



## TEHRĀNI, ḤOSAYN

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**TEHRĀNI, Ḥosayn** (b. Tehran, 1290 S3./1911, d. Tehran 1362 S3./1973) well-known master performer of the tonbak (Persian drum, also called tombak, dombak, and żarb). Ḥosayn's father was an enthusiast of music and had close association with many musicians. Ḥosayn was thus fostered in an artistic environment and developed an interest in playing the tonbak. As a child, he made himself a toy drum and began practicing with it. Since playing the tonbak was considered vulgar in Iran in those days, Ḥosayn's father stopped the child from pursuing his passion as soon as he discovered the child's interest. The love of music, however, did not diminish in Ḥosayn, and at 16 he began studying the tonbak with Ḥosayn Esmā'il-zāda, a famous player of the kamānča (spiked fiddle). Ḥosayn's first instructor was not acquainted with musical notation, and Ḥosayn, therefore, had to resort to various schemes to memorize musical pieces. He then joined the classes of two other famous tonbak performers, Reżā Ravān-bakš and Mahdi Qiāsi. Meanwhile Ḥosayn frequented a number of traditional Persian gymnasiums (Zur-k3āna) to familiarize himself with the rhythmic songs which were traditionally played on the tonbak while the athletes performed their daily exercises. Tehrāni's best instructor, however, turned out to be **Abu'l Ḥasan Şabā**, who had long studied various rhythmic songs and methods of performing them, was well acquainted with artistic rapping methods in playing the tonbak, and who was searching for a talented player to execute those rhythms and melodies on that instrument. This presented Tehrāni with an opportunity to get acquainted with the Persian musical repertoires (radifs) and numerous melodies while studying the tunes and rhythms which Şabā taught him. Tehrāni was soon



capable of playing any tune on the tonbak by ear and succeeded in affording the tonbak a new identity, establishing its performance as a respectable and worthy art in Iranian society. Tehrāni was one of the first musicians to join Radio Tehran, working both as a solo performer and as a member of orchestras. He also joined the National Music Society (Anjoman-e Musiqi-e Melli), as well as the National Conservatory of Music (Honarestān-e Musiqi-e Melli), where he taught the tonbak. Many of the later great performers of the tonbak were Tehrāni's students. One of Tehrāni's accomplishments at the Conservatory of Music was forming an ensemble of tonbak performers. He also composed many rhythmic songs for the tonbak, and wrote a book on tonbak performance in association with a number of other master players of the instrument.

Tehrāni had his own particular style of playing the tonbak. He was renowned for being very ingenious in his use of rapid rapping and timely strokes, through which he rendered numerous innovations in the performance of tonbak. Tehrāni believed that the tonbak should play a leading role in the performance of orchestrated Persian music and did his best to achieve such a position for the instrument. Tehrāni has been highly praised by many master musicians both in Iran and abroad. Farāmarz Pāivar, a master performer of the santur (hammered dulcimer) has described Tehrāni as the most dexterous tonbak performer in the history of Persian Music (Behruzi, p. 287). He has arranged all of the gušas (melodic materials) of the radifs (repertoires) of Iranian music which could be rearranged into rhythmic songs, and has personally played them on the tonbak, accompanying them with his own vocal performance. He knew all of the musical compositions of Abu'l-Ḥasan Ṣabā and 'Ali-Naqi Waziri by heart and played them all on the tonbak. (ibid) Javād Ma'rufi, the renowned pianist, calls Tehrāni a genius in playing the tonbak (ibid, pp. 278-91). Tehrāni's music was appreciated by foreign master musicians as well. Leon Keniper, the famous composer of the former Soviet Union, considered Ḥosayn Tehrani as one of the greatest master musicians of Iran. After listening to Tehrāni's works, he had come to the conclusion that tonbak was the most perfect percussion instrument ever created (Kāleqi, pp. 145-48).

*Bibliography:*

R. Kāleqi, Sargodašt-e musiqi-e Iran III, Tehran, 1381 S./2002, pp 145-148.

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