Constitutional Revolution, Vaziri engaged in heated debates with colleagues and opponents, negotiating the tension between pride in Iranian elements of music and aspirations to be “modern” like the “West.” The second case draws on my ethnographic research with Iranian musicians and scholars, focusing on a 2021 virtual roundtable organized by the Iranian Artists Forum. This event brought together three musicians and music educators to reflect on their teaching and performing practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, when concerts were cancelled and music classes had shifted online. Their discussions reveal how pedagogical practices and value systems were renegotiated in real time as they navigated technological, social, and cultural disruptions. By comparing these two moments, I show how musicians’ articulations of musical value illuminate broader social transformations. I situate my analysis between historical documents, ethnographic encounters, and recent scholarship on music and socio-political change in the Middle East (LeVine 2012; Boulos 2020; Ghaem-Maghami 2025), offering a fresh perspective on the dynamic interplay between musical and social transformation in modern Iran.

### **Bio**

Solmaz Shakerifard is a PhD candidate in the Interdisciplinary Program in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Washington, with a background in piano performance, music education, and ethnomusicology. In her doctoral research Solmaz investigates how Iran’s sociopolitical transformations in the past century are manifested in Iranian soundscapes. By examining the teaching and performing practices of Iranian musicians, she interrogates the production of Iranian perceptions of ‘modernity,’ ‘nationalism,’ ‘authenticity,’ and the ‘West’. Her applied work focuses on developing decentered and anticolonial approaches to teaching music in North American higher education. As an adjunct faculty at the Cornish College of the Arts, Solmaz teaches ethnomusicology and music history in the music department.

# Unconventional Violin Tunings in Iranian Classical Music: Transferring Historical Practices to the Kamancheh

**Majid Javdani Naddaf**

This research introduces and explores unconventional violin tunings historically employed in the performance of Iranian classical music, examining practices that were once prevalent but have largely fallen into disuse and are now considered unconventional. The study situates the violin within the broader historical context of Iranian music, tracing its evolution from the Qajar era through to contemporary practices. It briefly surveys various tuning systems used during this period. The core of this research focuses specifically on selected unconventional tuning systems. Each system is detailed through descriptive charts, fingering diagrams corresponding to specific Dastgah/Avaz, and explanations of the distinct timbres and performance capabilities these modes facilitate. Additionally, the study references repertoire that employs these tunings, providing visual and textual documentation. To enhance clarity, the tuning systems are systematically categorized based on three primary factors: (1) string tuning changes, (2) associated modes and Dastgah/Avaz, and (3) tonal characteristics. An integral component of this presentation is a live demonstration using these tuning systems on the Kamancheh. This practical performance underscores the potential of reintroducing these unconventional tunings, revealing how they enrich timbral diversity and offer valuable, underutilized performance techniques. The significance of this research lies in the revival and reintroduction of performance practices that were once utilized but have become less common in recent times. By revisiting these tuning systems, particularly for bowed string instruments, new possibilities may emerge for performers to preserve the vitality of their art. Introducing these tunings and ultimately encouraging their application can offer valuable tools for performers, contributing to a more diverse and expressive sound palette in both solo and ensemble settings. This study, therefore, aims to highlight sonic textures that are increasingly rare in contemporary practice.

## **Bio**

Majid Javdani is a Kamancheh and Violin (Iranian and classical styles) performer and a master's student in Ethnomusicology at Bowling Green State University. He holds a B.A. in Iranian Music Performance from the University of Guilan. Majid has performed and taught Iranian music extensively, winning First Prize for Kamancheh at the 2020 National Festival of Youth Music. From 2017 to 2024, he collaborated with ensembles in Mashhad,

Rasht, and Tehran. He also served as concertmaster of a string orchestra in Tehran. His research explores modal music, Iranian classical and folk traditions, and cross-cultural approaches to Middle Eastern music.

