

# COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGY AND IRANIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

---

A Dissertation  
Submitted to  
the Temple University Graduate Board

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

---

by  
Erum Naqvi  
July 2015

Examining Committee Members:

Philip Alperson, Advisory Chair, Department of Philosophy  
Susan Feagin, Committee Member, Department of Philosophy  
Espen Hammer, Committee Member, Department of Philosophy  
Lara Ostaric, Committee Member, Department of Philosophy  
Lydia Goehr, External Member, Columbia University

©  
Copyright  
2015

by

Erum Naqvi  
All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

My project began quite innocently, when, in my first philosophy of music class as a graduate student, I found it extraordinarily difficult to bring questions about the nature and meaning of music to bear on the case of Iranian classical music. I knew very little, technically speaking, about Iranian classical music at the time, but what I did know was challenging to reconcile with many commonplace assumptions about music in philosophy. Specifically, that this tradition is highly performative, that musicians rarely use scores, and, importantly, that anyone who calls herself a musician but cannot extemporize, is not really considered much of a musician in Iran at all. This, I remember all too vividly from my teenage years, when I recall the bemused faces of my family at gatherings in Iran to my protestations that I was unable to perform because I didn't have my "music." Scores exist in Iran, of course, and are used in some musical circles, but they are never used in the highest musical circles, those of Iranian classical music performance. Yet curiously, despite the emphasis on extemporization in this tradition, there is, nonetheless, a resounding sonic familiarity among performances considered as falling in the classical genre, so much so that it seems odd to say that extemporization is the extemporization of something *new*. Prompted by my curiosity about the nuts and bolts of a perspective on music in which scores are met with an air of disdain, and extemporization is venerated, but not so much that the music sounds "different," I began to research how one might go about honing in on the notion of musicality that operates in Iran.

What I discovered almost immediately was that there seemed to be very little concern with musical works, as understood in the western classical sense. Herein lay my first problem, as it is nearly impossible in ontology to talk about music without talking, in some sense, about works, or their significance. It seemed, however, if I were going to talk about Iranian music, I would have to do it without talking about works. The seemingly simple attempt to do so resulted in this study. It reflects my process of discovery in coming to terms with this music tradition through a philosophical lens, beginning with an inquiry into the differences between Iranian classical music and the general parameters for claims about music in philosophy. What it also offers, I hope, is a methodological insight about approaching culturally comparative practices in philosophy, and a philosophical insight about music, particularly when the significance of activity in the performing moment is at stake.

In my first chapter, I articulate the methodology I advocate. This methodology is adapted from Lydia Goehr's *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992). Goehr critically examines analytic ontologists who take the musical work as given, and offers, in contrast, a theory about when the concept of the musical work rises in significance to the point that it becomes the concept around which western classical music's practices are oriented, taking on the appearance of necessity on which many analytic ontologists rely. To make her claim, Goehr offers a reading of the history western classical music that looks for the concepts around which its discourses center. Drawing on this insight, I argue that the application of similar analysis to what scholars in other music traditions have to say about music will reveal something about the concepts around which their practices center. The emphasis is on reading the discourses of a practice for the concepts

that dictate the thinking about it. This, I suggest, helps to make sense of what musicality means in the tradition in question.

My central claim is that when Iranian classical music is read this way, one concept emerges as centrally significant. This concept is not of the work, but of embodied activity: a notion of *doing* in musical practice that relies heavily on the idea of musical dexterity in the performing moment, without this doing being oriented to the creation of something work-like. My second, third, and fourth chapters attempt to articulate and situate this reading against discussions about the ontological significance of performance in the philosophy of music.

I begin, in my second chapter, by arguing that the historical attention to mentally composed sound structures in Eduard Hanslick's 1854 book, *On the Musically Beautiful*—a foundational text for the contemporary philosophy of music—leaves out the performing activity in musical practice. This, I suggest, is captured in the difference of approach to the musical nightingale: a metaphor that serves to illustrate musicality in the Iranian context but stands in Hanslick's theory, for everything that music is not.

In my third chapter, I offer a detailed reading of Iranian classical music to expose more fully the conceptual shape and force of the sort of embodied activity that the trope of the nightingale captures, when scholars of Iranian classical music analogize it—as they so often do—as the metaphorical aspiration of classical musicians, because it is considered the most musical being on earth in virtue of its dexterity. This, I contextualize using Polanyi's notion of tacit knowledge (1966).

In my fourth chapter, I explore the extent to which the reading I offer of Iranian classical music may be accommodated by contemporary discussions in the ontology of

performance by turning to contemporary discussions that move away from addressing performances of works, but center on the significance of performative activity itself. This happens most commonly for the case of musical improvisation, after the question is introduced by Philip Alperson in “On Musical Improvisation” (1984). My central claim here is that in this area of scholarship, performing activity tends to be characterized as a “making,” because the significance of performing activity is negotiated under conceptual terms where what is made or produced as a result also matters. I compare this with the scholarship on Iranian classical music to argue there is a crucial difference between the two cases. This difference is that embodied activity is not product-oriented in Iranian classical music practice, but rather, focused on dexterity or technique: the craft of doing. Because the concept of the musical work is absent from this tradition (it is, in fact, only beginning to emerge at its margins), the activity in the performing moment is not characterized as a making but a *doing*: dexterous activity in and of itself.

In my final chapter, I explore how this insight can be extended more broadly into philosophical analysis, particularly in its comparative dimensions. I suggest there are implications not only for the ontology of performance, but notions of self-expression, creativity, and aesthetic attention, when they are considered in this culturally comparative light. In doing so, I hope to raise questions about the potential for doing non-reductive comparative ontology, and what can be gained, in a broad sense, from the effort of looking at artistic practice through a culturally different lens. The overarching methodological picture I point to alludes to the metaphor of the Persian nightingale: “And hearken how yon happy nightingale / Tells with his hundred thousand new-found tongues / Over and over again the old attractive tale” (Hafiz, Ode 49, Diwan).

For my grandparents,  
Mohammad Reza and Bolour Keyvani,  
and my mother,  
Shayesteh Keyvani.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people who have helped me in the completion of this project. To all of them I owe my sincere gratitude.

I thank first, the people who read draft sections of this project, particularly my sister Mona Naqvi, Bernard Gendron, and Usha Nathan. I also thank the participants of the Aesthetics Reading Group at Columbia University and of the Center for Humanities at Temple for their feedback on my presentations of some early chapter drafts. I thank Parisa Akbari, Arzhang Mirshahi, and Yazdan Zamani for accompanying me on my field research in Iran, and I am indebted to the musicians who met with me: Hooman Asadi, Atabak Elyasi, Malihe Saeedi, and Mahsa Vahdat. I thank my peers for their company and advice in my earlier stages of graduate study, especially Aili Bresnahan, Remei Capdevila-Werning, Patrick Denehy, John Dyck, Jonathan Fine, Dehlia Hannah, Marlies DeMunck and Beau Shaw. I thank Matthew Gilbert and Megan Robison for study breaks and sanity checks outside the Bobst. For keeping me in good cheer, especially in the final stages of writing, I thank my sister Mona, my brother Reza, my cousin Imran, and my friends Steven Hamilton, Markus Mamoser, Andrea Ponce, Daxton Carney, Deon Serrant, Janosch Delcker, Jacqueline Anto, Stephanie Gilbert, Meng Sun, Judith Vaugh, Sarah Stodola, Sacha Wynne, Marlana Hwang, Diego Torres, Autumn Horton, Erica Brugman, David Snelus, Julia Vantrimpont, Jasper Stapleton, Sarvie Nasser, Alex Maragoudakis, Vincent Bouffandeau, Alex Kuschel, Alex Liebergesell, Reep VerLoren van Themaat and Niels Huby. I also thank my roommates for putting up with my nocturnal schedule when I shifted camp from the library to the apartment in my last six

months of writing, especially Ross Beattie who covered me more than once when bills were due, Jessica Hussaini, David Close, and Mark Selim who I also thank for talking music with me at all hours of the day.

I am indebted to the professors to whom I owe my graduate school education, Philip Alperson, Elisabeth Camp, Taylor Carman, Kristin Gjesdal, Jonathan Gilmore, Lydia Goehr, Carol Gould, Paul Guyer, Espen Hammer, Joseph Margolis, Tatiana Smoliarova, Achille Varzi, Jerrold Vision, and David Wolfsdorf. I am also indebted to Sonia Lawson who made sure I crossed my t's and dotted my i's in all my paperwork from my first to last day of graduate school, and to Shawn Schurr for her tireless advice and support in facilitating the technical arrangements for my dissertation committee and defense. I thank the Graduate School, the Center for Humanities, and the Department of Philosophy at Temple University for their generous financial support during the course of my doctoral studies. I also thank Gregg Horowitz and the Department of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies at Pratt Institute for hiring me when my funding ran out, and for giving me access to the most rewarding teaching experience of my life so far.

More than to anyone, I am indebted to my mentors. I thank Roman Frigg for slipping me copies of Danto's books on the sly even though he was teaching a class in scientific method, for encouraging me to write my undergraduate dissertation on the ontology of art, and for inspiring me to pursue graduate studies in philosophy. I am greatly indebted to Laudan Nooshin, who met with me several times throughout the course of my graduate study. She generously shared with me her time, her access to musicians she worked with in Iran, and her rich and inventive work in progress on Iranian music that was invaluable to my research. I am inspired daily by the spirit and rigor of

her work and her kindness and generosity to her students. I thank my committee members, Espen Hammer, Susan Feagin, and Lara Ostaric, and, in addition, Kristin Gjesdal. I have learned a great deal from each of them, and I am grateful not only for their mentorship, but also for their time, support, and helpful criticism on this manuscript.

Most of all, I owe my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to my philosophical “parents,” Philip Alperson and Lydia Goehr.

I thank my supervisor Philip for inspiring me in my first year of graduate school to write about music, for encouraging me with an unfailing open mind to pursue my interest in Iranian classical music despite the somewhat unorthodox nature of my topic, for recommending me for my first publication, for facilitating my participation in a conference and doctoral workshop at the Sibelius Academy in Finland from which I retain some of the fondest memories of my graduate school experiences, and for his meticulous and generous editorial attention to my project. Above all, I thank Philip for sharing with me his love of music, both inside and outside the classroom. It is something evident in his writing that I hope to convey in mine, and also a part of every conversation we have ever had. His company and his sense of humor revived and enriched me many times during my doctoral studies. I am grateful also, for Philip’s infinite patience and kindness during the tougher periods of my development. Had it not been for Philip’s encouragement in these times, I doubt I would have been able to complete my dissertation. I learned from Philip a great deal about what it means to be a supportive, professional, compassionate, encouraging, open-minded, collaborative, and generous teacher. I hope to pay forward all I have learned from his example to my own students in the future. More than an inspired mentor who I deeply respect, Philip is a dear friend,

both to me and to my music collection. We both thank him deeply, and I look forward to many evenings talking about music with him in years to come.

I thank Lydia for taking me under her wing, for investing in me out of nothing but the generosity of her spirit when I met her and came to study with her at Columbia, and for being so much more to me every day since our first meeting. Lydia has been, at different times, mother, sister, friend, and mentor to me, and the gratitude I owe her for my intellectual development in philosophy and my personal development in life surpasses any description I can provide here. I thank her for being my toughest critic, for sending me back to the drawing board countless times knowing I had more in me, and for reminding me every day to have the courage not to write for anyone but myself. I thank her also for recommending me for my first teaching job outside Temple, and for generously bringing me into her intellectual circle. From each person she has introduced to me to, I have learned something valuable. More than all of this, I thank her for her abundant supply of humor, emotional support, and advice that has kept me inspired, empowered, and grounded throughout this journey. Most of all, I thank her for making me feel that wherever my path will take me in the future, she will be a part of it. I am so grateful that I have gained from my encounters with her, not only a brilliant mentor whose work inspires me every day, but someone who is truly, to me, family.

Finally, I thank my mother for instilling in me a deep passion for my heritage. Despite challenging circumstances in Iran, I have always felt supported by my family's warm spirits and good cheer. I share with them a love for my homeland, the people in it, and the traditions we share. This love I owe to my mother for showing me so much of what is so wonderful about the place we come from. I also thank her for encouraging me

to learn the piano, and for insisting that I stick with it when I was a teenager who hated everything, piano included. I thank her for teaching me to be driven in the pursuit of my education, and for cheering me on when I struggled, particularly in my final year of graduate school. Without her emotional and financial support, I would not have been able to complete my graduate studies. Most of all, I thank her for telling me over Skype to take a night off when I really looked like I needed it. And once again, I thank Steven, my partner in crime, for being there whenever I did.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
1. APPROACHING A COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGY.....	1
Goehr and the Ontological Pursuit.....	5
The Comparative Pursuit.....	10
2. DOES THE NIGHTINGALE SING?.....	16
Tonally Moving Forms.....	18
Music and Emotions.....	21
Music and Nature.....	24
Performance.....	27
The Eclipse of the Nightingale.....	29
3. LEARNING WITHOUT THEORY.....	33
Iranian Classical Music.....	34
Iranian Classical Music Scholars and the Transmission of Musical Practice.....	44
Musical Modulation as Musical Dexterity.....	47
4. DOING WITHOUT MAKING.....	54
Performance and the Ontology of Works.....	55
Performance and the Ontology of Improvisation.....	58
Performance, Works, and Iranian Classical Music.....	65

Doing Without Making.....	85
5. COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS.....	87
Comparativist Approaches.....	87
The Aesthetic Attitude, Formalism, and Dexterity.....	90
Self-Expression and Creativity.....	93
Coda.....	96
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 98
 APPENDICES	
 A. SCHOLARS OF IRANIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC.....	 107

## CHAPTER 1

### APPROACHING A COMPARATIVE ONTOLOGY

In every corner of the globe, people engage in music. From Bangladesh to Brazil, it is not too hard to find someone participating in a practice that is musical. Some musicians manipulate instruments that generate sounds. Others sing or clap or otherwise manipulate their own bodies to make sounds. Some invent patterns of sounds. Others reproduce them. Some do both. Most, if not all, learn how to interact with other people doing similar things. And everywhere in the world there are people who observe, appreciate, document, and evaluate what musicians do. The sounds, instruments, voices, people, activities, and documents considered parts of musical practice may be widely disparate from place to place and past to present. Some will differ in importance, be absent from, or present in different music traditions. All are associated with the concept of music, but perhaps not in the same way. Though all these practices may be referred to as music in some sense or other, it is not always easy for the philosopher to pin down what the concept of music refers to in each context.

My project is motivated by the culturally comparative question of why so many claims about the nature of music in philosophy fail to fit many musical practices in the world. The answer I offer centers on the claim that the concept of music is not always identified with the same features of musical practice in different traditions. My main concern is with the ontology of music. Contemporary philosophical accounts of music tend to revolve around the concept of the musical work as it operates in the context of western classical music—historically, the “high” musical art of Europe—in which the

production and reception of musical works has featured for some time.<sup>1</sup> But what if the music tradition on which the ontologist draws is not this one? I attempt to capture how participants in a music tradition might conceive of music in ontological terms when their practice has nothing to do with making musical works.

Comparative approaches to the ontology of music in the analytic philosophical tradition that do address the question of divergent musical traditions tend to address popular music or jazz improvisation. These discussions typically share two features: (1) a general orientation to music in which making musical works is the dominant conception of musical practice against which the variant musical traditions are compared, and (2) an inquiry into the extent to which the concept of a musical work might be accommodated within the outlying tradition.<sup>2</sup> Some of these discussions

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that my use of the word “western” (for want of a better word) references the tradition of art music that has its historical roots in European culture, but is used in many parts of the world today. In using this term, I do not mean to imply in any sense that other musical traditions in the world can be categorized under one homogeneous “non-western” category. It should also be noted that my use of the term “classical” in the “western” context refers broadly to this tradition as codified in the last few hundred years, characterized in particular by the use of staff notation, which provides a guideline, if not a standard for the performance of music. This usage is to be distinguished from two other historically and stylistically narrower, but common usages of the term “classical” in this cultural context. The first is western art music of the so-called “classical period,” that is, roughly 1750–1830, including the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, often characterized by basic tonic-dominant-subdominant harmonic patterns. The second is music written in a “classical style” (typically, a style associated with order, clarity, and formal perfection), commonly contrasted with the style of “romanticism,” generally taken as a more expressive, fanciful, and adventurous approach to composition exemplified by composers like Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt.

