

THE RADIF

The Radif is a musical corpus, considered by the Iranians as a legacy whose purpose is to preserve and to transmit the principal elements of their specific musical culture, within which they share a common emotion and esthetic taste. They consider it to be one of the most important expressions of their national identity, as special as the Persian poetry, miniature, carpets, etc...

It is a serious and introverted music with extreme refinement and richness in ornaments. The repertory of Persian art music together with its traditional order of classification is called the Radif. A repertory of melodies that have been collected by different people and added to the repertory at different times. This repertory is not like western art music, which is composed and intended to be played exactly as written. It is made up of traditional melodies, many of which are derived from popular and folk sources; their origins have been obscured with the passage of time.

This repertory was organized by musicians to be used both for performance and instruction. More specifically it provides a multitude of model melodies (about 250) which is used like prototypes as a point of departure for improvised performance and composition of set pieces.

The oldest Radif that we know about comes from two masters of the Radif, Mirzâ Abdollâh (1843-1918) and Aqâ Hosein Qoli (died 1913). These two brothers spent their whole lives teaching their radif with an incredible conviction and rigor and educated the best musicians of the following generation. The students were supposed to memorize the entire repertory; therefore, it was important that the Radif be both complete and brief; and hence, as concise as possible. Moreover, since the intention was to make the radif concise, and since different people played the same melody in different ways, the masters selected from among the versions of a melody to create their Radif.

To understand the concept of the Radif, we must first understand that the Radif and the modal system are not the same thing.

The characteristic of melodies (which are called gusheh-s) are as important as their relationship. The position of each melody in the Radif is determined by its modals characteristics.

The performance of Persian music is made by the multi-modal structures which in each system (dastgâh or âvâz) a number of gusheh-s demonstrate the different part of the system. We will make a distinction between the melodies of the Radif and the modal system and we will present further the different modal structures.

The organization of the melodies in the Radif.

In Mirzâ Abdollâh's Radif there are about 250 pieces (gusheh-s) organized into seven large complexes (dastgâh-s) and five smaller and simpler ones (âvâz-s). This organization is the same in all the subsequent Radif-s, but the number of gusheh-s as well as the nomenclature and placement varies somewhat from one to the other. For instance, the twentieth century vocal master Mahmud Karimi left us a Radif with 145 gusheh-s, which seems the largest number in any vocal Radif. The Radif of the târ and setâr (plucked long-necked lutes) has more gusheh-s because it includes all the vocal melodies as well as those just for instruments, such as Châhârmezrâb-s, Reng-s and, the gusheh-s of Basteh Negâr, Majles Afruz, and others.

Since the idea of a Radif originated with a family of musicians who played the târ and the setâr, the earliest Radif-s are intimately linked to these instruments. Moreover, because the precise use of the mezzâr (plectrum or nail) was very important for performance on the târ and setâr, the melodies, often derived from vocal sources and added to the repertory of these instruments, necessarily became more regularized and structured. They also took on the style of performance of those musicians, who, since they were scholars of the musical tradition and fine artists, transformed the melodies into a very elaborate and cerebral form of art music.

The original 19th century Radif was created for performers on the tar and setar. In the 20th century, partial Radif-s have been created for other instruments, such as violin, kemâncheh (bowed lute), santur (dulcimer), and ney (end blown flute).

Each gusheh has a particular name and distinct character. The origins of the gusheh-s are diverse; some of them like the gusheh -s called Darâmâd have primarily a modal role, and presumably they are derived from art music practice. Some other kinds of gusheh-s are basically recognized by their specific melodies.

Their sources could be folk or popular music; religious occasions (such as ta'ziyeh); Sufi poetry song; music associated with heroism, in particular descriptions of battle scenes when the Shâhnâmeh (Iran's national epic poem) is performed in tea houses in Iran; or traditional sport Zurkhâneh which is accompanied by music, and so forth.

No specific musical notation existed for radif until 20th century when Iranians started to learn about western music and western notation, and since the Radif was a valuable part of the heritage of Persian music, musicians began to notate the Radif, which had previously been preserved by memorization. The first people who notated the Radif were Sâlâr Mo'azzez (the student and successor of the French music instructor in Iran, Alfred Lemaire), Mehdi Qoli Hedâyât, and Ali Naqi Vaiziri.

However no notation can dispense a musician from oral learning of the radif. The melodic parts of the Radif are made up of what I call "flexible melodies". This notion needs further amplification here. The concept of "flexible melody" is very common in all kinds of music in Iran, especially with the widespread and very common unmeasured melodies, in which the rhythm depends on the meter of the poetry. When Persian poetry is recited or sung, the long or short syllables are articulated in flexible units of time.

Nonetheless, the short syllables are always sustained for a shorter time than the long ones.. Performances of flexible melodies vary because people have performed them many times under many different circumstances. The variations should not be considered as improvisation, but as a kind of aura each melody has, that is a part of the ethnic or group collective memory of the melody. This collective memory includes not only the melody but any poetry that goes with and its historical context.

The main intention of the creators of the Radif was to create an organized repertory for Persian music; they were not necessarily trying to give order to the modal system. Thus,

the relationship of the modes to this system was not clarified and its pedagogical system included no theoretical or explicative terminology.