## The Iranian Violin in the Twentieth Century: Emergence, Flourishing, and Marginalization

**Siamak Barghi**

This article traces the emergence, development, and eventual marginalization of the “Iranian violin” from the 1920s to the present, focusing on the pivotal role of Abolhasan Saba (1902–1957) and his students. Introduced to Iran during the Qājār era, the violin gradually secured a place in Persian classical music through adaptations by kamāncheh players and innovations by early instructors. Saba’s systematic approach, enriched by Western violin technique and codified in his pedagogical works, established the instrument as a central voice in Persian music, created a distinctive repertoire, and inspired a generation of notable soloists. This trajectory began to change before the 1979 Revolution and more decisively in its aftermath. In earlier decades, the violin thrived both as a solo instrument and within ensembles, particularly in the Golha radio programs and music orchestras. The establishment of the Center for the Preservation and Propagation of Music in 1968 marked a turning point: its cultural policies, centered on “authentic” tradition, excluded the violin from official programs and framed it as a symbol of Westernization. Institutional neglect, along with the marginalization of leading figures such as Parviz Yahaghi, Habibollah Badiei, Ali Tajvidi, and Asadollah Malek (especially after 1979) accelerated its decline. Other factors included the lack of new repertoire, a shift toward improvisatory solo performance, and an increasingly romanticized playing styles. Examining the cultural, political, and aesthetic forces behind this marginalization, the article considers why the violin, despite successful integration into Indian and Arab ensembles, failed to sustain a stable role in Iranian ensemble performance. It argues that the vitality of an instrument depends on ongoing repertoire renewal, institutional support, and adaptation to changing social contexts. The history of the Iranian violin thus reveals both the transformative impact of individual innovation and the fragility of musical traditions under shifting political and cultural conditions.

### **Bio**

Siamak Barghi is an Iranian musician, composer, and educator, currently

pursuing a DMA in Music Composition at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He earned his MA in Ethnomusicology from the University of Tehran in 2021. Trained by his father, Assad Barghi, he studied with prominent maestros including Bahman Rajabi, Mohammadreza Lotfi, Navid Afghah, Hooman Asadi, Sasan Fatemi, Tanya Merchant, Ben Leeds Carson, and Matt Schumaker. Siamak has performed extensively since 2006 collaborating in concerts with renowned Iranian musicians such as Aliakbar Shekarchi, Shahram Mirjalali, and Ardeshir Kamkar. He co-founded the Saba Orchestra with his brother, Samad Barghi, in 2010.

## ORGANIZED PANEL

### Rethinking Access, Pedagogy, and Voice in Contemporary Iranian Music Education

**Nasim Khorassani, Pedram Diba, Sohrab Motabar, Bahar Royae**

#### Roundtable Abstract

MOAASER is a music education initiative that promotes inclusive, equitable, and socially and politically responsive music education for students in Iran. It aims to overcome systemic barriers in Iranian music learning environments by addressing key structural challenges such as unfair admissions, limited performance opportunities, and inflation driven by sanctions. To realize these goals in practice, MOAASER implements a range of interventions that reimagine how, where, and by whom music can be learned. This presentation highlights how MOAASER tackles exclusionary practices related to performance and knowledge background, spatial access, and instrument availability. Instead of requiring prior formal training, physical presence, and access to traditional instruments, MOAASER embraces open admission, online delivery, and learning through everyday objects. This approach reimagine the learning environment, prioritizing affordability, spatial accessibility, and inclusivity. These interventions allow participation regardless of physical location or economic status, a necessity amplified by COVID-19 and imposed sanctions. MOAASER also challenges traditional hierarchical frameworks in music pedagogy, emphasizing collaboration and student voice. Its innovative model encourages students to “write, listen, experiment” through meditative, research-driven, and creative exploration. In this context, idiomaticity is fostered not as

mastery of established techniques, but as an embodied expression shaped by the student's personal environment and experiences. By fundamentally destabilizing traditional hierarchies of virtuosity and placing co-creation at the forefront of its approach, MOAASER presents a groundbreaking alternative model for music education within Iran. This innovative model is deeply rooted in several core principles: fostering shared agency among all participants, cultivating a profound sense of cultural self-awareness, and championing continuous pedagogical experimentation. This allows for a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment where individual expression and collaborative exploration are highly valued and encouraged.