<sup>2</sup> On comparative ontology and the case of popular music, see, for example Davies (2001), Gracyk (1996), and Kania (2006, 2008a, 2008b). On the case of improvisation in the context jazz, see, for example, Alperson (1984, 1998), Brown (1996, 2000), Kania (2008d), and Young and Matheson (2000). Alperson (1984) introduces the question of whether the musical work is the right object for analysis in the context of improvisation, to which many subsequent theorists respond.

question the authority of the concept of the musical work and some do not. I ask, however, what ontological implications follow when the comparative case is itself a “high” classical tradition but a tradition in which the concept of the musical work has no historical force. What can the ontologist say about music if she cannot use the concept of the musical work in her theory at all, because it has no place in the musical history she addresses?

Why ask this question? Consider, for a moment, the kinds of issues on which contemporary analytic philosophers of music typically focus. Many contemporary philosophers frame their examinations of music explicitly around particular ontological questions about the nature of musical works such as “What kind of thing is a musical work?” “How are performances identified with musical works?” and “What is it to give an authentic performance of a musical work?”<sup>3</sup> Philosophical discussions of music may also center on implicit notions of the musical work. It is a popular strategy to begin a philosophical discussion of music, for example, with the assumption that music is organized sound.<sup>4</sup> Organized sounds, of all the various facets of music making, are precisely the musical features that the concept of the musical work is historically taken to capture.<sup>5</sup> Many contemporary philosophers who address other questions such as the relationship between music and the emotions or the evaluation of music often rely on the

---

<sup>3</sup> See Kania (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Hanslick, who exemplifies this view in the late nineteenth century, is influential in delineating the range of musically organized sound in terms of tones organized relative to the diatonic system of tonality in western classical music and composed for the purpose of the contemplation of the intrinsically aesthetic qualities of the musical forms themselves (1986). See also Levinson (1980).

concept of the musical work by couching theories in terms of how we respond to musical works or, more loosely, to organized sound structures.<sup>6</sup>

Iranian classical music, however, is a performative practice centering on musical activity that has not historically been concerned with making works. In a tradition where the concept of the musical work has no force, an explanation for what the understanding of music must be among the tradition's participants cannot rely on this concept. It must appeal to something else. I will argue that embodied doing—dexterous activity in the performing moment—is so important for Iranian classical music practitioners that it is the dominant concept shaping musical practice in this art form. Scholars, artists, and audiences have centrally taken the art of music to be the art of developing, showcasing, and appreciating the achievement of dexterous activity in a musical context. When thinking of music, participants in the practice of Iranian classical music think of the doing in musical practice, without the doing being placed either in service of work-creation or in challenging a historical norm of work-creation.

Some contemporary ontologists of music have argued that performing activity has a substantive role to play in the ontology of music, particularly when musical exemplars are chosen that challenge or deviate from a practice model in which composing notated musical works is privileged. The most popular cases discussed in this context are improvisation, especially jazz improvisation.<sup>7</sup> What is different about the

---

<sup>6</sup> Theorists concerned with expressivity in music for example often conceive of music as an object with a formal shape—a musical work, a piece of music, or a collection of sounds exhibiting a structure—and then proceed to offer explanations of how we associate the structured object with emotion. See for example Langer (1953) and Kivy (1989, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> See Alperson (1984) and Brown (2000). I address these arguments in my fourth chapter.

case I choose, in which the concept of the musical work has no dominant historical force? The bulk of my analysis will address this question. I approach it by asking: What place does performing activity have in the ontology of music's history? What place does it have in the scholarship and discourses of Iranian classical music? How does the conception of music that centers on performing activity in Iran differ about claims about this activity that already feature in the contemporary ontology of music? And, finally, how does this case inform the comparative ontological endeavor in general?

### Goehr and the Ontological Pursuit

In addressing these questions I draw from and adapt for the comparative context, methodological work set out by Lydia Goehr in her book, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*.<sup>8</sup> Goehr's work in this context is particularly suited to the task of the comparative ontology of music because it focuses on the vital and complex relationship between ontology and the concepts that particular musical practices hold central and idealize. I offer here an overview of Goehr's work in which I concentrate on the issues germane to my present purposes. Goehr offers a philosophical examination of the concept of the "musical work." Goehr's argument is divided into two parts. The first ("The Analytic Approach") is a methodological critique of analytic philosophical

---

<sup>8</sup> Goehr's text was originally published in 1992. A revised edition with an additional introductory essay, "His Master's Choice" was published in 2007. My references are from the 2007 edition. See also Goehr (1989), an article-length articulation of her argument, and Goehr (2000), a response to musicological critiques of her argument.

accounts of the ontology of the musical work. The second part (“The Historical Approach”) offers Goehr’s own positive account.

Contemporary philosophical accounts of the ontology of the musical work have, on Goehr’s view, focused on the search for identity conditions of the musical work that guide our understanding of when and in what way a musical performance ought count as a performance of the work. Goehr discusses these accounts in terms of a debate between Platonist and nominalist theories.<sup>9</sup> The former argue that the musical work ought to be identified with a permanent abstract (often Platonic) kind.<sup>10</sup> Nominalists take the musical work as a class of particulars linked by a logic: musical works on this view are conceptual categories whose theoretical specification allows for the possibility of particular performances.

Goehr’s central example of a nominalist theory of musical works is Nelson Goodman’s in *Languages of Art*.<sup>11</sup> Goehr argues that the concept of a work that follows from Goodman’s account is one constructed to avoid the logical problem of vagueness.<sup>12</sup> Goodman’s concern is with this problem: if a performance with one wrong note were to count as a performance of a particular work, there would be no logical justification to

---

<sup>9</sup> On this point see also Kania (2013) and Bertinetto (2013).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Dodd (2000, 2002, 2007) and Kivy (1993, 2004), who consider musical works eternal, abstract objects, and Levinson (1980, 1990), who considers the musical work a creatable object. “Platonic” here refers to the kind of entity thought to be relevant rather than to any particular degree of fidelity to Plato’s theories per se.

<sup>11</sup> See Goodman (1976, 127–91), and Goehr’s analysis of Goodman’s argument and Goodman’s critics (Goehr 2007, 13–43).

<sup>12</sup> Goehr discusses Goodman’s concern in terms of the paradox of the heap (the so-called sorites paradox), asking, for example, how many hairs removed from someone’s head make one bald (Goehr 2007, 41–43). See also Goehr (2008b).

prohibit identifying a performance with two, three, or even all wrong notes as performances of that work, or of any other work, for that matter. Goodman asks: under what conditions can performances be identified with works so that there is no case in which a performance can be identified with more than one work? Goodman makes no direct claim about the metaphysical status of musical works but argues rather that the musical work must be understood as a class of performances notationally compliant with a score. Only features of actual scores meeting Goodman's criteria for a notational system count in a test of a performance's identity, and the test demands that a performance with even one wrong note would not count as a performance of that work. Goodman acknowledges that the theory is counter-intuitive, asserting simply that his test need say nothing about how people do or ought to identify performances with works in practice. Such an admission, however, on Goehr's view is a fatal flaw: "Goodman is thus obliged to relinquish loyalty to our pre-critical practices...The discrepancy between this theory and how we think about musical practice is just too great" (Goehr 2007, 43).

Goehr's central example of a Platonist theory of musical works is Jerrold Levinson's view in "What a Musical Work Is."<sup>13</sup> Levinson's worry is not over the logical problem of vagueness. Rather, he asks what properties can be formulated for the musical work if it is to be characterized as an abstract entity of the sort he desires. Levinson is concerned with defining a musical work so that it can fit into a Platonist-inspired metaphysical worldview in which abstract entities exist, but in such a way that the composer is the originator of entities that are musical works, a condition that

---

<sup>13</sup> See Levinson (1980), and Goehr's discussion of Levinson's argument and Levinson's critics (Goehr 2007, 44–68).

acknowledges the intuition that musical works are brought into existence by the composer's creative compositional activity. Levinson argues that a work is usually considered an abstract object when it is identified with a sound structure. The sound structure is generally taken to be a type that is identified with all the instances corresponding with that sound structure (usually performances of a work). But, Levinson argues, if a musical work is identified solely as a sound structure, it follows that the work can exist in the abstract before it is composed, in which case the function of creating the work cannot be attributed to the composer. Levinson's solution is to posit the musical work as a type to which certain historically contextual features of its production are essential. From a range of implicit pre-existing types of things a musical work could be identified with, each musical work is a special metaphysical entity he calls an initiated type. An initiated type is realized by a composer's choices at the time of composition given a range of implicit types (including sounds and performing-means) available to the composer in that historical period.

Levinson's account, with its sensitivity to historical and contextual matters, is, according to Goehr, more respectful of our pre-ontological and aesthetic understanding of musical works than is Goodman's. However, as Levinson himself acknowledges, his theory applies only for cases of fully notated classical compositions in the western classical tradition, which he calls "paradigm" musical works.<sup>14</sup> But what is the warrant for selecting and concentrating on examples drawn from the repertoire of the early nineteenth century? Levinson's restriction, Goehr argues, is symptomatic of a more

---

<sup>14</sup> See Levinson (1980, 3, 11–17, 24).

general methodological problem that plagues the contemporary analytic focus on musical works:

Just why is it that no theory of musical works has ever contained any explanation (a) for the examples it uses, (b) for its confinement to paradigm examples (if that approach is taken), or (c) for what counts as a borderline example... It is a serious issue how we chose examples as subjects for theoretical account. It is just as serious an issue how examples come to be considered paradigmatic of a concept. For when we inquire into these matters it turns out that some central procedures of the analytic method have to be rethought and perhaps replaced... While the analytic method has given theorists a way to account for the logic of phenomena, this has not been true for their empirical, historical, and where relevant, their aesthetic character.” (Goehr 2007 83–86)

In Part II of her book (“The Historical Approach”) Goehr proposes a methodological shift from “asking what kind of *object* a musical work is, to asking what kind of *concept* the work-concept is” (90). On Goehr’s view, the concept of a musical work is an *open* concept with *original* and *derivative* employment, correlated to the *ideals* of a practice, a *regulative* concept that is *projective* and is an *emergent* concept. In line with this reorientation, Goehr endeavors to trace the genealogy of the concept or the history of its meaning as it has functioned within the relevant practice (89–93). Reading the history of aesthetic theory against empirical accounts of European classical music practices, Goehr argues that the work-concept emerges from gestation—that is, a period in which it functions “by intimation and without stable meaning” (109)—and begins to regulate musical practice—in an “entrenched, stable, and accepted manner” (*ibid*)—around the end of the eighteenth century. It was at this time, when a constellation of aesthetic and musical factors converged such that composers began to

view their compositions as ends in themselves, that a regulative ideal emerged that enabled us to “talk of each individual musical work as if it were an object, as if it were a construction that existed over and above its performances and scores” (106) and that performances must meet the ideal of *Werktreue*,<sup>15</sup> of being true to the work. In this way, Goehr offers a demonstration of the methodological view that ontology needs to be reconceived to be tied to history, in the specific sense that “methodological priority is given to making ontological claims compatible with the historical and conceptual complexity of the subject-matter with which they are associated” (89).

### The Comparative Pursuit

While Goehr is reluctant to pigeon hole her approach with a label, she does allow that her methodology might reasonably be called “genealogy, cultural metaphysics or anthropology, or historically based ontology” (Goehr 2007, 7). From that point of view her main concern is with the question how the work-concept has actually functioned in practice in the history of western classical music: the tradition of western classical music is itself historically and culturally bound, with the work-concept coming into its own in the west with the rise of the romantic conception of artistic creation and the emergence of music as an autonomous fine art (113). My aim is to take some of Goehr’s central insights and apply them, comparatively, to a different musical tradition, to see what concepts emerge when we look at the non-European context of Iranian classical music, a

---

<sup>15</sup> Note that I do not italicize foreign terms in this document, for ease of reading given the frequency of their use.

practice in which the concept of a musical work does not have the force of a regulative ideal. What aspects of Goehr's methodology remain of use in my own comparative ontological endeavor?

For a start, I agree with Goehr's general position about the priority of practice over abstract speculations about ontology. This is one lesson we can take from Goodman's notorious effort to advance a theory that is theoretically coherent but that ends up being completely at odds with prevailing musical understanding, behavior, and values. My aim, rather, is to look carefully at the discourses on musical practice in the tradition of Iranian classical music and see what concepts might have normative force within the practice.

This general goal, however, is not as easy to attain as it may seem, in part because of the very pervasiveness of the notion of the work concept in the western context. As Goehr effectively points out, when people participating in the art of western classical music take themselves to be primarily engaged in the activities of composing, performing, and appreciating musical works, the concept of the musical work takes on the appearance of necessity and attains regulative force in the conceptual framework by means of which we understand the practice: it is hard today to think of western classical music without referring to the work-concept (1). Composers become characterized as people who are concerned with making musical works. Scores become important (and scoring conventions become standardized) because scores are understood to function as documentations of musical works that enable a composer's organized sounds to be efficiently captured, disseminated, and repeated. Performers are understood as people who endeavor to repeat musical works so that audiences can appreciate the musical

work presented by performers. Indeed, to be fair to Goodman, it is the very centrality of the idea of being true to the work that provides an impetus for Goodman to look for a theory that will adequately address the question of a performance's compliance with score so as to identify a genuine performance of a work.

At the same time, it is precisely because these concepts and conventions *are* institutionalized and normalized in a practice of music that carries a very high level of prestige in western cultures, we must be on guard for unwittingly importing these concepts into a musical tradition in which they may not figure. This is a risk that exists even in considering western musical traditions where fundamental notions such as composing, performing, novelty, and compliance may not play the same explanatory roles as they do within the established tradition of western classical music. Consider, for example, the case of improvisation in music. There is debate about the extent to which the use of concepts like composition and performance describe or misdescribe the practice of improvisation under terms that fit a work-production model.<sup>16</sup> In certain circumstances the improviser may be understood to be composing and performing simultaneously, eclipsing the traditional distinction between composer and performer.<sup>17</sup> Similarly there are instances where the focus of the artist does not seem to be primarily on ordering sounds per se, and neither does the focus of the audience appear to be solely

---

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Alperson (1984), Bertinetto (2013), and Brown (1996). All question tensions in applying concepts derived from western classical music's practices to the case of improvisation, and jazz improvisation in particular. Nooshin makes the same criticism about musicological discussions of Iranian classical music that make use these concepts (2003).

<sup>17</sup> See Bertinetto's survey and critique of attempts to formulate ontological claims about improvisation under terms usually associated with the work concept, and in particular his critique of Kivy (Bertinetto 2013, Kivy 2004, 99–101).

on listening to ordered sounds. Take, for example, moments when John Coltrane puts aside his tenor saxophone to pound his chest and scream, viscerally, into his microphone.<sup>18</sup> Or consider John Cage's 4'33," in which the audience members themselves (unwittingly) generate the sounds that comprise the compositions. And in Iran, where music has been heavily regulated since the 1979 revolution, and where the performance of music is fraught with political significance, the visual presentation of a musician in the throes of the creative moment is typically considered much more controversial (or, put another way, closer to the "stuff" of music, and therefore more problematic) than the audible sounds that arise.<sup>19</sup> Such examples call into question the facile assumption that all musical practices consist in—and valorize—the presentation of composers' sonically organized musical works by performers for audiences.

In what follows, however, I shall not be concerned with the viability of Goehr's genealogical claim about how the work-concept came to be so important in western classical music or about her historical claim that the work concept crystallized at the beginning of the nineteenth century, claims that are more commonly discussed in both

---

<sup>18</sup> Hear the recording of John Coltrane's live performance in Philadelphia in 1966 (Coltrane 2014).

