



MAḤJUBI, MORTEŽĀ

MAḤJUBI, Morteżā (b. Tehran, 1279 Š./1900; d. Tehran, 1 Farvardin 1344 Š./21 March 1965), celebrated composer and performer of the piano. He was a self-educated and innovative piano player who was renowned for his masterful utilization of the piano in performing traditional Iranian music.

Maḥjubi's father, 'Abbās-'Ali Nāẓer, had artistic talent and played the Ney (an end-blown flute); and his mother, Faḵr-al-Sādāt, knew how to play the piano. This very suitable family atmosphere and his own natural genius for music helped Morteżā to get initiated into the world of music in his early childhood. As a child, he often sat behind the piano and played this instrument in his own childish fashion, creating certain tunes. His parents, noticing his talent for music, took him to Ḥosayn Hangāfarin, a famous musician and performer of the violin and the piano to teach him the basics of music and performance of the piano. They later sent him to Maḥmud Mofaḵḵam, a pianist and an outstanding student of master musician Āqā Ḥosaynqoli, to further familiarize him with the repertoire (*radif*) and melody sections (*guša* of traditional Persian music and to help him master the art of piano playing (Kāleqi, 1954, I, pp. 250-51; Nas'Airifar, 1990, p. 329; Behruzi, 1993, p. 256).

Maḥjubi's genius in absorbing music manifested itself from early childhood. By the time he was ten years old, he had become an expert pianist who played in the gatherings of the aristocracy. His fame as a child prodigy reached such proportions that he, at the age of ten, participated in a concert featuring 'Āref Qazvini and accompanied 'Āref's singing on the piano. Since 'Āref was extremely fastidious in regard to the performance of his band's members, his



acceptance of a young boy as his own back-up performer illustrates Maḥjubi's masterful excellence as a youthful pianist. He had become a well-known musician by the age of twelve and was regarded, by many, as the leading piano performer of his time. At the age of 13, he accompanied in concerts such celebrated masters of Persian music as Darviš Khan, Sayyed Ḥosayn Tāherzāda, and Ḥosayn Esmā'ilzāda (Naširifar, pp. 329-37).

In 1928 Maḥjubi traveled to Beirut in the company of Abu'l-Ḥasan Šabā Ḥosayn Yāhaqqi, [Morteżā Ney-Dāwud](#), 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Šahnāzi, and other master musicians in order to have some of his musical works recorded on gramophone records. On this occasion, around 100 musical records were made, including two solo piano performances by Maḥjubi. Other works of Maḥjubi, in which he has accompanied such masters of Iranian singing as Qamar-al-Moluk Waziri, [Moluk Zarrābi](#), Tāj Ešfahāni, [Adib K̄vānsāri](#), Jawād Badi'zāda (*qq.v.), and [Ġolām-Ḥosayn Banān](#) on the piano, are regarded among the best examples of classical pieces of contemporary Persian music.

Maḥjubi was not familiar with the international system of musical notation, so he invented his own system of writing music by using symbols that were somewhat similar to the *siāq* script (a system of signs once used in accounting; for a sample see Naširifar, p. 337). Parviz Yāhaqqi, the Persian composer and violinist, has related that he had once composed a song that was to be broadcast on the radio. When the musical note sheets were distributed to the members of the orchestra, Maḥjubi asked Yāhaqqi to play the song on the violin. He then jotted the tune down in his own style of writing music on the back of his cigarette pack. When the rehearsal started, Maḥjubi's performance was unexpectedly more accurate than the rest of the orchestra (Behruzi, p. 256).

After the establishment of the Radio Tehran, Maḥjubi was one of the first musicians to join it and to take part in its musical programs. Later, in 1956, when radio program entitled [Golhā](#) was launched, Maḥjubi became one of the most outstanding figures of this musical program, which aimed at demonstrating the aesthetic relationship between poetry and music in Persian culture (Sangin-qalam, I, p. 144). According to Esmā'il Nawwāb-e Šafā, Maḥjubi would sometimes go to the Golhā studio at Radio Tehran without an appointment or an advanced notice and play the piano in solitude. On such occasions, the technical personnel of the Golhā program would, without Maḥjubi's knowledge, record his performance on tape. These recordings are now considered among the treasures of traditional Persian music (Nawwāb-e



Şafā, 1998, p. 222).

Composition. Numerous vocal and non-vocal pieces of music composed by Maḥjubi are now at hand. Most of his rhythmic vocal compositions (*taşnif*), generally considered among the lasting pieces of Persian music, were performed by the distinguished vocalist Banān in the Golhā program, with lyrics mostly composed by the celebrated poet Rahi Mo‘ayyeri. In a radio interview with Taqī Ruḥāni, Maḥjubi said that he had composed some 150 pieces of music including songs, Piş-darāmads (preludes; see [DARĀMAD](#)), [Āhārmežrāb](#) (improvised musical solos) and Rengs (dance music; Nawwāb-e Şafā, p. 218). It is interesting to note that according to many of the authorities of Iranian music, including According to Ḥosayn Alizāda, Maḥjubi’s song entitled “*Man az ruz-e azal*”) is the most brilliant melody composed in the past one hundred years. (Please provide reference)

Style. The significance of Maḥjubi’s work is partly in the fact that he performed Persian melodies on a completely Western instrument with such masterful excellence that one would think the piano was truly a Persian instrument (Behruzi, p. 256). According to Mr. Sāsān Sepantā (1990, p. 179), Maḥjubi’s music contains embellishments and accents that brilliantly manifest genuine characteristics of Persian music

Maḥjubi was one of the most prominent improvising music performers. He always began playing without advanced planning and his works always took form under the influence of his feelings and his sentimental impressions at the time of playing the piano. For this reason, if he played in the Daşti mode ten different times, ten very different works would be created. Due to this style of work, none of his compositions resemble any other (Nawwāb-e Şafā, p. 218).

[Table 1.](#) Most Famous Songs Composed by Maḥjubi with Banān as the Vocalist.

For a music sample, see [Āvāz-e Daşti](#).



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