



JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES XI. MUSIC (2)

JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES OF IRAN

xi. Music

(2) Specific Topics on the Jewish Contribution to Persian Music

This section is divided into the following sub-sections: *moṭrebs*, Persian classical music, instrument makers, and popular music.

MOTREBS

Excluded from courts, mosques, and other locales of Muslim ritual, Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian musicians thus became practice-for-hire popular musicians or *moṭrebs* who, in the face of existing prohibitions, performed at life-cycle ceremonies and other social gatherings. Existing scholarship and historical documents suggest that Jews were the most prevalent minority engaged as *moṭrebs*. Other than the fact that they were a widely dispersed minority with documented settlements throughout Persia at the time of Shah 'Abbas I's reign (Fischel, pp. 276-77), one of the more central factors for their prevalence in this field was the notion of *najāsāt* (uncleanness), which, though applicable to all non-Muslims, was most strongly associated with Jews. As a result, there were many draconian restrictions regulating physical contact between Jews and their Shi'ite compatriots, particularly with respect to any



exchange of organic goods (Ebrami, pp. 100-101; Chaouli, 2006, pp. 46-48; Maghen, pp. 183-94). For Jewish families with little or no capital to fund the exchange of merchandise, service for hire was the only available means of income, with music-making being the least physically demanding and comparably most lucrative. The trilateral combination of demographics, *najāsāt*, and aforementioned Shi'ite prohibitions and the concomitant low social status thus resulted in a circumstance that, partly by default, turned a portion of the Jewish population of Persia into professional entertainers in general, and *moṭrebs* in particular. Those historical reports suggesting that professional musicians throughout Persia were exclusively Jewish no doubt fall short of contemporary standards of a methodic population census, but it would safe to say that the majority of the *moṭrebs* in Persia were indeed Jews (R. Kāleqi, I, p. 22; Mašḥun, p. 283, 357; Mir-'Alinaqi, p. 153; Loeb, pp. 155-56).

Though reasonably lucrative, professional music-making came at a considerable social cost for the Jewish *moṭrebs*, who generally belonged to the lowest echelons of society (Confino, pp. 142-43; Loeb, pp. 158-59). Viewed by both Muslims and Jews as enablers and agents of various moral and physical laxities, they were further disdained by many Muslims simply for being Jewish, and marginalized by Jews for socializing with Muslims, eating non-kosher food in their employers' homes, working at all hours of the night, and sleeping late into the day. The social disdain for *moṭrebs* was to such a degree that professional musicians were subject to frequent physical harassment (Z. Kāleqi, p. 40; Loṭfi, 1992, p. 138). Predominantly for this reason, professional music-making became a familial trait, with families intermarrying more out of necessity than choice, thereby creating dynasties of musicians from whose ranks some of 20th-century's Jewish masters of Persian classical music would eventually emerge (Loeb, pp. 156, 158-59, 161; Loṭfi, 1990, p. 4).

Though outcasts, *moṭrebs* were nevertheless indispensable members of society, and their services were very much sought after at social gatherings and life-cycle celebrations. In the case of the Jewish *moṭrebs*, this peculiar dichotomy granted them an exceptional license to move freely across socio-economic divides and transcend with ease otherwise insurmountable social boundaries. We have documented evidence of their presence in the shah's court as early as the rule of [Fath-'Ali Shah Qājār](#) (r. 1797-1834). Physicians and jewelers were the only other members of the Jewish community in post-Safavid Persia to have such a wide-ranging license. This broad social pass no doubt afforded the Jewish *moṭrebs* many opportunities, both positive and



negative. Aware of the mercurial nature of their social status, for instance, Mirzā Aḥmad Khan ‘Alā’-al-Dowla, the governor of Fārs, attempted to engage the Jewish moṭrebs of Shiraz to spy on his behalf in 1903. They managed to evade this by leaving town or rejecting work opportunities for some time (Sa’īdi Sirjāni, ed., p. 719).

The negative social values associated with and often unjustly attributed to the moṭreb should by no means be taken as a reflection of his or her artistic creativity and musical expertise, as the moṭreb’s music is no less grounded in the traditional modal system (*dastgāhs*) of Persian classical music than that of the master musician. Furthermore, over the course of the past five centuries, moṭrebs have practiced, preserved, and passed on specific techniques and particular songs and melodies that would have otherwise been lost, and without which the heritage of Persian music would be unquestionably impoverished. As such, moṭrebs merit equal recognition for their respective part in the preservation of the Persian musical tradition. In light of the fact that the moṭreb was often the exclusive source of music for every member of society prior to the broad distribution of gramophones and radios in Persia in the early to mid-20th century, it further becomes more than apparent that the professional musician’s contribution to Persian music was not only in its preservation but also in its proliferation (Loṭfi, 1992, pp. 137-38, 146-47; Mir-‘Alinaqi, pp. 153-54; Chaouli, 2002, pp. 24-27, 30-34, 36-42; Mašḥun, pp. 371-73).

After the rise of the Qajar dynasty and the official reinstitution of the category of court musicians, the more skilled professional musicians found their way to the court. Named ‘*amala-ye kāṣṣ-e ṭarab*’ (entertainers’ ensemble), these court musicians were retained by the shah and various courtiers with an annual stipend of food and clothing. During the reigns of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96) and his son Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah (r. 1896-1907), the court regularly retained fourteen ensembles of ‘*amala-ye kāṣṣ-e ṭarab*’, each consisting of nine to twelve musicians and dancers. Photographs in an album (no. 6884) belonging to the Golestān Museum and now held in the archives of The Central Library (Ketāb-kāna-ye markazi) of Tehran University show that four of these ensembles were exclusively Jewish. According to Alain Chaouli, all musicians are identified by name in each photograph (Chaouli, 2002, pp. 137-38, 144-45; Najmi, pp. 182, 226). The earliest Jewish musicians known to us belong to this category of ‘*amala-ye kāṣṣ-e ṭarab*’, with their names and details having been preserved essentially because of their association with the court. Of these, the oldest one on record is Ostād Rostam Kalimi Širāzi, the leader of a group of

