



SAMĀ'Ī, ḤABĪB

SAMĀ'Ī, ḤABĪB (b. Tehran, 1284 Š./1905; d. Tehran, 1325 Š./1946), outstanding player of the *santur* (a kind of dulcimer), usually considered the greatest *santur* player of his time (Mašhun, II, p. 517).

Samā'ī's first teacher of music was his father Ḥabīb-Allāh Samā' Ḥożur, an accomplished performer of the *santur*, who started teaching his son how to play the *tombak* (drum) when the child was four years old. Before long Samā'ī began to accompany his father's *santur* playing with his *tombak*. He then started learning how to play the *santur*, and by virtue of his own talent and his father's conscientious and demanding teaching, he could perform this instrument with a good degree of proficiency by the time he was ten years old. At the age of twelve, he was proficient enough to play in the ensembles of the master musicians of the time. Samā'ī also attended music school for a while, where he learned some basics of musical notation, but he never made use of musical notes to write down his compositions (Naşirifar, I, p. 303).

Samā'ī joined the army as a young man and spent a number of years on military assignments in Khorasan and Kermān; but he did not show much interest in pursuing a military career and never got higher than the rank of first lieutenant. When he finally returned to Tehran, with the encouragement of his friends, particularly [Abu'l-Ḥasan Şabā](#), he started a *santur* class. His music classes quickly gained momentum and attracted a large number of students. Samā'ī, however, was not very keen on teaching and lacked the forbearance and perseverance required for this profession. Moreover, he was a rather moody and irritable person, often alienating students with his



unwarranted critical remarks. Most of his students soon left his class except for a handful whose deep love of music induced them to tolerate his edginess. One of these students was Abu'l-Ḥasan Ṣabā, who stayed with him for about one year trying to learn Samā'i's particular techniques of playing the *santur*. Some others, such as Nur-'Ali Borumand, Qobād Zafar, and Mortezā 'Abd-al-Rasuli attended Samā'i's classes for ten to fifteen years. Manučehr Jahānbeglu and Ḥosayn Ṣabā also joined his classes but could not continue for long.

Samā'i was one of the first musicians to join Tehran Radio when it was established in early 1940. His performances there were so widely appreciated by the public that soon the Department of Music (Edāra-ye musiḡi-e keřvar), which was in charge of the musical programs of the Tehran Radio asked him to have himself transferred from the army to the Ministry of Education in order that he would teach music full-time. Samā'i agreed at first and got himself transferred but soon changed his mind and transferred back to the army.

Samā'i was an exceptionally talented *santur* player, who was also endowed with a charming voice, which he often used to accompany his music, thus creating an enchantingly combination. His strokes were gracefully measured, rapid, and fluent. Dāriuš řafwat refers to him as a great genius (*nābeęa-ye bozorg*) with brilliant creative talent and relates, on the authority of Nur-'Ali Borumand, a case illustrating the profound effect that Samā'i's music had on his audience (řafwat, p. 65; Ḥaddādi, p. 222).

Samā'i's greatest contribution to Persian music, however, was his rejuvenation of the *santur*, which, due to its complex nature that requires years of dedicated effort before one could master playing it, was rapidly falling into oblivion. When Samā'i began his career, there were very few people in Persia who knew how to play the *santur*, but the broadcast of his masterful performances on Tehran Radio created such an excitement and enthusiasm that soon a large number of young people began learning how to play this instrument (řafwat, p. 58; Ḥaddādi, p. 324).

Unfortunately not many of Samā'i's works have survived. The sole recording of his solo performances, which was kept in the archive of Radio Tehran, was erased at Samā'i's own insistent request (or it was erased to reuse the blank tape; Sepantā, p. 175). The only remaining pieces of Samā'i's performances are five gramophone records (in Māhur o Delkař, Abu 'Aęā o Ḥejāz, Bayāt-e Eřfahān, Žarbi-e řahnāz o Gereyli), in which he accompanies Parvāna, a well-



known vocalist of the time (Kāleqi, III, p. 50). Samā'ī also composed a few rhythmic pieces, the best known of which is on a verse by the poet Moẓaffar Širāzi, which was later performed by the vocalist Purān Šāhpuri. Samā'ī died at the age of forty-one and was buried at Ẓahir-al-Dawla cemetery north of Tehran.

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