



## BANĀN, ĠOLĀM-ḤOSAYN

**BANĀN, ĠOLĀM-ḤOSAYN** (b. Tehran, Ordībehešt, 1290 Š./May, 1911, d. Tehran, 10 Esfand 1364 Š./29 February 1986) one of the foremost Persian singers of the twentieth century. He was known for the quality of his voice, vast knowledge of *āvāz* repertory, exactness of style, ability to match poetry with music, and expressive interpretation of Persian poetry.

Banān was born in Tehran into a prominent family with a background in government service. His father, Karīm Khan Banān-al-Dawla, son of Moḥammad-Taḳī Mīrzā Fażl-Allāh Khan Mostawfī Nūrī, appreciated traditional music. His mother was the daughter of Moḥammad-Taḳī Mīrzā Roknī (Rokn-al-Dawla), a brother of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (*Majalla-ye mūsīqī-e rādīo-ye Īrān*, p. 13). Banān's home environment fostered artistic development. His father sang and played the tar (long-necked lute; Abu'l-Ḥasan Varzī apud Farrahī), his mother played the piano, and his maternal aunt played the *ney* (end-blown flute). Once a week friends of his father would attend an informal party to which well-known musicians of the day were also invited (Mallāḥ, p. 3).

Banān received the education customary in the families of bureaucrats, with emphasis on penmanship and Persian literature, in both of which he excelled at school. His handwriting was of calligraphic quality, and he knew many poems by heart (Yarshater). He was known then and throughout his life for his prodigious memory, his ability to pick up accents and to mimic the gestures and diction of others (Mallāḥ, pp. 4-5). Banān learned to play the piano from his mother and would sing and accompany himself (*Majalla-ye mūsīqī-e rādīo-*



*ye Īrān*, p. 13). He also listened to and imitated recordings of his father's voice. His sisters studied the *tār* with Mortazā Ney-Dāvūd. Banān was present during his sisters' *tār* lessons, and would learn and memorize the pieces to help them remember their lessons. Ney-Dāvūd recognized his talent and persuaded Banān's father to let him study voice with him (Mallāḥ, pp. 3-4). He began working with Ney-Dāvūd at the age of eleven and later began his main vocal studies with the religious singer Żiā'-al-Dākerīn (a *rawza-kvān*, or reciter of Shi'ite passions), one of the favorite singers of Banān's father (Mallāḥ, pp. 5-6; Behrūzī). Later he also studied voice with Nāṣer Sayf, who used to sing at the *Anjoman-e Oḳowwat*.

Banān was influenced by a number of other vocalists and instrumentalists. As a young man he listened to and imitated the voice of Janāb Damāvandī, whose voice was high-pitched, but also soft and very relaxed. He was later impressed by Adīb Ḳvānsārī, who was known to him through his recordings. Other singers who indirectly influenced his style were Reżāqolī Mīrzā Żellī, Tāherzāda, Tāj Eṣfahānī, and Amīr Qāsemī (on these, see Ḳāleqī, vol. I, index).

Although there was no systematic vocal *radīf* (repertoire) during the period of Banān's apprenticeship, there were different regional schools, among which the schools of Isfahan and Shiraz were of note. Banān's style was a combination of those found in Isfahan and Tehran (Varzī). His singing was also influenced by the violin style of Abu'l-Ḥasan Ṣabā (q.v.), whose written repertoire was formulated in conjunction with Żiā'-al-Dākerīn (Varzī).

In 1923 'Alī-Naqī Wazīrī (q.v.) the celebrated composer and performer, returned from a five-year stay in Europe and set out to reform the traditional music by his new compositions, his introduction of Western orchestration and notation, and the founding of a music conservatory and, a little later, a musical club, where regular concerts were scheduled by his ensemble. Rūḥ-Allāh Ḳāleqī, a student and assistant of Wazīrī and his eventual successor as the director of the National Conservatory of Music (Madrasa-ye Mūsīqī-e Mellī, recognized Banān's exceptional voice and persuaded him to join his programs, and Banān gradually became the major vocal performer of the concerts arranged by Ḳāleqī in the Wazīrī style (Yarshater). It was his acquaintance with the works of Wazīrī and the association with Ḳāleqī which impressed upon him the importance of clarity of singing, expressive rendering of the lyrics, and careful matching of the meaning of classical lyrics with appropriate melodic materials (*gūṣas*) of traditional modes (*dastgāhs*). It was also Ḳāleqī, the founder of the National Music Society (Anjoman-e Mūsīqī-e Mellī), who



encouraged him to sing more frequently rhythmic vocal compositions accompanied by an orchestra.