## **Bios**

Nasim Khorassani is an ASCAP composer, sound artist, visual artist, educator, and co-founder of MOAASER, a free online music academy supporting Persian students. Nasim's music takes various approaches to visuality, emotional connection, and language. Her works have been performed by No Exit New Music Ensemble, Del Sol String Quartet, Patchwork Duo, Zeitgeist, OCAZENigma, Loadbang, International Contemporary Ensemble, Inset trio, Silkroad Ensemble, Thin Edge New Music Collective, Cepromusic ensemble, and La Jolla Symphony Orchestra. She has also been featured on the Composers Now IMPACT Series and 77th Ojai Music Festival. Nasim received her PhD in Music Composition from UC San Diego.

Pedram Diba: Pedram Diba is a composer and co-founder of MOAASER. His work explores sound, space, light, and gesture as interrelated materials. His music has been praised for its "powerful interaction and striking richness of components" (ResMusica) and for its "deep sense of musical energy and great attention to the organicity and morphological profiles of sound" (Jodlowski). His works have been presented at SEAMUS, IRCAM Forum, ICMC, Splice, SICMF, and New Music Gathering, and performed at venues including the DiMenna Center, Le CENTQUATRE, Constellation, CKL Stage, and Le Gesù. He studied at Oregon, McGill, IRCAM, and is a PhD candidate at Northwestern.

Sohrab Motabar (1984) is a composer and co-founder of MOAASER from Tehran. With regards to states of suspension and dazzled motion his music resonates like a maze for the listener. He composes with algorithms, chaotic functions, and non-standard synthesized sounds as a way to give rise to obscured dimensions and experimental modes of perceiving and listening. In 2018 he graduated from the Institute of Sonology. Since then, he is teaching, giving workshops, and keeps developing his research further. In

addition, he also actively collaborates in selected projects with artists and other musicians.

Bahar Royae is a music educator and a composer/sound designer. Her work has been performed at prominent events such as the Time:Spans 2020 Festival and the 2020 Fromm Foundation Composer Conference, 2022 Tehran Electroacoustic Music Festival, and has won awards such as the Pnea Award, the Roger Session Memorial Composition Award, and the Korourian electroacoustic music award. Bahar, has worked with Claire Chase, Suzzane Farrin, International Contemporary Ensemble, Loadbang, Composer Conference Ensemble, Contemporary Insights of Leipzig, Ensemble der gelbe Klang, Guerrilla Opera, Longleash, Mazumal, Kimia Hesabi, Splice Ensemble. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in music composition from CUNY.

## ORGANIZED PANEL

### Music, Identity, and Resistance in the Ethnic and Religious Soundscapes of Iran

#### Panel Abstract

This panel explores the ways in which marginalized communities in Iran mobilize music and sound as venues of spiritual meaning, political identity, and cultural resistance. Bringing together ethnographic and theoretical perspectives, the three papers investigate how sacred soundscapes, musical ownership claims, and shifting performance practices articulate complex relationships between tradition, modernity, and power. The first paper, *Echoes of the Divine*, explores Yārsān sacred music as both a spiritual realm and a form of sonic resistance, drawing on acoustemology theory to show how the ritual of tanbur performances evoke divine presence while countering cultural assimilation. The second, *Theft Songs*, analyzes Kurdish digital discourses that accuse Persian and Turkish musicians of “stealing” melodies, framing these narratives as ethnonational boundary-making strategies rooted in histories of structural marginalization. The third, *Sacred Strings and Mundane Tides*, applies Thomas Turino’s participatory–presentational framework to trace the transformation of Yārsān musical practice from a sacred, participatory performance to a commodi-

fied art form in global markets. Together, these studies reveal how musical practices—whether through performance, discourse, or digital mediation—become vehicles for asserting sovereignty over cultural expression in contexts of political repression and cultural erasure. By foregrounding sound as both an aesthetic and political act, the panel highlights the central role of music in shaping ethnic and religious identities and contesting hegemonic narratives in contemporary Iran.

