

CLASSICAL MUSIC OF IRAN, THE DASTGAH SYSTEMS

Compiled, edited, and annotated by Ella Zonis Mahler with the technical assistance of Mr. Ruhallah Khaleqi



Mr. Heydari playing the *santour*

Previously issued in 1966 as FW 8831
and FW 8832
(three tracks have been omitted in this reissue)

Descriptive notes enclosed

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An Iranian musician playing the *setar*
(this musician does not appear on the album)



Mr. Zarif playing the *tar*

Printed in Canada.

Classical Music of Iran *Dastgah Systems*



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0 9307-40039-2 3

1. **Dastgah of Mahour** 9:18
Ahmad Ebadi, setar
2. **Avaz of Bayate Esfahan** 7:33
(secondary dastgah of homayoun)
Mohamad Heydari, santour
3. **Avaz of Afshari** 3:10
(secondary dastgah of shour)
Asghar Baharai, kamancheh
4. **Dastgah of Shour** 10:51
Khatereh Parvaneh, voice
5. **Dastgah of Chahargah** 4:42
Houshang Zarif, tar
6. **Dastgah of Homayoun** 4:24
Hassan Kassayi, nei
7. **Dastgah of Segah** 10:30
Ali Tajvidi, violin; Nasser Effetah, drum;
Hossein Fakhtei, vocal
8. **Avaz of Bayate Tork** 6:10
(secondary dastgah of shour)
Houshang Zarif, tar
9. **Avaz of Abu Ata** 9:12
(secondary dastgah of shour)
Houshang Zarif, tar; Khatereh Parvaneh, vocal
10. **Avaz of Dashti** 5:25
(secondary dastgah of shour)
Ahmad Ebadi, tar

Stunning performances of Iranian classical music by some of Iran's finest musicians. Recorded before the 1979 Iranian revolution drove many performers into exile, this represents some of the best of Iranian classical music. Includes recordings of ten of the twelve dastgah, or tone sets performed on tar, santour, drum, flute, violin and voice. Notes by Dr. Ella Zonis Mahler explain the principles of the musical forms, describe the instruments, and present the poetry of the vocal performances in both the original Arabic and in English translations.



**Smithsonian
Folkways**

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings
Office of Folklife Programs
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600
Smithsonian Institution
Washington DC 20560

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Introduction to the 1991 edition
Anthony Seeger

Director, Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings

This collection by Dr. Ella Zonis Mahler presents brilliant performances in ten of the twelve tone sets, or *dastgah*, of Iranian classical music. The selections were recorded in Iran before the 1979 revolution drove many musicians into exile, and present some of the best classical musicians of that period. The notes by Dr. Mahler explain the principles of the musical forms, describe the instruments, and present the poetry of the vocal performances in both the original Arabic and English translations.

A review in *Ethnomusicology* (volume 15 p. 152-154) hailed this as an excellent collection that includes recordings on most of the currently employed musical instruments by active musicians of the highest caliber; it characterized the compiler's notes as invaluable. In preparing the 2 LP albums for re-issue on a 70-minute CD, time limitations forced us to delete two *dastgah* (*Rast-panjgah* and *Nava*) and a drum solo. The compiler selected these *dastgah* to be dropped because they were performed so infrequently. The two *dastgah* not on this CD are available on Folkways 8832 (see separate box), for those who wish to complete their set of *dastgah*. The drum solo is available on Folkways 8831.

After the Iranian revolution forced the Shah of Iran into exile and brought Islamic fundamentalists to power, the status of this music in Iran changed. Many fine musicians went into exile in Europe and the United States,

where they continue to perform to enthusiastic audiences. For those who remained, public performances were less frequent and house concerts more the rule. A logical step for those who enjoy these recordings is to attend live performances. Iranian classical music is performed in many large U.S. cities today.

Listeners who would like to read more about Iranian music are fortunate in the availability of sources. The compiler published her own fine introduction to the subject (see Ella Zonis 1973, below) that provides much greater detail than she was able to include in these notes. The most concise discussion of Iranian classical music is in **The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians**, Volume 9, pages 292-299. Copies of this dictionary are available at many public and university libraries. Other sources include:

Bruno Nettl, "Persian Classical Music in Iran: The Processes of Change" in **Eight Urban Musical Cultures: Tradition and Change**. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978, pages 146-186.

Bruno Nettl, **The Radif of Persian Music: Studies of Structure and Culture Context**, with an audio cassette. Champaign Illinois: Elephant and Cat, 1987.

