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
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London has a thriving live music scene, and Persian and Middle Eastern music is not left out: it is facilitated by a host of musical venues and festivals spread across the city, various societies, institutions and concert organisers. Together they serve an international audience living, visiting and studying in London. A major part is played by the educational institutions teaching, disseminating and providing a performance platform, such as SOAS which acts as a major venue for visiting artists and students to perform, as well as other ethnomusicological courses being taught across London (at City University, Goldsmiths, Kings College and Royal Holloway) which also play their part in spreading the region’s music.

For Persian and Middle Eastern music London accommodates both classical and modern, young and old, although in my humble opinion not all with the same frequency or indeed quality. A cursory overview on the Internet of musical events that took place across London since the start of 2015 shows the wide range in age, styles and venues used for musical events. From many restaurants with popular Persian and Middle Eastern music to smaller gig venues and large concert halls sharing popular and classical music, there is always something going on musically in London. The annual Nour Festival has a cornucopia of the region’s cultural offerings which are presented at various venues across Kensington and Chelsea, whilst Shubbak shares Arab culture biennially across London.

When looking at the creation, performance and consumption of Persian and Middle Eastern music, one must also consider the impact from the unprecedented spread of people from these regions in the modern world.

The exponential growth of diaspora communities over the past 40 years has created a mélange of artistic styles, manners, forms and expressions.
with an exponential growth of diaspora communities over the past 40 years. A survey of demographics looking at Iranian and Middle Eastern people residing outside the region shows an uphill spike in the scale and spread of these peoples across Europe and America since the late 1970s. This has created a mélange of artistic styles, manners, forms and expressions within the diaspora community, including those born in the region, those born outside the Middle East sometimes to both Middle Eastern and mixed parentage and not least the Western students, teachers and consumers of the region’s music. Together these groups provide fertile grounds for continuation, preservation and experimentation of old and new musical traditions.

Across London in any given month Persian and Middle Eastern music is performed by native artists, sometimes alongside their Western colleagues, playing both traditional Middle Eastern and Persian repertoires, Western classical repertoires as well as fusions of Middle Eastern, world music and modern Western-style popular music. In spite and perhaps because of the socio-political context of Persian and Middle Eastern musical performances in London, the range and quality of music performed here competes well with any other metropolis.

Roya Arab is a musician and archaeologist. She is currently Honorary Research Assistant at IoA, UCL and PhD candidate at City University researching music in Iranian film.