<sup>19</sup> When music is broadcast on national television in Iran, the sounds themselves are left intact, but the images of musicians in action are "dubbed over" with images of flowers or nature. The supposition is that by removing the imagery of musicians playing their instruments from the view of audiences, the practices of performing and listening are effaced or attenuated so that the activities are less musical and therefore less controversial. An "editing" error on January 18, 2014 in which musicians were accidentally displayed on television prompted discussions of this policy in the media. See, for example, Dehghan (2014), Ernst (2014), and Mostaghim and Sandels (2014).

philosophical and musicological criticism.<sup>20</sup> What matters for the purpose of my argument is rather Goehr's critical point that the questions ontologists pick out as significant tend to matter because certain concepts have the force they do in practice. When, for example, works matter—and performing works as scored matter—in practice, puzzles about identifying works with performances matter in theory. Accordingly, I will look carefully at what Iranian classical musicians do and say, as well as read the scholarship surrounding this tradition, by looking for the concepts that appear to have the most regulative force when it comes to making sense of this musical practice, and the thinking about it.

One thing to note here is that I will not be making claims about when certain concepts became regulative in the history of Iranian classical music in a way that would be analogous to Goehr's own historical claims about the work-concept in western classical music. Part of the difficulty in making historical claims in the context I address is the scarcity of written descriptions about Iranian classical music before the late

---

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, an edited volume centering on these parts of Goehr's argument (Talbot 2000a). Talbot offers a genealogical claim of his own—inspired by Goehr's—that the work-concept came to matter because the composer-concept did: “To borrow and extend Lydia Goehr's metaphor: musical works enter the imaginary museum only because composers have already entered their imaginary Pantheon” (Talbot 2000b, 186). Elsewhere, other theorists question Goehr's empirical claim. White, for example argues the concern with textual integrity in contemporary Bach performance reaffirms the regulative force of the work-concept after 1800. But, looking, as Goehr does, at historical descriptions of musical practices, White argues there is evidence—in descriptions by, and about, Bach and Fux—of the work-concept (and another concept he calls the authority-concept) regulating European classical music practice as early as the Baroque period (1997). To the critics of her empirical argument, Goehr responds her claim is not that the work concept originated around 1800, but that it took on sufficient regulative force to become the institutional norm around 1800. See Goehr (2000). Goehr also makes this point explicit in her discussion of the case of Bach in *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (2007, 113–115).

nineteenth century. The tradition extends much further back, but its history is predominantly oral and anecdotal.<sup>21</sup> My concern is rather to identify those concepts that currently have force in Persian classical music and, in particular, to show that the work-concept is not one of them. At the same time I am alive to the important observation that cultural practices are dynamic, not static, affairs, with their own histories. I will return to the question of the historicity of the practice of Persian classical music in my last chapter.

Finally, it might be asked, why, of all the world's musical traditions, should the ontological examination of Iranian classical music be of particular interest? I have already suggested part of the answer to this question. Iranian classical music is philosophically interesting precisely because it is a musical tradition that operates in the absence of a well-defined concept of the musical work. Rather, the guiding principles of the practice center on a particular conception of musical doing as kind of embodied activity that centers on the notion of dexterity. The fact that Iranian classical music focuses on this idea of embodied doing but does so in the absence of a concept of the production of works presents to philosophy an intriguing alternative to conceptions about music that we tend to take for granted in western discourse. I turn now to a defense of these claims.

---

<sup>21</sup> On this point see Nooshin's discussions of historical data about Iranian classical music (2014a, 279, and 2015, 55–56).

## CHAPTER 2

### DOES THE NIGHTINGALE SING?

Much can be learned about the activities, objects of attention, and values of a cultural practice by examining the controlling analogies and metaphors that surround it. Consider the role that the nightingale plays in metaphors central to artistic practices in Iran.

Dubbed *bolbol*, or *hezārān*—the singer of a thousand songs—the nightingale is revered in Persian myth for its supposed ability to sing endlessly without ever repeating itself.<sup>22</sup>

For centuries Iranian poets and scholars have drawn on the nightingale’s singing as the ultimate metaphor for loving, devotion, and creative artistry.

The nightingale of Persian legend sings in a mythical garden where white roses bloom. The nightingale, as lover, is enamored with the rose, its beloved, to which it sings ceaselessly in a thousand different ways of its love. As it sings, the nightingale presses close to the white rose, pricking its breast on the rose’s thorns, bleeding on the rose, and turning the rose red. Indeed, the motif of the nightingale and the rose has occupied such a commanding place in Persian poetry that Persians often refer to Iran as the land of the rose and the nightingale. Ferdowsi, the tenth-century poet, uses the motif of the nightingale yearning for the rose in his *Shahnameh*, the national epic poem of Iran,<sup>23</sup> as does the revered fourteenth-century poet, Hafiz.<sup>24</sup> And at least since the late

---

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Rothenberg (2005, 133) and Poole (1914, 230). For a somewhat contrasting assessment of the relationship between the nightingale and the idea of repetition—with emphasis shifted to the nightingale’s song, rather than its activity—see Kant (2000, 182).

<sup>23</sup> See Ferdowsi (2007, 370).

nineteenth century, Ostāds—a general term denoting scholars, teachers, composers, and performers of Iranian classical music—allude to the nightingale’s mythic ability to rotate through different melodies without repetition as the ideal of musicality to which all musicians aspire. So forceful is this metaphor that in some regions of Iran the honorific “bolbol” is reserved for the most skilled musician in the area.<sup>25</sup> In Iranian classical music, to do as the nightingale does is to be musical.

This characterization stands in stark contrast to the influential treatment given the nightingale by Eduard Hanslick, the originator of the first European course in music appreciation, at the University of Vienna, and who may fairly be said to be the “father” of the contemporary philosophy of music, having articulated many of its basic concepts and setting the terms of debate of the field. Hanslick famously writes in his influential book of 1854, *On the Musically Beautiful*, “Not the voices of animals but their entrails are important to us, and the animal to which music is most indebted is not the nightingale, but the sheep.”<sup>26</sup> From artistic muse inspiring the most gifted musicians to

---

<sup>24</sup> Many poems of the famous poet use the motif of the nightingale and the rose. For Hafiz, the nightingale’s singing often stands in interchangeable metaphorical reference to the acts of loving, spiritual devotion, and his own artistry. “O scented rose, will you set on fire our nightingale? Who sings your praise all night—the lover’s prayer!” (Hafiz 2006, 61). An English translation of parts of his famous Divan compiles many poems that draw on the nightingale and the rose. See, for example “Hafiz, what song is it thou dost sing, dread nightingale? Hafiz hath nothing but a prayer to bring” (Hafiz 2004, 145). See also “Ode 223,” (2004, 83) and “Ode 49” (2004, 31–32). Oscar Wilde famously rearticulates this story for different purposes with the addition of a third character, a human scholar, severing the metaphorical identification of the nightingale with human lover, artist, or devotee that is more common in Iranian poetry (Wilde 2008, 24–34). On this see Rothenberg (2005, 140–141).

<sup>25</sup> See Nooshin (1998, 69–70) and Rothenberg (2005, 133).

<sup>26</sup> (Hanslick 1986, 72). The first edition of this text was published in 1854. I reference the authoritative eighth edition, translated by Geoffrey Payzant in 1986.

lamb guts for violin strings: this is quite a fall. To understand the full force of this transformation, I examine here, the concepts and arguments in Hanslick's pioneering work that result in the making of this claim.

### Tonally Moving Forms

Hanslick begins his examination of music with a methodological claim about doing the philosophy of music. Musical aesthetics, he argues, has predominantly occupied itself with a subjective account of music, that is, with "giving an account of the feelings which take possession of us when we hear it" (Hanslick 1986, 1). What Hanslick seeks, in contrast, is what he calls an objective and scientific account of music "based on the axiom that the laws of beauty proper to each particular art are inseparable from the distinctive characteristics of its material and its technique" (2). Hanslick argues that every art originates from a particular sensuous base through which ideas are externalized. The goal of musical aesthetics, he says, is to identify and understand the specifically musical kind of beauty (29–30).

What kind of beauty is musical beauty? Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, in what content does musical beauty reside? It resides, Hanslick famously says, in "tonally moving forms" (29).<sup>27</sup> Musical beauty is the beauty of moving forms emerging from the tonal unfolding of a musical motif born in the mind of the composer.

---

<sup>27</sup> Hanslick's account of the formal, tonal beauty of music is laid out in Chapter III, "The Musically Beautiful," (28–44).

Moving forms are the movement between tones arranged in composition, arising one after another in rhythmically structured melody and harmony.

The musically beautiful is, for Hanslick, an audible phenomenon that has some affinity with the ornamentation of arabesque in the visual arts and with the moving visual forms of a kaleidoscope, but such comparisons have their limits (29–30). Musical beauty consists of the specific formal and dynamic features of musical form, addressed to the musical imagination that contemplates “the rational coherence of a group of tones” (30). As Hanslick puts it, “Music has sense and logic—but musical sense and logic. It is a kind of language which we speak and understand yet cannot translate” (30). Music, Hanslick says, presents to us “relationships, fraught with significance, of sounds which are in themselves charming—their congruity and opposition, their separating and combining, their soaring and subsiding—this is what comes in spontaneous forms before our inner contemplation and pleases before us” (28).

Composing, Hanslick asserts, is the work of mind upon musical material, the elaboration of musical ideas, which, he says, manifest themselves in “the aftereffects of audible tones already faded away” (31). Listening to music—in the correct way, according to Hanslick—requires a particular kind of aesthetic attention in which “the auditory imagination...enjoys in conscious sensuousness the sounds shapes, the self-constructing tones, and dwells in free and immediate contemplation of them” (30). It is important to note that “auditory imagination” is a technical term for Hanslick, referring to a particular faculty of mind by means of which we scrutinize and delight in the sounding tonal forms and structures of music in their development.

There are several things to note about Hanslick's positive account of tonally moving forms. In his emphasis on the connection between musical beauty and musical laws and with objectivity more generally, and in his intellectualist account of the manner in which we apprehend the underlying rational coherence in music (even if, as we will see later Hanslick thinks the development of the tonal system is a distinctively human contribution), Hanslick can be seen to be a child of Enlightenment thinking.<sup>28</sup> Hanslick's theoretical insistence on the centrality of tonally moving forms is also consistent with his own stylistic preferences evinced in his own practical criticism. Hanslick was a noted music critic known both for favoring music of the "classical" era, in particular the music of Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms, and for attacking the music of romanticism, in particular Bruckner, Wolf, and above all, Liszt and Wagner,<sup>29</sup> though he takes his claims here to hold over both styles.<sup>30</sup> It should also be noted that Hanslick's account of the tonally moving forms of music is a permanent legacy to the philosophical understanding of music, identifying a particular set of aesthetically relevant features of music that seem central to the experience of many musicians, theorists, and music lovers in the western tradition.

---

<sup>28</sup> For a general outline of the Enlightenment characterized as a period of thought in which the world is made sense of according to principles of human reason, see Bristow (2011). See also Cassirer (1951). Mapping developments in thought about knowledge of reality, Cassirer articulates the cultural move toward a concept of nature as something governed by fixed laws observable by human intellect without the appeal to a transcendent being like God, which had been a central feature of philosophical thought in Europe before the Enlightenment (37–92).

<sup>29</sup> See the collection of Hanslick's music criticism from 1846–1899 (Hanslick 1950).

<sup>30</sup> See Hanslick (1986, 38).

## Music and Emotions

Hanslick's insistence on musically autonomous beauty is also noteworthy for what Hanslick wishes to exclude from the sphere of music. "Aesthetic contemplation cannot be based upon any features which are outside the artwork itself," Hanslick asserts (1986, 48). Above all, as he notes, Hanslick wishes to separate the aesthetics of music from the specter of human emotion. This, he does in two ways.

First, Hanslick dissociates the beautiful in music from emotions that music may arouse in the listener. Hanslick acknowledges that many listeners do listen to music for the evocation of emotion of which music is capable, but this, he argues, is nothing unique to music. Winning the lottery, hearing a sermon, seeing a beautiful painting or cathedral, or learning of the illness of a friend can all arouse strong feelings. For Hanslick, there is no reason to single music out in this regard (5–7).

More fundamentally, Hanslick argues, the arousal of emotions has nothing to do with the proper understanding of music. The beautiful in music, though it is presented in sensation (the relationships of tonal sounds), is a matter of the contemplation of the objective features of musical beauty, not the subjective feelings the music may evoke. Nor is music even capable of establishing a strict causal connection between pieces of music and the emotions they might be said to evoke, an argument that Hanslick supports with observations about changes in reactions to music from one generation to another. A Mozart symphony that was once seen as arousing violent agony is easily taken, twenty

years later, as evoking wholesome tranquility.<sup>31</sup> There is no causal nexus between particular pieces of music and the particular emotions they arouse.

In addition to attacking the causal claim that the aim of music is arouse emotion, Hanslick seeks to dissociate the beautiful in music from the realm of emotion by arguing that music is incapable of representing emotions. Here Hanslick advances a view of what he calls “definite” emotions, such as love, piety, or rage. Definite emotions, he says, are dependent not only on physiological conditions but also on ideas, judgments, and “the whole range of intelligible and rational thought” (9). One cannot, for example, conceive of sadness in abstraction from the idea of some thing that is sad, or some thing about which one is sad. The definite feeling of hope, for example, cannot be separated from the representation of a future happy state that is compared to the present. Melancholy depends upon a cognitive connection between past happiness and the present. And it is this conceptual apparatus that music cannot supply: “the specification of feelings cannot be separated from actual representations and concepts, which latter lie beyond the scope of music” (10). The compositional form of a Donizetti overture may, for example, seem to represent yearning to one listener, while seeming to represent piety

---

<sup>31</sup>“How many works by Mozart were declared in his time to be the most passionate, ardent, and audacious within the reach of musical mood-painting. At that time, people contrasted the tranquility and wholesomeness of Haydn’s symphonies with the outbursts of vehement passion, bitter struggle, and piercing agony of Mozart’s. Twenty or thirty years later, they made the exact same comparison between Mozart and Beethoven. Mozart’s position as representative of violent, inspired passion was taken over by Beethoven, and Mozart was promoted to Haydn’s Olympian classicism. Any attentive musician who lives long enough will encounter similar metamorphoses. Nevertheless, throughout this variation in the impression of feeling, the musical value of many works remains in itself for us unaltered, their originality and beauty remain as fresh as ever despite the excitement they might at one time have caused” (Hanslick 1986, 6–7).

to another. Hanslick asks: “Can we call it the representation of a specific feeling when nobody knows what feeling was actually represented?” (14).

Hanslick offers several qualifications to this attack on the emotionalist view of music. First, Hanslick acknowledges that he speaks of what he deems the core of classical music: absolute instrumental music, that is, music without words. What about vocal music? It is true, Hanslick allows, that words, whether they are sung or suggested in programmatic handouts, can help to specify the definiteness of emotions which instrumental music is incapable of representing. But in such cases, the vocal content simply subordinates and therefore distracts attention from the purely musical content.

It is important to understand what is at stake in Hanslick’s discussion of music and language. Hanslick actually makes three points. First, he wishes to argue that music is malleable in the sense that it can support a variety of linguistic overlays. Hanslick claims, for example, that the music of Orfeo’s famous aria in Gluck’s opera *Orfeo*, just as easily supports the words “J’ai trouvé mon Euridice, Rein n’égale mon bonheur!” as the original “J’ai perdue mon Euridice, Rein n’égale mon malheur!” (17). Second, Hanslick wishes to argue that music and language operate according to their respective principles and requirements. In an important passage Hanslick writes:

The essential difference is that in speech the sound is only a sign, that is, a means to an end which is entirely distinct from that means, while in music the sound is an object, i.e., it appears to us an end in itself. The absolute supremacy of thought over sound as merely a means of expression in spoken language are so exclusively opposed that a combination of the two is a logical impossibility. The essential centre of gravity thus lies entirely differently in language and music, and around these centres all other characteristics arrange themselves. All specifically musical laws will hinge upon the autonomous meaning and beauty of the tones, and all linguistic laws upon the correct adaption of sound to the requirements of expression. (Hanslick 1986, 42–43)

Finally, Hanslick argues, there is the psychological point that when music and language are combined there is a tendency to listen to the meaning of words instead of to the musical meaning. The priority of linguistic over musical content explains how it is that Handel could have transcribed some of the most famous themes for the *Messiah* from secular and erotic duets. For all these reasons Hanslick calls the union of poetry with music a “morganatic” union, that is, a marriage of unequals (26).