‘amala-ye kāṣṣ-e ʿtarab at the court of Fath-‘Ali Shah. His group was headed by his pupil, the renowned female vocalist and musician Ostād Zohra, wife to Ja‘farqoli Khan, [Āḡa Moḥammad Khan Qājār](#)’s (r. 1796-97) brother and Fath-‘Ali Shah’s uncle (Solṭān-Aḥmad Mirzā, pp. 38, 40; Mašḥun, pp. 374-75; Maleki, pp. 133-35). Chaouli’s claim (2006, p. 78) that Ostād Zohra and her rival Ostād Minā (wife of Moṣṭafāqoli Khan) were both Jewish requires more substantial evidence. In one of his *qaṣidas*, the poet Mirzā Ḥabīb Qā‘āni (1807-53) mentions one, or possibly three, Jewish *tār* players from the early Qajar era: “*Tārzan Zāḡi o Rayḥān o Malikāy-e yahud*” (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 18-19; Mašḥun, p. 378). Given Qā‘āni’s proclivity for composing court poetry, it is likely that these musicians were well known in the court, though the syntax makes it impossible to determine with certainty whether the qualifier “*yahud*” (Jewish) applies to all three musicians or to Malikāy alone. Similarly, a mid-19th-century oil-on-canvas portrait identifies a Jewish *setār* player named ‘Arus ben Šelemo. Granting some degree of verisimilitude to the portraiture, we may assume from his attire that ‘Arus was esteemed highly enough as a musician to be under the patronage of a member of the ruling elite if not the shah himself (Sarshar, ed., 2002, p. 138). Nothing more is known about any of these four musicians.

Among later professional Jewish court musicians, the *kamānča* player Musā Khan Kāši, or Kāšāni (1856-1939) is the best known ([Figure 1](#)). Also admired for his mellifluous singing voice, Musā Kāši was given the honorific title of Khan by Mas‘ud Mirzā Zell-al-Solṭān (1850-1919), Nāṣer-al-Din Shah’s son and prince governor of Isfahan, in whose provincial court he served for nearly twenty years. While in Isfahan, Musā Khan took on a novice pupil by the name of Bāqer Khan Rāmešgar, who became one of the 20th century’s masters of the *kamānča* (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 66, 68-69; Sepantā, 1987, p. 118). Musā Khan later became a musician at the court of Jalāl-al-Dawla Qājār, the prince governor of Yazd (Levi, III, p. 437), and from there he went to Tehran at the invitation of Nāṣer-al-Din Shah to perform at his court (Sarshar, ed., 2002, p. 144, figs. 671, 672). Musā Khan was famous for his innovation of the six-stringed *kamānča*, a traditionally three-stringed instrument that took on its now-requisite fourth string in the mid-19th century. While Musā Khan’s six-stringed *kamānča* did not prove a lasting tradition among later *kamānča* players, his chief pupil, Bāqer Khan Rāmešgar, was known to use one regularly (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 66, 69-71, 318; Chaouli, 2006, pp. 91-92; During, 1984, p. 77).

[Raḥim Qānuni Širāzi](#) (1871-1944) was another Jewish musician from this



period to hold a position of particular esteem in the history of Persian music, most notably for reintroducing the *qānun* (trapezoidal zither) into Persia around 1900. The instrument had not been in use there since the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsb (Mašḥun, pp. 523-24). This earned him the accolade Qānuni, which he officially adopted as his last name in 1926. During his lifetime, Raḥim Qānuni remained the sole master of the *qānun* in Persia, and while he had some pupils, none surpassed him (Ghanuni; Behbudi). After Raḥim's death, his son Jalāl Qānuni (b. 1900-87) became the next most renowned *qānun* player in Persia (Š. Behruzi, pp. 238-42; Ghanuni; Behbudi).

Among other famous professional Jewish musicians of the Qajar era, mention should also be made of Dāwud Kalimi Širāzi, a celebrated *tār* player, who was teacher to 'Ali-Rezā Khan Čangi (*kamānča* player in the late-Qajar court) and father to Āqā Jān (known as Āqā Jān-e Dovvom, see below) and Esmā'il Sāqi, both renowned musicians in their own right. An accomplished *tār* player, Esmā'il Sāqi was a student of Āqā Ḥosaynqoli (1853-1916), and kept regular company with the famous lyricist 'Ali-Akbar Šeydā (d. 1909), who dedicated one of his *tašniḥs* (ballads) to Esmā'il Sāqi (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 71, 135, 396, 406; Mašḥun, p. 467). An acclaimed *tombak/žarb* (chalice drum) player was Āqā Jān-e Dovvom, who was teacher to Bālā Khan (Raḥamim Kalimi, b. ca. 1865; d. July 1956). Son of *tombak/žarb* player Yaḥyā (Yehudā) Khan, Bālā Khan was among the acclaimed *tombak/žarb* players of his time and a musician at the courts of the last three Qajar monarchs. His exceptional skill on the *tombak/žarb* earned him the honorific title Bālā Khan from Nāšer-al-Din Shah; and he adopted it as his official name (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 406-7). He is the father of two 20th-century master musicians, namely, Morteżā Khan and Musā Khan Ney-Dāwud (see below; Figure 2).

The second half of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of a number of other acclaimed Jewish *tombak/žarb* players. Chief among them was singer and *tombak/žarb* player Āqā Jān-e Awwal who studied the *tombak/žarb* with Samā' Ḥożur (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 404-5). The other two are Yusof Khan (also known as Howni), who was of Bālā Khan's generation, and Mordaḳāy 'Azariyā, who played the *tombak/žarb* at the court of both Nāšer-al-Din Shah and Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah. Like Bālā Khan, 'Azariyā was the patriarch of an extended family of master musicians. A renowned *tombak/žarb* player in his own right, 'Azariyā's son Ebrāhim was father to the 20th-century composer and master musician Solaymān Ruḥafzā (Mašḥun, p. 646; see below).

