

Hossein Alizadeh,
and
Hamavayan Ensemble

Afsaneh Rasaei *vocal*
Pejman Hadadi, *tombak, daf*
Ali Boustan, *setar*
Pouria Akhavass, *vocal*
Nima Alizadeh, *robab*
Saba Alizadeh, *kamancheh*
Hossein Alizadeh, *shourangiz, setar*

Program

Part I

Improvisation

Hossein Alizadeh, *setar*
Pejman Hadadi, *tombak, daf*

Intermission

Part II

Soroud-e Gol (Ode to Flowers)

Hossein Alizadeh & Hamavayan Ensemble

1. Sarmast

(Poem: Molavi (Rumi))

2. Daramad-e Rast

Saba Alizadeh, *kamancheh*
Nima Alizadeh, *robab*

3. Shab Cherag-e Eshgh

4. Esfahanak

Nima Alizadeh, *robab*
Saba Alizadeh, *kamancheh*

5. Golbang-e Sarbolandi

(Poem: Hafez)

6. Parvaz Taa Shahr-e Sobh

(Instrumental & Vocal Piece / Poem: Shafee Kadkani)
Pouria Akhavass, *vocal*

7. Avaz-e Robab

(Poem: Molavi (Rumi))
Afsaneh Rasaei, *vocal*
Nima Alizadeh, *robab*

8. Golhaye Kaboud

(Poem: Feridoun Moshiri)
Afsaneh Rasaei, *vocal*

9. Bouye Baran

(Poem: Feridoun Moshiri)

10. Sorou-e Gol (Poem: Feridoun Moshiri)

All songs composed by Hossein Alizadeh

Persian Classical Music

From high mountain ranges to vast desert plains and fertile coastal areas, Iran is a land of contrasts. Iranians often explain the profound spirituality of their music and poetry as a response to this landscape as well as to the country's turbulent history. Rooted in a rich and ancient heritage, this is a music of contemplation and meditation which is linked through the poetry to Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam whose members seek spiritual union with God. The aesthetic beauty of this refined and intensely personal music lies in the intricate nuances of the freely flowing solo melody lines, which are often compared with the elaborate designs found on Persian carpets and miniature paintings.

Creative performance lies at the heart of Persian classical music. The importance of creativity in this music is often expressed through the image of the nightingale (*bol bol*). According to popular belief, the nightingale possesses the most beautiful voice on earth and is also said never to repeat itself in song. A bird of great symbolic power throughout the Middle East, the nightingale represents the ultimate symbol of musical creativity. To the extent that Persian classical music lives through the more or less spontaneous re-creation of the traditional repertoire in performance, the music is often described as improvised. The musicians themselves talk freely of improvisation, or *bedaheh navazi* (lit. "spontaneous playing"), a term borrowed from the realm of oral poetry and which has been applied to Persian classical music since the early years of the twentieth century. Musicians are also aware of the concept of improvisation in styles of music outside Iran, particularly in jazz and Indian classical music. But as in so many other "improvised" traditions, the performance of Persian classical music is far from "free" – it is in fact firmly grounded in a lengthy and rigorous training which involves the precise memorization of a canonic repertoire known as *radif* (lit. "order") and which is the basis for all creativity in Persian classical music.

Like other Middle Eastern traditions, Persian classical music is based on the exploration of short modal pieces: in Iran these are known as *gushehs* and there are 200 or so *gushehs* in the complete *radif*. These *gushehs* are grouped according to mode into twelve modal "systems" called *dastgah*. A *dastgah* essentially comprises a progression of modally-related *gushehs* in a manner somewhat similar to the progression of pieces in a Baroque suite. Each *gusheh* has its own name and its own unique mode (but is related to other *gushehs* in the same *dastgah*) as well as characteristic motifs. The number of *gushehs* in a *dastgah* varies from as few as five in a relatively short *dastgah* such as *Dashti*, to as many as forty-four or more in a *dastgah* such as *Mahur*. The training of a classical musician essentially involves memorizing the complete repertoire of the *radif*. Only when the entire repertoire has been memorized - a process which takes many years - are musicians considered ready to embark on creative digressions, eventually leading to improvisation itself. So the *radif* is not performed as such, but represents the starting point for creative performance and composition.

The complex detail of the solo melody line is of utmost importance in Persian classical music – there is no harmony as such and only an occasional light drone (in contrast with the constant underlying drone in Indian classical music). As such, Persian classical music was traditionally performed by a solo singer and a single instrumental accompanist – in which case the instrument would shadow the voice and play short passages between the phrases of poetry - or by an instrumentalist on his own. In the course of the last century it became increasingly common for musicians to perform in larger groups, usually comprising a singer and four or five instrumentalists (each playing a different classical instrument). Nowadays one can hear both solo and group performances.

