



QAMAR-AL-MOLUK VAZIRI

QAMAR-AL-MOLUK VAZIRI (Waziri), commonly referred to as Qamar, the stage name of Qamar-al-Moluk Vazirizāda (b. Tākestān, circa 1284 Š./1905; d. Tehran, 14 Mordād 1338 Š./5 August 1959, [FIGURE 1](#)), popular, pioneering Persian mezzo-soprano, much revered for her mastery of the repertoire of Persian vocal music (*radif-e āvāz*) and her sensitive rendition of *taṣnif* or through-composed metered songs (*taṣnif, tarāna*). The date and place of her birth and the circumstances of her early childhood have been the subject of conflicting anecdotal and speculative accounts. Her existing birth certificate, however, issued in Tehran in 1925, legally records her first name as Qamar-al-Moluk and her last name as changed from Sayyed Ḥosayn Khan to Vazirizāda, the name she chose for herself in honor of the musician and theoretician of music 'Ali-Naqi Vaziri (see [Kāleqi](#), pp. 19, 20, 21). It also indicates the place and date of her birth as Tehran, 1905. She was born to her widowed mother Ṭubā, who had lost her husband Mirza Sayyed Ḥosayn Khan shortly before Qamar was born. She subsequently lost her mother when she was around a year old and grew up in the care of her maternal grandmother, Mollā Kayr-al-Nesā' ([Kāleqi](#), pp. 22-23).

Under her grandmother's tutelage, Qamar grew up in central Tehran, in the then middle-class Sangelaj neighborhood ([Kāleqi](#), pp. 19, 22-24). In her youth, Mollā Kayr-al-Nesā's melodic voice had gained her a position as a *rawzakvān*, a narrator of the tragedy of Shi'ite martyrs of Karbalā, at the religious gatherings of the women's enclosed quarters (*ḥaram*) at the court of the Qajar king Naṣer-al-Din Shah. The king had bestowed upon her the title of Efteḵār-al-



Dākerin “the Glory of narrators” (Behruzi, p. 502). At age seven, Qamar began accompanying her aged, ailing, but still active, grandmother to her religious recitals during the ninth and tenth days of the month of *Moḥarram*, Tāsu‘ā and ‘Āšurā, the period of mourning by the Shi‘ites for the martyrs of Karbalā. She also would follow Mollā Ḳayr-al-Nesā’ to less formal women’s religious gatherings, funerals, as well as birthdays and anniversaries. During these gatherings, the musically precocious Qamar was able to learn a great deal by ear from her grandmother as a *rawzakvān* about the modal and tonal qualities of the Shi‘ite religious elegies, lamentations, and meditations (*marṭia*). The *marṭia*, in its essential correlation with *radif-e āvāz*, the foundational and generative repertoire of unmetered modal arias in Persian traditional music, particularly its highly elegiac segments such as Ḥejāzin the mode of Abu ‘Aṭā and Ġamangizin the mode of Dašti, constituted Qamar’s first aural schooling in Persian traditional music. With her health rapidly failing, Mollā Ḳayr-al-Nesā’ encouraged Qamar to perform along with her the *marṭia* repertoire at women’s religious gatherings. Qamar reportedly did so with a precociously confident and poised presence and an accurate, uncommonly projective, strong, and emotionally evocative voice. These performative characteristics were to become the signal traits of Qamar’s subsequent career as a simultaneously popular and esteemed Persian vocalist (Ḳāleqi, pp. 25-28).

Musical education. Qamar attended various elementary schools (*maktab*) and then Madrasa-ye Nāmus for girls in her Sangelaj neighborhood and learned how to read and write, which later enabled her to appreciate the subtleties and nuanced musical patterns of Persian classical poetry and to incorporate them into her recitations. Musically, Qamar continued to learn much aurally from well-known musicians of the time who frequented the festive musical gatherings held at the house of a relative and patron of music Majd-al-Ṣanāye‘ (Ḳāleqi, pp. 33-34). The names of such musicians included *tār* (a lute with a long neck and six strings) players Ġolām-Ḥosayn Darviš, known as [Darviš Khan](#), and Musā Naydāwud in 1922-23 (Behruzi, pp. 507-8). Persuaded by the inherent purity, power, and the expanse of Qamar’s mezzo-soprano voice, Naydāwud offered her lessons in the tonal techniques and modal refinements of the traditional Persian voice repertoire. Qamar’s apprenticeship with Naydāwud led to the discovery of their mutual musical affinities and his later collaboration with the young singer as her first accompanist (Behruzi, p. 508).

