



DELKAŠ

DELKAŠ, Stage name of ‘Ešmat Bāqerpur Panbaforuš (b. Bābol, Māzandarān, 1303 Š./1924; d. Tehran, 1383 Š./2004) popular Persian singer and actress of the mid-20th century. Delkaš’s distinctive vocal style and the purity and operatic expanse of her alto range quickly elevated her to artistic as well as popular acclaim. She was recognized for her mastery, intuitive grasp, imaginative interpretation, and emotive projection of the traditional vocal repertoire of Persian music (*radif-e āvāz*) and its melodies (*guša*). She was also extremely appreciated for the vitality and versatility of her vocal innovations and passionate rendering of through-composed love songs. Her popularity began with her interpretation of folk songs of her native Māzandarān, whose essential characteristics she stylized and made entirely her own. Her renown as a singer led to a successful film career as an actress for a decade (1950-60).

Formal education. Delkaš was one of ten children born into a family of modest means in Bābol on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. After her father’s death, her mother sent the twelve-year old ‘Ešmat to live with her married sister Mawlud in Tehran (Golestān). Before coming to Tehran, Delkaš had only attended the traditional *maktab*, where she had learned certain passages from the Qur’ān by ear and rote memorization (Delkaš, p. 55). Soon after arriving in Tehran, despite her age and at her own insistence, Mawlud registered ‘Ešmat in the first grade at the Ordibehešt elementary school. Delkaš’s formal schooling did not exceed the fifth grade. Nonetheless, learning to read and write and her extraordinary imagination, sensitivity, and intelligence provided her with a primary but lasting appreciation of the general poetics



and musical patterns of Persian that would later culminate in her pristine rendering of musical qualities of Persian classical poetry and modern lyrics (*tarāna*).

Musical education. Delkaš's earliest experience of vocalization was listening to her mother's recitations of the holy scriptures from the Qur'ān. She also heard the religious chants and the rich, vibrant folk songs of her native Māzandarān (Nakhjavani). In the fifth grade, a violinist and music teacher known to her as Mr. Ṣahir-al-Dini, discovered the potential of Delkaš's remarkably accurate alto voice while she was learning to sing patriotic songs (Nakhjavani). At his behest, Delkaš began her apprenticeship in music with master of *tār* (six string, skin-covered instrument using a metal plectrum) and music teacher 'Ali-Akbar Šahnāzi (De1kaš, p. 55). Ṣahir-al-Dini subsequently introduced her to the director of the Department of National Music (Edāra-ye musiḡi-e kešvar), 'Ali-Naḡi Waziri (q.v.) and the assistant director Ruḡ-Allāh Kāleḡi. Waziri and Kāleḡi were both musicians, composers, musical theorists, and exigent teachers. Kāleḡi, too, recognized the musical quality, wide range, unusual volume, and the depth of Delkaš's young alto voice. He chose the promising professional name Delkaš for her. "Delkaš" denotes "attractive" but is plurisignificant and semantically resonates in many registers in Persian. In this case, Kāleḡi specifically chose it, because it is also appropriately the name of a melodic, metered segment in the mode of Māhur. Kāleḡi also assigned Delkaš as a student to the singer and *tār* player 'Abd-al-'Ali Waziri.

'Abd-al-'Ali Waziri, a former student of 'Ali-Naḡi Waziri, introduced Delkaš to the traditional vocal repertoire. Delkaš, who did not read music, began her training by learning the modes (*dastgāh*) and their metered melodies (*guša*) by listening and rote memorization as she had done earlier with Koranic scriptures at *maktab-kāna* (Nakhjavani). He also taught Delkaš elements of the new declamatory style of singing, that is the precise pronunciation of vowels and their musical qualities, and enunciation of poetic diction. She received breathing lessons and learned how to articulate clearly poetic sequences in cadenced musical phrasing in the recitatives of classical Persian poetry. Thus 'Abd-al-'Ali Waziri methodically handed down to Delkaš what he himself had learned from his own demanding teacher. His instructions laid the foundation of Delkaš's later exceedingly discriminating, even "obsessive" (Ṭolu'i), concern with the selection of appropriate *ḡazals* for her *āvāz* performances and lyrics of her songs. Delkaš also acquired expertise in playing the *setār* (long-necked, four-stringed instrument with a sound box cover) in the style of master player

of *setār* Aḥmad ‘Ebādi (Nakhjavani).

Musical Career. Delkaš’s auspicious debut as a singer aired on Radio Tehran in 1945. A brilliant former student of virtuoso violinist and respected music teacher Abu’l-Ḥasan Ṣabā, the violinist and songwriter Mehdi Kāledi and his ensemble accompanied her (Behruzi, p. 12). Thereafter, they performed each Sunday evening between 20:30 and 21:00 and often on Friday mornings between 11:30 and 12:00 until 1952. The ensemble, which included both Persian traditional and Western bowed, wind, and percussion instruments, would begin and end with a song of varying length (4 to 8 minutes) in a certain mode and the two segments would be segued by *āvāz* and instrumental solo sections in the same mode as the song. Delkaš’s nascent vocal style closely coincided with the new stylistic simplicity, economy, and elegiac strands that characterized Kāledi’s style as a violinist and songwriter. The predominantly plaintive love lyrics of Rahi Mo‘ayyeri, Esmā‘il Nawwāb-e Ṣafā, and Parviz Kaṭibi complemented and enhanced the new musical aesthetics and stylistics of the singer and the songwriter.