The disproportionate number of *tombak/žarb* players among 19th-century



professional Jewish musicians in Persia cannot be considered fortuitous or unrelated to the proliferation of both *moṭrebi* and classical music. Master tombak/żarb player Ḥosayn Tehrāni (1912-74) states that prior to his lifelong effort to elevate its status to that of a respectable instrument, the tombak/żarb was regarded with great disdain in Persia. As such, tombak/żarb playing was entrusted to the lowest ranks of professional musicians, that is, predominantly the Jews (Mir-‘Alinaqi, p. 153). Yet the fact remains that to the end of the Qajar period, the tombak/żarb was a requisite instrument in ensemble performances. Moreover, a basic knowledge of tombak/żarb-playing was a prerequisite for all dedicated vocalists and practitioners of other instruments (Loṭfi, 1992, pp. 225-26; Naşirifar, V, pp. 406-7). This stemmed from the peculiar and often complicated rhythms of a range of *guşas* in various modes (*dastgāh*), which required an advanced familiarity with rhythm in order to be executed correctly. As such, master tombak/żarb players like Mordekāy ‘Azariyā were also percussion teachers to many Muslim masters of Persian classical music and *āvāz*. Moreover, the particular proclivity of Jews for playing the tombak/żarb lead to a relatively greater number of Jews skilled in *żarbi-kvāni* (rhythm-singing), which, unlike its closest contemporary Western counterpart “freestyle wrap,” is sadly a dying art in today’s Iran (Loṭfi, 1992, pp. 231-33). While many of Shiraz’s Jewish *moṭrebs* as well as Muslim *morşeds* (in this context the man who accompanies the exercising athletes with singing and beating of a drum) of *zur-kānas* (traditional Persian gymnasium) throughout Persia were skilled practitioners of this art through the middle of the 20th century, few at the turn of the 21st century can claim any degree of mastery in this particular genre of traditional Persian music, now immeasurably impoverished with the loss of their unrecorded songs and lyrics.

Within the broader category of professional musicians, the Jewish *moṭrebs* of Shiraz generally enjoy a reputation as the finest, with reports of this reputation dating as far back as the early 1800s (Loṭfi, 1992, pp. 142-43; R. Kāleqi, pp. 27-28; Loeb, p. 81, 155-63; Browne, pp. 119-20, 241, 243, 320-21; Wills, p. 165, apud Loeb, p. 157). In Shiraz, one of the earliest known by name was Arzāni (Browne, p. 323). Another named Mollā Āqā Yahudi was considered the town’s finest musician during the reign of Moẓaffar-al-Din Shah. Several different episodes from his professional life have been recorded, one involving the kidnapping of his fifteen-year-old dancer son by a Muslim shoemaker (Sa‘idi Sirjāni, ed., pp. 588-89; Chaouli, 2002, pp. 121-22), and another recounting the details of a dispute between Bahā’-al-Soltān and



Entezām-al-Soltān Farrāšbāši over his services (Saʿīdi Sirjāni, ed., pp. 597-98, 602). Other accounts about Jewish moṭrebs from this period reveal that on occasion some would travel to surrounding towns and villages for work, while others left Shiraz for good in order to avoid the relentless persecution of one particular cleric, [Ḥājj Sayyed ʿAli-Akbar Fāl-Asiri](#), who would periodically round up Jewish musicians, destroy their instruments, and shave their heads in humiliation (Saʿīdi Sirjāni, ed., pp. 338-39, 409, 575, 588, 616, also see pp. 157-58, 160, 337, 356, 470, 585, 686; Chaouli, 2002, pp. 116-21). A 1903 survey of Jewish occupations in Shiraz by the Alliance Israélite Universelle shows that 80 of the 1,025 members of the community were musicians (Loeb, p. 82; Confino, pp. 142-43; Saʿīdi Sirjāni, ed., p. 602). In 1960, Ḥabib Levi claimed that ten percent of the Shiraz’s Jewish population of 17,000 were professional musicians (Levi, III, p. 1011). By 1968, Laurence Loeb documented only nine violinists, thirteen *tār* players, fourteen *žarbikvāns*, and one *qānun* player. Keeping in mind the likely inaccuracy of Levi’s demographics, this decline in numbers may be attributed to improved economic opportunities for Jews and the proliferation of radios and phonographs in private homes. The fee for a troupe of two moṭrebs ranged from 300 to 2,000 rials around 1968, with an average earning of 950 to 1,400 rials per week during the peak season of late-March to mid-October; approximately the weekly wage of a school teacher at the time (Loeb, p. 157-58). By the late 1970s, a group of five or six moṭrebs could expect to earn between 3,000 to 4,000 rials for the night. While a comprehensive list of Jewish moṭrebs from Shiraz cannot be compiled (see below for selected list), mention should be made of the most renowned. Of these, Moš-Allāh Managen and his sons Faraj and Jalāl, as well as Kerāmat, ʿAziz, and Jalāl Bālāzāda are among the older and more celebrated families of moṭrebs from Shiraz. Jalāl Owrām-Pulād (also known as Fulādi) was a dancer-actor and the *šandoqdār* of Shiraz’s most famous *ru-ḥawzi* troupe (*dasta-ye Jalāl Khan*). He was admired for his striking good looks and beautiful dance, and his troupe was well known for its *siāh-bāzi* performance. Its *Čahār darviš* performance was among its most popular events. In the mid 1940s, Hāšem Ariya was one of Shiraz’s last and most celebrated boy-dancers who performed wearing women’s clothes. Known mostly by his stage-name Tirām-tirām, Ariya later took on the violin and formed a group with Yaʿqub Kāši (*tār*) (originally from Kāšān; Loeb, p. 160; Sarshar, ed., 2002, p. 361). Šekar Širākun is another of Shiraz’s celebrated moṭrebs. Reputed for his expertise in playing the tombak/žarb while singing, dancing, and juggling the instrument, he was particularly known for a dance he had coined the *juqanaki* (< *juqan* “mortar,” a Shirazi Pers. term), which consisted of playing and juggling the tombak/žarb



while singing and walking around the room in a half-squatted posture as if seated on a chair (Rafailzadeh). Āqājān Baḳṣi (violin), ‘Aziz Baḳṣi (violin, *siāh-bāzi* actor), and Māni (*žarbiḳvān*) also formed a famous troupe. Nasim Golak (*žarbiḳvān*), Ḥašem Delnavāz (*tār*, vocalist), who eventually moved to Tehran where he performed on the radio, and Šokri Kaftari (*tār*) were among the other most reputed moṭrebs of Shiraz, the last two often traveling to Tehran for work. Mention must also be made of Manučehr Širāzi (vocalist, tombak/žarb), the vocalist in Jalāl Qānuni’s ensemble, noted for his broad knowledge and skill at performing *daštestāni* (folk songs of the Fārs province) songs.