Musical career. Qamar’s first formal performance as a vocalist took place at Tehran’s Grand Hotel in 1924. The first public appearance of a Persian female



vocalist without the obligatory veil (*hejāb*) signaled an immensely significant development in Persian music. It was an event that set a precedent and affected the musical life of future generations of Persian female vocalists prior to the Revolution of 1979 and eventual establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On this consequential occasion Qamar sang *Morġ-e saḥar* (The Dawn bird), a through-composed song in the mode of Māhur composed by Mortazā Naydāwud with lyrics by the poet Moḥammad-Taqi Malek-al-Šo‘arā’ Bahār. Until the establishment of musical broadcasts on Radio Tehran in 1940, Qamar’s frequent concerts continued in formal venues such as movie-theaters Sepah and Palace in Tehran and less formal festive, charitable, and commemorative musical events both in Tehran and provincial cities such as Mashad around 1928-30 and Hamadān in 1931 (Kāleqi, pp. 92-93).

Performances on Radio Tehran. Qamar’s inaugural weekly participation as a vocalist on Radio Tehran’s musical programs was in 1941 with a song written by pianist Musā Ma‘rufi and lyrics by Hedāyat-Allāh Nayyer Sinā. After suffering a stroke, she retired from her weekly radio participation as a singer. In her farewell radio performances in 1956, Qamar sang in a drastically diminished voice in the modes of Abu ‘Aṭā, Afšāri, and Māhur for Radio Tehran. In the first two sessions, she was respectively accompanied by violinist Abu’l-Ḥasan Šabā, *tār* player Esmā‘il Kamāli, and *zārb* (chalice drum) player Amir Nāṣer Eftetāḥ, and in the final session by *tār* player Arsalān Dargāhi (Kāleqi, p. 162).

Collaborations with master Persian musicians and lyricists. Many accomplished musicians found proclivities between Qamar’s stylized, lyrical vocalization of the repertoire of *radif-e āvāz* and her affective phraseology of songs and their own instrumental style. They collaborated with her as accompanists, soloists, ensemble leaders or members in live performances and recordings. Chief among such musicians were pianists Mortazā Maḥjubi, Ḥabib-Allāh Mošir Homāyun (Šahrdār), Musā Ma‘rufi; *tār* players Arsalān Dargāhi, Esmā‘il Kamāli, Mortazā Naydāwud, and ‘Ali-Akbar Šahnāzi; violinists Abu’l-Ḥasan Šabā and Rokn-al-Din Moḳtār, and violin and *kamānča* (four string spike fiddle) player Ḥosayn Yāḥaqqi; and *zārb* player Amir Nāṣer Eftetāḥ. Contributors of lyrics to Qamar’s songs also included well-known poets and lyricists of her time such as Moḥammad-Taqi Bahār, Pežmān Baḳtiāri, Ḥasan Waḥid Dastgerdi, Mirzāda ‘Ešqi, Iraj Mirzā, Rahi Mo‘ayyeri, Moḥammad-‘Ali Amir Jāḥed, Jahāngir Nur, ‘Aref Qazvini, and Mo‘ayyed Tābeti (Behruzi, p. 509; Kāleqi, pp. 360, 364)



Recordings. Beginning in 1927-28, accompanied by *tār* player Arsalān Dargāhi and violinist Ḥosayn Yāḥaqqi, Qamar did various 78 rpm recordings of songs for the German company Polyphon. Her career as a recording artist and as a performer of *āvāz* and songs continued with the recording company His Master's Voice (1933), with collaboration of pianist Mortazā Maḥjubi, her musical mentor and *tār* player Mortazā Naydāwud, his brother violinist Musā Naydāwud, and flutist Ya'qub Khan Rašti. Among Qamar's lasting legacies as a vocalist are her *āvāz* recordings for Red and Yellow Seal Polyphon records in the modes of Abu 'Aṭā, Afšāri, Čāhārgāh, Dašti, and Šur, in which she was accompanied by Arsalān Dargāhi. She made a number of song recordings for Yellow Seal Polyphon records such as *Mawsem-e gol* (Flower season), *Ruzgār-e godašta* (Bygonedays), *Māh-e man* (My beauty); and *Qalb-e mādar* (A mother's heart), *Ḥāšel-e zendagi* (Life's harvest), and *Sirat-e zibā* (Inner beauty) for His Master's Voice.