Banān began working as a young man for the Department of Agriculture in 1936 and later for the Īrānbār Company in Ahvāz. In 1943 he returned to Tehran to work for the Ministry of Food and eventually became responsible for distribution of bread coupons for the Department of Grain and Bread (Edāra-ye Ġalla wa Nān; Mallāḥ, p. 8). He began singing for Radio Tehran in 1942. He first performed with Abu'l-Ḥasan Ṣabā's ensemble, which included both Western and Persian instruments. These programs were broadcast live one or two evenings a week. Banān also performed regularly with the National Music Society (Anjoman-e Mūsīqī-e Mellī), which performed once or twice a month. The music society primarily performed the compositions of Wazīrī and Kāleqī, which were largely long vocal compositions performed by a soloist accompanied by a large orchestra of Persian and Western instruments. Banān was first interested only in performing *āvāz* (traditional singing); but Kāleqī, impressed by Banān's voice, persuaded him to sing these new compositions with the orchestra. Although Banān did not read music, his ability to memorize allowed him to learn these pieces easily; he would write the name of the *gūšas*, rhythm, rests, and orchestral interludes in the margin of the lyrics (Mallāḥ, p. 11).

Banān performed regularly at both formal and informal gatherings. He paid careful attention to his choice of poetry and the accompanying music and would plan what to sing by going over his notebook at the beginning of an evening. At informal parties, he would often first entertain by telling stories and singing popular and comic songs, saving serious performances for late in the evening. Often at these gathering he would improvise rhythmic (*zarbī*) pieces, accompanying himself on a drum.

His preference for singing eventually led him to pursue a career in music exclusively. The National Music Society had by then divided into two organizations, the National Conservatory of Music (Honarestān-e Mūsīqī-e Mellī) and the "Flowers Program" (Barnāma-ye Golhā, begun in 1955 and ably directed by Dāwūd Pīrnīā; Varzī). In 1953 he became one of the first teachers at the Conservatory (Mallāḥ, p. 9), although this was secondary to his performing career. He taught instrumentalists and vocalists using the traditional oral method of instruction (Mallāḥ, p. 12).

Banān continued to work for the radio two or three times a week, performing



fifteen minute segments that included *āvāz* and a short *taṣnīf*. He performed songs in the style of the day as well as more classical pieces. These song compositions included works by ‘Alī-Naqī Wazīrī, Rūḥ-Allāh Kāleqī, Naṣr-Allāh Zarrīnpanja, Mortazā Maḥjūbī, Akbar Moḥsenī, and ‘Alī Tajwīdī. Lyricists for these pieces included Rahī Mo‘ayyerī and Nawwāb Ṣafā. He became the most prominent singer to perform for the programs “Multi-colored Flowers” (*Golhā-ye rangārang*) and “Eternal Flowers” (*Golhā-ye jāvīdān*). These programs were a continuation of Kāleqī’s efforts to revitalize Persian music. They were arrangements and orchestrations of traditional Persian music, along with newer compositions that utilized basically Persian melodies with Western orchestration, harmonies, and interludes.

In 1958 as the result of a car accident, Banān lost vision in his right eye, which had a noticeable impact on his singing. Not only did he take his work more seriously, but from that time he also began to sing more rhythmic pieces that had popular appeal (Mallāḥ, pp. 13-15). Banān retired from active singing around 1967, although he continued to sing occasionally at private parties.

Banān was careful and exact in his own performance and worked daily to improve his singing (*Majalla-ye rādīo-ye Īrān* 14, 1336 Š./1957, p. 20). He did not perform for television, preferring to sing for a live audience. Since he also did not perform in nightclubs or concerts, the majority of people knew him only through the sound of his voice on radio and recordings. He led a relatively simple life, and was never well off. He had four marriages and two children. His first wife, Maryam Wazīrī, was a sister of ‘Alī-Naqī Wazīrī (communication by Mallāḥ); his last wife was Parī Āvar, who survives him.