The most that music can convey by way of emotive content is what Hanslick calls an analogical similarity between musical dynamics and the dynamics of emotion—the sense of speed or acceleration, of slowing or falling motion, for example. But, Hanslick argues, the dynamic quality of emotion is merely one attribute of feeling, and, importantly, is not it consistent in emotive experience. The experience of love, for example, might be gentle as easily as it might be violent.

Whispering? Yes, but not the yearning of love. Violence? Of course, but certainly not the conflict. Music can, in fact, whisper, rage, and rustle. But love and anger occur only within our hearts...music can only express the various accompanying adjectives and never the substantive, e.g. love itself. A specific feeling (a passion, say, or an affect) never exists as such without an actual historical content, which can only be precisely set forth in concepts. (Hanslick 1986, 9)

### Music and Nature

In addition to excluding emotion from the realm of the musical, Hanslick also wishes to distance music from the realm of nature. Hanslick’s position here is quite nuanced.

In considering the relation of music to the natural order of things Hanslick distinguishes several senses of “material.” There is a sense in which natural material figures into the instrumentality of music, where the double-entendre of this term is clearly in Hanslick’s mind. Nature can supply materials—like wood, ore, and the skins and entrails of animals—for the construction of musical instruments but these natural materials play only an instrumental role, in the production of the instruments. Natural materials such as wood or ore, what Hanslick refers to as “crude physical material,” are not in themselves aesthetically relevant (Hanslick 1986, 68).

There is a second sense of material that is aesthetically relevant, however: “pure, measurable tone” (68). Tone, Hanslick says, is the prime and indispensable requisite of all music. Having made this point, however, Hanslick argues that tones do not occur in nature: “Has anyone ever heard a triad in nature? A chord of the sixth or seventh?” (69). Hanslick associates three basic elements with music, namely melody, harmony, and rhythm (32). Of these, he argues, the only one to be found in nature is rhythm, which Hanslick defines as a unity in which “successive particles of time assemble themselves and construct a perceivable whole” (69). This, he claims, we find in the gallop of horses, the clatter of the mill, and in the sounds of birds, divorced from melody and harmony. For Hanslick, it takes little sophistication to perceive simple rhythms: simple, duple, and triple rhythms can even be perceived by very young children and animals.

The tonal system, on the other hand, is not to be found in nature. By “tonal system” Hanslick means the system of major-minor tonality that allows for the articulation of major and minor scales, melody, harmony, and the system of equal temperament, all of which make western music possible. The tonal system is rather what

Hanslick calls a product of the human spirit. It is “artificial” in the precise sense that, as a human creation, it is something that has come into being gradually as the result of human invention, and something that must be learned. Whatever else in nature that seems like music—the slap of the waves on the shore, the babbling of the brook, or the “song” of birds—are “noises” in the technical sense of consisting in air vibrations of incommensurable frequencies, as opposed to tones in the true sense of the word, sounds of determinate, measure pitch that can be heard in a spectrum of high to low. This is why Hanslick says music has no prototype in nature (73), notwithstanding the fact that the “logic” of musical development is governed by natural laws, among which he names the law of harmonic progression (30–31). This is also why Hanslick writes that nature gives us only the raw physical materials which we make subservient to music and why, as we have seen, Hanslick asserts that the animal to which music is most indebted is not the nightingale but the sheep. It is the array of tones within the tonal system that provide the materials by means of which composers create music.

Hanslick also distinguishes a third sense of material. Could it be that nature provides music with material in the sense of subject matter or ideas that might be represented in music? In the case of the visual arts such as painting, and sculpture we can clearly find examples of such natural subjects as trees, flowers, and landscapes. Poetry, Hanslick argues, has an even wider range of natural prototypes, including the actions, feelings, and fortunes of human beings. Is this not possible in music? After all, Beethoven wrote the overture to *Egmont*, the subject matter of which is presumably the life of the sixteenth-century Dutch nobleman the Count of Egmont as depicted in the play of the same name by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (73).

Not so, Hanslick argues. Whatever connection Beethoven's music might have to the life of Egmont comes from the title, not from the music itself, which could as easily have been titled "William Tell" or "Jeanne d'Arc" (75) in which cases, as Hanslick has already argued, the linguistic meaning subsumes the musical meaning. Similarly, one would be amiss in thinking that natural sounds such as cockcrows or birdsongs imported into music are musical material. These imitations may have poetical significance but they are not musical. Hanslick writes, "Not all the natural sounds on earth put together can produce a musical theme, precisely because they are not music...music can make use of nature only when it dabbles in painting" (76). Hanslick's position here is consistent with his thoroughgoing autonomism with respect to the meaning of music. If a composer, such as Berlioz or Liszt, has in mind the representation of a specific content as an external device as he or she composes, the composer places himself or herself "at a wrong standpoint" (35). If the composer thinks the music is about extra-musical content, the composer is simply deluded (37).

### Performance

Hanslick also wishes to distance music from musical performance. Or perhaps, more accurately, one might say that Hanslick wishes he could distance music from musical performance. Hanslick's position, as we have seen, is that the beautiful in music inheres in pure form, in particular in the tonally moving forms that distinguish musical beauty from other kinds of beauty. The view is an idealist view in the sense that Hanslick orients his understanding of music around musical ideas, taken as tonal themes or motifs

(Hanslick, 1986, 73). It is the musical idea that the composer creates, and it is the musical idea that is the proper object of musical contemplation for the listener. Music is composed in the auditory imagination of the composer and it is the auditory imagination by means of which the listener contemplates the musical work which, strictly speaking, is complete in the composer's auditory imagination, regardless of whether it is performed or not (48).

What is it, then, that the performer does? Hanslick takes a minimalist path here. Ideally, the act of performance is an act of reproduction or faithful transmission. Hanslick is aware, however, that performers freely invest feeling into their performances. But this, for Hanslick, is a double-edged sword. On one hand, the composer's work may be presented by the performer with energy that enlivens the musical features of the work. On the other hand, performers necessarily render musical works into audible form by means of visible physical actions of the body. Performers and audiences alike can—and do—succumb to the temptation of being moved by the personal outpouring of feeling when the performer's "bodily ardor" makes itself visible and audible as the performer "presses the soulful vibrato upon the string, or pulls the bow" (49). For the performer, feelingful expression is cathartic, for the audience, is it stimulating. In both cases the performance interferes with proper musical contemplation. The temptation here is great: whereas the composer works slowly and intermittently in a fundamentally intellectual labor<sup>32</sup> that

---

<sup>32</sup> "Initially the composer has only a vague notion of the outlines of a composition. It is chiseled, from the individual beats up to the distinctive shape of the completed work, perhaps directly into the responsive and variform orchestral guise. This labor proceeding step by step as it does, is so deliberate and complex that nobody can be expected to comprehend it who has not so much as tried his hand at it. Not just fugal or contrapuntal movements, in which in measured fashion we sustain note against note, but also the most smoothly flowing rondo and the most melodious aria demand in minutest detail a

aims for posterity, the performer works in impetuous flight, oriented toward the moment of fulfillment (49).

Performance, then, on Hanslick's view, is a necessary evil, one fraught with the danger of leading us away from the intellectual delight at the heart of musical appreciation. Performance runs the risk moving from the contemplative understanding of music to what Hanslick calls the subjective, "pathological," emotively and bodily tinged reception of music (57). "For people who want the kind of effortless suppression of awareness they get from music, there is a wonderful recent discovery which far surpasses that art," Hanslick writes. "We refer to ether and chloroform." (59).

### The Eclipse of the Nightingale

We are now in a position to see why the nightingale's singing fits uncomfortably as a metaphor or touchstone for a theorist of Hanslickian persuasion. Hanslick lays the theoretical groundwork for a view of music as consisting in a particular activity of mind. This activity, as I have indicated, centers, for Hanslick, around an ideal object of certain sort—tonally moving forms—that is complete in the composer's mind and that become available by means of two varieties of physical presentation: musical notation and the actions of a performer. The musical idea itself, however, is an autonomous object

---

'working out' (as the saying so aptly goes)" (Hanslick 1986, 46). Hanslick also implies that good musical composition requires the ability to detach from emotions to do the intellectual work of constructing tonally moving forms. This is apparent in his comments on women composers: "This may have been overlooked by Rosenkranz when he observed that but did not resolve the paradox of why women, who are by nature preeminently dependent upon feeling, have not amounted to much as composers" (Ibid.).

consisting exclusively in tones and tonal relations in their musical development, notably in the movement of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features. Hanslick specifically excludes from the realm of the musical any extra-musical content, most especially emotive content, as well as any non-musical elements such as natural models the performer, the audience, or even the composer might add onto the purely musical idea. The activity of the performer plays no positive contributory role in the process. The performer's bodily activity is valued only and exclusively for the role it plays in transmitting in as neutral a way as possible the work of art as it was conceived in the mind of the composer.

On such a view, the nightingale's song is something of an outlier. And the precise ways in which the nightingale does not fit comfortably within Hanslick's view of music are instructive. The point here is not simply the literal one, that the nightingale's song contains no tones, that the sounds of the nightingale are not arranged in accord with systematized tonality, that we do not find in the nightingale's singing tonal motifs suitable for musical development, that, as Hanslick says, birdsong "cannot be accommodated to our scales" (71). Without tones intentionally ordered in relation to a system by human mind so that they unfold in moving forms there is no musical beauty, and without musical beauty there is no music. All this might be granted, one might argue, given Hanslick's focus on musical beauty and his insistence on the primacy of tonality in musical beauty.

On the other hand Hanslick's reverence for the western system of tonality is itself open to question, and this is something that the trope of the nightingale brings to the fore. Hanslick's view is admittedly Euro-centric. Cast outside the sphere of music along with

the song of the nightingale are the songs of the “South Sea Islanders” that arise from their “unintelligible wailing” and rhythmic banging of staves, as well as those of “mature savages” and the “Patagonians of South America” (70).

The deeper question, however, has to do with the valuation of the diatonic musical system itself. Hanslick’s view is a teleological one, claiming that European classical music is the most evolved stage of music in the sense that, over centuries of development, it has shown itself to have facilitated the highest levels of musical beauty. There is however a circularity to this line of thought. Musical beauty is defined in terms of tonally moving forms, that is, certain constellations of sounds within the European diatonic system. The European diatonic system is then declared to be the highest development of musical culture because it facilitates the creation of tonally moving forms. My point here is not to deny the depth of satisfaction that can be taken in such constructions—that is indeed one of the great strengths of Hanslick’s view—but rather to inquire further into Hanslick’s claim (for example) that what the South Sea Islander does is “just not *music*” (70). Speaking more generally, just what are the principles that warrant our devaluing or rejecting music that pushes the envelope of tonality, or tonal music with other than diatonic tonal systems, or even of musical practices that dispense entirely with tonality? Will it do to simply assert that such endeavors are not “music”?

It is also significant that when Hanslick considers the nightingale, he addresses only the nightingale’s “song,” the product of the nightingale’s activity, and not the nightingale’s “singing,” the activity the nightingale undergoes to produce sounds. Hanslick proceeds on Cartesian lines, with a strict demarcation of body and mind, and argues that it is the work of mind that organizes tones, not the work of body. Whatever

doing that is not oriented toward the constitution of the composition is not necessary to his concept of music. This implies that the work of the body is not constitutive of a music object except insofar as it has instrumental value in the transmission of the composer's ideal object. Recall, however (as I will argue in more detail), that in Persian mythology, the nightingale is valued for the improvisational novelty in its singing, rather than for the labored development of musical complexity or for the faithful transmission of previously composed works. This novelty is a mark of the musical activity considered as having value qua activity: as a kind of doing that manifests itself in the performance of music. In addition, it is central to this mythology that the nightingale's body is pricked by the rose's thorn. The nightingale's singing, the activity of musical performance, is in this way taken as the very emblem of embodied, feelingful existence. The nightingale's singing is an embodied activity.

My claim is that what the metaphor of the nightingale highlights, then, is not what Hanslick leaves in—the tonal composition that contains specifically musical beauty—but rather what Hanslick leaves out: all the doing in musical practice that is not the compositional thinking of a mind. It is to these questions about the nature of music and musicality that I now turn by looking at how these issues arise in the context of a tradition that differs in significant ways from the one that Hanslick takes as central to his philosophical inquiry. I turn to the practice of Iranian classical music and to the question of what concepts have explanatory power within that tradition.

### CHAPTER 3

#### LEARNING WITHOUT THEORY

I have argued that Hanslick's identification of music with the product of musical activity betrays an object-oriented stance toward music that focuses on the mental conception and reception of organized sounds. The history of Iranian classical music tells a somewhat different story. I have suggested that Iranian classical music is a musical tradition in which the concept of a musical work has no regulative force. Rather, I have implied in general terms that Iranian classical music practice prizes most highly a certain conception of musical creative activity, one that is captured metaphorically in the trope of the nightingale, which is said to be able to endlessly articulate subtly different melodies without ever repeating itself.<sup>33</sup>

In this chapter, I will examine in greater detail the practice of Iranian classical music, which I approach from three complementary perspectives. First, I will identify the basic musicological features of Iranian classical music. Second, I will discuss what sorts of things scholars and practitioners emphasize in their discussion of the practice. And third, I will look at music education practices to establish what musical traditions and values are deemed worthy to be passed on from generation to generation. In this way I hope to establish not only what specific concepts are regulative or constitutive to the practice but, more generally, how these concepts help to form the basis of the Persian

---

<sup>33</sup> See Nooshin (1999, 353; 2015, 31) and Nettle (2002, 135; 2005, 22, 315; 2009, 195, and 2013, 116).

conception of musicality, that is, those features of music that adumbrate what it means to be sensitive to Iranian classical music as an art form.

### Iranian Classical Music

Iranian classical music—known as *musiqi-e-sonnati* (traditional music) or *musiqi-e-assil* (original or authentic music)—is an elite musical tradition that was performed almost exclusively in the royal courts and homes of the aristocracy in Persia until the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Presumed to have a longstanding presence in Persian culture, Iranian classical music has traditionally been transmitted aurally from master (*Ostād*) to apprentice for generations. Today Iranian classical music is considered the classical music of Iran. The repertoire of Iranian classical music now considered canonic dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

Iranian classical music is to be distinguished from Iranian pop music (*musiqi-e-pop*), which emerged as a musical style in mid-twentieth century Iran. Since the 1979 revolution Iranian pop music has suffered heavy censorship, and was entirely banned for most of the 1980s. Currently Iranian pop music is legally restricted but thriving

---

<sup>34</sup> Shiloah offers a summary of the elite circles in which Iranian classical music developed through Iran's history (Shiloah 2001, 95–96).

<sup>35</sup> Referenced in ancient Greek texts such as Herodotus' *The Histories* (1954, 69), Iranian classical music is thought to trace back to ancient times. Documentation of the tradition as formal court music exists only since the Sassanian dynasty commenced in the third century A. D. The general repertory in its current form is considered to date back to the mid-nineteenth century (Daring et al. 1991, 33; Farhat 1990, 5; Nettl 1992, 3; Zonis 1973, 39), when the *radif* used by prominent musician Mirza Abdollah (1843-1911) began to be promoted as a standard or somewhat authoritative version of the *radif* for the first time (Nettl 1978, 6; Nooshin 2015, 58–60).

underground in Iran. There is also a further distinction between musiqi-e-pop produced (largely illegally) in Iran, and pop music produced by Iranians in diaspora who left Iran following the 1979 revolution. The latter is colloquially referred to as LA-pop, Tehrangeles-pop, or Losangelesi-pop since most production originating outside Iran since the revolution takes place among the expatriate community in southern California. Iranian pop music incorporates foreign instruments and stylistic influences from non-classical music genres common in Europe, North America and Latin and South America including jazz and rock, and more recently metal, rap, and techno.<sup>36</sup>

Iranian classical music is also distinct from regional folk music (musiqi-e-mahali), which uses traditional instruments, often goes hand-in-hand with region-specific traditional dances, and encompasses stylistic approaches named after different regions and ethnic groups in Iran.<sup>37</sup> After the 1979 revolution regional folk music also faced some restrictions in Iran given the association of regional folk music with politically targeted social practices like dancing. Restrictions have eased significantly in recent years. Despite legal restrictions, Iranian pop music and regional folk music feature widely in recreational and ritual practices in Iran like dancing, weddings, and festivals, mostly in

---

<sup>36</sup> On the legal and ideological status of musiqi-e-pop genre in comparison with musiqi-e-assil see Nooshin (2005a, 2005b). For a musicological analysis of pop music in Iran in 1969, ten years before censors targeted this genre following the 1979 revolution, see Nettle (1972). Documentation of current musiqi-e-pop production and reception practices within Iran are scarce due to its legally restricted status. *The Glass House* (2008), a documentary featuring socially marginalized young women in Iran, contains some footage of illegal recording practices in Iran. The contemporary underground musiqi-e-pop scene in Tehran is also fictionalized in the film *No One Knows about Persian Cats* (2009).

