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Global Influence of Persian Music

Part I (Persian Instruments)

Homayoon Beigi



In its thousands of years of evolution, Persian music has left its mark on many cultures around the world, from east Asia to the Americas. Being the operators of over a thousand Caravanserays, covering the majority of the Silk Road and with the Persian language being the lingua franca of the Silk Road, the Persians exported many instruments and musical styles and traditions to other cultures. This is not hard to grasp, considering that according to the Guinness Book of Records, *Ancient Persia encompassed over 44% of the whole population of the world*. In this two-part series, we will examine the two aspects of this influence, namely that of the instruments in Part I (March 30, 2022), followed by the theory and practice in Part II (June 15, 2022). The first part reveals some ancient and modern Persian instruments and their influences on those being played in most regions of the world. We will be introducing many instruments live, in addition to viewing some superb video footage about these instruments and those which they have influenced. Our guest in Part I will be master luthier and musician, Maestro Maziyar Heidari, live from Tehran. We will be viewing a one-hour video which is supplemented with his book, "The Secret of Instrument in Making Tar," turning a mulberry tree trunk into a precious Persian Tar. He will be available at the end of the presentation to answer questions from the audience. We will also uncover some instruments from his newly developed cyber-museum, presenting many masterpieces of Persian luthiers and other instruments. We delve into instruments influenced by their Persian counterparts such as the Biwa, Erhu, Pipa, Sitar, Oboe, Oud, Lute, Guitar, etc. In Part II, we will look at the structure and theory of Persian Classical music, including its microtonal and free rhythm aspects. We will review the Dastgah and Maqaam traditions, as well as the structure of the Radif and Persian vocal and instrumental repertoires. We will make comparisons with Western Classical music and draw parallels with relevant case studies, including sample audio.



Born in Kermanshah, Iran in 1969, Maziyar Heidari began his musical education from an early childhood. His first music mentor, Master Ebrahim Sepehri, was one of the best students of the renowned Maestro Ahmad Ebadi. Mr. Heidari studied the Tar and the Tanbur with great masters Fereidoon Hafezi and Taher Yarveisi. At the same time, he familiarized himself with the styles of masters such as Asadollah Farmani, known as Gahvareh, and his brother Yadollah Gahvareh (Tanbur masters). He also benefited from the skill and experience of Maestro Ebrahim Ghanbari Mehr (master luthier). The result of his long work experience and research lead to the publication of his masterful book, "The Secret of Instrument in Making Tar," a book published with the collaboration of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO. In this book, Maestro Heidari has analyzed and revealed the secrets of Tar making over last couple of two centuries, by renowned master luthiers such as Farajollah, Khachik, Hovanes Abkarian (knows as Yahya) and his father Yahya I, Melcom, Jafar San'at, Haji Agha, and Ramezan Shahrokh. His book provides exact instructions for building instruments with the said styles, including exact measurements and tricks of the trade. This book of 500+ oversized pages contains many glossy photos of masterpieces in the Tar making from the above masters, in addition to an accompanying video of Master Heidari at work, showing the whole process of turning a Mulberry tree trunk into a wonderful Tar. His other publications include series of instructional books of the Persian Tar for the youth, for all levels from novice to the advanced stage. Master Heidari has worked with museums and galleries in restoring precious old instruments. Recently, he has founded a cyber-museum, "Maktabkhaneh-ye Yahya," (school of Yahya) showcasing many rare instruments in his collection.



Homayoon Beigi has been conducting research in acoustics for over 30 years and has studied and taught speech recognition and the physics of sound at Columbia University for over 25 years. He also studied music theory with the late Maestro Gregory H. Aslani, along with collaborations with that G.H. Aslani in the composition of a fusion work with three incarnations, featuring the contemporary composition of G.H. Aslani and Homayoon's Persian compositions and arrangement in Chahargah and Shur. Homayoon has been working on the theory and practice of introducing 24-tet microtonal harmony to melodies derived the Persian classical repertoire. He studied the Persian *Kamancheh* with the late maestro, Andranik Aroustamian, from 1983 to 1993. From 1993 to 1995 he studied the classical Persian etudes of *Mirza Abdollah* for the *Tar* under *Reza Derakhshani*. He has also self-studied the Persian *Dotar* in the style of late *Maestro Haj Ghorban Soleimani* since 1996. He has performed in many Persian classical and fusion venues including several appearances at Columbia University, Adelphi University, Symphonyspace, IBM T.J. Watson Research Center, and the Bowery Poetry Club. His fusion work has involved Persian classical music with North Indian (Hindustani) Music (*Tar* and *Dotar* with *Sitar* and *Tabla*), South Indian (Carnatic) Music (*Kamancheh* with *Mridangam* and *Voice*), Persian popular oldies (*Tar* with *Voice*) and Contemporary American Music (e.g., *George Gershwin* on *Tar* with *Voice*), in collaboration with the American Suprano Singer, Monika Jalili. In 1995 and 1996 he won two consecutive *Adventurous System and Software Research awards, while working at IBM Research, for the development of a paper-like interface using a tablet PC for entering and editing musical notation on a computer, utilizing pen-gestures and handwriting recognition technology. Dr. Beigi earned his BS (1984), MS (1985), and PhD (1991) from the mechanical engineering department of Columbia University. He worked at IBM TJ Watson Research Center for ten years (1991-2001) and since 2001 he has been the President of Recognition Technologies, Inc., conducting research on Speaker, Face, and speech Recognition. He has been an adjunct professor in the departments of Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, and Electrical Engineering and has supervised PhD students in Civil Engineering at Columbia University since 1995.*