THIS ISSUE: PERSIAN MUSIC

- Sounding the city
- Still singing
- A discursive study of music in Iran during the 1960s
- Shaping the Persian repertoire
- The introduction of piano practice in Iran
- Music, Islam and Persian Sufism
- Music on the move in the Middle East
- Swaying to Persian and Middle Eastern tunes in London

PLUS
Reviews and events in London

Volume 12 - Number 2
February – March 2016
£4
About the London Middle East Institute (LMEI)

The London Middle East Institute (LMEI) draws upon the resources of London and SOAS to provide teaching, training, research, publication, consultancy, outreach and other services related to the Middle East. It serves as a neutral forum for Middle East studies broadly defined and helps to create links between individuals and institutions with academic, commercial, diplomatic, media or other specialisations.

With its own professional staff of Middle East experts, the LMEI is further strengthened by its academic membership – the largest concentration of Middle East expertise in any institution in Europe. The LMEI also has access to the SOAS Library, which houses over 150,000 volumes dealing with all aspects of the Middle East. LMEI’s Advisory Council is the driving force behind the Institute's fundraising programme, for which it takes primary responsibility. It seeks support for the LMEI generally and for specific components of its programme of activities.

LMEI is a Registered Charity in the UK wholly owned by SOAS, University of London (Charity Registration Number: 1103017).

Mission Statement:

The aim of the LMEI, through education and research, is to promote knowledge of all aspects of the Middle East including its complexities, problems, achievements and assets, both among the general public and with those who have a special interest in the region. In this task it builds on two essential assets. First, it is based in London, a city which has unrivalled contemporary and historical connections and communications with the Middle East including political, social, cultural, commercial and educational aspects. Secondly, the LMEI is at SOAS, the only tertiary educational institution in the world whose explicit purpose is to provide education and scholarship on the whole Middle East from prehistory until today.

LMEI Staff:

Director Dr Hassan Hakimian  
Executive Officer Louise Hosking  
Events and Magazine Coordinator Vincenzo Paci  
Administrative Assistant Aki Elborzi

Subscriptions:

To subscribe to The Middle East in London, please visit: www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/affiliation/ or contact the LMEI office.

Letters to the Editor:

Please send your letters to the editor at the LMEI address provided (see left panel) or email lmei@soas.ac.uk

Disclaimer:

Opinions and views expressed in the Middle East in London are, unless otherwise stated, personal views of authors and do not reflect the views of their organisations nor those of the LMEI and the MEL’s Editorial Board. Although all advertising in the magazine is carefully vetted prior to publication, the LMEI does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of claims made by advertisers.
# Contents

## EDITORIAL

4

## INSIGHT

5

### Sounding the city: Tehran’s contemporary soundscapes

Laudan Nooshin

7

### PERSIAN MUSIC

Still singing: female singers in contemporary Iran

Parmis Mozafari

9

### A discursive study of music in Iran during the 1960s

Mohammadamin Hashemi

11

### Shaping the Persian repertoire

Houman M. Sarshar

13

### The introduction of piano practice in Iran

Maryam Farshadfar

15

### Music, Islam and Persian Sufism

Terry Graham

17

### Music on the move in the Middle East

Ilana Webster-Kogen

19

### Swaying to Persian and Middle Eastern tunes in London

Roya Arab

21

### REVIEWS

CD

Rhapsody of Roses: Persian Classical Music from the 1950s

Pejman Akbarzadeh

22

### BOOKS

Iranian Classical Music: The Discourses and Practice of Creativity

Stefan Williamson Fa

23

### BOOKS IN BRIEF

26

### IN MEMORIAM

Homa Nategh (1934-2016)

Touraj Atabaki and Nasser Mohajer

27

Khodadad Farmanfarmaian (1928-2015)

Ramin Nassehi

28

### EVENTS IN LONDON
Iranian Classical Music: The Discourses and Practice of Creativity

By Laudan Nooshin

Ashgate Press, February 2015, £65.00

Reviewed by Stefan Williamson Fa

The central creative role of the performer in Iranian classical music has led to an emphasis on the role of ‘improvisation’ in describing the tradition. Drawing on years of in-depth research with Iranian musicians, Nooshin challenges such a description by questioning the dichotomy between notions of ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’, suggesting such a binary has served to mark essentialised differences between Western art and Other music. Nooshin provides a detailed analysis and examination of the practices, discourses and social life of the radif, the repertoire which has been at the centre of the performance of Iranian classical music over the past century. The radif is a collection of pieces organised according to the mode which is studied and memorised by students and forms the basis for creative performance. Despite only becoming standardised fairly recently through the advent of notation, sound recording and the institutionalisation of musical education in Iran, the radif has become the marker and framework of authenticity and tradition within the performance of Iranian classical music.

The book makes important contributions towards understanding musical creativity and the creative process through the lens of Iranian classical music. Chapter two provides the wider context to the study in hand, summarising the historical and social developments which have led to changes in musical discourse in Iran over the last century. Here, Nooshin outlines how Iranian classical music has been shaped significantly by the processes of modernisation and Westernisation, and by the introduction of new ideas about ‘authenticity’ and nationalism in the post-revolution period. She argues that there has been an emergence in binary thinking in relation to creative practice in Iranian music, between the act of composition and improvisation. Building on the work of other ethnomusicologists, she goes on to challenge this strict division by focussing on the limits of improvisation and the authority of the radif. Nooshin sees the ways in which musicians vary the material of the radif as central to keeping the balance between creative freedom and respecting the demands of tradition. This balance leads to a constant negotiation through performance.

Chapter three focusses on the radif, outlining more specifically the repertoire and its transmission. Chapter four, perhaps impenetrable to the non-musicologist, turns to the music ‘itself’, examining more traditional forms of performance practice by comparing a number of musicians playing a range of instruments spanning a period of more than 30 years. Here the focus is on one particular section of repertoire, dastgah Segah, to examine how musicians use the learnt repertoire to create new material in performance.

The final chapter turns away from this musicological focus through a portrait of a contemporary music project between nei player Amir Eslami and pianist Hooshyar Khayam. Their album All of You sought to challenge the constraints of the radif through the development of a musical voice which is both rooted in tradition and responsive to the contemporary moment. Drawing on extensive interviews with the artists, Nooshin gives space to the musicians’ own articulations on their approaches to the creative process in making the album. The final focus on this project not only hints towards the future direction of creative performance in Iranian music but also sums up many of the key themes of the book.

Nooshin successfully incorporates elements of postcolonial theory in a way which has long been absent in ethnomusicology. A particular strength of the book is the attention given to local discourses and terms used by the musicians themselves. This book is clearly aimed towards ethnomusicologists and is not an introductory guide to Iranian classical music. However, by combining musical analysis, social and cultural context and ethnographic insights it provides a broad and in-depth overview of Iranian classical music which will appeal to a wider audience.

Stefan Williamson Fa is a PhD candidate in social anthropology at UCL whose research looks at the role of sound in Shi’i ritual in Eastern Turkey. He is co-founder of ‘Mountains of Tongues’ a project working to preserve and promote the musical traditions of the Caucasus region.