## Echoes of the Divine: Yārsān Sacred Soundscapes and the Politics of Sacred Resistance in Iran

**Azadeh Vatanpour**

This research explores the sacred sonic practices of the Yārsān, an ethno-religious minority in western Iran, focusing on how sound functions as both a spiritual conduit and a means of sociopolitical resistance. In Yārsān cosmology, sacredness is not confined to physical places but extends into the sonic realm, where music—particularly the ritual performance of the tanbur and sacred Maqāms—mediates between the human and the divine. Through these performative soundscapes, the Yārsān articulate a distinct religious identity while simultaneously resisting assimilation into Iran's dominant cultural and religious narratives. Theoretically, the study draws on Steven Feld's concept of "acoustemology"—the understanding of the world through sound—and examines how the Yārsān shape their auditory environment as a site of spiritual knowledge and political agency. Rather than existing passively within imposed sonic regimes, they produce sacred sounds that evoke divine presence, encode communal memory, and assert cultural sovereignty. Additionally, the analysis is informed by postcolonial critiques of power and discourse, particularly Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity and resistance, to interpret the Yārsān's sound practices as counter-hegemonic expressions. Methodologically, this research combines semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis of religious poetry and liturgy to investigate the role of sound in preserving Yārsān identity. By foregrounding sacred music as a form of auditory resistance, the study demonstrates how marginalized communities negotiate power through embodied sonic practices. This research argues that the Yārsān sacred soundscape operates as both a spiritual lifeworld and a political strategy—an aural assertion of presence that challenges dominant epistemologies and reclaims cultural space in an environment marked by repression and marginalization.

## Bio

Azadeh Vatanpour is a Ph.D. candidate in Religious Studies at Emory University. She holds an M.A. in Ancient Iranian Culture and Languages from Shiraz University, as well as M.A. degrees in Folk Studies and Religious Studies from Western Kentucky University. A scholar of religion and minority studies, her research examines ethno-religious minority groups in the Middle East, particularly the Yārsān. She co-edited *Essays on Guranī Literature* with Dr. Alireza Korangy, exploring the literary heritage of Guranī-speaking communities in the Zagros region. She is currently co-authoring *The Maqām Tradition and Esoteric Belief in Yārsān Thought* with Sirvan Manhoobi.

## Theft Songs: Musical Ownership and Ethnonational Identity in Kurdish–Persian Relations

**Kajwan Ziaoddini**

This paper examines the recurring claim within Kurdish virtual spaces that certain Kurdish melodies have been “stolen” or “copied” by members of neighboring ethnic or national groups, particularly Persians and Turks, to explore the ideological frameworks through which music becomes a contested site of ownership, heritage, and legitimacy in Kurdish narrative. Focusing on the digital circulation of this trend, especially within Kurdish online spaces such as Instagram, I situate the phenomenon within the broader sociopolitical context of Kurdish-Persian relations and explore the ideological conditions that have enabled its emergence and reproduction. In doing so, I ask: What forms of musical ownership are being imagined, and how are they mobilized in the negotiation of ethnonational identity? Drawing on theories from folklore studies, as well as scholarship on ethnicity and nationalism, I argue that the notion of collective musical ownership reflects a broader process of ethnicization and nationalistic discourse in Iranian Kurdish society. Through a digital ethnography of the Instagram page “Kurd Copy,” and a close reading of the liner notes from original recordings referenced by the page, I show how visual and textual signs, along with strategically curated information, construct a narrative of unilateral cultural appropriation—obscuring the reciprocal exchanges between Kurdish and other Iranian musicians. This framing, I argue, must be understood as reactions to the structural marginalization and cultural erasure experienced by Kurds under the Iranian state. The discourse of musical theft, then, becomes a means of reasserting ethnonational boundaries

in the face of longstanding political exclusion. While previous scholarship has focused on music-making as a site for negotiating identity, this paper demonstrates that recorded music—conceptualized as a form of property—also functions as a tool for articulating and defending ethnonational claims in digital and mediated contexts.

### **Bio**

Kajwan Ziaoddini is a Ph.D. candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland. His research focuses on the intersection of music, identity, and politics. His dissertation examines the Kurdish music practices as a site for negotiating ideologies and identities. Kajwan's research interests also include music and online community-making, Sufi musical practices, and the Iranian classical music theory. He earned his Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Iranian classical music at the University of Tehran and, since 2016, has served as music faculty member at the University of Kurdistan. Kajwan is also a specialist in Persian Radif repertoire analysis and transcription, and an accomplished santour performer.

