

Although a large body of scholarship on Iranian music has been produced both inside and outside Iran, very little of it pertains to the teaching and learning methods of Persian classical music. From her 2014 master's study of the performing and teaching practices of Iranian traditional musicians in Canada, Solmaz Shakerifard discovered that many musicians and scholars, both inside and outside Iran, expressed a desire to “develop a more efficient and successful teaching methodology for this musical tradition” (Solmaz Shakerifard, 2014). In this section I explore some of the literature on traditional teaching and learning methods in preparation for setting out, in the next chapter, this study's methodological approach to trialling a new hybrid teaching and learning method for Persian classical music. It is my hope that this proposed method can go some way towards resolving the tension that exists between those who believe in cultural preservation and those who argue for the modernisation of the tradition.

1.1. The *radīf*-based aural approach

In late 19th century, teaching practices were based on memorising, imitating and absorbing the *radīf* by apprentices, and this could take up to a decade to accomplish. As Erum Naqvi notes, “in transmitting the discipline”, the established master or *Ostād* – a composer, performer and instructor – did not “expound upon these organising principles” (Naqvi 2012, 184). The approach was a holistic one, based on experience and absorption under the supervision of the *Ostād*. According to Naqvi, “[w]hat is distinctive about Persian art music's instructional practice [...] is not its aural basis [...] but rather the complete absence of theoretical discussion in instruction” (Naqvi 2012, 185).

The “structure of the *radīf*, Naqvi explains, “is a central force in guiding the musical development of a Persian art music performance. However, instructors believe that guidance is most effective when it operates subliminally” (Naqvi 2012, 187). The music's organising principles should be “grasped intuitively rather than schematically cognised, in order to encourage highly spontaneous interpretation of its content” (Naqvi 2012, 187). Some music teachers today continue to advocate the *radīf*-based approach, believing this to be the only way to teach Persian classical music (Solmaz Shakerifard, 2014, pp. 109-110).

Talaī explains that the internalisation of the *radīf* is an enormous task and it can take several years before it comes to fruition, shaping his or her understanding of music at a deep level:

In learning the *radīf*, there is a point of meeting known as internalisation. This occurs when a performer, after so many times of learning the music by heart and then

forgetting it, by sheer perseverance, reaches a level where the *radif* becomes more than just a set of notes or even a set of melodies. Here the performer is so familiar with the concepts and elements of the *radif* as to never forget them. He may even believe that the *radif* is a product of his own “psyche.” . . . After the internalisation process, which may take several years to achieve, the performer goes beyond mere apprenticeship. Based upon what is remembered of the *radif*, he is now able to rearrange and reproduce the phrases in a new way. This happens without thinking or even being aware of what is happening. In fact, the performer may not have the faintest idea of the theoretical formation of his performance. (Talaī, quoted in Naqvi 2012, 187)

In Naqvi’s view, “the teaching practices of Persian art music reflect the belief that aural instruction is superior to theoretical instruction in cultivating the improvisatory skills at the heart of this cultural tradition” (Naqvi, 2012, p. 189). Thus, there is “a clear relation between what is valued in this musical tradition and the concepts that are applied to it”(Naqvi, 2012, p. 189).

1.2. Modern pedagogical methods of teaching Persian classical music

1.2.1. Inside Iran

From 1923, when Alī Naghī Vazīrī’s *Dastur-e Tār* (textbook for the *tār*) became the first published Iranian music instructional text, music teachers began to produce materials for various instruments. This was in keeping with other music systems where musicians and composers created pedagogically oriented music in order to address certain technical challenges or to make statements about the nature of a particular musical system. In Persian classical music these texts were collections of composed pieces as well as *gūshehs* from the *radif*, and etudes and scales for different instruments, all of which were in the Persian classical style but separate from the original *radif*. Well-known examples of these include Faramarz Payvar’s *Dastur’e Santur* (A book of *santūr*), Ruholah Khaleqi’s *Dastur’e Moghadamati’e Violon* (Basics of violin), Hossein Alizadeh’s *Dastur’e Tār va Setār*, *Moqadamati* (A book of the *tār* and *setār*, elementary level), Abdol-Naghi Afsharnias *Amuzesh’e Ney* (A book for *ney*), and Mohamad Ali Kianinejad’s *Shive’ye Ney Navazi* (The method book for the *ney*). These provided step-by-step for instrument learning at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels.

At the elementary level, almost no melodies from the *radif* are used and the focus is on learning the basic techniques of the instrument as well as sight-reading. Basic Western music theory is also taught at this level. When the novice enters the intermediate level, short compositions

together with simple and short melodies from the *radīf* are introduced into the learning process. These include metrical and non-metrical pieces. The novice is introduced to different *dastgāhs* by playing etudes or melodies that are written in that *dastgāh*, and the name of the lesson indicates which modal system is played. For the advanced level, the whole body of the *radīf* is eventually taught, part of which has been gradually learned over several years before reaching this level. Students should attempt improvisation at this level, drawing on the musical knowledge they have gained. Improvisational techniques, such as extension, transposition, and interpretation will become the main focus.

In comparison to the traditional approach, by using Western notation, these instructional texts speed up the process of teaching and learning Persian classical, although the new methods are lacking in their ability to cultivate the cultural ethos essential to the music. The inclusion of Western music theory in some of these texts has caused confusion and has shifted the focus away from the foundations of the music and its intricacies. Other changes have been simplifying the meter of the pieces in order to make the music easier to learn, which has also led to misrepresentation and incorrect learning of the actual rhythmic structures. Missing from both traditional instructional methods and these modern attempts to create a systematic pedagogical approach is Persian music-specific theory. This presents a considerable challenge to those attempting to transmit the music system to non-Persian students (Shahrnazdar 2004).

1.2.2. Outside Iran

Solmaz Shakerifard undertook a study of the performing and teaching practices of Iranian musicians who had emigrated to Canada following the 1979 revolution in Iran. Shakerifard anticipated that the Iranian teachers would develop new teaching methods and material, particularly for the non-Iranian student population. Her findings indicated, however,

that a significant majority of the participants' students were Iranian. In fact, most interviewees reported having taught only 2-3 non-Iranian students since their arrival in Montreal. Siamak Nasr was the only participant with a different experience, who reported having as many as 20 non-Iranian students attending his music institute. Furthermore, participants asserted that their non-Iranian students were already interested in and familiar with Iranian culture and music to a great extent (some were fluent in Farsi). As such, they did not need to treat the lessons differently than if it were given with an Iranian student. Iran (Shakerifard 2014b, 110)

Based on my own communications with Iranian musicians in Australia who are actively involved in teaching Persian classical music, when they teach non-Iranian learners, they tend not to deviate from teaching the way they themselves were taught in Iran.

To what extent is Persian classical music included in the curricula of Western academic institutions? It appears that at present only a limited number of universities around the world incorporate the practical teaching and learning of Persian music of various genres into their academic programs. I briefly mention two of these that are relevant to the present study before moving on to discuss Persian classical music's historical methods of transmission.