

CLASSICAL MUSIC OF IRAN

Dastgah Systems

COMPILED AND EDITED BY ELLA ZONIS

With the technical assistance of Mr. Ruhallah Khaleqi

DASTGAH OF MAHOUR

AVAZ OF ESFAHAN (Secondary Dastgah of Homayoun)

AVAZ OF AFSHARI (Secondary Dastgah of Shour)

DASTGAH OF SHOUR

DASTGAH OF CHAHARGAH

DASTGAH OF HOMAYOUN

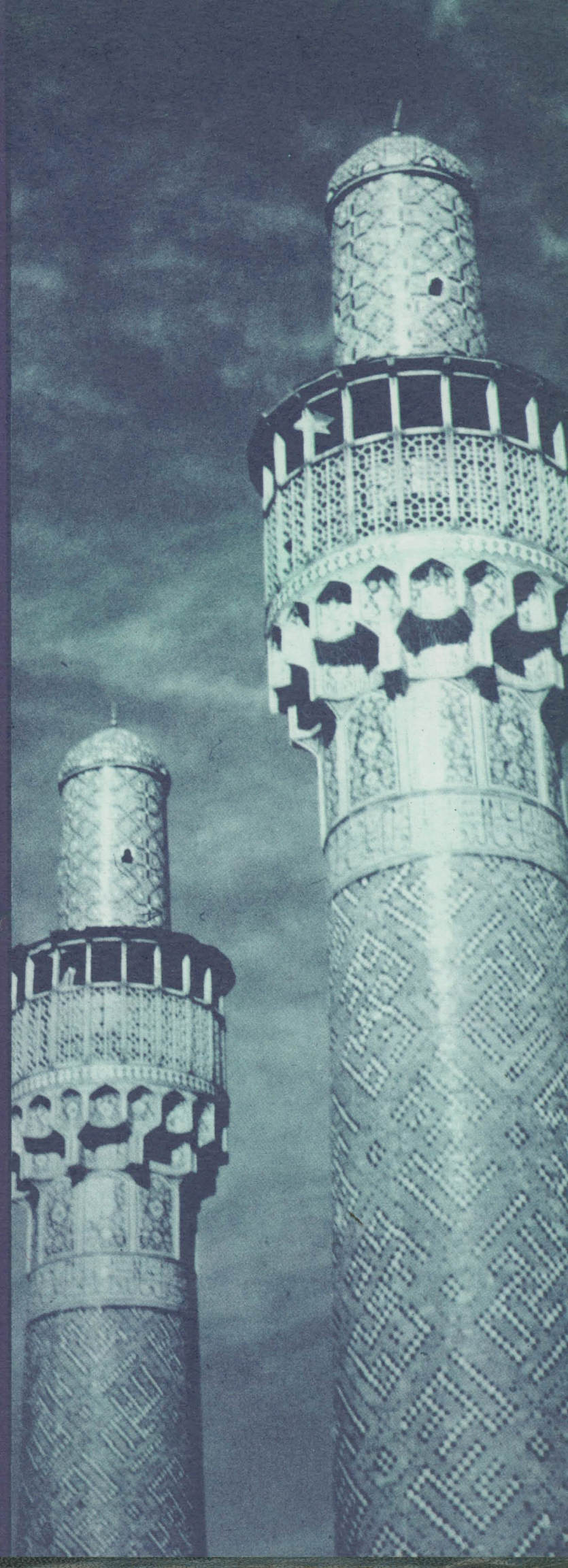
DRUM SOLO

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8831

VOLUME ONE

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MUSIC LP



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The performances of Miss Parvaneh, Mr. Heydari, Mr. Zarif, and Mr. Tehrani are through the courtesy of the Fine Arts Organization of the Government of Iran.

Recordings of the performances of Mr. Ebadi, Mr. Bahari, Mr. Kassayi, Mr. Fakhti, Mr. Tajvidi, and Mr. Eftehah were obtained through the courtesy of Radio Iran.

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Iranian Musician Playing a Setar.

TRADITIONAL PERSIAN MUSIC

The art music of Iran has a long, continuous history. Music heard today, we believe, is quite similar to that of medieval Persia and even to that of ancient Persia. Under the religious provisions and social system of Islam, the practice of music was severely limited; and for more than a millenium Persian music lacked the support of the church, a patronage vital to Western music during the corresponding period. Art music was relegated to private practice and to use by certain Sufi orders. Being thus secluded, Persian music was able to remain in its original form for an unusually long period of time; and, therefore, it now provides us with a link to music which has long since disappeared; for example, that of ancient Greece with which Persia had close contact from the fifth century B. C.