*Banān’s vocal style.* Banān was known for the quality of his voice as well as for his style of singing. He had a relatively low-pitched, soft, and relaxed vocal style. His facial expression and singing style were also relaxed. The ideal vocal quality of his time had been high-pitched and intense, possibly due to the tendency of religious singers to project for their large audiences. His modulations (*tahrīr*) and vocal ornamentations were soft, effortless, clear, and well-placed in the context of his singing (Yarshater). Kāleqī has likened his *tahrīr* to the sound of pearls dropped on a marble floor (Varzī). His use of these vocal ornaments was systematic in type, length, direction and place. His use of rests was also systematic. He knew how much and where to put pause in order to create and resolve suspense for the listeners.

Banān had knowledge of both Persian music and poetry. In selecting music for



a poem, he was careful to choose the *gūšas* that fit the meaning of the poetry. He was also careful to match the melody and ornaments to the poetry and was attentive to poetic interpretation (Mallāḥ, p. 8). He had great control and musical skill and was able to express whatever meaning or feeling was in the poetry, varying vocal quality, intensity, and timing. He planned the essential outline and direction of his performance shortly before he performed. At times he would modify the traditional order of the *gūšas* to fit the poetry. He would also choose specific lines of a *gāzal* and at times would vary their order. He then developed his musical expression and improvisation according to poetic interpretation. Banān developed a style that was uniquely his own, drawing from a number of influences. He worked on his style in private; experimenting, innovating, and perfecting it. His favorite accompanists, Reżā Varzanda on the *santūr* (hammered dulcimer) and Loṭf-Allāh Majd on the *tār*, had developed the ability to play and to follow him according to this style. He also enjoyed working with the pianist Mortazā Maḥjūbī and with the violinists Maḥdī Kāledī, Maḥmūd Tājbaḳš, and Parvīz Yāḥaqqī (Varzī; Şafā, p. 193).

*Banān's place in Persian music.* Banān's voice appealed to and was respected by a wide variety of people. Although he was primarily a performer of traditional *āvāz* and was trained in the *dastgāh* (q.v.) system of Persian music, he adapted to the musical trends of his day and performed the more Westernized compositions of Wazīrī, Kāleqī, and others. He also performed popular songs that appealed to people that did not have a background in classical Persian music. In addition to being technically skilled in both poetic interpretation and musical expression, he was extremely versatile and innovative. He carefully crafted his performances, ever developing and perfecting his style. Beyond the expertise of his craft, Banān had great power of emotional expression and communication. He could take people out of themselves, refreshing and transforming them spiritually. The ability to place people easily into a transcendent state (*ḥāl*) is considered a unique gift, and for this Banān became almost legendary as a supreme interpreter of Persian poetry and music.

For a music sample, see [Banān – Kasi ke dar sar-e u](#).

For a music sample, see [Hālā čerā?](#)

For a music sample, see [Kāleqī, Ey Irān](#).

For a music sample, see [Kāleqī, Mey-e nāb](#).



For a music sample, see *Tasnif (balākeš) – Dastgāh šur*.

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Table 22 (Table 22a, Table 22b, Table 22c, Table 22d) and Table 23 (Table 23a, Table 23b, Table 23c) contain a nearly complete listing of performances by Banān recorded on tape. They are based on a list compiled by Mr. Karīm ‘Abd-al-Rasūlī.

For the radio programs in which the pieces were performed the following abbreviations have been used: G.J. = Golhā-ye Jāvīdān; G.R. = Golhā-ye



Rangārang; G.T. = Golhā-ye Tāza; B.S. = Barg-e Sabz; Š.G. = Yak Šāk-e Gol; M.R. = Music on the Radio; M.C. = Tehran Conservatory of Music. In each table the pieces are arranged alphabetically by *dastgāh* and within each *dastgāh* by program in the above order. Pieces for which no program number or program is known are listed alphabetically by the title of the piece. By comparing the two tables it can be easily seen which of the songs (*tašnīfs*, *tarānas*, etc.) listed in Table 23 were performed in conjunction with the *āvāzes* listed in Table 22 and who were the accompanists.

*Search terms:*

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