Thomas Ogger, **Maq:am Seg:ah/s:ik:ah Vergleich der Kunstmusik des Irak und des Iran Anhand eines Maq:am-modells**. Hamburg: Verlag der Musikalienhandlung, K.D. Wagner 1987.

Ella Zonis. **Classical Persian Music, an Introduction**. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

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FW 8832 *Classical Music of Iran volume 2*
(Note: all but 2 dastgah of this album have been re-issued on this recording [SF 40039]).

FW 8856 *Folk Songs and Dances of Iran*
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Traditional Persian Classical Music

by Ella Zonis Mahler

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 millennium Persian music lacked the support of the Church, a patronage vital to European 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 musics which have long since disappeared, for example that of Ancient Greece with whom Persia had close contact from the fifth century B.C.

In the contemporary art music of Iran we find many characteristics of older musical traditions, preserved in Persia during this long historical period. Persian music is still a chamber music and is not traditionally played by orchestras. The most usual performances are solo instruments or the combination of a single 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 ornate. 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 European fantasia form. But there are also rhythmic sections, the most famous being the *chahar mezarab* 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 *goucheh*, 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 *dastgah*, 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 European 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; it is neither a major third nor a minor third, but is somewhere in between.

The use of micro-intervals plus the free-floating unmeasured rhythm and the particular tone of the instruments and voice, create for the European or American listener a quality of sadness in all Persian music. Iranians themselves characterize most of the *dastgah* as being of melancholy character. 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 Persian culture, 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 *goucheh*. These introduce both a new range and new stressed scale degrees. Each *goucheh* may contain several unmeasured sections and perhaps a *chahar mezarab* (virtuoso section).

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 sections. The shorter instrumental performances are less typical, but here serve to illustrate the major characteristics of ten of the twelve *dastgah* systems used in Iran today. [Editor's reminder: all aspects of the *dastgah* system are more fully treated in Ella Zonis, *Classical Persian Music, an Introduction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973].

The Recordings

1. **Dastgah of Mahour**
Scale: C D E F G A B C
Mr. Ahmad Ebadi, *Setar*

Although this scale is similar to the European major scale, additional chromatic tones are added for the major *goucheh*. 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 instrument played in this example, the *setar*, is the most characteristic traditional Persian musical instrument in use today. In medieval Persia it was called the *tambour* or *pannore* and it is widely discussed in the theoretical treatises of Al-Farabi (d. 950) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 1037). 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 was the foremost *setar* player in Iran at the time of this recording.

2. **Avaz of Bayate Esfahan** (secondary *dastgah* of *Homayoun*)
Scale: C D E-flat F G A-koron B(-koron) C
Mr. Mohamad Heydari, *Santour*

The *santour*, which resembles the hammer-dulcimer, has become very popular in Iran 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 stretched, 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 rather it is struck with wooden mallets. For this recording Mr. Mohamad Heydari uses felt coverings on his mallets, bringing the tone of the *santour* close to its structural descendent, the piano.

3. **Avaz of Afshari** (secondary *dastgah* of *shour*)
Scale: C D E-koron F G A(-koron) B-flat C
Mr. Asghar Baharai, *Kamancheh*

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 instruments represented here, the *kamancheh* is the rarest and has been replaced almost entirely by the violin. Mr Asghar Bahari plays a *daramad* or prelude in *Afshari*.

4. **Dastgah of Shour**
Scale: C D-koron E-flat F G A-flat B-flat C
Miss Khatereh Parvaneh, voice

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 Malevi 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 is presented in the original Persian in figure 1, 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.

عاشق پیداست از آری دل چه نیست بیماری چو بیماری دل
هر چه گویم عشق را شرح و بیان چون پیش آیم فردا نام از آن
عفت عاشق رفته جداست عاشقان را ندب و عفت خدا
گر چه تفسیر زبان روشنگر است لیک عشق بی زبان روشنگر است
غیر معشوق از ماشائی بود عشق نبود مهرزه حموالی - بود
عشق آن شهادت کو چون بر فردو هر چه بر معشوق باقی جمله خست

Figure 1. Poem of Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Dastgah* of *Shour*

5. **Dastgah of Chahargah**
Scale: C D-koron E F G A-koron B C
Mr. Houshang Zarif, *Tar*

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'.

6. **Dastgah of Homayoun**
Scale: C D-koron E F G A-flat B-flat C.
Mr. Hassan Kassayi, *Nei*

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, under the lower lip or between the player's upper teeth. With these two positions the player produces two distinct registers. These are heard in alternation in this recording.

Mr. Hassan Kassayi here plays an important *goucheh* of *Homayoun* called *Shushtari*. 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.