Vocal style. Qamar's mezzo-soprano voice had a wide expanse; it was powerful and lyrical, accurate and sensitive, faithful to the traditional values and emotive. The tone of her voice was elegaic and plaintive, the qualities she had learned in singing the moving lamentations at religious ceremonies as a young girl. She was respected among musicians for her mastery of the modal vocal repertoire of Persian music and its various modal segments (*guša*), and her nuanced declamatory delivery of them. Qamar also excelled in her execution of all the ornamental refinements of *āvāz*, known as *riza-kāri*, and was particularly noted for her extraordinary ability in performing of the *tahrir*, a falsetto break between higher and lower notes in the melody line of the *āvāz*, a signal trait of Persian traditional music. Qamar also made a cameo appearance in the film *Mādar* (The Mother, 1951) with [Delkaš](#), another Persian vocalist of high stature, in which Qamar briefly performed selections from the *radif-e āvāz*. No copies of this film are known to be extant.

Qamar's place in Persian music. As a vocalist, Qamar was respected for her musical as well as her pioneering spirit as a vocalist in public concerts as well as her progressive social and political tendencies and legendary compassion for the poor and the powerless and her generosity to them. She was the first Persian vocalist to perform in public without the socially and religiously sanctioned dress code for women, the first recording artist, and the first female vocalist to sing and record highly charged political songs such as Abu'l-Qāsem Āref's Constitutional Revolution song *Mārš-e jomhuri*. Qamar's strong legacy as a vocalist preceded and became the exemplary foundation for the



career of Persian female vocalists who followed her until the Revolution of 1979 and the advent of the Islamic Republic.

For a music sample, see [Qamar al-Moluk – Magar nasim-e sahar](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Šāpur Behruzi, *Čehrahā-ye musiqi-e irāni*, Tehran, 1993, pp. 499-516.

Zohreh Kāleqi, *Āvāy-e mehrabāni: yādvāra-e Qamar-al-Moluk Vaziri*, Tehran, 2000, pp. 19-28, 92-93, 162, 362-64.

Partial Discography.

Audiocassette: Qamar-al-Moluk Vaziri, a collection of eleven songs: Māhur: “*Ḳabar az delnadārad ka nadārad yār-i*”; Māhur: “*Gar konad-am sar bā sar-i*”; Dašti: “*Agar to fāreḡi az ḥāl-e dustān*”; Afšāri: “*Āḡer in nāma suzāndan aṭarha dārad*”; Maṭnawi-e Afšāri: “*Jānā hezārān āfarin*”; “*Ey ka gofti hič moškel čun ferāq-e yār ništ*” and “*Amān ze hejr-e roḡ-e yār*”; Segāh: “*Tā ‘ešq-e to kard kāna dar kāna-ye del*,” Ahangrooz, Canoga Park, California, 1991.

List of recordings selected from Zohreh Kāleqi’s *Āvāy-e Mehrabāni*. Red Label Polyphon Records (1927-28, p. 364): “*Āvāz-e Dašti*,” accompanied by Aرسالān Dargāhi (*tārtār*) and Ḥosayn Yāḥaqqi (violin); “*Oššāq*,” accompanied by Aرسالān Dargāhi (*tār*).

Yellow Label Polyphon Records (1929, pp. 362-63). “*Dar bahārān*,” song in the Segāh mode, accompanied by Mortazā Naydāwud (*tār*) and Musā Naydāwud (violin); “*Āvāz-e ḡamangiz*,” accompanied by Ya‘qub Khan Rašti (flute); “*Āvāz-e Šur-e Salmak*,” accompanied by Mortazā Naydāwud (*tār*)

His Master’s Voice (1933, pp. 362-63). “*Āvāz-e Segāh*,” accompanied by Mortazā Nadāwud (*tār*) and Musā Naydāwud (violin); “*Qalb-e mādar*,” song in the Segāh mode, accompanied by Mortežā Naydāwud (*tār*) and Musā Naydāwud (violin); “*Āvāz-e Afšāri*,” accompanied by Mortazā Naydāwud (*tār*)