



'EBĀDĪ, AḤMAD

'EBĀDĪ, AḤMAD (b. Tehran, 1305/1906, d. 1371 Š./1993; [Plate LVI](#)), one of the outstanding modern masters of Persian music. He was a grandson of 'Alī-Akbar Farāhānī (d. ca. 1275/1858) and a son of Mīrzā 'Abd-Allāh (1261-1336/1845-1918), the great masters of their own times. 'Ebādī began accompanying his father on the *zārb* (see [DRUMS](#)) at the age of seven years, then took lessons on the *setār* from his two sisters Mawlūd Kānom and Molūk Kānom before studying briefly with his father (Kāleqī, pp. 128, 453-54). In 1303 Š./1924, at the age of eighteen years, he appeared in his first public concert, accompanying the singer Molūk Żarrābī. Subsequently, however, he became an official in the Tehran municipal government and later in the Ministry of Culture (Wezārat-e farhang), deferring his public career until 1321 Š./1942 (Behrūzī, p. 116). For the next ten years he participated actively in the development of the musical radio series *Golhā-ye jāvīdān*, directed by Dāwūd Pīrnīā. It was through the radio that he attracted a growing audience for the *setār*. In 1337 Š./1958 he played in concert in Paris and thereafter in several European countries. He continued to perform regularly in Persia until 1358 Š./1979. He generally appeared as a soloist or accompanied by the *zārb* and frequented private circles of music lovers, where the special charm of his playing was appreciated.

'Ebādī played a leading role in popularizing the *setār*; the appeal of his performance resulted partly from the development of a new style involving slight technical and acoustical modifications to the instrument, which he undertook upon his disappointment caused by hearing recordings of his own



first radio performances. In contrast to the traditional style of playing, his own was much less rapid, with sharper contrasts in timbre and intensity and less systematic reliance on the drone on all the strings (During, 1984, pp. 45-46); it was characterized by a rich sonority resulting from a firm and broad attack, made easier by a slight displacement of the strings from the sounding board and the use of strings 10-20 percent thicker than usual. Another of his contributions was a very large number of different tunings (*kūk*), which allowed him to play the traditional musical modes (*dastgāh*) in unfamiliar tonalities that lent them original coloration (for a list of his tunings, see ‘Ebādī, Šīvahā). On the other hand, ‘Ebādī never shifted the frets of his instrument, which were at fixed intervals (analyzed by During, 1985, pp. 110-18; idem, 1991, pp. 49-52), regardless of the mode. Available recordings include performances of the *dastgāhs* Māhūr and Daštī (cf. Zonis) and *Šīvahā-ye novīn-e kūk-e setār* (cf. ‘Ebādī).

‘Ebādī had no children and trained very few students, but his style inspired not only players of the *setār* but also most of the instrumentalists of the period 1329-59 Š./1950-80. Although he was extremely generous with advice, he played no role in transmission of the repertory (*radīf*), placing innovative improvisation and development of a personal style above academic knowledge. For ‘Ebādī the *setār* had to touch the heart, but, though its tone is naturally melancholy, it had also to be able to express joy; he believed that it should never be played in the open air or in an orchestra, where it could have only a secondary role (Behrūzī, p. 119). As for his audience, according to Mīrzā ‘Abd-Allah, “Two listeners are not enough; three are too many” (Behrūzī, p. 117).

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

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Plate LVI. Aḥmad ‘Ebādī plays the setâr, Tehran. Photograph Faḵr-al-Dīn Faḵr-al-Dīnī, courtesy of M. Kasheff.