<sup>37</sup> The literal translation of musiqi-e-mahali is regional music, though in English language scholarship, musiqi-e-mahali is also called rural folk music (in contrast with musiqi-e-assil referenced as urban art music) by Farhat (1990, 1), and folk music (in contrast with classical art music) by Zonis (1973, 13) and Beeman (1976, 6). For a brief English-language overview of musiqi-e-mahali as a genre, see Daniel and Mahdi (2006, 195).

private social gatherings, underground concerts, and in a limited capacity in the public sphere.

Iranian classical music is in contrast a more isolated musical practice that uses traditional instruments but is performed purely for contemplation. In this sense I consider Iranian classical music an art form. In using the term “art” I do not mean to place the tradition within the orbit of the so-called modern system of the arts in the west whose shape began to take place around the beginning of the eighteenth century, when it was proposed that there was a group of arts—the “fine arts”—that possessed a common thread by virtue of which they formed an affinity group.<sup>38</sup> Iranian classical music extends much further back than that, with documentation tracing the practice in the royal courts and aristocratic circles at least to the Sassanian dynasty in the third century A. D.

In calling Iranian classical music an art form I mean rather to refer to the practice of attending to the music largely for its own sake, in a disinterested manner, independent of any other use or value the music might have. The idea of disinterested attention is of course an important part of the philosophical discourse of the modern western system of aesthetics, one that runs from Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten to Kant and into the twenty-first century. But western cultural tradition has no unique claim to this kind of attention and appreciation. It is, arguably, a mode of attention that transcends cultures—a claim that would take me too far afield to defend here. My point is rather to identify a range of values and expectations within the music is created and enjoyed and to use the term “art” to refer to that context. It is part of the purpose of my work to articulate the

---

<sup>38</sup> See Kristeller (1951, 1952).

regulative concepts, expectations, and values relevant to Iranian classical music as an art in the pertinent sense.

With the exception of military music, Iranian classical music has been the least restricted genre in post-revolutionary Iran. Despite ideological opposition to music in general in Iran's post-revolutionary government, scholars and artists of Iranian classical music have managed to carve out a legal space for Iranian classical music. Some argue that the high artistic status of Iranian classical music saved this tradition from censorship.<sup>39</sup> Others argue that Iranian officials considered Iranian classical music relatively isolated from "western" cultural influences that censors tried to expel from Iranian culture in the "return to roots" movement of the 1980s. Yet unlike regional folk music, also considered a traditional art form, Iranian classical music was distanced from newly controversial recreational practices like dancing in post-revolutionary political ideology. Restrictions on other genres of music in the decade following the revolution resulted in renewed public interest Iranian classical music as one of the few openly accessible genres in the early years of post-revolutionary Iran. On one hand, this provided wider access to the tradition outside the elite and educated, particularly, some argue, for women.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, female artists have faced heavy regulation in public and institutional channels since the revolution. Women continue to maintain a strong presence

---

<sup>39</sup> See Miller (1999, 46–52).

<sup>40</sup> Nooshin offers a nuanced history of the shifting power constructs and ideological battles between scholars in the evolution of Iranian classical music from the early twentieth century to the present day (2014a). For her comments on the decade following the revolution see (289–292).

in the practice and scholarship of Iranian classical music through private channels and outside Iran.

In the most traditional performances of Iranian classical music a soloist performs for a small audience in an intimate setting, adjusting the performance based on the experiential response felt from the audience. Since the mid-twentieth century, larger and more formal public concert hall settings have also housed Iranian classical music performances by soloists or small groups (usually playing in turns). Iranian classical music is distinguished from other Iranian music traditions by a specific repertoire, the years of apprenticeship each individual must undergo to learn this art form by rote memorization, and reception practices that center on contemplating the performer.

Iranian classical music is most commonly performed on traditional instruments popular in the Middle Eastern region, particularly Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Iraq, and Turkey. The Iranian versions of these instruments bear subtle differences from their regional counterparts, differing in shape, the number of strings, and sonic capabilities. The most common traditional string instruments are the “tār” and the “setār,” long-necked wooden lutes with six and four strings, respectively. A third string instrument is the “kamānche,” a spike fiddle, which is the only traditional instrument that is bowed. Other traditional instruments include the “santur,” a hammered dulcimer, the “qanūn,” a plucked box-zither, a reed flute called the “ney,” the “tombak” or “zarb,” a goblet drum played from a seated position, held between the knee and the elbow, and, less commonly, the “daf,” a large frame drum with a single drumhead and inlaid with small chains of metal ringlets that strike the drumhead from behind as it is played with

the fingers whilst held in the air.<sup>41</sup> Occasionally western instruments, especially the violin, may be used. Vocalists may also perform. The vocal practice, called “āvāz,” involves guttural yodeling in which the focus is on the musical modulations of phonemic patterns, even in cases when the vocalist chooses to sing a poem.<sup>42</sup>

Stylistically, Iranian classical music is subtle. The musician spontaneously modulates melodies using structural motifs from the memorized repertoire to perform as intricately as possible, and as if instinctively. In group performances that aim to be traditional in style, musicians explore a small melodic range, playing in turns and echoing each other, emulating the quiet, meditative style of solo performances. Musicians aim to explore a small tonally fluid area, usually not exceeding two and a half octaves, by modulating as extensively and intricately as possible within the area without repeating themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Several terminological issues are in order here. When I say that Iranian classical musicians “modulate” monophonic lines, I am not referring to the standard western musicological notion of modulation, namely, changes of key. By “modulation” I am referring rather to a practice of spontaneously embellishing melodic motifs.

Even here we must tread carefully because though Iranian classical music is “monophonic” in the sense of consisting of single melodic lines without additional parts

---

<sup>41</sup> See During et al. (2015c) on the *tār* (six-stringed lute), During and Dick (2015) on the *setār* (four-stringed lute), During et al. (2015a) on the *kamānche* (spike fiddle), During et al. (2015b) on the *santur* (dulcimer), Poché (2015) on the *qanūn* (zither), Hassan (2015) on the *ney* (flute), During (2015) on the *tombak* (goblet drum), and Conway-Morris et al. (2015) on the *daf* (frame drum).

<sup>42</sup> See Miller (1999, 108–129).

<sup>43</sup> See (Farhat 1990, x).

or accompaniment (as opposed to “polyphonic”), the concept of “melodic” in this context is not interchangeable with the western concept of melody understood as a succession of musical tones. Melody in the western sense is a musical phenomenon that rests closely on the background of tonality, a system of articulated, measurable tones arrayed on a scale whose steps can be perceived as ranging from high to low. The basic tonal scale of western music is the diatonic scale, the fundamental elements of which are found in the chromatic array of twelve semitones that one finds, for example, on the piano keyboard running from one tone to its octave, that is, c, c#, d, d#, e, f, f#, g, g#, a, a#, b, (c). Melodies in western classical music are successions of musical tones, possessed of pitch and duration that proceed rhythmically in time. Whether proceeding “conjunctly” (according to successive degrees of the scale) or “disjunctly” (forming intervals larger than a second), the connection between western melodies and the underlying tonal scale is intimate and unmistakable.

It is an area of musicological debate, however, whether Iranian classical music is tonal in the sense that western music is, and also whether Persian melodies are tonal in the western sense. Efforts have been made to bring western scalar notions to bear on what is said to be the Persian musical gamut (Vaziri suggested a 24-quarter-note scale, Barksli devised a 22-tone scale) but there is little agreement on what the degrees of the scale would be, if one is to be applied to the tradition at all.<sup>44</sup> Nor would it be accurate to describe Persian melody as “micro-tonal,” strictly speaking, since the discriminable differences in melody in Iranian classical music are frequently smaller than the semitone,

---

<sup>44</sup> See Farhat (1990, 7–18).

the smallest interval in traditional western music, and, as noted, it is not clear that there exists a regular discriminable array of pitched tones on a scale.

In any event, the fact of the matter is that while these attempted applications of scalar theory are of interest to musicologists who study Iranian classical music, they play virtually no role in the minds of practicing musicians, whose conception of melodic movement is considerably looser and seems based more on the range of movements of the hand on the physical instrument. Embellishments may be a little bit up, a little bit down, etc. This is not to say that tones play no role in Persian classical music. It will become evident in a moment that Persian musical practice does employ a “centering” around tones as a point of reference in melodic elaborations. Some melodic motifs may have collections of tones that may strike the western ear as reminiscent of minor keys. But, it will become clear that the elaboration of melody in Persian music is simply not thought about primarily in terms of compliance with the tones or discrete melodic steps on a scale. Nor is melodic creation conceived primarily in terms of an implied harmonic development as it so often is in the west. If tonality is to be understood in the robust western sense of comprising an underlying tonal scale and relevant elements of tonal structure including melodic and harmonic development involving loyalty to a tonal center established with reference to a key signature, one would be disinclined to call Persian classical music “tonal.” With these provisos in mind, then, I shall continue to use the word “modulation” to refer to the transformation of musical “melodic,” and “tonal” material, understood in these loose senses of the terms.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> In a related vein, while the modulations of Persian melody are spontaneous, I shall avoid calling them “improvisations” for reasons that will become clear in the next chapter.

The background against which musical modulation occurs must rather be understood in terms of the assemblage of what are known as the “radifs,” “gushes,” and “dastgāhs” of Persian classical music. Iranian classical musicians spend their lifetimes performing a specific repertoire collectively called the radif. The radif contains approximately five hundred fragments that are small motifs or structural patterns called gushes (literally “corners”), organized into twelve groups called dastgāhs (literally “equipment”). The contents of the radif are not compositions that are to be repeated in performance. Rather, the contents of the radif demarcate the sonic area in which a performance will take place and structurally guide the extensive modulation within that sonic area that comprises a performance.

Each performance is of a dastgāh. The term dastgāh is a composite of two terms, “dast” meaning “hand” and “gāh” meaning “place.” Each dastgāh is recognized by a seven or eight note melodic phrase that indicates where on the instrument the hand will be positioned in performance. The notes in the dastgāh phrase map the outer tonal boundaries of the sonic area in which a performance will take place. The dastgāh phrase also indicates the central sound or point on the instrument—called the shahed, or “witness”—around which modulation will center. The gushes are structural patterns within the tonal boundaries of each dastgāh that musicians memorize. The patterns of each gusheh guide modulation by structuring the ornamentation around each gusheh that the performer must also spontaneously undertake. The opening gusheh of a dastgāh performance is the daramad—literally, “coming out,” meaning “introduction” or “opening.” During the daramad, the points on the instrument marking the tonal

boundaries of a performance are played. Following the daramad, musicians perform a dastgāh by “going into its corners.”<sup>46</sup> The phrase “going into its corners” means exploring the sonic area contained within a dastgāh, by modulating through a selection of the gushehs (corners) associated with that dastgāh. Musicians perform various gushehs, often in order from low to high pitch.<sup>47</sup> Musicians also simultaneously embellish the gushehs as they articulate them, using the forms of the gushehs as guides for deeper explorations of the dastgāh area. As musicians modulate within and between gushehs they stress the dastgāh notes, particularly the shahed to which they return frequently throughout each performance.

A performance of Iranian classical music amounts to a spontaneous expression of a dastgāh based on what is intuitively called to presence from the memorized structural fragments to enable modulation in the moment of performing. Musicality for the Iranian classical musician lies in two things. First, in being able to modulate extensively without repetition while circling around the shahed and staying within the small tonal area of the dastgāh. Second, in having internalized the radif so well that modulations based on the radif’s components are or seem to be entirely spontaneous.

One gets a sense of the musical rewards and intricacies of Persian classical music in Edith Gerson-Kiwi’s description of her experience of witnessing a classical music performance:

One finds the most expressive melodies usually restricted to a mere three tones which are confined within the ambitus of a third... Usually, the small three- or four-tone melodies are drawn out for half an hour, and one is

---

<sup>46</sup> See Zonis (1973, 46).

<sup>47</sup> For more on the musicological structure of a typical performance see Nettl (1974a).

amazed to find out how much has happened in one single minute. It manifests a self imposed demand on human imagination to let a motive rotate in never-ending spirals without ever repeating it nor exceeding the Dastgāh limits...music is not composed of tones, but spun like a spinning-web in increasing cycles, out of a single thread. (Gerson-Kiwi 1963, 9–11)

### Iranian Classical Music Scholars and the Transmission of Musical Practice

What I have presented so far is what we might call a surface description of some of the key musicological features of Iranian classical music. To arrive at a deeper philosophical understanding of Iranian classical music, I turn to the scholars of Iranian classical music, and to the concepts and values that emerge in the transmission of Persian art music from one generation to the next. In this regard a little background is in order.

It is important to note that whereas philosophers of music in western discourse have quite varied levels of expertise—ranging from those with scant musical training or experience to those who are very accomplished in the practices of musical composition, performance, and criticism or have years of academic training in music history, music performance, or musicology—the situation in Iran is quite different. Scholars of Iranian classical music in Iran are themselves practitioners, operating at a very high level of achievement. They are considered masters, given the title of “Ostād.” Ostād is a title equivalent to “professor,” or “Doctor” (in the academic sense). The title is used in many fields of study, but when it designates a scholar of Iranian classical music, it simultaneously connotes an expert with several decades of experience who is at once and without distinction composer, performer, teacher, and scholar. The title is applied to musicians who have learned the traditional repertoire of Iranian classical music—the

radif—and can perform with a level of expertise that allows them to impart the radif to their own apprentices. Since absorbing the radif in entirety takes years, sometimes decades, a high degree of practical competence is required to earn the title of “Ostād.”<sup>48</sup> Once the title has been earned, the person to whom it is applied is also considered a scholar in the academic sense.

Historically, most of the scholarship published in Iran is published by Ostāds. After the study of music gained a formal place in Iran’s public education system at the turn of the twentieth century, a handful of Ostāds who had trained under two court musicians, Ostād Mirza Abdollah (1843-1918) and Ostād Darvish Khan (1872–1926) became institutionally recognized.<sup>49</sup> Mirza Abdollah and Darvish Khan’s students are affiliated with two rival music schools in Tehran, known as the “Honarestān” (founded in the early twentieth century) and the “Markaz” (founded in 1968). The most authoritative historical voices of Iranian classical music in Iran are generally considered to be the Ostāds who ran these institutions, and their students (who became the next generation of institutionally recognized Ostāds). Some Ostāds have published outside Iran, often in co-authored collaborations with foreign scholars. Safvat, for example, has co-authored several publications in French and English.<sup>50</sup> More recently, a handful of scholars begun

---

<sup>48</sup> See During et al. (1991, 17).

<sup>49</sup> Darvish Khan was master of the *tār*. Mirza Abdollah was master of the *tār* and *setār*. The version of the radif that Ostād Mirza Abdollah used and transmitted to his apprentices is widely considered the common source of today’s versions of the radif. Many theorists acknowledge the centrality of Mirza Abdollah’s radif to the versions in use today. See for example, Babiracki and Nettle (1987, 46), Nettle (2013, 114) and Tsuge (1974, 29).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Caron and Safvat (1966), and During et al. (1991).

to carve out a distinct space for musicological scholarship in Iran in the early 2000s. They prefer to be identified as “musicologists” or “ethnomusicologists,” but also have extensive musical training under an Ostād. Hooman Asadi is indicative of this emerging trend.<sup>51</sup> Outside Iran, there is substantial English-language research on Iranian classical music published by musicologists. Of this research, some is published by Iranian Ostāds who also completed higher education in music outside Iran. Hormoz Farhat and Dariush Tala’i offer research of this kind.<sup>52</sup> The rest is published by musicologists who base their claims on fieldwork conducted with Ostāds in Iran. Much of this fieldwork tends to center on capturing the views of Ostāds. Nettle, Miller, and Nooshin exemplify this kind of research.<sup>53</sup> In other words, most, if not all, of what is known about Iranian classical music comes, in one way or another, by way of the Ostāds.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Asadi raised this point in a personal interview (2012).