The Poetry

Poetry has played a central role in Iranian culture for centuries. At times when Persian language and identity were under assault, it was poetry in particular which kept the essence of the culture alive. Such a time, still remembered as one of the darkest periods of Iranian history, was the Mongol invasion of the 13th century through which the sufi poet Molavi (also known as Jalal-e Din Rumi, 1207-1273) lived. The fact

that such a period produced some of the finest poetry in the Persian language is a testament to the passion with which the culture was maintained against the odds. Moreover, it was through the poetry, particularly that of Molavi, that the message of mystical sufism found its most potent voice. With religious proscriptions against music, dance and representational art at various times over the past few centuries, the creative energies of the artistically-minded have often found an outlet through poetic expression. It will be no surprise then, to find that an art form so imbued with history and which addresses some of the most fundamental and eternal philosophical issues of human existence, should play such an important role in the lives of Iranians today. Poetry is also central to Persian classical music - it's still unusual to hear a performance without a singer – and vocal sections are usually set to the poetry of medieval mystic poets such as Baba Taher (11th Century A.D.), Sheikh Attar (12th Century A.D.), Molavi and Hafez (1325-1389) and, more recently, to the words of classical contemporary poets.

Edited from notes by Laudan Nooshin

The Instruments

The **daf**, a large frame drum with metal rings lining the inside, is usually used in Sufi ceremonies.

The **kamancheh** (spike fiddle), the ancient bowed string instrument of Iran, is ancestor to most bowed instruments throughout Asia and Europe. It has a small hollowed belly made of walnut or mulberry wood with a thin stretched skin covering and a conical shaped neck. The modern *kamancheh* has four strings, generally tuned in fourths or fifths, and is held vertically.

The **robab** is an ancient short-necked lute made of wood, with goatskin covering the body. It has three melody strings, three drone strings, and 11 or 12 sympathetic strings. It is the ancestor of the North Indian *sarod*, but - unlike the *sarod* - it is fretted. The *robab* is usually used in southeastern Iran (Sistan and Baluchistan) as the main instrument, and is the national instrument of Afghanistan. The *robab* used in the Hamavayan Ensemble has been modified; it has a longer neck, metal frets (instead of gut) and 15 sympathetic strings.

The **tombak** (goblet drum) is carved from solid wood and covered at the wide end with lamb or goatskin. It is held horizontally across the player's lap and is played with both hands. The elaborate finger technique consists of various rolling and snapping styles, which allow for a great variety of sounds.

The ancestry of the **setar** (long-necked plucked lute) can be traced to the ancient *tanbur* of pre-Islamic Persia. Its pear-shaped body has a back of thin mulberry wood slats covered by a thin resonance board of the same material. The fingerboard has 25 adjustable gut frets, and there are four strings that are plucked with the nail of the index finger.

The **shourangiz**, a new instrument which was created about 50 years ago, is a 6-stringed lute that combines the techniques and physical characteristics of the *tar*, *setar* and *tanbur*. The *shourangiz* used in tonight's performance was designed by Hossein Alizadeh.

The Artists

Hossein Alizadeh, born in Tehran in 1950, is one of the most important figures in contemporary Persian music. He learned the *radif* of Persian classical music with various masters of the tradition including Houshang Zarif, Ali Akbar Shahnazi, NurAli Borumand, Mahmood Karimi, Abdollah Davami, Yousef Foroutan, and Saied Hormozi, and later recorded the entire body of the *radif* based on the interpretation of Mirza Abdullah for *tar* and *setar*. He also received a BA in Music Composition and Performance from the University of Tehran, and later studied Composition and Musicology at the University of Berlin. He has taught at the University of Tehran and the Tehran Music Conservatory. Alizadeh has performed as a soloist in Iran, North America, Europe and Asia. He was the conductor and soloist in the Iranian National Orchestra of Radio and Television, established the acclaimed Aref Ensemble, and worked with the Shayda Ensemble. His first professional experience in Europe was playing in the orchestra of the famous Bejart Ballet Company in Maurice Bejart's ballet, *Gulistan*. Some of Alizadeh's most noted compositions are *The Nava Improvisations* (1976), *Riders of the Plains of Hope* (1977), *Hesar* (1977), *Revolt* (1983), *Ney Nava*

(1983), *Dream* (1986), *Torkaman* (1986), *Raz-O-Niaz* (1986), *Delshodegan* (1987), *Song of Compassion* (1991), *New Secret* (1996), *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), *Turtles Can Fly* (2004), *Endless Vision* (2004), *Nive Mang* (2006), *Under the Razor* (2007) and *Ode to Flowers* (2007). The recording *Endless Vision* was recently nominated for a Grammy Award for Best World Music Album of 2006. Alizadeh established the Hamavayan Ensemble in 1989 with a new approach to traditional Iranian choral singing. The ensemble, using traditional instruments, has performed many of Alizadeh's works, including *New Secret*, *Gabbeh*, *Song of Compassion* and *Endless Vision*.