Delkaš and Kāledi’s productive musical collaboration ended over creative differences in 1952 (Behruzi, p. 189). Delkaš’s unique, plangent, but quite often exuberant and fast-tempo style as a vocalist continued on the radio after leaving Kāledi’s ensemble. In the following years, her voice found its varied expressions in folk songs and the compositions of other violinist-songwriters such as Bozorg Laškari, Majid Wafādār, ‘Ali Tajwidi, Parviz Yāḥaqqi, Ḥabib-Allāh Badi‘i, pianist Anuṣiravān Ruḥāni, and the lyrics of Raḥim Mo‘ini Kermānšāhi, and Biżan Taraqqi.

Delkaš, who loved live-audiences and was energized by them (Golestān), also regularly performed at a variety of artistic clubs, night clubs, such as Fānus (Kaṭibi, p. 33) and Guṣvāra-ye Ṭalā‘i, as well as a variety of formal and informal social gatherings (Golestān; Nawwāb-e Ṣafā, p. 444). She traveled with Mehdi Kāledi, virtuoso *tār* player Naṣr-Allāh Zarrin-panja, and *zārb* (a chalice drum) player and singer ‘Ali Zāhedi to Bombay, Lahore, and Karachi, India, in 1946. In Bombay, they recorded twenty-five records (Naṣiri-far, p. 22; Behruzi, p. 163), seven of which were folk songs (Delkaš, p. 57). In 1956, at the invitation of the Soviet government, Delkaš performed in Moscow, Baku, Soviet Azarbaijan, and the Persian-speaking republics of the Soviet Union (Kaṭibi, p. 33). After a twenty-year hiatus, on 6 October 1988, Delkaš appeared in concert at Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, England. The following autumn, she gave concerts in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, and New York and



was enthusiastically received by Iranian audiences everywhere.

In nearly three decades of active professional life as singer and occasional actress, Delkaš repeatedly performed the *āvāz* repertoire, and 370 songs on the radio, in the movies, and on extensive recordings (Nakhjavani). She also composed songs such as the well-known “Bordi az yād-am” (You have forgotten me), in collaboration with Parviz Kaṭibi, and “Sāz-e šekasta” (Broken musical instrument).

Delkaš’s vocal style. As an aspiring singer, Delkaš listened to Qamar-al-Moluk Waziri’s recordings (Delkaš, p. 56). She also greatly admired Ruḥangiz’s vocal style. Delkaš believed Ruḥangiz’s voice possessed “a mysterious something” that inspired her (Nakhjavani; Kaṭibi, p. 33). Her own personal vocal style, however, remained unaffected by her predecessors and contemporaries and eventually proved to be inimitable.

What constituted Delkaš’s new and original aesthetics and stylistics of the art of singing were paradoxical but artistically complementary combinations: passion and intensity maximally controlled; voluminous alto (contralto in her mid-career) sonority modulated by exuberance; profound dramatic and emotional projection made resonant; virtuosic and exact execution of the traditional (*ašil*) *āvāz* repertoire vitalized by its creative appropriation and interpretation; and accuracy of vocal expression augmented by the emotional dimensions and qualities of the accompanying poetic texts. Her improvisational aesthetics in singing through-composed songs and the folk songs of her native Māzandarān were also characterized by such devices as melodic and rhythmic inventions that were highlighted by clearly enunciated diction and the consistently well delineated, nuanced, and elegant turn of the musical phrase.

Delkaš’s place in Persian music. Delkaš’s intuitive ability to bridge the gap between the traditional and the evolutionary in twentieth-century Persian vocal music has established her reputation as a pioneering singer and has prompted critical commentaries such as the “fabulous Delkash, a highly respected singer of both popular and classical music” and the “great vocalist” who invites comparison in Persian-speaking countries with Omm Kolṭum in the Arab world (Nettl, p. 155-56).

Delkaš’s film career. The great popularity of Delkaš’s voice attracted the attention of film producer and director Esmā’il Kušān at Pārs Film (Omid, p.

202). Kušān, who was convinced that Delkaš's "face and presence could make any movie successful," overcame the singer's misgivings about acting and persuaded her to join Pārs Film as an actress (Omid, p. 203). "Delkaš's triumph" (Haghighat, p. 39) in the cinema began in 1950 with the popular success of the film *Šarmsār* "Disgraced" in 1950. Her contributions to the development of the Iranian cinema continued with *Mādar* "Mother" (1951), *Afsungar* "Spellbinder" (1953), *Dasisa* "Conspiracy" (1956), *'Arus-e farāri* "Runaway bride" (1957), *Zālem-balā* "Mean and nasty" (1957), *Fardā rowšan ast* "Tomorrow will be bright" (1960), and *Širforuš* "The Milkman" (1960).

Delkaš was married twice, first to Šāpur Yāsami in 1949 and later to Dariuš Fozun-māya in 1961, from whom she eventually separated (Delkaš, p. 58). Suffering from severe osteoporosis, she lived in semi-retirement in the last two decades of her life with her sole child Soheyl Fozun-māya and his family (Delkaš, p. 55). Delkaš passed away on September 22, 2004 in Tehran.

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(Erik Nakjavani)

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