



ŠEYDĀ

Šeydā, the pen name of Mirzā ‘Ali-Akbar Širāzi (b. Shiraz, 1259/1843; d. Tehran at the Šafi ‘Ališāh *kānaqāh*, 1324/1906), a Persian musician regarded as the most important composer of the lyrical popular song (*tašnif*) in the late Qajar period. He was also a composer of *ġazals*, a calligrapher, a singer, and a *setār* player. Persian classical musicians regard Šeydā’s *tašnifs* as the best examples of the classical *tašnif*, a song on traditional love themes and metaphors which is often composed in one section (*guša*) of a *dastgāh*. Šeydā drew on both court (‘Abdallāh Dawāmi, interview, 28 September 1976) and popular tradition (Badi‘i, pp. 85, 92), in line with the 19th-century trend in language and poetry toward simplification and popularization. His *tašnifs* appealed to a wide audience that was not confined to the circles of the court and aristocracy.

Mirzā ‘Ali-Akbar left government employment in Shiraz to follow the spiritual leader (*moršed*) Šafi ‘Ališāh, a Sufi of the Ne‘matallāhi order (Ātaši, p. 14). He also followed this *moršed*’s successor Šafā ‘Ališāh, or Ṣāhir-al-Dawleh, who founded the Anjoman-e Oḳowwat (Society of Brothers). An aristocrat during the time of Nāšer-al-Din Shah, Ṣāhir-al-Dawla became a political figure favoring the revolution during the time of Moṣaffar-al-Din Shah (Kāleqi, p. 75). He was also a *tašnif* composer and encouraged musicians, including Šeydā. The concerts he organized in the Anjoman-e Oḳowwat included the leading musicians of the day and were directed by Darviš Khan, a student of the court musician Āqā Ḥosaynqoli and himself at one time in the service of one of the princes.

Tašnifs of Šeydā were performed at these concerts, which were given at



gatherings and celebrations of the Anjoman in Zahir-al-Dawla's home or in the gardens of Bahjatābād or 'Ešratābād (Kāleqi, pp. 76-79). In what was considered the first public concert of its time, the Society held a 24-hour celebration of the birthday of the 'Ali b. Abu Ṭāleb, where many musicians played together in a new presentation of classical music that included *pišdarāmad* (overture), *āvāz* (vocal improvisation), *tašnif*, and *reng* (in a dance rhythm) (Zonis, p. 144; Kāleqi, pp. 76-79). The orchestra performed *pišdarāmad* and *reng* compositions of Darviš Khan and *tašnifs* composed by Šeydā, including the *tašnif* "Mawlud," which he composed specially for the festival in the *dastgāh* of Segāh (q.v.).

Although many of Šeydā's *tašnifs* were composed for the ceremonies of the *kānaqāh*, his love for a woman named Marziya has been considered the main impetus for his *tašnif* composition. As the story is told, 'Ali-Akbar, a Sufi dervish, old and impoverished, falls in love with a young Jewish singer, becomes consumed with this love, and writes songs to her and about her, singing them to himself late at night. He then leaves the *kānaqāh* (Badi'i, p. 82), and when he is eventually brought back, "nothing was left of his body and soul" (Ātaši, p. 15). Biographers of Šeydā draw a parallel to the story of the mystic Shaikh Šan'an, who falls in love through a dream with a Christian girl and leaves his students to become the tender of her pigs. The students eventually find him and bring him back to the path of spiritual pursuit. Both 'Abdallāh Dawāmi and Ruḥallāh Kāleqi mention that at least one of Šeydā's *tašnifs* was written for his close companion, Esmā'il, known as Sāqi, who played the *tār*, and who eventually killed himself over an unfortunate business venture (Kāleqi, pp. 354-55).

'Abdallāh Dawāmi, a master teacher of *tašnif* and vocal repertoire, learned his *tašnifs* from the family of the court musician Somā' Hožur, also a member of the Ne'matallāhi order (Dawāmi, interview, 18 September 1976; Loṭfi, p. 13; Kāleqi, p. 146). Dawāmi, who knew and studied with leading musicians and was considered a major source for the *tašnif* of the court, said that Šeydā had no formal training in music but attended gatherings of court musicians and picked up some knowledge of their style.

According to Moḥammad-Rezā Loṭfi (interview, 31 May 1975) and Nur-'Ali Borumand (interview, 1 March 1975), the *tašnif* of the aristocracy in the Qajar period used verses of an existing *gāzal*, with the composer adding a refrain. It was a lyrical vocal form, based on amatory themes. Šeydā began by composing music on lines by classical poets, particularly Sa'di, adding a refrain or writing

his own lines influenced by Sa'di (Badi'i, p. 85). Khoshzamid classifies Šeydā's *tašnifs* in three groups: those beginning in a classical poetic meter (*'aruž*) and continuing with syllabic verses; those based only on *'aruž*; and those that are exclusively syllabic (p. 18). He also classifies these *tašnifs* according to whether they have a slow tempo, a quick tempo (like *reng*), or a combination of tempi. Most of Šeydā's *tašnifs* are in the third category, with the first part in a slow tempo and the second part in a faster tempo on a different theme.

Borumand and Karimi both felt that Šeydā's are the best examples of old *tašnif*, in both poetry and music as well as in the relationship between the two. 'Āref Qazvini, the well-known composer of political *tašnifs* in the period immediately following that of Šeydā, also spoke highly of Šeydā in his *Divān*: "From twenty years ago, the late Mirzā 'Ali-Akbar Šeydā ... made changes in the *tašnif*, and most of his *tašnifs* had pleasing melodies" ('Āref Qazvini, pp. 331-32).

One of the most famous singers of Šeydā's *tašnifs* in former times was Jamāl Šafawi (Badi'i, p. 83). When in 1955 the Iranian radio began to present the *Golhā* programs, orchestrated settings of traditional Persian music, a number of singers appeared who became identified with singing the older *tašnifs*. The singer Marziya (q.v.) is largely responsible for reviving and reintroducing the works of Šeydā. This too has been added to the story of Šeydā's love for Marziya, that his works should be taken up, appreciated, and made known by another singer of the same name decades later (Ātaši, p. 15).

What remains of Šeydā's poems and *tašnifs* has not been determined with certainty, except for the existence of a collection of *gāzals* copied for Ḥosayn Yazdi, one of the dervishes of Šafi 'Ališāh (Ātaši, p. 16). The number of "authentic" *tašnifs* claimed to be extant is variously ten (*idem*, p. 17), eighteen (Borumand, *apud* Khoshzamid, p. 17), and sixty (Badi'i, p. 86)—a figure that includes all the Šeydā's *tašnifs* in *Golhā* program, most of which were recorded by Marziya. Of the works consulted, *Alā sāqiā*, *Emšab šab-e mahtāb ast*, and *Duš ke ān mahlaqā* were mentioned by four sources, including Kāleqi and Borumand, both of whom had contact with the older musicians who knew Šeydā.

For a music sample, see [Shaydā – az ġam-e 'ešq-e to](#).



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