In the contemporary art music of Iran we find many characteristics of older music, preserved in Persia during this long historical period. Persian music is still chamber music and is not traditionally played by orchestras. The most usual performances are solo instrumentalists or a combination of player, singer, and drummer. The music is monophonic, with frequent references to a second melodic line in the use of the bourdon bass and occasional chordal decorations. When the instrumentalist performs with a singer, the texture is heterophonic; that is, the same melody suggested by the singer is repeated, with slight variation, by the instrumentalist.

There is no distinction between composer and performer in Persian music as the musician creates his own composition while playing. He improvises during his performance, using traditional melody patterns as the basis for his improvisation. Because so much of the improvisation consists of adding musical ornaments to the basic melody patterns, the resulting style is extremely florid. This is immediately heard in the famous trills of Persian singers, and even the solo instrumental performances have this florid vocal character. Much of the music is unmeasured and is similar to the *ad libitum* rhythm in the Western fantasia form. But there are also rhythmic sections, the most famous being the *chahr mezbab*, where the performer displays his virtuosity as in the cadenza of a concerto.

The repertoire of traditional melody patterns, which musicians use as the basis for their improvisation, is organized into seven systems called *dastgah* and five secondary systems called *avaz*. Like the Indian *raga* and the Arabic *maqam*, each of the twelve Persian systems has its own scale, its own special degrees of the scale where the melodies center and where they stop, and its own group of traditional melody patterns. The more important of these patterns, called *gouchehs*, may add an accidental to the original scale of the *dastgah* and may center around different notes. Also they may be in a higher or lower range. The five *avaz* can be considered derivative *dastgahs*, as each borrows melodies and cadence formulae from its own parent *dastgah*.

A Persian musician thinks of a *dastgah* in terms of its melody patterns, which are tetrachordal units, and not in terms of its scale. However, for illustration, we may abstract a scale for each. Many of those quoted below, transposed from their performance pitches to start on the note C, contain intervals smaller than the Western half step. The size of these micro-intervals varies from player to player and also varies according to the use of that interval in the melody. They are not exact quarter tones. The sign *koron P* indicates a lowering of the tone to a point between natural and flat. The interval C to E *koron*, for example, may be considered to be a neutral third; that is, it is neither a major third nor a minor third, but is somewhere between.



Iranian Musician Playing the Tar.

The use of micro-intervals plus the free-floating unmeasured rhythm and the particular tone of the instruments and voice create for the Western listener a quality of sadness in all Persian music. Iranians themselves characterize most of the dastgahs as melancholy. But the Persians have an acute sensitivity to this emotion and can distinguish many fine degrees of sadness, from the depths of despair to the sweet sadness of a lover's longing. This music is well suited to the basic philosophical nature of the Persian people, especially when combined with verses from the great Persian mystic poets.

Performances of Persian music normally open with a rhythmic introduction followed by an unmeasured daramad or prelude. After the musician has established the most important scale degrees of the dastgah, he plays a number of gouchehs. These introduce both a new range and new stressed scale degrees. Each goucheh may contain several unmeasured sections and perhaps a chahr mezarab. Close to the end of the performance the musician will descend to the original range of the dastgah. Typical dastgah performances are heard here in the longer vocal selections. The shorter instrumental performances are less typical, but here serve to illustrate the major characteristics of each of the twelve dastgah systems used in Iran today.

THE RECORDINGS

VOLUME I--Side A

1. Dastgah of Mahour

Scale: C D E F G A B C

Although this scale is similar to the Western major scale, additional chromatic tones are added for the major gouchehs. For example, in the goucheh of Mahour called Delkash the seventh scale step is lowered to B flat and the sixth to A koron; here the fifth scale degree is stressed. Near the close of the performance the intervals are resolved to their original

value in the foroud, or the return to the starting range of mahour.

The setar is the most characteristic traditional Persian instrument in use today. In medieval Persia it was called the tambour or pandore. It is widely discussed in the theoretical treatises of Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna). Instruments similar to the setar are found throughout Western and Central Asia. Two of its four strings are tuned to g and c'; the other two are changed according to the dastgah being performed, and the setar is plucked with the right forefinger nail.

Mr. Ahmad Ebadi is the foremost setar player in Iran today.

