

47th ICTM World Conference (Univ. of Ghana, Legon)

PRESENTATION

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# **Iranian Traditional Music in Lives of Iranians Under the Rule of the Islamic Republic**

Roozbeh Nafisi

University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna

# Backgrounds and Personal Motivations

- Iran

- Geography

- History

- Persia (Intl. known as Iran since 1935)
- 633: Islam (2 centuries until rebirth of Iran)
- 1979: Revolution and rule of Islamic regime

- Iranian Traditional Music

- Folk Music and Court Music
- Maqam and Radif
- Importance: Music and Language

- Motivations

- My experience as an Iranian musician (santur player , educator and composer)
- My PhD dissertation: ethnomusicology and musical acoustics



Map of Iran (worldatlas.com)

# Research Questions

- 1) What ties Iranian traditional music with lives of contemporary Iranians?
- 2) What is the role of Iranian traditional music in lives of Iranians since the 1979 revolution?

## Methods

- Expert Interview
  - Four questions:
    - 1- Provide a brief self-introduction, including how you got involved with Iranian music.
    - 2- Where you live, which occasions might commonly include performances of Iranian music?
    - 3- Introduce your region's communities of Iranian music.
    - 4- Where you live, what are the typical repertoires of Iranian music?
- Literary Research
- Reflections on my personal experience
  - As an Iranian santur player I lived and played in Iran until 1999
  - Since immigration I kept close contact with music scenes in Iran

# Islam and Music

- Quran

- No mention of the word music

- Ruling on music assumed primarily through Quran 31:6

“ومن الناس من يشتري لهو الحديث ليضل عن سبيل الله بغير علم ويتخذها هزواً أولئك لهم عذاب مهين”

“Among the people is he who trades in distracting tales [*lahw al-hadith*]; intending without knowledge, to lead away from God’s way, and to make a mockery of it. This will have a humiliating punishment”

- Interpretations

- Lives of holy figures

- Holy narratives

- Story of Nadhr bin al-Harith

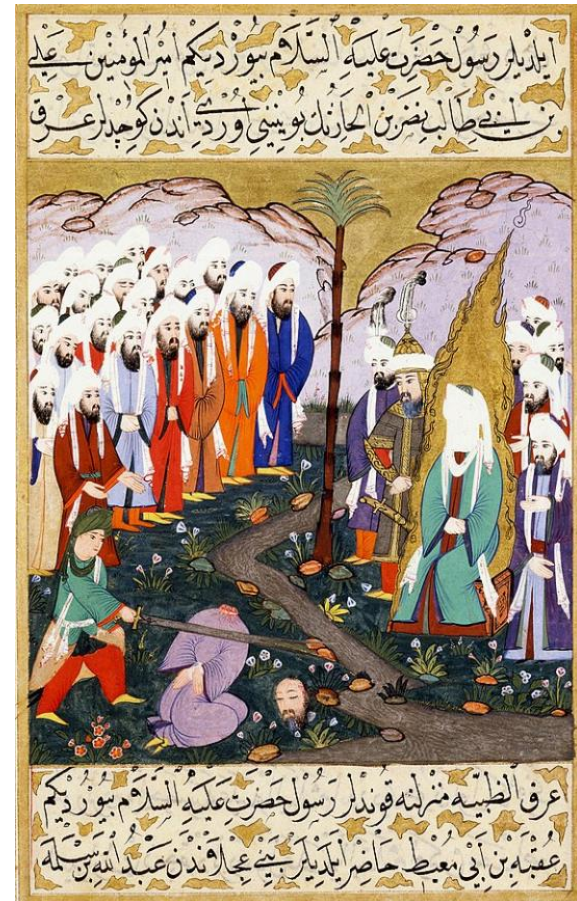
- Personal details

- Singing / Reciting / Storytelling (vs. Quran)

- Persian myths

- Elimination

Right: An Ottoman Painting  
“Ali beheading Nadhr bin al-Harith  
in the presence of Prophet Muhammad”  
(Abdullah 1594)



# Since the 1979 Revolution

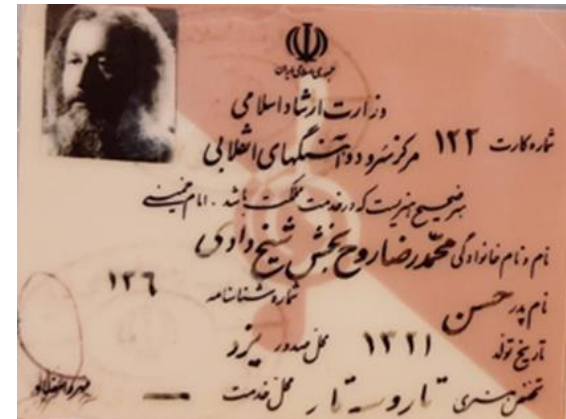
- Theocracy

- Replacing monarchy
- Immediate ban on music: no clapping, no women, illegal genres, censorship (no 6/8, etc.)

- Khomeini (1979-1989)

- Music and suspicious sounds (Khomeini 2013: 410)

Right: Music permit from 1980's, issued by Center for Revolutionary Tunes and Hymnes, Ministry of Islamic Guidance. Top of card reads: "Correct art is the art at the service of the state" (Aramesh 2021)



- Khamenei (1989-dato)

- "Promotion of music is not congenial to the grand goals of the holy Islamic system" (Khamenei 2009).
- "Sunglasses and music instruments, whether or not they are available, make no difference in lives of people. If some are after music instruments or their personal wishes, there are other countries. They could leave Iran" (Mousavi 2021)

- My Experience (1988- )

- Finding a teacher
- Secrecy
- Discouragement to study at univ.
- Leaving Iran



Left: Musicians live on IRIB TV in April 2023. Instruments are covered (Saltanatpour 2023).

# Social Aspects

- Great Popularity
  - Absence of other music genres
  - People's homes as stages and workshops (performance, pedagogy, even instrument making)
  - Traits: more dance music, less improvisation, experimenting with tuning

Video: Kamkar's 1990's Santur Solo, Tehran (at a Stadium)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgiZnd0AxvA>



- Influences of Technology
  - Instagram: compact timing
  - Tuners: enforcing precision and standard

- Music as a Protest Tool
  - Masses clap, sing, and dance as protest

Video: Lian Ensemble's June 14, 2023 Concert, Tehran

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-KWIJ3e-CM>



- Overseas
  - Performance (also banned musicians)
  - Interculturality (also in composition)

Audio: Nafisi and Soltani's Bayaat-e Zand  
2022 Schallwende Festival of Contemporary Music, Austria

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6lPvvvTtJM>



## Conclusion

Iranian traditional music continues functioning as a fundamental element of Iranian culture, showing its various dimensions in the course of socio-political changes, and reflecting the lives of Iranians. It has continually managed to keep thriving and flourishing despite (and sometimes from) the bans and censorship imposed by the Islamic regime.





Thanks!

[rozbehn@yahoo.com](mailto:rozbehn@yahoo.com)