<sup>52</sup> See Farhat (1990) and Tala’i (2000).

<sup>53</sup> See Miller (1999), Nettle (1963, 1974a, 1974b, 1978a, 1978b, 1980, 1984, 1994, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2009, 2013), Nettle and Foltin Jr. (1972), and Nooshin (1998, 1999, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2014a, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> For a more thorough survey of Ostāds see Appendix A.

## Musical Modulation as Musical Dexterity

What is perhaps most striking about Persian scholarly discussion of music is the emphasis—both in writing and in instructional contexts—on concrete musical activity, typically to the exclusion of explicitly theoretical discussions. Of course there is an implicit sense in which theory resides, as it were, in the music: as I have indicated, the *radif*, considered as a body of structurally interrelated motivic fragments, provides a basis for the spontaneous modulations at the heart of Persian classical music, and every performance of Iranian classical music must be structured in a certain way to count as an instance of Iranian classical music. But, in traditional instruction, the use of notation or of theoretical discussion is generally frowned upon and avoided. Instead, *Ostāds* favor instruction in which the apprentice witnesses the *Ostād* play short passages based on the *radif* and plays back by mimicry. I suggest here that this approach can be described in a shorthand way by saying that Iranian classical music instruction is distinguished not by its oral basis, but its aural basis.

My aim is to argue that this emphasis in instruction on a particular mode of productive activity is not merely a pedagogical device but is rather a manifestation of a central aesthetic feature of Iranian classical music. To understand this, I turn more closely to what exactly transpires when Iranian classical music is taught.

Iranian classical music is traditionally been handed down by rote, “*sineh-be-sineh*” (from “chest-to-chest”)<sup>55</sup> from *Ostād* to apprentice. Unlike instructional methods for teaching jazz improvisation, for example, where the aspiring jazz improviser is

---

<sup>55</sup>See Nooshin (2015, 75).

expected to have at hand at least some theoretical framing such as the knowledge of relevant keys, or relevant chord progressions, scales, or rhythmic patterns of the music over which one improvises, a Iranian classical musician, if instructed in the most traditional manner, will never have discussed theory with her Ostād. Instead she is expected to learn the radif entirely by absorption without any explicit reference to its theoretical structure.<sup>56</sup>

The apprentice witnesses the Ostād modulate based on the radif in small interludes and learns by trying to play back what she sees and hears by working out with her own bodily action what is required to get the job done. From this witnessing, bodily action, memorization, and copying, the structure of the radif on which modulation is based is intuitively grasped. After some years of undergoing this process of observing and playing back, the apprentice reaches a point where the radif has been so deeply internalized that the apprentice can instinctively rearrange sounds beyond what has been memorized without needing to explicitly think about what she is doing. It is at that point that a person moves from apprentice to musician. Ostād Tala’i puts the matter this way:

In learning the radif, there is a point of meeting known as internalization. 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 internalization 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. (Tala’i 2000, 1)

---

<sup>56</sup> Nooshin refers to this as the “non-verbalized teaching” (2015, 77).

The absorbed radif's structure is thought to condition so deeply how a student relates sounds to each other that she cannot help but modulate according to the radif's structure unless she is consciously trying not to. The musicologist Bruno Nettl recalls asking Ostād Boroumand when Boroumand would teach him to modulate, to which Boroumand replied, "We do not teach [modulation]. You learn the radif and it teaches you" (Nettl 2002, 190 / Nettl 2009, 185). Ostāds Boroumand, Kiani, and Safvat analogize the relation between the radif and modulation to the relation between the rules of grammar and the speaking of a language. Safvat puts the analogy this way:

The radif teaches musical syntax. Knowing the words well is not enough. Even if we learn by heart the whole content of a dictionary, it is not enough; we must know the syntax of the language, and that is actually what the radif teaches. (Safvat quoted in During et al. 1991, 216)<sup>57</sup>

Traditional instruction, then, facilitates musical articulation in the way that children learn how to speak their first language. By hearing and mimicking the same words uttered variably over and over again, children gain an intuitive grasp of how to combine words in coherent sentences without consciously thinking about the grammatical structure of the sentences they articulate. After enough absorption has taken place, children become

---

<sup>57</sup> Ostād Boroumand remarks on how modulation (or, in his words, "improvisation") must adhere to an accepted structure in Iranian classical music: "If we say, for example, 'This year, the summer was too hot and we felt very uncomfortable because of this,' we have delivered a complete and properly constructed sentence. But if our statement turns out to be 'because year this felt summer hot very, etc.,' we have delivered a disjointed phrase containing nothing but misplaced words. Our improvisers, those who are not versed in the art of improvisation, often present their music in the second manner, thinking that they have delivered correct phrases; but they should realize that, in order to develop the subject properly, the work of an improviser must have a basic structure, and every phrase should be appropriately related to the one that precedes it" (During et al. 1991, 205). The structure Boroumand is referring to is imparted by the radif.

fluent in the language they have absorbed: they can spontaneously utter coherent sentences without thinking about what they are doing, or even knowing the rules of grammar at all. Just so, in the case of learning the art of musical modulation in Persian classical music.

It is also important to underscore that what the student is expected to learn is not an intellectual understanding of the music but rather a kind of embodied activity. The emphasis on bodily activity is in fact one reason why students are discouraged from writing notes down as aids to the memory. Memorization plays a central role in training but what is memorized and how memorization arises come from the activity of the body. The student witnesses the Ostād's activity, and plays back with the activity of her body, until she memorizes what she has observed and done. The zarb player Zia Mirabdolbaghi characterizes this when he describes the method and focus of his teacher, Ostād Chemirani:

The only thing at play was the 'stuff' of music, that is the sound of the master's zarb, the movements of his fingers, and the repetition of many different rhythms. The first session reminded me of calligraphy classes where the students had to try their best to produce an exact copy of the specimen produced by the master. Djamchid Chemirāni talked very little in the class. At times, he would remind us about some necessary points, but, generally, he tried to make it possible for the student to grasp things directly by himself... One day a student, before leaving the classroom and unaware of being watched by the teacher, began to jot down something on a pad of paper. Djamchid Chemirāni walked over to him quickly, asked him to hand over the pad, and added with a smile: 'It's better to forget than to write down!' (During et al. 1991, 211–212)

The emphasis, then, is on what I suggest can be called "musical dexterity": a musical modulation arising from what the embodied musician is able to do spontaneously.

Musical dexterity shows itself in what the musician is able to do, where the musician is able to “go” in the musical variations she produces based on the foundation the radif supplies. The ideal is a coherent musical “utterance” that arises intuitively from the activity of doing rather from the conscious application of thought about the structural decisions that are being made.

The concept of musical dexterity I am laying out as central to modulation in Iranian classical music has some similarities to a process of thinking described by the scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi in his account of “tacit knowledge” (1966, 3–25). Polanyi offers an account of human knowledge motivated by the conviction that “we can know more than we can tell.” Taking a cue from Gilbert Ryle’s (1945) distinction between propositional knowledge (“knowing that”) and practical knowledge (“knowing how”),<sup>58</sup> Polanyi adduces a number of examples where we have knowledge but cannot give an adequate account of the particularities by means of which we come to this knowledge. Facial recognition is an example of this kind of knowledge as is using a tool or playing the piano.

Tacit knowledge, on Polanyi’s view, is a two-stage affair that can be spoken of in four ways. First, there is a functional relationship between the first (“proximal”) and the second (“distal”) stage: in the case of acquiring a skill, for example, one may rely on a (proximal) set of muscular acts for the (distal) performance of a skill (Polanyi 1966, 10). Second, there is a phenomenal structure: we are aware of the proximal term (the muscular moves) in the appearance of its distal term but we have no explicit knowledge of the first term particularities in themselves. In Polanyi’s words, “we are aware of that *from* which

---

<sup>58</sup> See Polanyi (1966, 7).

we are attending *to* another thing, in the *appearance* of that thing” (11). Third, there is a semantic aspect: we ascribe meaning to the knowing act, in a particular way. Meaning tends to be displaced away from ourselves, from the proximal to the distal. In the case of a tool, for example, we attend to the meaning of its impact on our hands in terms of its effect on the things to which we are applying it (12). Finally, there is an ontological aspect to tacit knowing which tells us what tacit knowledge is a knowledge of: the jointly constitutive relation between the proximal and the distal (13). There is in all this, Polanyi argues, an element of integration or “interiorization”: “it is not by looking at things but by dwelling in them, that we understanding their joint meaning” (18). To the extent that we aim to separate the proximal to the distal, we run the risk of destroying our understanding of the meaning of the comprehensive entity, which is why, Polanyi argues, if a pianist overly concentrates her attention on her fingers, she can temporarily paralyze her movement (18).

Polanyi’s account of tacit knowledge is a part of Polanyi’s larger critique of positivist thought that has implications not only for creative activity but also for philosophical, scientific and moral thinking.<sup>59</sup> I make no claims regarding these larger questions. For my present purposes I wish to stress rather the resonance that Polanyi’s work has to the view of musical modulation in Iranian classical music that I am presenting. Musical meaning, in the case of Iranian classical music, resides in a particular kind of musical modulation involving the dexterous spontaneous elaboration of musical forms rooted in the *radif*. This dexterity is inescapably bodily to the extent that the production of musical modulation involves particularities and skills of the body. The

---

<sup>59</sup> Polanyi (1966, 29–92). See also Polanyi (1962).

embodied aspect of the music is, in Polanyi's words, a tacit dimension, something not featured or directly seen in itself, which is perhaps why Ostāds—as a matter of pedagogy—tend to shun theoretical discussion and note-taking.<sup>60</sup> The tacit knowledge of the body plays an ineliminable role in the activity of creative production, which is why I characterize musical modulation as a kind of “musical dexterity” and why the emphasis in music education is on internalizing, by way of mimicry, the playing of the Ostād. The focus, for teacher, performer, and listener, is properly on a particular kind of activity, the activity of spontaneous musical modulation in which resides the meaning and the value of Iranian classical music. Everything that is done in and known about Iranian classical music comes from what is grasped by doing.

It is now clear how different this view of music is from the position espoused by Hanslick. For Hanslick, as I have argued, performance is an instrumental activity required for the re-production of an object, the musical work of art. In Iranian classical music it is the performance itself that matters, made manifest in the spontaneous creation of musical modulations. For Hanslick the bodily aspects of musical performance are a distraction, essentially unrelated to the music itself. In the case of Iranian classical music musical modulation is inherently tied to an achievement of the body, even if its mode of presentation is tacit, manifest in the outward expression of musical dexterity. For Hanslick the goal of musical performance is repetition. For Iranian classical musicians the musical performance is the goal.

---

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion of the exclusion of theoretical instruction as an intentional instructive choice in Iranian classical music see Naqvi (2012).

## CHAPTER 4

### DOING WITHOUT MAKING

I have suggested that Iranian classical music poses a conceptual challenge to ontology because the tradition is oriented toward generating performances, rather than works. But there are other musical traditions that also stress musical performance. The most commonly referenced example in ontology is improvisation. Improvisation is often (but not exclusively) considered in the context of jazz. Cases like this have already been used to formulate ontologies of music in which the sonic composition does not take conceptual priority over the performance.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps, then, Iranian classical music can fall under one of these existing ontological accounts of improvisation. I argue this is not the case. The dexterous activity in Iranian classical music performance is important because it is taken as the basis for creativity, but there is a crucial difference that needs to be taken into account: this activity is not directed at the production of something that is offered as a musical work. To articulate the difference, I begin with a summary of the ways in which significance is given to performance in contemporary ontology. First, I address accounts that offer ontologies of works. Then, I look at accounts in which the discussion shifts, more narrowly, to cases of improvised music. Finally, I show what sets Iranian classical music apart from both. My claim is that Iranian classical music departs from cases where it is appropriate to use the concept of a work at all.

---

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Alpers (1984, 2010, 2014), Brown (1996, 2000), and Gould and Keaton (2000).

## Performance and the Ontology of Works

For Hanslick, performance is categorized as an activity that merely reproduces an existing composition. In the contemporary ontology of music, there are also accounts in which performance is identified as something standing outside a work. Goodman's theory illustrates this approach clearly. Performance matters when it is the performance of a musical work, and it matters insofar as it facilitates the identification of that work.<sup>62</sup> But some theorists have allowed performance to play a more substantive role in an ontological claim. Gregory Currie (1989) and David Davies (2004) both offer theories in which the definition of a work is expanded to encompass the processes of art making. Both theorists offer claims intended to hold over works of all art forms, rather than (more narrowly) works of music in particular. The aim, in other words, is to offer one definition that holds over plastic arts and performing arts alike.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, both aim to bring the definition of an artwork closer in line with receptive and critical practices that pertain to the appreciation of works.<sup>64</sup>

For Currie, the appreciation of an artwork is not restricted to appreciation of the object. It also encompasses appreciation for the achievement of the artist, which Currie

---

<sup>62</sup> Goodman (1976, 127–191).

<sup>63</sup> “I am arguing here for theses which are supposed to apply to all kinds of art works... part of my task is to obliterate a distinction that is made between kinds of arts where works may have multiple instances and kinds of arts where works may not” (Currie (1989 13). See also Davies: “My claim is that there is a fundamental continuity in the structure of appreciation that unites such works [in performance arts] with works in the other arts, traditional and modern” (2004, 234).

<sup>64</sup> See Currie (1989, 72), and Davies (2004, 129, 143).

conceives of as a kind of performance.<sup>65</sup> Resting his ontology on this notion of performance as a kind of general generative activity of artistic products, Currie argues that a work is not an object, but an action-type. Specifically, the work is “the action-type that the artist performs in discovering the structure of the work” (Currie 1989, 75). The artwork is identified with a type of process that is the path of discovery leading to the generation of a structure (in the musical case, the relevant structure is a sound-structure). Davies similarly wants to conceive of artworks as generative processes. However for Davies, the artwork is not identified with a certain *type* of action. Rather, it is taken as a *token* action. Davies characterizes the token action as a performance, and identifies it with a work.<sup>66</sup> What constitutes an artwork, for Davies, is just the actions that comprise the generation of an artistic product. Davies argues that when we appreciate artworks, we are focusing not only on the products, but the whole process that generates them: “an artwork, in any of the arts, specifies a focus of appreciation” (Davies 2004, 146).

It seems these accounts are moving closer to the kind that might hold for music when musical performance is considered more ontologically substantive than either Hanslick or Goodman would allow. But it is important to note that for both Currie and Davies, the term “performance” is being used in a much looser, and in fact different, sense than it would be in a musical context. That is, the kind of performance Currie and Davies are talking about is not musical performance. One crucial difference is that actions that are discontinuous can count as part of what each means by performance.

---

<sup>65</sup> “The work is the action type that the artist performs. In appreciating the work, we are thereby appreciating the artist’s performance” (Currie, 1989, 71).

<sup>66</sup> Davies (2004, 148, 168).

Another is that actions that have nothing to do with generating sounds count as relevant actions.

A large part of each theorist's task rests on separating actions that fall under the "performance" that constitutes a work from those that do not. For Currie, this task entails delimiting the "heuristic path" of the artist who is in the process of discovering a structure, or, as he puts it, "rationally reconstructing the detailed history of his creative thought, insofar as the information available allows this to be done" (Currie 1989, 131).<sup>67</sup> For Davies, the task entails separating, from a possible range of actions, those that count as part of the "performance" from those that do not. For example, Davies remarks, "we surely do not want to say that a painter's pausing to make and drink a cup of coffee while executing a canvas has any place in either the identity or the appreciation of her work" (Davies 2004, 152). Since, in many cases, the audience has access to the final product but not the generative process that creates it, a large part of the philosophical work rests in capturing actions that are not present for to the audience to see. But there may still be some overlap with the kind of performance that is specifically a musical performance. In Davies' case, it seems the actions of musicians in a musical performance may count as some of the actions that comprise a "performance" in his less narrow sense of the term (particularly in the context of improvisation), but, importantly, they do not count in virtue of being musical performances. Rather, they happen to be actions that arise in musical performance, but they count when they fall under the category of actions that are

---

<sup>67</sup> See also Currie on the "heuristic path" that marks the act of work-production (1989, 71–73).

generative processes, and are therefore, constitutive of artworks.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, they do not exhaust the category.