As well as Shiraz, other cities with a relatively large Jewish population also had their own Jewish moṭrebs, though not in such large numbers. In Isfahan, for instance, the Šabrang family was one of the oldest families of professional musicians from the first quarter of the 20th century. Closer to the 1940s, *tār* player Musā Širāzi (a native of Shiraz), tombak/žarb player Sāqi Tombakzan, Šabrang (vocals), Višcow (violin) and *ney* player Ruben-e Ṭows (also known as Pir-e Vezaḡ) were the city’s main moṭrebs. In Isfahan, as in other cities throughout Persia, moṭrebs were a fixed feature of all festive life-cycle events, especially weddings and circumcisions. Their most public performances consisted of their leading the ritual precession from the bride and bridegroom’s respective homes to the public bath in a ceremony called *ḥamum-barun*, where the new in-laws would take the bride and groom to the public baths in an elaborate festivity on the eve of their wedding (R. Kāleqi, I, pp. 25-27). Since Jews were barred from Muslim baths and Muslims would not enter Jewish ones, this ritual in particular was always led by Jewish moṭrebs, who followed the precession as far as the vestibule of the bathhouse and entertained the family during the often day-long festivities. During the same ritual in Shiraz moṭrebs would sit in the ante-chamber of the [bathhouse](#) called *bina*, where patrons changed their clothes before entering the inner bathing chamber. The most renowned female moṭreb in Isfahan was a Jewish woman named Bati Bandandāz, a talented tombak/žarb player who was also endowed with a beautiful voice and had a wide knowledge of folk songs, especially *daštestāni* melodies. She also presided over the bride’s ritual grooming and requisite first shaping of her eyebrows on the eve of her wedding (Baravarian; Omidvar; Sakhayi; N. Sarshar).

Kāšān also had a sizeable Jewish population and a number of Jewish moṭrebs. Among them were Bābā Jān (vocals, *kamānča*), Raḥmān Menaša; Eshāq



Māšiah (*dāyera*); Moša Ḥaīm (*tār*); Ešhāq Abrāhām Qaṣṣāb (tombak/żarb); Musā Khānzāda, son of Musā Khan Kāši (*kamānča*); Rabi Rowšan (*kamānča*); Ya'qub Jimjim (*santur*); Moš-Allāh (*sornā*); Nur-Allāh Kohan (*kamānča*); 'Aziz Kohan (violin); Nisān Mollā-Yuhannā (tombak/żarb); 'Aziz Sornāzan (*sornā*); Yusef Khan (*kamānča*); and one female musician Goli Kānom (*ney*) (Haghani).

In Tehran, on the other hand, the number of Jewish moṭrebs was comparatively small relative to its Jewish population. They generally convened around Sirus Street near Tehran's Jewish quarter *Sar-e čāl*, where the majority of Jewish instrument makers (see below) were located. Of these, some would also work as pay-for-hire musicians, while others worked mainly as agents for those moṭrebs that did not keep a shop. Among Tehran's Jewish moṭrebs the male *żarbiḳvān* Nabāti, *tār*-player and vocalist Najāt-Allāh Moš-Allāh Dunel, female *tār*-player and vocalist Šāzda Nabāti, and *tār*-player Farangis Verdi are the only ones from the latter part of the 20th century whose names have survived (Z. Baḳši). Another relatively more famous, named Marżia Kalimi (also known as Marżia Kāldār) was a vocalist from the Aḥmad Shah era (r. 1909-1925) whose name has survived mostly because of her regular collaborations with the lyricist Mirzā 'Ali-Akbar Širāzi, Šeydā, who fell passionately in love with her. The latter's famous *taṣnif* "Marżia" was originally dedicated to this singer and performed by her (Mašḥun, pp. 395, 465; Kāleqi, I, p. 395; Maleki, pp. 143-44). This same song was later performed in a famous recording by the 20th-century singer of *Barnāma-ye Golhā*, Marżia (Š. Behruzi, pp. 391-92). While the reasons behind the comparatively lower number of Jewish moṭrebs in Tehran require further analysis, one possible explanation for it may be the fact that many of the Jewish musicians born in the capital in the 20th century were more likely to gravitate towards Persian classical music. Furthermore, given that socio-economic opportunities for Tehran's Jewish community improved earlier and more rapidly than in other cities, it is also likely that the Jews in Tehran were more quick to take up other means of income than professional music making. The active promotion of Western music at the expense of Persian music and the government mandate that all professional musicians should have permits also had an impact on the profession of moṭrebs, particularly in Tehran, where the government was capable of exerting a greater control on the populace.

Selected list of moṭrebs from Shiraz. Mayur 'Alam (*ru-ḥawżi* actor); Kerāmat Āqābālā (Bālāzāda, violin) (Loeb, p. 158); Jalāl Āqābālā (Bālāzāda; *tār*); Sāqi Āqābālā (Bālāzāda); Ḥāšem Aria "Tirām-Tirām" (boy-dancer, violin) (Sarshar,