Even the term gusheh by itself (literally means "corner") has no other meaning than a "piece" or a "part". For Iranian musicians what specifies the identity of the piece (gusheh) is its specific character which is designated by its particular name, for example, gusheh-ye "Gilaki".

20th century musicology has placed too much emphasis on separating musical styles, such as folk, popular, religious, and classical or art music. But in the case of Iran there is, in reality, a constant tension and interplay between art music and less formal genres. What makes this interplay more vital in the Iranian society has been the religious establishment to musical practice during some historical periods.

The music in these periods could only have survived in contexts such as folk, religious, dervish music, or music to accompany story telling, all of which were tolerated.

For the medieval scholars, such as al-Kindi (d.874), Farabi (d.950), Ibn Sina (d.1037), Safi uddin Ormavi (d.1293), Qotbuddin Shirazi (d.1311) and Abdolqader Maraghi (d.1435), the tetrachord also corresponds to the physical space on the neck of instruments such as the °ud, târ and setâr, where the fingers can reach the notes without changing position.

In medieval theories the open string (called motlaq) and the names of the different fingers on the neck of the °ud were used to designate the pitches used for making different sorts of tetrachords.

The character of the tetrachord depends on the size of its two variable pitches (the intervals of the second and the third). Each of these tetrachords has its own unique genetic makeup.

All the Persian modes are based on only four different sorts of dâng-s. In the following table, Chart 1, these dâng-s are shown by the three intervals which separate the four notes of each dâng. The measurements are in cents (based on a system where an octave is divided into 1200 cents, and each half tone is equal to 100 cents) and each dâng, encompassed by the interval of a fourth, is equal to 500 cents.

Chart 1 - 4 Basic dang-s

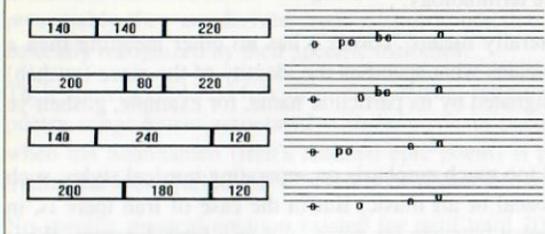


Chart 3 shows the actual frets on the neck of the setâr from which all the above dang-s will be derived. The frets on either side of the intervals of 60, 70 and 30 cents (Dp and D, for instance) are never used in succession in Persian music.

The interval relationships above G on the C string are the same as from open string G in the octave below.

In practice the intervals are never precise. They fluctuate between the four basic dang-s in Chart 1 and tempered forms in Chart 2. The more complex the system and the more the dang-s are transposed and interact, the more intervals need to be tempered on fretted stringed instruments. However, because the intonation that results from tempering the intervals always bothers the best musicians, the frets on the târ and setâr have always remained moveable. This moveability allows the musicians to adjust them for each performance, so that the most suitable tuning is achieved for each combination of modes.

Mâyeh is a term which does not exist in the Radif system. When Persian musicians use this term among themselves it refers to a unique mode in the context of Persian art music, whose organization and performance is multi-modal. A western musician, looking for a

Chart 2
Tempered intervals of the
dang-s above

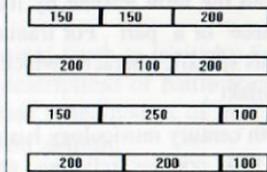
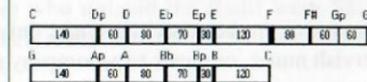


Chart 3



Persian equivalent to the terme "mode", would choose the word "mâyeh". Each mâyeh is made up of two dang-s in succession. Most of the time the stress of the melodies in a given mâyeh is on the note shared by two dang-s. This pitch is most often the first note of the second dang, but it can also be the second note or rarely the third. Thus, several mâyeh-s may share the same dang-s, but be distinguished by their different stressed pitches.

Persian art music uses a modal system which provides a set of modal frameworks. This system has much in common with the modal musics of this part of the world, where the mains cultures other than that of the Persians are those of the Turks, the Arabs, and, to some extent, the Indians.

When Persian, Arabic, and Turkish music is performed, modes are combined together. Mastering the art of their combination is one of the most important aspects of performance of these art musics. In Persian music when two different mâyeh-s share a common dang, this dang could be used as a bridge to modulate from one mâyeh to the other. The modal structure of each dâstgah and âvâz is the combination of several mâyeh-s in a special range and order. Although these combinations are ordered in a traditional manner, they are not taught or defined with any modal terminology, but by their specific melodies (gusheh-s), which match each step in the modal progression.

What follows will be the charts of all the modal structures on wich all the dastgâh-s and âvâz-s in the radif rely. The dastgâh-s are Shur, Navâ, Segâh, Châhârgâh, Homâyun, Mâhur and Râstpanjgâh. The âvâz-s are Abuatâ, Afshâri, Bayât-e Tork, Dashti and Esfehân. Bayât-e Kord is also played independently like an âvâz, but in the radif it is not counted as an independant âvâz; thus, the total number remains 12 (seven dastgâh-s and five âvâz-s).

THE SETAR

The setâr is a lute made up of a small pear-shaped body and a long fingerboard. There are 25 gut frets going up the fingerboard at the end of which are four small pegs. Although the setar is variable in shape, the body must be small enough to be held in one hand, and the