### **Sacred Strings and Mundane Tides: The Transformation of Music and Society in Yārsān People of Kermanshah**

**Sirvan Manhoobi**

The Yāri faith—also known as Yārsān or Ahl-e Haqq—is an ancient religious tradition rooted in Iran's Kermanshah Province, where music plays a central role in spiritual life. Deeply intertwined with ritual and cosmology, music accompanies a range of Yāri sacred practices, from creation narratives to funeral rites. Within Yārsān communities, music serves not only as a spiritual medium but also as a social binder, connecting religious belief with everyday life and reinforcing communal bonds. Drawing on Thomas Turino's theory of participatory and presentational musical frames (2008), this study examines the shifting social function of Yārsān music—particularly the tanbur tradition. It investigates how tanbur music, once strictly participatory and confined to sacred contexts—especially through exclusive repertoires like the Haqqāni Maqāms—has evolved into a presentational form. Since the 1960s, factors such as urbanization, formalized music training, recording technologies, political pressures, and international exposure have transformed tanbur into a professionalized and commodified art. As it entered broader cultural and economic circuits, tanbur music began to signify both spiritual heritage and cultural capital. The study argues that

this transition reflects a profound reconfiguration of Yārsān musical practice, wherein tanbur now functions simultaneously as a ritual instrument, a marker of identity, and a global performance commodity—revealing the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and market forces.

## Bio

Sirvan Manhoobi is a distinguished Kurdish Iranian multi-instrumentalist, composer, and educator specializing in Iranian classical and folk music. He studied Music at San Francisco State University under supervision of Hafez Modirzadeh and he is currently a PhD student of ethnomusicology at the University of Maryland with focus on Kurdish and Yaresan music. He has worked with prominent artists such as Bahram Beyzai, Shahram Nazeri, Bijan Kamkar, Shahrokh Moshkin-Ghalam and Mojgan Shajarian. He has collaborated with prestigious ensembles such as the Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Shams Ensemble, Sorvad Ensemble, and Ardeshir Kamkar Ensemble. His work as a composer, educator and performer continues to bridge cultural divides, bringing the rich heritage of Iranian music to audiences worldwide.

## ORGANIZED PANEL

### Pish-Radif: A Transformative Approach to Classical Persian Music

**Hesam Abedini, Payam Yousefi, Jessika Kenney, Eyvind Kang, Amir Kourshkani**

#### Roundtable Abstract

This panel examines the emergence and implications of a pedagogical and conceptual model developed by Dr. Hossein Omoumi that offers to reshape approaches to teaching, and understanding within classical Persian music. Designed as a preparatory framework rather than a replacement for the radif, *pish-radif* offers an accessible entry point into the complex modal structures, trajectories, and aesthetic logics of the *dastgāh* system. This panel brings together scholars, composers, and performers to explore *pish-radif* from multiple, intersecting perspectives. Papers address its foundational concepts and instructional aims; its role as an introductory pedagogical method in Euro-American academic settings; its empha-

sis on poetic structure, breath, and voice as tools for internalization and agency; and its relevance for musical imagination, composition, and creative practice. Several contributions examine how *pish-radif* functions as an emergent practice-based framework developed from within the classical Persian music tradition, clarifying functional distinctions among modal units, orienting students toward improvisatory possibility, and offering a condensed yet comprehensive map of the system early in the learning process. Collectively, the panel considers how *pish-radif* responds to long-time calls from within the classical Persian music tradition to address specific pedagogical needs—particularly the inaccessibility of the radif for beginners, the delay in developing structural and aesthetic literacy, and the pedagogical ambiguity in clarifying distinct *gusheh* functions for performance practice. The panel invites reflection on how this model reshapes pedagogical practice, informs analytical and creative approaches, and influences how musicians and audiences alike engage with classical Persian music as a living tradition.