Afsaneh Rasaei, born in Tehran, studied psychology at the University of Pars. She began her musical training with her father, Mohammad Rasaei, who was the son of the famous Seyd Zia-edin Rasaei. She trained in the vocal *radif* with Mahmood Karimi and continued her advanced studies with Mohammad Reza Shajarian. In 1989, she joined the Hamavayan Ensemble and continued her musical training and professional activities under the guidance of Hossein Alizadeh. She has appeared extensively in Iran, Europe, North America and Japan with Hossein Alizadeh, Hossein Omoumi, and the Hamavayan Ensemble. She has performed on numerous recordings, including *Song of Compassion*, *New Secret*, *Endless Vision* and *Saaz-e No*. Her film music credits include *Del shodegan*, *Gabbeh* and *Az Asar*. Rasaei has been teaching the vocal *radif* for years and has many students.

Pejman Hadadi, born in Tehran in 1969, is the founder of the Neyreez World Music Institute, and a two-time recipient of the prestigious Durfee Foundation Master Musician Award. He began playing *tombak* at the age of ten with Asadollah Hejazi and Bahman Rajabi. Upon immigrating to the United States in 1990, Hadadi began his professional career performing and recording with ensembles of Persian classical music, as well as Indian, Turkish and American musicians. In 1995, he joined Dastan Ensemble, with which he appeared in many international music festivals and toured the US, Europe and Iran. He has been resident composer and performer with the Namah Ensemble since 1998 and has written a number of compositions for dance. He is a founding member of Zarbang, a percussion ensemble with which he has toured regularly, and released several live recordings.

Ali Boustan, born in Tehran in 1968, is a graphic artist by profession. He received his basic level of training in the *setar* at the age of 14 with Mohammad Firouzi, Parviz Meshkatian and Mohammad Reza Lotfi, and found his way to Master Ahmad Ebadi. In 1987, he sought out Hossein Alizadeh in order to complete his advanced training and to study the *radif* and improvisation. Since then, he has worked closely with Hossein Alizadeh in designing the graphics of Alizadeh's instruction manuals and albums, as well as performing on his recordings and in his concerts. Boustan has performed with the Hamavayan Ensemble and the Nour Ensemble in Iran and abroad, and played on numerous soundtracks and music recordings, including *Endless Vision*.

Pouria Akhavass, born in Tehran in 1981, received his introductory training in singing and the vocal *radif* with Razavi Sarvestani, and continued his training with Mohsen Karamati. Recently he has pursued his educational and artistic activities under the guidance of Hossein Alizadeh. In 2005, he became a member of the Hamavayan Ensemble, with which he has toured extensively in Iran and abroad. He has also performed with Majid Derakhshani and Masoud Shoari and appeared on the album *The Lover's Worthiness* composed by Amir Abbas Setayeshgar. Akhavass currently teaches beginning and advanced vocals. In addition to being a vocalist, he is an accomplished *kamancheh* player.

Nima Alizadeh, born in Tehran in 1983, has a degree in photography. He began his musical training as a child with percussion and piano, and from early on chose *tar* as his main instrument. He studied rhythm and percussion with Dariush Zargari, Pejman Hadadi and Swapan Chaudhuri. He received his basic and intermediate levels of training in the *tar* with Fariborz Azizi, and continued his advanced levels of training with his father, Hossein Alizadeh. In 2005, he became a member of the Hamavayan Ensemble, playing stringed instruments, including the *robab*. He has appeared with the Hamnavayan Ensemble in Iran and abroad, and performed on numerous music recordings and soundtracks.

Saba Alizadeh, born in Tehran in 1983, began his musical training as a child with percussion and piano, and from early on chose *kamancheh* as his main instrument. He studied *tombak* with Dariush Zargari and received training in rhythm with Pejman Hadadi and Swapan Chaudhuri. He completed his basic and

intermediate levels of training on the *kamancheh*, as well as the *radif*, with Saeid Farajpouri, and studied a variety of techniques with Ardeshir Kamkar. He is currently completing his advanced studies and training in improvisation with Kayhan Kalhor. He also continues to study music with his father, Hossein Alizadeh. He became a member of the Hamavayan Ensemble in 2005 and has appeared with this ensemble and the Nour Ensemble in Iran and abroad. He has also performed on numerous recordings and soundtracks.