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The Santur-Playing Iranian-Americans in Northern California

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Tulips (Laalehaa)

A socialist hymn, composer and lyricist unknown

Notation: Roozbeh Nafisi

♩ = 70-80

da mad laa le haaz az de le ku ho dasht be yaa de a zi ze sha hi daa ne ma

mf

8 az aan akh ta raa ni ke af ruukh tand be daan saan be daa maa ne sob he se pid, be

16 paa ko nim par cha me khash mo kin raa pey af ka nim zen de gaa ni ye no vin kho ru she

23 maa bar ka nad ba naa ye bi daad be sar re sad in na bar de aa kha rin

A protest song (in Farsi) of the Iranian leftist oppositions
briefly before and after the 1979 revolution
as remembered by
an anonymous Iranian-American santur player in Northern California (Anonymous 2020)

Backgrounds and Motivations

- **Santur**
 - A chordophone from the family of hammered dulcimers
 - Representative instrument of Iranian music
 - Types: 9-bridge G-santur, and larger
- **Iran**
- **Northern California**
- **Iranian Americans**
- **Personal Motivations**
 - My experience as an Iranian-American santur musician in Northern California: before 2008 and after
 - My PhD dissertation: ethnomusicology and musical acoustics



Map of California (Tamanho 2018)

Research Questions

- 1) What are the aesthetic conceptions of Iranian santurs and their sounds, held by santur-playing Iranian-Americans in Northern California?
- 2) What are the social applications of Iranian santurs in Northern California?

Methods

- Participatory Field Research

- Expert Interview

Five questions:

- 1- Please provide a brief self-introduction, including how you got involved with santur.
- 2- In your region, which occasions might commonly include santur performances?
- 3- Please introduce your region's santur communities (emphasizing on performance, pedagogy and making of santur).
- 4- In your region, what are the ensemble settings in which the santur participates?
- 5- Please describe your region's typical santur repertoires.

- Listening Test (opinions about audio samples)

Five short music samples, each one followed by five questions:

- 1- Please comment on the type and sound qualities of the santur.
- 2- What is the possible performance occasion?
- 3- What are the tuning details?
- 4- What are the particular performance qualities?
- 5- Please add any additional remark you might find important regarding this sample.

- Literary Research

- Reflections on my experience as a santur-playing Iranian-American who lived, played, and taught in Northern California

Collaborating Persons

- Three persons collaborated with me on interviews and listening tests:
 - Faraz Minooei (40): professional santur player and educator (San Jose)
 - Saeid Bashash (38): santur player and professor of mechanical engineering (San Jodse)
 - Anonymous (in his 60s): social activist and amateur santur player (Rancho Cordova)



Faraz Minooei and Colleagues on Stage - 2019, San Jose
(Minooei 2019)

Findings

I) Social aspects:

- Three groups: masters of older generations, masters of younger generations, pupils
- Characteristics of activities: role of the tradition
- Occasions of social presentations
- Intercultural exchanges
- Formation of new musical languages

II) Performance approaches:

- Ornamentations
- Virtuosity
- The *feeling*
- The *moment*

III) Organological aspects:

- Instruments
- Tuning

Conclusion

- Social applications based on political motivators and intercultural dialogues
- Santurs in Northern California meeting specific needs of musicians:
 - Mostly 9-bridge G-santurs
 - Also larger santurs, including 11-bridge and 12-bridge instruments
- Santur in Northern California: a distinctive identity



Collaboration of Iranian and Indian Santurs

A. Chattopadhyay, T. Bhattacharya, R. Nafisi - 2007, UC Berkeley
(Nafisi 2007)

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