## **Bios**

Hesam Abedini is an Iranian–American composer, performer, and educator whose work interweaves classical Persian music, jazz, computer music, and contemporary composition through polystylistic and improvisatory approaches. His music has been performed by ensembles including the JACK Quartet, Del Sol Quartet, and Hypercube. As the founding member of the Sibarg Ensemble, he explores new models of intercultural music-making. His scholarship appears in *Iran Amplified: One Hundred Years of Music and Society* (Ilex/Harvard University Press, 2026). He holds a Ph.D. in Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology from UC Irvine and is Assistant Professor of Composition and Assistant Director of the New Music Series at California State University, Fullerton.

Amir Koushkani is a performer, composer, and instructor of the traditional stringed instruments: Tar and Setar. He holds a Master’s Degree in Western Musical Composition and a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology. Over the last three decades, apart from concentrating on different aspects of classical Persian music, he has composed widely for theatre, orchestra, and various musical ensembles. Koushkani has recently published a two-volume study on the “Persian Avaz” in collaboration with Master Mohammad Reza Shajarian and Professor Robert Simms. He has performed with Maestro Hossein Omoumi in various concert halls across the U.S. and currently is recording and notating Pish Radif lessons.

Jessika Kenney (she/they) is a vocalist, composer, sound artist, writer, educator, and improviser channeling warbled poetics and visceral blossoms through studied and experiential learning towards liberatory possibility. Her recorded work includes the surrealist meditative provocations of “Uranian Void” on Kou Records and the exegetical nuances of the album "Atria" on Sige, as well as six acclaimed records in collaboration with Eyvind Kang including 2023's "Azure" on Ideologic Organ. Kenney's work remains close in spirit to her punk roots, revealing a defiant imagination that hovers on the edge of knowability, from her recording of Alvin Lucier's final vocal piece "So You" with Charles Curtis, Anthony Burr and Tom Erbe on Black Truffle, to Sarah Davachi's "Two Sisters" recorded remotely with Dorothy Berry. Kenney has also recorded and performed with Niloufar Shiri, Lori Goldston, Trimpin, Simone Forti, and Melati Suryodarmo. Recent experiments include a radio play based on a libretto by Will Alexander. Kenney has studied with Ostad Hossein Omoumi since 2004, including work on the recording “Voices of Spring” in 2009. She is currently based in Berlin till June of 2026.

Eyvind Kang is a composer and instrumentalist who has released 20 albums of original music on labels such as Tzadik, Ipecac, Abduction and Ideologic Organ, as well as worked on hundreds of recordings as a musician and arranger. His latest record is Chirality (Angelica, 2019). His compositions have been played by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony, the Seattle Chamber Players, MG\_INC Orchestra, Coro di Camera di Modena, Orchestra del Teatro Communale di Bologna, and other ensembles. As a violist he has been featured by a wide range of independent musicians including Bill Frisell, Laurie Anderson, John Zorn, the Sun City Girls, and Secret Chiefs. Kang has also performed solo pieces by Christian Wolff and Giacinto Scelsi. His ongoing, genre defying collaboration with composer and singer Jessika Kenney has been described as “serious, refined music” (The New York Times), taking the form of sound actions and installations, choral and orchestral works, and minimalist vocal and string arrangement, with two releases on Ideologic Organ (2011, 2013) and one on Black Truffle (2017). Kang is currently faculty at California Institute of the Arts.

Payam Yousefi (PhD Harvard, 2023) is an Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Florida specializing in the intersections of music and politics in Iran and the US. Currently, he is a Visiting Professor in the Yale Department of Music and a Fellow at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. Yousefi's book project titled, Subversive Sounds: Music and Author-

itarianism in Modern Iran tells multiple stories of how Iranian musicians' have transcended authoritarian controls over the past 20 years: Presenting case studies in four genres, the book argues for music's efficacy as tool to inscribe change in authoritarian political contexts where explicit protest is violently suppressed. His research on the musical resistance of female vocalists in Iran and music and protest , 2019 was awarded the "Charles Seeger Prize, 2019" and the "RMSS Prize ,2023 by the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2019. Most recently his new solo album for the Kamancheh, Songs of Hope was awarded a Global Music award in the instrumental category.

