



ČAHĀRMEŽRĀB

ČAHĀRMEŽRĀB, a genre of traditional rhythmic instrumental music. Its name suggests four (*čahār*) consecutive strokes of the plectrum (*mežrāb*) on a string. The use of the plectrum in Persian stringed instruments is based on the opposition between right (*rāst*, marked A in modern transcription) and left (*čap*, marked V), or between up and down; the classical formulas of Čahārmežrāb based on this opposition consist of rhythmic patterns (also called *pāya*) performed at a fast tempo with specific combinations of *rāst* and *čap* strokes, for example, A A V A A V, which is the pattern covering the widest span of those in common use. As there is no classical pattern consisting of four strokes, however, it may be assumed that the term Čahārmežrāb originates from this basic pattern, taking into account only the four A strokes, which are louder than the Vs. In the classical instrumental repertory (*radīf*) Čahārmežrāb is often found with this pattern or its variation A V A A V in a 6/16 measure introducing a *dastgāh*, or mode (mainly Rāst-panjgāh, Homāyūn, Navā, Čahārgāh, Segāh) or as a sequence in an important subsection, or *gūša* (Hešār, Bīdād, Bayāt-e Kord, ‘Oššāq, etc.). In this academic context its duration may vary between ten seconds and one minute. Its melodic profile is simple, extremely regular and symmetrical, consisting of a regular progression up and down the basic scale, repeating the same motif on different levels of the scale. It is often characterized by continuous sound of a pedal or drone below the melodic line, which may eventually drop below it. Despite this simple melodic form, some Čahārmežrābs call for very complex work with the plectrum (on the *setār* called *mežrāb* or *nākon* “nail”) to add subtle grace notes to the basic pattern. The best-known example is the Čahārmežrāb-e Māhūr of Darviš Khan



for the *setār*, arranged by Abu'l-Ḥasan Šabā.

Čahārmežrāb has become an important genre in free performances, whether classical or modernized, and its form has undergone profound evolution in the 20th century: The stroke patterns have been extended and adapted to the specific technical capabilities of each stringed instrument (*tār*, *setār*, *santūr*); the rhythmic formulas are no longer restricted to 6/16, though it is still the main type; the tempo may be slower, sometimes close to that of *reng*; the specific pattern of plectrum strokes is not necessarily obvious throughout the piece, so that Čahārmežrābs can also be played on the *kamānča* (bowed instrument) and the *ney* (flute; this adaptation has been developed over the last forty years by the master Ḥasan Kasā'ī). The most elaborated modern forms of Čahārmežrāb are those of the contemporary *santūr* master Farāmarz Pāyvar, some of them called Semežrāb. The melodic form may be much freer than in the Čahārmežrābs of the *radīf*; in fact, in contrast to the latter, most modern forms may be accompanied by drum, or *tonbak/žarb*. Nor is the modern Čahārmežrāb restricted to a few *gūšas* or the introduction to a mode (*darāmad*); it can be performed in almost any context (*gūša*, *āvāz*, or *dastgāh*). In modern arrangements of the *radīf* (Šabā, Šahnāzī) all the modal systems are provided with introductions in Čahārmežrāb, whereas formerly only the *dastgāhs* mentioned above were introduced in this way. The Čahārmežrāb is often arranged by the performer himself or partly improvised.

In spite of these developments Čahārmežrāb has preserved some of its traditional characteristics. It is a solo virtuoso piece requiring a specific technique and usually occurs at the beginning of a *dastgāh* or a main *gūša*, never at the end; its melody is generally simple, with much repetition and transposition; and its function is to relieve the tension generated by the nonmeasured melodies (*āvāz*) or to introduce a mode by presenting the tones of its scale. It can be performed accompanied by a *žarb* or, in recent times, by several instruments.

Čahārmežrāb is also found in the Azarbaijan classical *tār* tradition (*moqām*, *maqām*), sometimes called Gošāmežrāb. It includes about twenty different rhythmic and *mežrāb* patterns and still follows the original style, characterized by simplicity and symmetry in the melodic line.

For a music sample, see [Čahārmežrāb-e Homāyun](#).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

M. Bahārlū, *Ketāb-e šešom-e mūsīqī-e Īrān. Bīst o hašt qaṭ'a čahārmežrāb-e kelāsīk dar davāzdah āvāz wa tārikča o šenāsā'ī-e form-e ān*, Tehran, n.d. N. Caron and D. Safvate, *Iran, les traditions musicales*, Paris, 1966, pp. 151-55.

J. Dūring, *La musique iranienne. Tradition et évolution*, Paris, 1984, pp. 149-53.

M. Ma'rūfī, *Radīf-e haft dastgāh-e mūsīqī-e Īrān/Les systèmes de la musique traditionnelle de l'Iran [radif]*, Tehran, 1352 Š./1973.

F. Pāyvar, *Sī qaṭ'a čahārmežrāb barā-ye santūr*, Tehran, 1351 Š./1972.

E. Zonis, *Classical Persian Music*, Cambridge, Mass., 1973, pp. 131-35.

(Jean Dūring)