ed., 2002, p. 361); Arzāni (Browne, p. 265); Āqājān Baḵši (violin); ‘Aziz Baḵši (*siāh-bāzi* actor, violin); Māni Baḵši (tombak, vocalist); ‘Aziz Bālāzāda (*tār*); Benti-Ya‘qub (comedian, *ru-ḥawẓi* actor); ‘Aziz Češbālā (violin); Manučehr Čubḡaṭṭi Širāzi (folk singer); Ḥāšem Delnavāz (*tār*, vocalist); Jalāl Fišfišak (violin); Našim Golak (tombak, vocalist); Manučehr Jikjikak (dancer); Šokri Kaftari (*tār*); Šokr-Allāh Kandarū (*tār*); ‘Aziz Kāši (*kamānča*); Dāvud Kāši (violin); Ya‘qub Kāši (violin) (Sarshar, ed., 2002, p. 361); Faraj Koškerāmān (Tefilim; tombak, *ru-ḥawẓi* actor); Faraj Managem; Jalāl Managem; Moš-Allāh Managem (Faraj and Jalāl’s father); Reyḥān Mollā-Āqā’i (violin); Šion Munešā (tombak); Jalāl Owrām-Pulād (Fulādi) (comedian, dancer, *ru-ḥawẓi* actor); Laṭif Pejman (violin); Jalāl Qānuni (*qānun*); Raḥim Šiāzi Qānuni Širāzi (*qānun*); Šekar Širāḡun (tombak, singer, performer); Manučehr Širāzi (vocalist, tombak); Moš-Allāh Tefilim (*žarb*, *ru-ḥowẓi* actor); Qitak Tefilim (tombak, *ru-ḥawẓi* actor) (Source: Javanizadeh; Nowbandegani; Rafailzadeh).

PERSIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

The turn of the 20th century was a time of great change in Persia’s social, political, and cultural environments. Music was one of the many fields affected by these changes, as the introduction of Western musicology and notation exposed many musicians to previously unexplored possibilities in music making. The unprecedented transcription of the *dastgāh* with the notation of the repertoire (*radīfs*) collected by Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh, the composition of operas or operettas like *Golroḡ* by ‘Ali-Naqi Vaziri (1886-1980) and *Rastāḡiz-e Irān* by Moḥammad-Rezā Mirzāda ‘Ešqi (1894-1923), and the composition of military marches and national anthems are but some examples of such possibilities (R. Kāleqi, II, pp. 278-87; Sepantā, p. 133; Z. Kāleqi, pp. 47, 53; Šehābi, pp. 72-86). During this same period, the work of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in educating the Iranian Jewish communities and the Constitutional Revolution’s recognition of the full civil status of Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews as citizens were greatly contributing to a general shift in the perception and position of Jews in society at large. Within the community of Jewish musicians, many saw this time of social expansion as a venue to contribute directly to the burgeoning phase of the development of Persian classical music. While recent scholarship has documented the name of many of these musician (see Chaouli, 2002, pp. 145-51), the present entry will consider only those who have left a noticeable mark on this development.



Solaymān Ḥaim is the oldest one of these. Though far more famous for his achievements as a lexicographer, like his contemporary Mirzāda ‘Ešqi, Ḥaim was among a handful of Persians to have experimented with the then-novel and short-lived musical genre of the operetta in Persia. A skillful *tār* and *kamānča* player, Ḥaim was also known for his beautiful singing voice. During the two decades spanning the end of the Qajar and the beginning of the Pahlavi eras, Ḥaim wrote, directed, and produced three operettas: *Yusof o Zolaykā* (full text with stage directions reprinted in Sarshar and Sarshar, 1999, pp. 287-352), *Ester o Mordekāy*, and *Rut o Nayomi*, all of which were brought to stage at the Grand Hotel in Tehran with Ḥaim himself as the lead male in each play. While it was still common for men to play the part of female characters during this period, we know that at least in one production in 1928 the famous Armenian singer Loretā (Loretta) played the role of Zolaykā opposite Ḥaim (Sarshar, ed., 2002, pp. 159, 267; Sarshar and Sarshar, 1999, pp. 3-28, 277-86).

Born in Tehran, master *tār* player Yaḥyā Hārūn Zarpanja (1897-1932) was one of the most prolific Jewish recording artists of his time. His surviving records demonstrate his exceptional technical mastery on the *tār* with his unusually fast and strong pick and his effortlessly fluid tremolos (*riz*). Of particular note among these recordings are his *Sorud-e melli* (national anthem) in the Māhur mode with Jamāl Šafawī on vocals and arrangements by **Mohammad-Taqi Bahār** (1886-1951, Columbia 15038), and his sessions in 1928 with Parvāna on vocals for His Master’s Voice label (Mir-‘Alinaqi, pp. 155; Kinnear, p. 19). Yaḥyā Khan’s other regular collaborators were the singers Nāhid Nikbakt and ‘Ali Khan Farāzi, with each of whom he recorded several albums for the Columbia label, again in 1928. Yaḥyā Zarpanja died of an infection in a hospital in Tehran due to post-surgical complications, thus cutting short a promising career as a classical musician. Master *tār* player Naṣr-Allāh Zarinpanja (1906-81) is Yaḥyā Khan’s most acclaimed pupil (Behruzi, pp. 86-87; Chaouli, 2006, pp. 100-101; Jawādi, II, p. 509; Naṣirifar, II, pp. 24-25; Mir-‘Alinaqi, pp. 155-59; Sepantā, 1987, pp. 209, 222-23; Idem, 1990, p. 177).

Grandson and son of master tombak/żarb players Mordekāy and Ebrāhim ‘Azariā, respectively, Solaymān Ruḥafzā (also known as Simon Imorā, ca. 1900-95) was a master *tār* player as well as a skilled violin, viola, and *kamānča* player. Ruḥafzā was a pupil of Āqā Ḥosaynqoli and **Ġolām-Ḥosayn Darviš Khan** (1872-1926); his chief accomplishment is a series of recordings in 1959 of the complete *radif* of the seven dastgāhs. Collected and arranged by Musā Ma‘rufi, this compilation included Mehdiqoli Hedāyat’s notation of Mirzā ‘Abd-



Allāh's *radif* (Naširifar, I, p. 62; Mir-'Alinaqi, p. 154; During, 1984, p. 32). This studio recording of Ruḥafzā's performance subsequently became the basis for the first-ever complete notation of the *radif*, published in 1963 by the Iranian Ministry of Fine Arts (repr. 1973). According to Šāpur Behruzi, the recordings were still available in the musical archives of the Ministry of Culture and Art as late as 1993 (Š. Behruzi, p. 383; Jawādi, II, p. 734). Ruḥafzā died in Israel in 1995 (R. Kāleqi, III, pp. 109-13; Sepantā, 1990, p. 223; Mašḥun, pp. 553, 559; Nasirifar, IV, pp. 21, 147, 155, 187-88, 191; Jawādi, II, p. 594).