The ontological questions that pertain specifically to musical performance are somewhat different. The emphasis is less on re-working the concept of performance to capture generative actions that are part of the art making process in general, so that this process can be understood as an “artwork” (of any kind). Rather, the concern is with capturing the ontological significance of a specific kind of activity that takes place in musical performance, particularly when it cannot be assumed that the musical work—qua sound structure—fully explains what is subject to aesthetic attention. In the ontology of music, discussions that hone in on this kind of activity tend to come up in the context of improvisation.

### Performance and the Ontology of Improvisation

Philip Alperson attends specifically to the case of improvisation in his 1984 article “On Musical Improvisation.” Several theorists subsequently respond to Alperson’s argument, which marks the introduction of improvisation into the ontology of music as a comparative musical case. Alperson’s argument centers on the claim that improvisation requires a different ontology than one that places emphasis on the work alone, given the performative nature of this kind of music making.

Alperson notes that improvisation is a central feature of many historical and contemporary musical practices, notably ancient Greek music, early church music, and

---

<sup>68</sup> See Davies (2004, 206–229).

Baroque era classical music, jazz, and several musical traditions around the world, particularly in India, Asia, and Africa. Yet the case is difficult to address in ontology because it is puzzling why—if the musical composition is the most important thing about musical practice (as the dominant view in ontology holds)—improvisation would be the subject of aesthetic attention in the first place. Under the dominant view, the context in which an improviser is required to compose—that is, during the performance itself—places the improviser in an unnecessarily more precarious position than a composer who has time to think out each note carefully in advance.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, since it is not guaranteed that an improviser will come up with a wholly novel sound-structure on the spot, many improvisers (particularly in jazz) use existing arrangements as starting points. Alperson notes, “even the freest improviser, far from creating *ex nihilo*, improvises against some sort of musical context” (Alperson 1984, 22).

This state of affairs raises the question, why would an audience be receptive to sound-structures that are hastily thrown together or perhaps borrowed or patched together from other sound-structures on the spot when there are plenty of opportunities to attend to carefully thought-out sound structures that offer a greater degree of formal novelty, and likely, complexity? Alperson suggests if the product of improvised performance—or musical work—is the only thing that matters, some people might be led to believe that improvisation is an inferior sort of work making. This is likely why, Alperson notes,

---

<sup>69</sup> “The composer in the conventional situation can correct his or her mistakes before the composition becomes public. No one else need know. The performer in the conventional situation is in a little more dangerous position: his or her mistakes will be heard, but one can at least rehearse a piece indefinitely, making only minor interpretive decisions at the moment of performance. The improviser is in the most precarious position of all, at least in those cases where she engages in a substantial amount of spontaneous composition in a performance” (Alperson 1984, 23).

Hanslick dismisses improvisation as inferior to “real” music making, namely thinking out tonal structures so that they are beautiful: “it is the architectonic limitations of improvised music which is at odds with Hanslick's notion of the beautiful in music and which accounts for his out-of-hand dismissal of the subject” (23).<sup>70</sup>

But, Alperson argues, since the fact of the matter is that improvisation *is* a subject of aesthetic attention in many musical contexts, there must be something else beyond the composition alone that is of interest to audiences, and this is its performative element. Admittedly, Alperson notes, audiences of performances of existing works also attend to the actions of performers. This is why it usually matters to audiences and critics who the performer is, and how each plays. But, Alperson argues, ontologists can explain away the ontological significance of performing activity by applying a type/token distinction to the case of music. Normally, the object “musical work” is taken as a type, and each performance is taken as a token that can be identified with that type (most commonly in virtue of correspondence between the sound-structure of the performance, and that of the work). This framework enables ontologists to differentiate responses in which performances are treated as actions—for example, when the virtuosity of different performers of the same work is compared—from those in which performances are treated as objects—that is, when performances (tokens) are identified with objects that are works (types) on the basis of their sound-structures (25). Many take the latter scenario as the relevant ontological question. The problem is, Alperson argues, improvisation does not facilitate the kind of ontological analysis that allows performances to be treated as tokens

---

<sup>70</sup> See also Alperson (1984, 17).

by comparison with types because improvisation collapses the type/token distinction.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps, Alperson suggests, an improvisation can be taken as a token that instantiates a type for the first time (26). This categorization only makes sense if there will be other tokens in the future that can be identified with the type just instantiated. But, Alperson argues, improvisations are not usually created as objects for repetition. Recordings and notations of improvisations exist of course, but not for the purpose of facilitating a future performance of the exact same sound-structure. And, when musicians improvise, they do not attempt to copy a previous improvisation note-perfectly. If they do engage in this kind of activity, then they are no longer improvising, but doing something else. It makes more sense to consider each improvisation as the only token of its type. But if there is no question about whether other tokens also identify with the type, the idea of a type serves no explanatory purpose it (26–27). The ontologist, according to Alperson, is guilty of a category mistake when she identifies an improvised performance with a token of a type (24).

Musicians do, however, sometimes take existing arrangements as their starting points. Could the existing arrangements be taken as the types that musicians instantiate with their token improvisations? This question comes up in more recent ontological accounts of improvisation.<sup>72</sup> I suggest that Alperson would maintain the question mistakes the claim that it is possible to find a sound-structure in the improvisation (something he does not deny) with the claim that the sound-structure exhausts what is

---

<sup>71</sup> Bertinetto makes the same claim for the case of improvisation (2013, 87).

<sup>72</sup> Gould and Keaton (2000) and Young and Matheson (2000) defend this claim. Brown (1996) rejects it.

there to be analyzed (something he does deny). Say, for example, several improvisations are taken as tokens of a type in virtue of sharing a sequence of notes. Here, the type is reduced to a small musical phrase or motif that musicians riff on when improvising. This sort of account runs into two problems.

First, the type must encompass wildly disparate tokens in virtue of the “riffing” that is added to the motif that makes the example one of improvisation. It is also not only possible, but also probable that tokens can be identified with other types in virtue of the improvised “riffing” that might articulate additional sound-sequences found in other types. Here, the claim runs into a more extreme version of the logical problem of vagueness that Goodman worries about.<sup>73</sup> This is likely one of the reasons why Alperson claims improvisations are not interpretations of previously existing works (1984, 26).

Second, to get around this problem, the riffing—that makes the case an example of improvisation—must be stripped away as inessential when a token is attended to. But Alperson’s central point is that when an improvisation is attended to, the riffing—or act of adding additional sound-structures—is not ignored. It is precisely what is subject to attention. Strictly speaking, for Alperson, the object of aesthetic attention is not the work, but the act of its creation in the performing moment: “This is an interesting case, ontologically, since, unlike the relationship between a painting and its copies, the object of our attention is not an artifact but the creation of one” (26). In ontological terms, the object of analysis is, strictly speaking, not the musical work, but productive activity: the act of work-creation.

---

<sup>73</sup> See Goodman (1976, 186–187).

Analytic ontologists who subsequently address improvisation tend, for the most part, to repackage improvisation (either in general, or specifically in the context of jazz) so that the conceptual superiority of the work is maintained. The claim is usually that it is possible to find a work qua sound-structure in improvised performance or (more specifically) in an improvised jazz performance, but there is generally little discussion about the ontological status of performance.<sup>74</sup> A notable exception is Lee Brown, who, like Alperson, argues that the productive activity of creating something on the spot is as much a subject of attention as the thing created:

The phenomenology of our appreciation of such music is striking: We find ourselves slipping back and forth between our hopes for the ultimate quality of the music and our fascination with the activity by which it is generated—even when those actions appear to threaten the quality of the resulting music. The strain contributes to the music's fascination, rather than detracting from it. (Brown 2000, 121–122)

The emphasis for both theorists is not on determining the presence or absence of a work in the musical example. Rather, it hinges on whether the concept of a work (taken as a sound-structure) exhausts, or fully explains, the object of aesthetic attention. Both argue that it does not. In conceptual terms, when the concept of a work—taken as an object with a particular sound-structure—is applied to the example, there is something left over that still needs to be explained. This is the activity of the musician in the performing moment. Put together, these two concepts better explain the phenomenon under analysis

---

<sup>74</sup> See Gould and Keaton (2000), and Young and Matheson (2000). Both arguments claim a sound-structure can be attributed to an improvisation (Gould and Keaton, 2000), or a jazz performance (Young and Matheson, 2000). Bertinetto takes a slightly different stance, arguing that the metaphysical concept of a work does not hold for improvisation, but that some concept of a musical object might (2013). See also a debate between Kania (2011) who argues there are no works in jazz and Dodd (2014) who argues there are.

than the concept of the work alone. This conceptual claim—about the explanatory role of each concept that is needed to make sense of the phenomenon—is something Brown makes explicit in his discussion of improvisation when he applies Goehr’s model of analysis to the case of jazz improvisation: “An improvisation consists neither of disembodied sounds nor of an activity abstracted from the sounds. It consists of the whole activity of creating a sound-sequence in the course of playing it” (Brown 1996, 357). The case of improvisation, when analyzed this way, demands an ontological theory in which the concept of a “work” does not do all the conceptual work. The concept that is required in addition to the work-concept to make sense of what is left over after the work-concept has played an explanatory role is the embodied activity of the performer. For both Alperson and Brown, this is elevated in importance so that it shares authority with the work-concept without being absorbed by it.

These arguments raise an interesting question about how much explanatory work each concept does when improvisation is at stake. Alperson also prompts questions about how much explanatory work each concept does in other musical contexts, particularly when he claims performing necessarily involves composition, and composition necessarily involves performing, even outside improvised contexts.<sup>75</sup> This line of inquiry, I suggest, raises an interesting question for the case of Iranian classical music. Since the Iranian classical music tradition also tends to emphasize the activity of the performer in the performing moment, can the tradition be classified as a case that falls under the sort of ontological account of improvisation that Alperson and Brown offer, in which the concept of activity shares significance with the concept of the work? The answer to this

---

<sup>75</sup> See Alperson (1984, 19–20, and 1991).

question rests on whether or not Iranian classical musicians are directing their activity toward the production of something that can be taken as a musical work.

### Performance, Works, and Iranian Classical Music

Iranian classical musicians are trained to perform so that the actual sounds uttered manifest from the dexterity of the hand in motion. To be able to utter complex sound structures without having to explicitly direct one's attention to what those sound structures will be is the mark of musicality. Ideally, any compositional decisions about what to play next come from the dexterous activity of the body, which functions as the basis for creativity in performance. But, as I have argued, there is an implicit theoretical framework in play that guides modulation in the performing moment, and this is captured by the *radif*. In fact, many musicological studies attend to the relation between the *radif* and performances based on it.<sup>76</sup> This relationship, however, raises an ontological puzzle.

Unlike performers of pre-composed musical works who aim to repeat compositions, no Iranian classical musician aims to merely repeat the *radif*. Yet unlike improvisers oriented toward producing novel sound structures in the moment of performance, Iranian classical musicians do not deviate from the *radif*'s structure. As Nettl notes, "In one sense, [the *radif*] is the central repertory of the musical system of Iran; in another...it is the theory, as opposed to practice, which consists of performances based in various ways upon it" (Nettl 1992, xv). Nooshin expresses the same sentiment: "On the one hand there is the concept of *radif* as a body of repertoires described above.

---

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Nooshin (1998). 65

On the other, there is the idea of radif as a structure which embodies the rules of musical compositions” (Nooshin 1998, 71). It seems that *if* there is some kind of understanding, among Iranian classical musicians, of their performing activity as something that happens so that works can be articulated, then, arguably, the work-concept has some explanatory role to play Iranian classical music’s ontology. If this is the case, it must be that either the radif or the radif-based performances are treated as work-like. I address each possibility in turn.

Consider first the radif. To the extent that traditional performances do not really deviate from the radif’s structure, it might be possible to say that the radif can be taken as a musical work. This would imply that the appropriate ontology for Iranian classical music comes closer to a more traditional work-centered ontology of music than an ontology of improvisation of the sort that Alperson offers. But this characterization does not really work, firstly, because it implies that an entire musical tradition is singularly oriented toward the articulation of one musical work. This would be an odd, but not unimaginable state of affairs. A conclusion like this could be softened by dividing the radif into multiple musical works, perhaps allocating one to each of the twelve dastgāhs. This seems more descriptively accurate, since performances are generally of dastgāhs rather than the whole radif. But this is also problematic because there are some overlaps between dastgāhs. Some, for example, are considered derivatives of others. This is why the radif is sometimes described as having five, or seven, rather than twelve dastgāhs.<sup>77</sup>

More obviously, Iranian classical musicians do not aim to repeat any part of the radif in performance in the way that performers aim to repeat musical works in western

---

<sup>77</sup> See Farhat (1990, 21).

classical music. Each Iranian classical music performance requires something more than mere repetition of the internalized radif (the structural framework within which modulation occurs) to count as music in the first place. In fact, playing the internalized radif “straight” without further spontaneous modulation in the moment is considered a lesser activity that does not really count as musical activity. A helpful comparison here might be that this activity is loosely analogous to something like playing scales rather than performing a composed sonata in western classical music. Nettl implies as much, when he notes, “he is not really playing music, only repeating the radif” (Nettl 1992, 2). Nooshin, similarly, distinguishes between playing music, “bedaheh navazi,” and merely articulating the core elements of what has been internalized of the radif without further modulation, that is, “radif navazi:”

A musician has to respect tradition by demonstrating his knowledge of the of the radif; yet at the same time, a certain level of creativity over and above the memorized repertoire is required for a successful performance. Unless the musician is just "playing radif" - "radif navazi" - a much less common and less valued activity, distinct from improvisation. (Nooshin 1998, 71)

Nonetheless, there is an implication that the radif is something musicians remain somewhat faithful to in performance, more faithful, it seems than improvisers in many other genres. Farhat, for example, implies as much when describing the radif:

To be sure, these are not clearly defined pieces but melody models upon which extemporisation takes place. The same piece never sounds the same twice, even as performed by the same person on the same day. It varies in content and length, but certain elemental melodic features remain which gives the piece its identity. In practice, the fundamental ingredient is not extracted, not even for teaching purposes. What I call the melody model is absorbed by the performing musician, as well as the informed listener,

through repeated experience of hearing different renditions of the same piece, over a long period of time. (Farhat 1990, 21)

Perhaps then, it might be possible to say that the radif is taken as a work, and performances of the radif are taken as interpretations of it. This would, again, place the ontology of Iranian classical music further away from something like Alperson's view on improvisation, and closer to a more work-centered ontology. But this characterization also seems somewhat counter-intuitive for several reasons, primarily because there is no authoritative version of the radif that can be identified with the work that performances "interpret." Take first, the issue of notation. Whenever notated versions of the radif exist in scholarly literature, they are offered as approximations that do not fully capture the radif, even among Ostāds like Vaziri, who endorse the use of notation:

Because nearly all the *gūshe-hā* have flexible rhythm, their timing is only approximated by Western music notation with its mathematical and rhythmic values. Nor can the slides and other subtle ornaments of this style be precisely notated. Thus, the transcribed radif is an approximate version of the original and a master teacher is still needed to play the *gūshe* for each student. (Caton and Blum 2008, 866)

This claim suggests, minimally, that western staff notation is inadequate for capturing the radif. Perhaps, however, with a more fitting system of notation, this problem could be circumvented. Asadi, a musicologist at the University of Tehran, implies as much when he suggests (in an interview) that a new system of notation might be what is needed (2012). It could be then, that the radif has not yet been adequately notated—or rendered explicit by notation—but still functions as something work-like in a more implicit sense

in every musician's mind. However, this assumption does not really work either. Many Ostāds argue that it is not on the case that notation *does not* capture the radif, but rather that it *cannot* capture the radif, because the radif is not static—this, in two senses.

