

3<sup>rd</sup> Early Career Workshop  
University of Vienna, Dept. of Musicology, Seminar Room 1

PRESENTATION

November 9, 2024 at 17:00

**Forbidden Voices:  
Women's Singing of Iranian Traditional Music  
under the Islamic Regime in Iran**

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# Backgrounds and Motivations

- Vocal Iranian Traditional Music according to its Female Interprets
  - Court Music and Folk Music
  - Radif and Maqam
  - Music and Language
  - Oeuvres of female singers of Iranian traditional music in Iranian society
- Political Backgrounds
  - After the 1979 revolution, female singers in Iran experienced one of the first waves of the still ongoing censorship. They continued their remarkable contributions, but mainly in unofficial settings
- Motivations:
  - My musical interest (vocal and instrumental) since childhood in post-revolutionary Iran, while engaging in performance, composition and education
  - My ongoing PhD dissertation focusing on the instrument santur from ethnomusicological and acoustical perspectives

# Research Questions

- 1) What is the status of women's singing of Iranian traditional music in Iran ruled by the Islamic regime?
- 2) What point(s) of conflict could there be between female singers of Iranian traditional music and the regime?

## Methods

- Participatory field research as the fundamental method: research partners contributed interviews and shared opinions
- Using the project *Andante for the Forbidden Voice: a Multimedia Tribute to Women's Singing in Iran* (premiered in Vienna on 15.3.24 with artists from Iran and Austria)
- Literature review for historical and social backgrounds
- Reflections on my experiences as an Iranian musician in Iran and outside

# Theoretical Approaches

- Censorship
  - Political
  - Religious
  - Self
- Gender Positionalities
  - Social Identities of [Female] Singers of Iranian Traditional Music
- Discourse of Conflict and Peacemaking through Voice
  - Also in Historical-Religious Contexts

# 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”
  - Conflict with Iranian Singing and Storytelling: Account of Nadr ibn al-Harith
- Interpretations based on Sunnah and Hadith
  - Holy figures
  - Holy narratives

# 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)
- Khamenei (1989-dato):
  - “Promotion of music is not congenial to the grand goals of the holy Islamic system”(Khamenei 2009).



An All-Male Ensemble with on IRIB TV, April 2023  
Instruments are covered (Saltanatpour 2023)

# Social Aspects

- Alternative Staging
  - People's homes as stages and workshops (performance, pedagogy, even instrument making)
  - *Gorouh-e Soroud* (Hymn Group)



Accompaniment to a *Hymn Group*  
A Girls Middle School in 1980's Iran  
(Photo credit: Padideh Naderi)



Video: A Hymn Group  
(<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/quEnDs6fa6U>)

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

# The 2024 Project

## Andante for the Forbidden Voice: A Multimedia Tribute to Women's Singing in Iran

- Production
  - Challenge of finding a singer
  - Seeking financial and promotional support

- Performance
  - 15.3.24, Alte Schmiede, Vienna
  - Audience

- Afterward
  - [Media](#) 📺 (Credit: ORF)
  - Outcomes
  - Insights
  - Next performance?



[Presentation of Project Andante](#)  
Video: 📺 (Credit: Elena Kirchner)



## Conclusion

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



Thank you!

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