A colleague of Ruḥafzā, master *tār* player, lyricist, and composer Ebrāhim Sarḳoš (1910s-March 1982) was also a third generation musician. Ebrāhim's father Karim and brother 'Ali-Akbar were also accomplished musicians in their own right, though both were known predominantly as master *tār* and *santur* makers (see below). Among Sarḳoš's most valuable and least recognized achievements were the first-ever complete recordings of the *āvāz radif* for the Ministry of Culture and Art (Wezārat-e farhang o honar) with the vocalists Adib Kṽānsāri (1901-82) and Ruḥangiz (1904-84) separately and himself on *tār* (Jawādi, II, pp. 736, 771; Š. Behruzi, p. 519; Maleki, p. 194). The complete Kṽānsāri recordings were released on CD in 2005 by Mahoor Institute of Culture and Art (www.mahoor.ir). In a career spanning over fifty years, Sarḳoš wrote, arranged, performed, and recorded a plethora of songs and programs for the radio, his most successful and longest lasting collaboration being with the renowned female vocalist Ruḥangiz. His most famous arrangement was that of the song "*Dar fekr-e to budam*" (I was thinking of you), performed by the vocalist Marzia in 1950 (R. Kāleqi, III, pp. 168-69; Sepantā, 1990, pp. 208, 252; Š. Behruzi, pp. 90-92; Nasirifar, I, pp. 290-92, IV, pp. 147, 155; Maleki, p. 289).

Yonā Dardašti (1903-93) is the only Jewish vocalist in recorded Persian classical music history to have received wide national acclaim as a master vocalist. Dardašti learned the basics of the *avāz radif* from his father, a *hazzan* (cantor), before studying with Ḥosayn Kožu'i (also known as Mirzā Ḥosayn Sā'atsāz, 1874-1944). A singer in the style of the Khorasan school, Dardašti was known for his powerful voice, high range, and smooth yodeling (*taḥrir*; Naširifar, II, p. 154; Mašḥun, pp. 658, 674). In 1947 Dardašti began singing for Radio Tehran, where, alternating with Jalāl Tāj Ešfahāni (1903-81), he performed on the live weekly program *Šomā va rādio* (You and the radio) every Thursday evening (8:00-8:30 PM) and Friday morning (10:00-12:00 AM) for nearly nineteen years. Despite his numerous concerts and live radio



performances, very few recordings were ever made of Dardašti's voice, with even fewer having survived. Of these, three *āvāzes* in Segāh, Šuštari, and Bayāt-e Tork were re-released in Los Angeles in the 1980s. His famous recording of the *sāqi-nāma* (rhythmic singing of a poem in the genre known as such) in the Māhur mode is also a staple in many anthology CDs of classical Persian songs. Dardašti moved to Rishon-LeTzion, Israel in 1967, where he funded the construction of the Šušān ha-Bira Synagogue, himself becoming its *ḥazzan*. During one of his trips back to Tehran in the mid-1970s, Dardašti recorded selections of liturgical music including the Patakh Eliahu, a *monājāt*, and fragments of Selihot prayers, all of which were also re-released in Los Angeles in the mid 1980s. He died of cancer on 16 January 1993 in Rishon-LeTzion and is buried in Jerusalem (Chaouli, 2006, pp. 101-3; Dardashti, p. 177).

‘Abd-Allāh Ṭāle’ Hamadāni (1914-2004) was a poet, lyricist, composer, vocalist, and violinist most famous for his collaborations with Morteżā Khan Ney-Dāwud and Qamar-al-Moluk Vaziri (1903-59). “*Āfat-e din o deli, rahzan-e jāni*” in Bayāt-e Ešfahān, “*Āh ke šod ruz-e wašl āker-e šab-e hejr*” in Afšāri, “*Az farvardin gašt kold-e barin sāhat-e bostān*” in Bayāt-e Tork, and “*Bād-e kazzān bār-e degar tā ke vazān šod*” in Abu ‘Aṭā were four of his songs that were performed by Qamar, but never recorded (Z. Kāleqi, p. 113). Of the various *tašnifs* by Ṭāle’ Hamadāni, six were posthumously recorded in a CD called *Ṭāle’-e mehr*, with Yaldā Yazdāni on vocals (Naširifar, II, pp. 158-64; Chaouli, 2002, pp. 280-84; Š. Behruzi, p. 512; Ṭāle’ Hamadāni; P. Ṭāle’; Š. Ṭāle’).

Arguably the most renowned Jewish master of Persian classical music, and indeed one of 20th century Iran’s leading musicians, is the composer and *tār* player Mortažā Khan Ney-Dāwud (1900-90), son of master tombak/žarb player Bālā Khan. A pupil of Āqā Ḥosaynqoli and Darviš Khan, Ney-Dāwud is among the very few Persian master musicians to have created a style of *tār*-playing so distinctly his own that it bears his name. Alongside this technical blueprint, he is credited with the discovery and training of a number of Iranian master musicians. The most renowned of these were two of Persia’s greatest recorded vocalists, Gōlām-Ḥosayn Banān (1911-1985) and Qamar-al-Moluk Vaziri, the former discovered by Ney-Dāwud at the age of six (Naširifar, I, p. 371). Ney-Dāwud first met Qamar around 1920, and after a few years of training he organized her first concert held in 1924 at the Grand Hotel, Tehran. The concert was of great historical significance. Nearly twelve years before the official unveiling of women (*kašf-e hejāb*) by Reza Shah (r. 1925-41) in 1936,



Qamar appeared on stage without the traditional Islamic *hejāb* (Z. Kāleqi, pp. 48, 146). Ney-Dāwud and Qamar's other legendary concert was held in Hamadān in 1931. Together, these two concerts have become historical markers not only in the field of Persian classical music, but also in the life of those who lived in Tehran and Hamadān at the time, both having become leitmotifs in many published memoirs of the period (e.g., Mošfeq Hamadāni, pp. 62-64). From 1926 until the end of their artistic collaboration, Ney-Dāwud and Qamar would become the most recorded artists of their time, producing over one hundred albums for His Master's Voice and Polyphon Records. These albums represent that period's first methodic recording of the complete *radif* of music and song combined (Sepantā, 1987, p. 188). In addition to his collaboration with Qamar, Ney-Dāwud regularly worked with at least three other legendary female figures of Persian classical music, namely Ruḥangiz (Batul 'Abbāsi, 1904-84), 'Ezzat Ruḥbakš (d. 1989), and Moluk Žarrābi (1910-99), playing the *tār* in the first two's début radio performances on Sunday 15 February 1942 and Friday 20 February 1942, respectively (Sepantā, 1987, pp. 305-7; Š. Behruzi, p. 519; Maleki, p. 194). Of the three, Moluk Žarrābi was the most regular collaborator with Ney-Dāwud, the latter being in part responsible for her vocal training (Naširifar, I, p. 35; Homa Sarshar; Gabbay).