7. **Dastgah of Segah**

Scale: C D E-koron F G A-koron B-flat C (E-koron is the tonic)

Mr. Ali Tajvidi, violin; Mr. Nasser Efteta, drum; Mr. Hossein Fakhtei, voice.

چو خوش است پیش زلفت سرشکوه بازگردن
 کوهی روز هم چون به شب دارگردن
 هر روز در خفا کم که شب دگر بیاید
 تو به ناز که داری من و نیاز گردن
 در دل کنون نشاید به هر نفس از گردن
 تو به خانگی، نشاید در خانه بازگردن
 به تکیه و همت بگنجد غمشه و بیم
 چو خوش است کشف معنی بر حال از گردن
 سر کوی دلش من به حرم کعبه مانده
 که به حرف کنی رو بتوان نماز گردن
 شاد اصغاری

Figure 2. Poem of Neshat Esfahani, *Dastgah of Segah*

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 *chahar-mezrab*. 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 Mr. Nasser Efteta. Mr. Hossein Fakhtei sings the verses of Neshat Esfahani, a 19th century poet. The original Persian is given in Figure 2. They may be freely translated as:

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 shall desire.

The door of the heart is not to be opened by everyone.
 While you are in this house, I shall not open the door.

Because of your words my complaints were begun.
 What a pleasure to discover fine words in those who are close.

The street of my beloved is like the *Ka'beh*,*
 Where one can pray in any direction.

[*The *Ka'beh* is the center of Mecca]

8. **Avaz of Bayate Tork** (second *dastgah of shour*)

Scale: C D E F G A-koron C

Mr. Houshang Zarif, *Tar*

9. **Avaz of Abu Ata** (secondary *dastgah of shour*)

Scale: C D-koron E-flat F G A-flat B-flat C

Mr. Houshang Zarif, *Tar*; Miss Parvaneh, voice.

The verses sung by Miss Parvaneh are from the famous thirteenth century poet Sa'adi and by the eighteenth century poet Hat'ef. Mr. Zarif accompanies Miss Parvaneh on the *tar*.

First poem of Sa'adi (see figure 3)

He who has not a sorrow like mine, how could he know
 How my eyes treasured your image all through the long night.

Now I must be defeated, for all my life
 I have never borne such a sadness.

And with this suffering I cannot go on;
 Alas! The desire of your image stays in my heart.

If I wrote of the anguish of separation,
 Sighs would appear from the hearts of all who read.

آنرا که غمی چون غم من نیست پنداردند

کز شوق تو ام دیده چو شب می گذراند

و وقت که از پای در آیم که همه عمر

باری ننگیدم که به مجسمه آن توانم

ترسم که نامم من از این پنج دیغا

کانه در دل من حسرت روی تو ماند

فریاد که کز شوق فراق تو نویسم

فریاد بر آید ز دل همه که بخواند

Figure 3. First poem of Sa'adi, *Avaz of Abu Ata*

Poem of Hat'af (see figure 4)

If for loyalty's sake you can look at my pale face,
 You will heal all my pain by that look.

For it is you who have sprung the bow and are taut with expectancy.
 You will shoot me...and I grieve.

And all my grief comes to this:
 What will happen if, heaven forbid, you miss?

You are the king and the world is yours.
 You are the moon and the world is yours.

Therefore what harm is there if, by way of
generosity,
You grace a beggar with your glance.

چه شود به چهره زرد من نظری ز راه و خاکینی

که اگر کنی همه در دمن بر یکی نظاره دو اکینی

تو گمان کشیده و درین که زنی به بریم و من غمین

همه غم بود ازین که خدا کرده خطا کنی

توشی و مکت جهان ترا تو مصی و مکت جهان ترا

ز ره کرم چو زبان ترا که نظر بسوی کد اکینی

حافظ

Figure 4. Poem of Hatéf, *Avaz* of *Abu Ata*

Second poem of Sa'adi (see figure 5)

Leave me physician as I know I have no mind
for your healing;
I leave my life as I do not know I live.

But stop—visit with me—in your presence I am
unconscious and shall improve.
Leave me pure delicious wine to relieve my
sorrow.

برو ای طبیب از سر که ز سر خبر ندانم
به خدارا که جانم که ز جانم خبر ندانم
بر میا دو تم قدم نکند ز پیجوی شوم به
می ناب و نوش هم ده که غم دگر ندانم

سعدی

Figure 5. Second poem of Sa'adi, *Avaz* of *Abu Ata*

10. *Avaz* of *Dashti* (secondary *dastgah* of *shour*)

Scale: C D-koron E-flat F G A-flat B-flat C
Mr. Ahmad Ebadi, *tar*

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