



BORŪMAND, NŪR-'ALĪ

BORŪMAND, NŪR-'ALĪ (b. 1905, d. 30 Dey 1355 Š./20 January 1977), one of the foremost authorities on the performance and history of Persian classical music in the 20th century. Born in Tehran to the family of a jeweler with roots in Isfahan, he became acquainted with Persian classical music in his early youth. His father, a man of artistic talent, loved music and frequently invited musicians to the family home, and two of his maternal uncles were accomplished musicians. Among the family acquaintances was the highly influential *tār* player Darvīš Khan, with whom Borūmand began to study at the age of thirteen. At the age of sixteen he was sent to Berlin to be educated. While there he took up the study of Western music; after receiving the secondary-school diploma at age 22, he returned to Tehran for a year, during which he again studied Persian music. His principal teacher this time was Darvīš Khan's outstanding pupil Mūsā Ma'rūfī. Borūmand was also briefly interested in the Westernized forms of Persian music then being promulgated by 'Alī-Naqī Wazīrī, the famous modernizer of Persian music. At the age of 23 he returned to Berlin to study medicine; he completed six semesters before a sudden illness caused the loss of his eyesight. He returned to Iran in 1935 and embarked in earnest upon his distinguished career as musician, spending most of his life in Tehran, where he lived in the southern district of Amīrīya.

From the late 1310s Š./1930s to the 1330s Š./1950s Borūmand occupied himself mainly with the study of music. Having become thoroughly proficient in the German language, he also taught it on a part-time basis at several specialized secondary schools and colleges, including Tehran Technical College. Owing to



his family's resources, however, he was able to devote himself largely to the study of music and musical theory. He continued to study the *tār* and took up *setār* and *santūr*. More important, he wished to study the *radīfs* of Persian classical music, the canon of melodies established in the late 13th/19th century by Mīrzā 'Abd-Allāh (q.v.) as the basis for improvisation and composition and thus the centerpiece of the classical tradition, in as authentic a form as possible. He studied with Ḥabīb Samā'ī, Mūsā Ma'rūfī, and particularly Esmā'īl Qahramānī, whom he regarded as the most authoritative master of this repertory. His purpose was to learn the *radīfs* of several masters, and he proceeded to synthesize from them a version both authentic and personal.

Throughout his life Borūmand was unwilling to be known as a professional musician, maintaining that the most excellent masters of Persian classical music were amateurs and that their ability to make choices in all matters—whether to play, when, what, for how long, in what order, choices not open to musicians who were at the beck and call of patrons and employers—was essential to the proper maintenance of the tradition. He was an intensely private person, who was rarely willing to have his performances recorded or even heard by outsiders. In 1344 Š./1965, however, when the University of Tehran began a course of study in theory and practice of Persian traditional music, he was persuaded by Mahdī Barkešlī, then head of music programs at the university, to become the principal teacher of the *radīfs*. An exacting but concerned and imaginative pedagogue, he met twice a week with a class of students, to whom he taught the *radīfs* through oral tradition, until his retirement in 1353 Š./1974. In the mid-1350s Š./1970s he also taught at the Center for the Preservation of Iranian Traditional Music (Markaz-e Ḥefz o Ešā'a-ye Mūsīqī-e Sonnatī-e Īrān). Through his private and academic teaching he eventually became one of the principal transmitters of the tradition, numbering among his students and disciples some of the most prominent of the younger Iranian musicians. He taught Moḥammad-Rezā (Sīāvoš) Šajariān, the prominent performer of classical *āvāz* and *tašnīf*, Dārīūš Šafwat, Dārīūš Ṭalā'ī, Moḥammad-Rezā Loṭfī, and Ḥosayn 'Alizāda. In about 1354 Š./1975, shortly before his death, having largely abandoned his earlier attitude, he permitted the Ministry of Fine Arts and Culture to record the *radīfs* from his own performance on the *tār* (a copy in the University of Illinois Archive of Ethnomusicology; Bayāt-e Ešfahān lacking).

Borūmand was an unusual figure among the musicians of 20th-century Iran. Although an excellent performer on *setār*, *tār*, and *santūr* who occasionally



entertained his guests and friends at small gatherings, he was considered (and considered himself) a scholar and teacher, whose principal contribution came from his thorough knowledge of the *radīfs* and of a large repertory of classical compositions. His outlook remained conservative, and he opposed changes in the *radīfs*, such modernizations as notation, recording, and public concerts, always steadfastly maintaining the uniqueness of the Persian *radīfs* in comparison with similar features in Arabic, Turkish, and Indian music. Although inclined to a retiring attitude, in middle age he recognized that he could make a major contribution to the survival of Iranian music by transmitting to students what he considered to be the authoritative *radīfs* and particularly by developing among non-Iranians an understanding of Iranian music. He taught such foreign ethnomusicologists as Jean During, Gen'ichi Tsuge, Margaret Caton, and Bruno Nettl, and among the pleasures of his later years was a month-long visiting professorship at the University of Illinois in Urbana in 1967.

For a music sample, see [‘Erāq, Nahīb, Moḥāyyer, Ašur-āvand, Esfahānak, Ḥazin, Kerešme, Zangule](#).

For a music sample, see [Borumand – Daramads of šur](#).

For a music sample, see [Delkaš \(2\)](#).

For a music sample, see [Denaseri](#).

For a music sample, see [Hejāz, Bastenegār, Yaquluna, Čāhārpāre](#).

For a music sample, see [Ḥešār – 1](#).

For a music sample, see [Köroğlu](#).

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Parts of Borūmand's *radifs* were recorded by Stephen Blum in Urbana, Illinois, 1967, and by Bruno Nettl, in Tehran, 1968-69; both are preserved in the University of Illinois Archives of Ethnomusicology.

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