Mortažā Khan was exceptionally gifted in composing *piš-darāmads* (see DARĀMAD), *čahārmežrābs*, and *tašnifs*, most of which he wrote between 1926 and 1950. While reverberations of Mortažā Khan's compositional achievements continue to be felt in many contemporary recordings of Persian classical music, his technical contribution to this tradition will arguably remain his most important and long-lasting one. Up to the turn of the 20th century, the *radif* in each of the seven *dastgāhs* was not only taught but also performed on a crescendo, starting with the *darāmad* and continuing to the *āvāz*, *tašnif*, and finally the *reng*, with the *gušas* and *āvāzes* arranged from the slowest to the fastest rhythm and the lowest to the highest range in each *dastgāh*'s respective scale. Along with his mentor Darviš Khan and his contemporary composer and master violinist Abu'l-Ḥasan Šabā (1902-57), Mortažā Khan was one of the pioneers in the compositional rearrangement of the traditional *radif*, reorganizing specific *gušas* and *āvāzes* of respective *dastgāhs* with variation in rhythm and melodic scale dispersed throughout the *radif* (Sepantā, 1990, pp. 280-82). Mortažā Khan can therefore be regarded as one of the major figures in Persian classical music, who shaped its future course by providing a model that virtually all composers and performers after him continue to emulate. He joins the ranks of such late 19th-century pillars of



Persian classical music as Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh by having his own signature *radif*. Known as the Ney-Dāwud *radif*, this arrangement of 297 *gušas* of the seven dastgāhs and five *āvāzes*, each identified by name prior to performance, was recorded in its entirety over the course of eighteen month with Mortazā Khan on *tār* in the studios of Radio Iran starting in 1969 (Ney-Dāwud, 1977). These recordings contained fifty-seven more *gušas* than Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh’s canon *radif* (Tala’i, p. 5) and as such remain the most expansive *radif* recorded to date. A complete copy of these recordings is stored at the Ministry of Education in Tehran. At his own insistence, Ney-Dāwud’s only compensation for this work was one complete copy of the recordings, which he later donated to the music library of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the 1980s (Sarshar, ed., 2002, p. 145). Nearly thirty-six years after the original recording, Ney-Dāwud’s *radif* was finally released for the first time in 2005 by Mahoor Institute of Culture and Art.

In the Ney-Dāwud family, Mortazā Khan’s accomplishments are followed by those of his brother Musā Khan (1910-91), who was a master violinist. Throughout his musical carrier, he collaborated with many of the established masters of his time and was a regular member of Mortazā Khan’s ensemble in concerts, recordings, and live radio shows, especially with respect to performances with Qamar and Moluk Żarrābi (Dawlatšāhi, no. 259; Kaṭibi, pp. 20-22). More adept in notation than his older brother, Musā Khan’s most invaluable contribution to his collaboration with Mortazā Khan was the meticulous transcription of all their music, which comprised a considerable collection of *taṣnifs*, *piš-darāmads*, and *čahārmežrābs* (Dawlatšāhi, no. 253). Of these, the only one exclusively attributed to Musā Khan himself is a *piš-darāmad* in Čahārgāh called “*Ešq-e bi ḥāṣel*” (unrequited love), which he taught to all of his students (Gabbay; Naširifar, IV, pp. 281-83; Dawlatšāhi, no. 254).

INSTRUMENT MAKERS

Religious prohibitions against music making also extended to the craft of instrument making; and here again non-Muslims, especially Jews and Armenians, filled in the void. Unfortunately very few old Persian musical instruments have survived to bear witness to their maker’s craftsmanship and identify them with any markers. Reliable information about particular Persian instrument-makers thus seldom reaches back further than the early to



mid-19th century (Šehābi, pp. 70-71). As was the case with musicians, Muslim instrument makers also played a very prominent role in this craft alongside their Jewish compatriots, but the available statistics suggest that there were a disproportionately large number of Jews represented in this field: In the late 1960s almost all of the thirty-five to forty music stores in the vicinity of the Majles in Tehran were owned by Jews (Loeb, 159). Up to that time, a sizeable portion of instruments in Tehran were made, repaired, and sold by these craftsmen, some of whom closely guarded the secrets of their trade (Naširifar, IV, p. 497). By 2005, however, there were no Jewish instrument makers of note left in Iran.

Among Tehran's Jewish instrument makers, the Delšād family is one of the most renowned and prolific. The family's involvement in the field dates back to the late 19th century, when tombak/žarb player Ebrāhim Khan (d. ca. 1950) opened his store on Sirus Street next to the Kešvari Bathhouse in Tehran's Jewish quarter. Ebrāhim had four sons, Solaymān, Mehdi, Našāt, and Fayż-Allāh (1913-82), who were all trained by him. Together, the four Delšād brothers owned and operated the Delšād music store on Bahārestān Square, which also served as a teaching studio for some of today's master instrument makers in Persia. Of the four, Fayż-Allāh was the only one to have acquired the honorific title *ostād* (master) by his fellow craftsmen. Fayż-Allāh died in Tel Aviv, and was buried there in February 1982. His three sons Hušang (b. 1940), Farhād (1945-93), and Farivar (b. 1950) would each become highly skilled craftsmen in their own right. Farhād studied the craft of instrument making with three other masters in Iran, Ebrāhim Qanbari (b. 1928), Darius Šafwat (b. 1928), and 'Abbās Šāpuri (b. 1923). Among his brothers, Farhād was the most prolific craftsman, with expertise in the making of *tārs*, *setārs*, *kamānčas*, *uds*, tombaks/žarbs, and violins. Delšād instruments were highly coveted by master musicians throughout Persia, and many remain today as some of the most exquisite examples of their kind (Naširifar, III, pp. 363-70, V, pp. 389-92; Delshad).

