



ELĀHĪ III. MUSIC

iii. Music

It was from his very childhood that Nūr-'Alī Elāhī began playing the tanbūr, the lute that traditionally accompanies the devotional songs (*dēkr*; q.v.) and dances of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq and is considered sacred by them. Acknowledged as a virtuoso on the tanbūr by nine, he demonstrated an uncommon creativity which was expressed through the development of a new musical technique involving five fingers of both hands (rather than the customary 3 or 4 fingers), the enhancing of the aesthetic aspect through numerous rhythmic and gestural patterns, and the considerable development of ornamentation. He also modified the sound and expressive possibilities of the tanbūr by doubling the first string. Another of Elāhī's achievements was his ability to transcend a musical tradition with a limited and scattered repertoire and raise it to the level of a classical art. He established a repertoire of approximately seventy-five melodic types and modes (called *dastgāh*) which provide the support for his improvisation, in addition to approximately a hundred brief melodies or sacred hymns (*sarband*) which he interpreted in his own ornamental style. The repertoire includes old sacred melodies as well as profane melodies from the stock of Kurdish folk music. In every instance they are original or personal versions arranged, developed, or recomposed by him in the spirit of a sacred art. Among melodies that are not found, or no longer found, in the traditional repertoires, sacred or profane, it is probable that a certain number were personal compositions. The inventory that he left includes the following tunes, categorized into four genres.



Mystical (‘erfānī) tune. Šayḡ-amīrī (17 forms), Bābā-faqīhī, Šāh-košīnī, Kākā-redā’ī, Bābā-sarhangī, Bābā-nā’usī, ‘Ābedīnī, Yādgārī, Sayyed-moḥammadī

Traditional tunes. Bālā-dastān, Zīr-dastān, Šāh-ḥosaynī, Šowāna šowāna, Do balā, Karīm-ḡānī, Bārīa bārīa (or Bārgā bārgā), Šīrīn mayā ḡāl, Ḳoršīd-e ḡavar, Saḡarī-e Sayyed Ḳāmūš, Ġarīb ḡāy ḡarīb (or Ġarībī), Šanam ḡāy šanam, Tārī tārī, Gel wa dara, Qaṭār, Mollā-moštafā’ī, Naftīya, Hejranī, Darviš Allāh-waysī, ‘Abd-al-bāqī Khan, Kūča-bāḡī, Lāva lāva, Sārū-ḡānī, Ṭarz-e ma’mūlī, Haft ḡān-e Rostam, Ṭarz-e Arkavāzī, Ṭarz-e mūya, Ṭarz-e ja’farī, Ṭarz-e Ḳān Bābā Ḳān, Ṭarz-e Ā-Sayyed Berāka, Ṭarz-e Ā-Teymūr, Zamzama-ye ṭarz, Nakīsā o Bārbad, Šīn-e ṭarz, Forūd-e ṭarz, Šīrīn o Farḡād, Rāz o nīāz, Sūz o godāz, Yār mobārak bād, Bādā bādā.

Dances (bāzī). Šān-jonbānak, Farangī, Jelow-šāhī, Jangārā, Savār savār, Saḡarī, Gol o ḡār, Pā kotakī, Šīrīna Leylāna, Amāna o yār, Fatā pāshā-ye ḡūrān, Fatā pāshā-ye kermānšāhī, Harātī, Čapī, Larzāna, Samā, Sangelī samā, Qara-čūpī, Ḳān-amīrī, Gardūna (or Geryān), Sejārān, Halpareka.

Outside mystical circles, many people, including renowned musicians such as Ruḡ-Allāh Ḳāleḡī (I, p. 145) and Mūsā Ma’rūfī (p. 14) have attested to the originality of his music as well as its exceptional intensity and impact on the listener.

Elāhī did not play outside a devotional context and his musical performance had all the meditative, emotional, and kinetic characteristics of a *dekr* (*ḡaft andjalī*) and a *samā’*. Many of his musical sessions have been recorded by his relatives, some extracts of which have been published on compact disks (*La musique céleste d’Ostād Elāhi*, 2 vols. Le Chant du Monde, Paris, 1995; *Iran. La musique céleste d’Ostād Elāhi*, Le Chant du Monde, Paris, 1996).

For a music sample, see [Nakisā va Bārbad](#).

For a music sample, see [Šeyḡ Amiri Suite](#).

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