2. Avaz of Esfahan (secondary dastgah of Homayoun)

Scale: C D E^b F G A^P B^(P) C

The santour has come into great popularity in Iran today because of its brilliant sound and because it offers opportunity for dramatic virtuoso playing. It is a trapezoidal hollow box over which eighteen sets of strings are placed, supported by wooden platforms. The strings are tuned for a range of three octaves. Unlike the European zither, which it resembles, the santour is not plucked or strummed, but it is struck with supple wooden mallets. For this recording Mr. Mohamad Heydari uses felt coverings on his mallets, bringing the tone of the santour close to its structural descendant the piano.

3. Avaz of Afshari (secondary dastgah of Shour)

Scale: C D E^P F G A^(P) B^b C

The kamancheh is a small bowed instrument held vertically and supported on the player's knee. The tuning of its four strings is similar to the Persian violin tuning, most often a, e', a', e'', or a, d', a', d''. Of all the traditional in-



Iranian Musician Playing a Santour.

struments represented here, the kamancheh is the rarest and has been replaced almost entirely by the violin. Mr. Ashgar Bahari plays a daramad (prelude) in Afshari.

VOLUME I--Side B

1. Dastgah of Shour

Scale: C D^P E^b F G A^b B^b C

For this performance of Shour, Miss Khatereh Parvaneh has chosen verses from the Masnavi, famous mystic poetry written in the thirteenth century by Jalal al-Din Rumi, the founder of the Mevlevi order of Dervishes (the "whirling" Dervishes). The verses are set in a free unmeasured rhythm, allowing great freedom for the addition of ornamentation and trills.

The poem, which can be read in the original Persian below, is allegorical. The love described in it is the love of God. A free translation is:

The grieving of the heart announces the state
of love
And there is no illness like that of the
heart.

As much as I describe love
When I attain it, I am helpless.

The cause of the lovers' illness is unique
To them, the religion and the cause is God.

Although words illuminate
In love, wordlessness is clearer.

If other than at the beloved you look
It is not love, but stray desire.

Love is the torch, which, when lit
Burns everything—but the beloved.

عاشقی پیداست از زاری دل نیست بیماری چو بیماری دل
هر چه گویم عشق را شرح و بیان چون به عشق آیم فرو مانم از آن
علت عاشق رعلتها جداست عاشقان را مذبح و علت خداست
گرچه تفسیر زبان روشنگر است لیک عشق بی زبان روشنتر است
غیر معشوق ارمایشانی بود عشق نبود هرزه رسوائی بود
عشق آن شعله است که چون بر فروخت هر چه جز معشوق باقی جمله سوخت

مولانا جلال الدین رومی

Example 1: POEM OF RUMI, Dastgah of Shour V. I, Side B, Band 1.

2. Dastgah of Chahrgah

Scale: C D^P E F G A^P B C

The tar is a larger instrument than the setar and it has a uniquely shaped double belly covered with a thin skin membrane. Its six strings are tuned in pairs: the first pair is variable and tuned according to the dastgah; the second, tuned to g; the third, to c'. The artist for this recording is Mr. Houshang Zarif.

3. Dastgah of Homayoun

Scale: C D^P E F G A^b B^b C

The nei, or Persian flute, is a long piece of bamboo pierced with finger holes and capped with a metal mouthpiece. It can be held in two positions. With these two positions the player produces two distinct registers. These are heard in alternation on the recording.

Mr. Hassan Kassayi here plays an important goucheh of Homayoun called Shoustari. Because it is now often played by itself, separated from Homayoun, this goucheh is likely to be classified as a secondary dastgah (avaz) by future theorists.

4. Drum Solo

The dombak is a one-faced drum held on the knee. The center of the skin face is struck with the palm of the hand producing a round sound "dom." The fingers strike the edge of the face producing the flatter sound "bak." Mr. Hossein Tehrani is the leading dombak virtuoso of Iran.

VOLUME II--Side A

1. Dastgah of Segah

Scale: C D E^P F G A^P B^b C (E^P is the tonic)

The violin is extremely well suited for Persian music as the micro-intervals can easily be played and its bowing technique is suitable for the bourdon or pedal effect characteristic of the chahr mezrabs. There are a number of tunings in use today. The most usual are g, d', g', d'', and a, e', a', e''. The violinist is Mr. Ali Tajvidi; the drum player, Nasser Efteta. Mr. Hossein Fakhteï sings verses of Neshat Esfahani, a poet of the last century. They may be freely translated as follows (see original Persian on the next page):

What a pleasure to complain in the presence
of your hair,
To utter my complaints of separation to
this long night.

Each day I think of the time to come,
When you shall tease and I desire.

The door of the heart is not to be opened to
everyone.

While you are in this house, I shall not
open the door.

MUSIC LP