'Ali-Akbar Sarkoš (b. 1923), brother of master *tār* player Ebrāhim Sarkoš, is another established Jewish instrument maker, whose exceptional expertise in making *santurs* (hammer dulcimer) had earned him a reputation as one of the masters of his craft. Among 'Ali-Akbar Sarkoš's contributions to the craft of instrument making is his addition of the quarter scale to the accordion, a modification which enables the instrument to produce the full range of notes



necessary for playing the entire dastgāh (Naşirifar, II, pp. 365-68).

Sons of Qodrat and Āşer Eshāq Baḳṣi, Şion (b. 1920) and his brother Najāt-Allāh Baḳṣi (1924-2005) were two of the other established instrument makers in Tehran. A skilled tombak/żarb, violin, and *kamānča* player, Şion was especially renowned for his craftsmanship in making tombaks/żarbs (Chaouli, 2002, p. 296). Najāt-Allāh Baḳṣi (b. 29 May 1924) was reputed for his exceptional craftsmanship in making *tārs* and repairing antique ones (Naşirifar, V, pp. 383-85). Located on Bahārestān Square near the Majles in Tehran, Şion and Najāt-Allāh's "Baḳṣi brothers' music store" was relocated after fifty years to a store on Darvāza Şamirān in the late 1980s. By the time of his last interview on record in October 2002, Najāt-Allāh was the last remaining Jewish store-owner of classical Persian instrument sales and repairs in Tehran (Farahani). He died on 5 October 2005 and was buried in the Giliārd cemetery in Tehran. His last store was demolished soon afterwards to make way for the new subway line (M. Bakhshi; Z. Baḳṣi).

POPULAR MUSIC

The westernization campaign that swept through Persia after the rise of Reza Shah in 1925 eventually affected the state of Persian music as well. Broadly speaking, this impact translated into a gradual shift in popular taste away from traditional and Persian classical music towards a novel genre highly influenced by the popular music of neighboring and western countries (Sepantā, 1990, p. 231). Called pop or *jāz* (jazz) music, this particular hybrid of Persian and quasi-Western music initially emerged out of extensive sampling of Russian, Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arabic folk and popular songs. Rapidly evolving into a distinctly Persian version of 1970s soft-rock by artists like Tom Jones, Elton John, Barbara Streisand, and Sonny and Cher, Persian pop reached the peak of its popularity in the decade prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 with recording artists like Guguş/Googoosh, Sattār, and Dariyuş on one end of the spectrum, and Mahasti, *Hāyeda* (1942-90), and 'Ali-Akbar Golpāyagāni on the other, the last three additionally successful performers of a more traditional hybrid of Persian music. Though none of the musicians that took the stage with this novel genre of Persian music were Jewish, its promotional and distribution infrastructure from 1962 to 1979 was, by and large, dominated by Āpolon (Apollo) Records, owned and operated by the Jewish brothers Manşur and Manučehr Bibiān (b. 22 November 1933).



Āpolon Records originally started in 1954 as a record shop selling imported 45s. In 1956, Manučehr Bibiān met a then unknown singer named Vigen Derderiān (1929-2003) performing at Kāfa (Café) Šemirān, and decided to produce a 45 rpm record of one of his songs. Recording their first song in a makeshift studio in Bibiān's home with a one-band hand-held recorder, they produced Vigen's now famous "*Kodā negahdār*." Printed on a 45 rpm record by Royāl Records, this song is the first Persian pop song ever produced. It was soon followed by Vigen's next two hit singles "*Šā[h]-dumād*" and "*Bārun bārun-e*," the last sung both in Persian and Armenian. After Vigen, Bibiān produced records for Ravānbakš and Purān. Prior to the production of these albums, the only pop music available in Persia was that of foreign artists. Their production thus represented a veritable revolution in modern Persian music, and their commercial success quickly attracted a new generation of musicians, lyricists, and singers, who started to work with the fledgling Āpolon Records. Under Manučehr Bibiān's leadership, Āpolon Records discovered some of the leading Iranian pop icons like singers Rāmeš, Dariuš, and Giti, and the composer/lyricist Farid Zolān (b. 1956; Sarshar, ed., 2002, p. 392, fig. 754). Exponentially increasing its influence over the recording industry, by the early 1970s Āpolon Records was working with virtually all the leading figures of Persian popular music, among them Jahānbakš Pāzuki (composer), Anuširavān Ruḥāni (composer), Manučehr Češm-Āḍar (lyricist/composer), Homā Mir-Afšār (lyricist), Ḥasan Šamā'izāda (lyricist/composer), Jannati 'Aṭā'i (lyricist), Turaj Negahbān (lyricist), Sattār (singer), Guguš (singer), Mahasti (singer), Ḥomayrā (singer), Hāyeda (singer), Golpāyagāni (singer), Banān (singer), Parisā (singer), and Moḥammad-Rezā Šajariān (singer), most of whom worked exclusively with Āpolon. In addition to his credit for producing the first Persian pop song, Bibiān was also the first recording executive to produce and promote a particular genre of Persian urban folk coined *lālazāri* music after the famous street in Tehran, where the cabarets showcasing its most popular singers were located. As such, Manučehr Bibiān is credited for the discovery of such Persian urban folk icons as Susan, Āqāsi, and Firuza, each of whom separately ranked among the most commercially successful recording artists of 1970s Iran. With exclusive production rights on more than six thousand titles, an established reputation for the discovery and promotion of new talent, and an ensemble of many of the leading recording artists, in the six to seven years prior to the Islamic Revolution, Āpolon was selling an average of twenty five thousand unites per day via nearly two thousand



records stores throughout the country and others abroad. As such, Āpolon had become by far the largest music production company in the country, and Manučehr Bibiān the most influential recording executive in Persia prior to 1979 (Bibiān).

For a music sample, see [Bayāt-e Tork](#).

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