The first of these is that even though the radif is often referred to as a singular concept, each musician uses a slightly different version of the radif, composed of what is internalized from the apprenticeship process. Because of this, the radif is both referred to as one radif and as multiple related radifs, each belonging to an Ostād, for example, “the radif of Ostād Saba.” Nettl captures this tendency when writing about the conception of the radif among Ostāds:

I often heard musicians insist that while there is such a thing as “the” radif, all musicians develop their own radifs. All students learn their teacher's radifs precisely but then develop their own variants. Some students' styles diverge more from their teachers', and some less, but my point is that the individual association was important. To each musician the radif was the canon, but also his own expression and understanding of it.” (Nettl 2010, 201)

It might be possible, then, to consider each musician's radif its own musical work. Under this categorization, each musician would be spending her musical life articulating her own single musical work, or her radif. It might be tempting to read a musical work into Iranian classical music's practices this way, but this also seems counter-intuitive. It would seem odd, first, that each Ostād's radif is so similar, and second, that nobody really seems concerned with capturing the degree of similarity and difference between radifs.<sup>78</sup> More problematic is the fact that it is no easier to pin down a definitive version of the radif that holds for each musician than it is to pin down one of the radif in general.

---

<sup>78</sup> See Nettl: “the extant radifs are really very similar to each other” (Nettl 1992, 15).

This insight tallies with the technical findings of musicologists who note that multiple iterations of the radif by the same Ostād often yield slightly different musical content in each iteration.<sup>79</sup> Nettle and Babiracki's study, for example, attributes eighteen versions of the radif to eleven Ostāds (1987, 47–48).

The points I raise here allude to the second sense in which the radif is not static, and why, therefore, it does not even make sense to conceive of each musician's radif as its own musical work. The radif each musician has internalized does not necessarily stay static even for herself. When asked (in an interview) about attempts to notate the radif, Vahdat expresses strong concern with the “freeze-kardane radif” (literally, freezing or ossifying of the radif) which on her view is precisely what notation aims to do. For Vahdat, to facilitate the best musicality, the radif should be a somewhat fluid concept in the musician's mind, one that breathes.<sup>80</sup> I suggest here that the importance of dexterity in the tradition has something to do with this. As I have noted, there is a notion of fluidity in play when it comes to tonality in Iranian classical music. When dexterity is driving creativity in a performance, the hands must be permitted to go wherever they go in the sonic area designated by the dastgāh without being limited to hitting only specific parts of the instrument, or certain “notes.” In addition, as musicians' skills develop, they often alter their instruments to facilitate their growing dexterity. Darvish Khan, for example, is credited with adding a sixth string to the tār.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, although the qanun is traditionally played with two plectra, one attached to each index finger, Saeedi introduced

---

<sup>79</sup> See Nooshin (1998).

<sup>80</sup> Elyasi and Vahdat (2012). See also Caton and Blum (2008, 866).

<sup>81</sup> See Miller (1978, 8).

the idea of playing with all ten fingers.<sup>82</sup> These insights, when combined with Vahsa's comments, imply that the musician's dexterous activity is not oriented toward articulating a radif as a musical work, but rather, the converse. It seems more accurate to say that the implicit radif in each musician's mind adjusts as the musician's performative skill develops, and is for this reason something of a moving target.

Aside from the difficulty in finding something static to identify with a work in the radif, another, more pressing problem remains, and this is that the performative element that is clearly of central significance in Iranian classical music is not really brought to the fore by discussions that center on identifying the radif (in some way or another) with the concept of a musical work. Here, the same point that Alperson's argument makes is relevant. There is a very strong sense in which the object of aesthetic attention is not the radif, but rather, the performance. And, insofar as each performance is a radif-based modulation, it might be more accurate to consider the radif more like an implicit theoretical framework than a work. This implies that it might be possible to bring the tradition more closely in line with an ontology of improvisation in which the act of performing is of central importance. Maybe then, it is the case that even though each performance stays within the framework of the radif, each can be taken as an improvisation in something like Alperson's (or Brown's) sense, that is, as an act of work-creation. This characterization of the Iranian classical music tradition would still make use of the work-concept because the performing activity and the work produced both have conceptual significance. Such a reading suggests that both concepts are needed to do some explanatory work given the phenomenon that is subject to attention. And, it would

---

<sup>82</sup> See Farabi School (2014).

imply that the ontology befitting Iranian classical music is the same as, or at least very close to the ontology that Alperson argues holds for improvisation. For a claim like this to hold, it must be the case that each radif-based modulation offered in performance can be analogized as an act of work-creation.

One of the difficulties in characterizing the product of a performance as something work-like is that this claim needs to marry with the idea that, as I have argued, the dexterity of the hand in motion is driving creativity for the Iranian classical musician. Engaging in what might seem like active work-directed thinking—that is thinking up sound-structures, or consciously deciding where to “go” next in a performance—is generally viewed as something of a hindrance to a successful performance. Nooshin’s study of the “generative processes” (1998, 71) in Iranian classical music helps to unpack the perception that thinking too overtly about the structure of a performance is detrimental.

An important factor is the speed with which decisions regarding such detailed aspects of the music have to be made in the performance situation, suggesting that in terms of compositional techniques, much of what happens in improvised performance occurs at some unverballed level of conception, with musicians continually drawing on a complex of musical experiences built up over a life-time of performing and listening. Compositional techniques, like other underlying aspects of the music, seem to be used intuitively as a result of many years of playing, listening, and "prolonged immersion in the idiom ... to the point where it is part of his [the musician's] very nature" (Small 1984:4). Payvar responded to a question about the use of compositional techniques, "This is really something intuitive. The musician has experienced/felt (hess) it and it comes naturally ... it is not worked out [consciously] (hesab nemikoneh) ... It is intuitive, but based on what a musician has already heard. He doesn't think about it - 'now I'll go up one pitch, now I'll come down again' [in the case of sequence] - it just happens like that" (intvw 8/xi/90). (Nooshin 1998, 101)

Nooshin speculates that Iranian classical musicians are trained to let the hands do the “thinking” because sounds need arise in such rapid succession in Iranian classical music. Put another way, sounds are spontaneously articulated so quickly that needing to think too much about structural choices would slow the musician’s hand down, or undermine the musician’s dexterity. To the extent, however, that there is “unverbalised,” or to use Polanyi’s words, tacit knowledge (of what to do) driving the motion of the hand in performance, it might be possible to say that a performance is work-oriented in a more implicit sense. Likely, even in cases of improvisation in other musical genres, there are moments when the hands do the “thinking” (I hazard a guess that these, as Nooshin suggests, are the faster moments) as well as moments when more conscious choices about where to “go” next are being made. Similarly, Alperson’s ontology does not reduce the act of work-creation in improvised performance to something driven solely by the kind of detailed thinking, or mental working out of tones that Hanslick suggests is necessary for compositional thinking. In fact, Alperson’s appeal to Sparshott’s characterization of improvisation seems to imply that both kinds of moments are actually in play during improvisation:

But we also allow for his forgetting what he was doing, trying to do two things at once, changing his mind about where he is going, starting more hares than he can chase at once, picking up where he thought he had left off but resuming what was not quite there in the first place, discovering and pursuing tendencies in what he has done that would have taken a rather different form if he had thought of them at the time, and so on. (Sparshott, quoted in Alperson 1984, 23–24)

If, for the Iranian classical musician, there is at least a notion in play of something “created” in a performance—even one with the balance tipped strongly in favor of the moving hand driving the creating—then it seems something like Alperson’s ontology of improvisation may still hold. However, a second difficulty in attributing a work, or created entity of some sort, to the outcome of a performance is the seemingly paradoxical approach to the idea of novelty in the Iranian classical music tradition. It is true that the nightingale’s singing is considered a metaphorical practice ideal precisely because it is thought never to repeat itself, but it is also true that each traditional performance must be recognizably, and substantially, grounded in the *radif*.<sup>83</sup> In practical terms, if a musician merely repeats the internalized *radif*, she is not playing music, but if she deviates too far from the *radif*, she is not playing the right kind of music for her performance to count as one that falls within the classical genre. Nooshin captures the seemingly conflicting demands for novelty and identity at the same time: “musicians are able to “re-create” a *gusheh* anew at each improvised performance whilst at the same time maintaining its identity” (1998, 91). For Nooshin, when Iranian classical music performance is understood neither as a creation nor a repetition, but a spontaneous re-creation, the apparent paradox disappears (1999, 353).

Nooshin’s comments elsewhere shed light on another important feature of the orientation to novelty in this tradition. It seems that musicians aspire to never repeat themselves, but in practice it may well be that they do. The musician does not actively think about avoiding repetition of something she has done before when she is performing.

---

<sup>83</sup> “whilst musicians talk readily of improvisation, there is a clear understanding that this is no sense “free” but always based on a musician’s knowledge of the *radif*” (Nooshin 1998, 70). See also Boroumand (During *et al.* 1991, 205).

The lack of repetition, in the most ideal circumstances, should just happen, but, in actuality, the ideal is not always met. As Nooshin notes, “in practice, of course, both nightingales and Iranian musicians do repeat themselves” (1999, 358).

It is probably true, however, that improvisers too, while striving for a degree of novelty, do not think about whether or not they are repeating something they have done before. The difference, I suggest, is that the improviser can rest more comfortably in the belief that she has created something novel because she has far wider musical parameters to work with. The Iranian classical musician works within a much narrower framework, and aims primarily at spontaneity, but rarely, if ever, is concerned with how similar or different each spontaneous performance actually is from another, despite the high probability of some repetition. The telling point is that neither do audiences seem particularly concerned with paying attention to the degree of similarity and difference between performances. It seems to me that for the case of improvisation, if a performance is passed off as improvised, but is actually a repetition of an existing work (perhaps, a recording of an improvisation that the performer has copied), the audience would be disappointed that what they have witnessed is not a “real” improvisation. The disappointment is likely to have two dimensions. To the extent that improvisations are offered as spontaneous, part of the disappointment for the improviser’s audience might rest in the fact that they have not actually witnessed something sufficiently spontaneous happen. The same concern would worry audiences of an Iranian classical music performance. But to the extent that the spontaneous act is offered as an act of creation, the improviser’s audience will also likely be disappointed that they have not witnessed something sufficiently novel transpire. The latter worry is of less concern to Iranian

classical music's audiences.

There are stringent limitations on novelty placed on performance by the *radif*'s structure, but there are still many ways in which performances can be differentiated. Musicians often use free rhythm, so it might be possible that performances could be differentiated by rhythmic variation. Because each performance is articulated within a fluid sonic area rather than with specific "tones" in a "scale," there will likely be subtle sonic differences in the actual sounds that emerge from each performance, even if the core "tones" (marking the outer sonic boundaries and the centering of each performance) do not really change from performance to performance. Because each performance lasts until the musician deems her modulation has exhausted the sonic area she works within, *radif*-based modulations differ in length, ranging anywhere from thirty or so minutes to several hours. There are no limits on how long a performance need take. So it is also possible that each performance can be differentiated from others on account of its length.

Yet, given these possibilities for ways of measuring or comparing variations between performances that might allow them to be differentiated, and despite whatever actual variations do arise in performance, Iranian classical music's audiences do not measure the sonic similarities and differences between performances in receptive practice. Specifying some degree of novelty between performances (by say, comparing recordings of individual performances, or discussing similarities and differences between the sonic content of live performances) is not something audiences usually do. The performer aspires to modulate with such dexterity as to enthrall audiences so much they are mesmerized by what is happening. In fact, it is not uncommon for audiences to have little idea how long a performance actually lasts, or what, exactly, is happening in a

performance, because their attention is focused less on what makes each performance sonically unique, and more on what the performer is doing in the performing moment. Documented audience responses to Iranian classical music performances are far sparser in Iranian classical music scholarship than are documentations of artists' practices. During et al. (1991) however do include one example in their study, in which a musician called Ruhollāh Khāleqi recounts the experience of witnessing another Ostād play. It is telling that his receptive attention is focused much more on the musician's activity than on conceiving the outcome of his activity as something made, or even concretely describable:

All eyes were riveted on the maestro's hands. Rapidly the mezzrābs [hand-held hammers for playing the santur, or Iranian dulcimer] struck the strings. They were so finely and evenly regulated that they seemed to be drawing lines in the air perpendicular to the santur. Shifting around between the rhythmic pieces and melodies for chanting, Somā' Hozur probably played for more than half an hour, spellbinding everyone. Had today's santur players been there that night, they could have found out for themselves the meaning of the words skill and mastery. How can I describe the pieces I heard from Somā' Hozur? Let me only write one sentence and leave it at that: years later, when little Habib [Somā' Hozur's son and apprentice] grew up and became Habib Somā'i, his santur had the effect of the master's. (Ruhollāh Khāleqi in During et al. 1991, 227)

Among scholars, there also seems to be little concern with capturing, comparing, or differentiating individual performances in a way that reflects them as acts of work-creation. Where a recorded or notated performance is used as a basis for musicological analysis, it tends to be staged not as its own entity, but as an illustrative (though not definitive) articulation of some part of the radif.<sup>84</sup> Neither are there naming conventions

---

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Nettl and Babiracki (1978).

in place that show individual performances are treated after-the-fact as their own entities, whether the performance be presented live, in recorded form, or by notational approximation. A performance is named by the section of the radif it articulates, so there are at most twelve names applied to Iranian classical music performances as a whole. These are the names of the radif's twelve dastgāhs. There seems to be little interest in attributing relations of identity to performances that share a name, but neither does the literature reflect efforts to discern differences between performances so each can be taken as its own work. Among musicians, audiences, Ostāds, and musicologists, nowhere does there appear to be a sense in which individual performances are treated as improvisations that create works. The concept of the musical work just does not seem to feature in the way Iranian classical music performances are understood.

One final aspect of the practice implies that performances are not generally work-oriented. This is evidenced by what is now happening at the margins of Iranian classical music practice, where dominant norms are tested by experimentation. Usually, musicians who perform sonic content that is not closely radif-based are classified as working outside the discipline of Iranian classical music. Both inside and outside Iran, there are many. They fall into the genres of folk music or pop music. Others who break with the radif entirely and blend Iranian source material (of any kind) with conventions of music production in western classical music are similarly classified as working outside the Iranian classical discipline as symphonic or polyphonic musicians.<sup>85</sup> Yet there are also Ostāds who test the boundaries of what is possible for innovation in Iranian classical

---

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, the compilation album entitled *Symphonic Poems from Persia*, composed for symphonic orchestras (Rahbari et al., 2006). Symphonic orchestras exist in Iran today (under frequent political strife), but their artists and activities are considered distinct from the genre of Iranian classical music.

music that will remain within the scope of the classical genre. Nooshin offers an account of these experimental Ostāds in the fifth chapter of her book, entitled “Postlude: ‘Roots in the past and a view toward the future’: Contemporary Developments in Iranian Classical Music Performance” (2015, 157–178). Her analysis situates artists that question the extent to which modulation ought be structurally coherent with the radif as the experimentalists in Iranian classical music.

These ‘new’ musicians are well-educated, cosmopolitan, eclectic in their musical tastes and liberal in their approach to tradition; several now reside outside Iran. All have undergone rigorous training in the classical repertoire but—as discussed in Chapter 3, where I have quoted from several of them—the radif is regarded as a starting point rather than an end in itself. Their work thus presents a challenge to some of the dominant discourses around notions of tradition. (Nooshin 2015, 162)

Testing the sonic possibilities of what is possible within articulations of the radif begins to give way among Iranian classical music’s most radical experimentalists to modulation that is connected with the radif but not solely based on it. The effort seems to be one that brings Iranian classical music’s performance practice in closer alignment with improvisation as Alperson characterizes it, where the musician is not only acting, but also making something new.

Tracing the history of experimentation in Iranian classical music from its post-revolutionary resurgence to the present day, Nooshin shows how innovation used to be centered on deviations from traditional ways of performing that allowed more sonic possibilities within the radif’s structural boundaries. Nooshin argues that innovators in the 1980s and 1990s (the decades following the 1979 revolution) did not so much challenge the centrality of the radif but began to extend the scope of what was sonically

possible within radif-based modulation. For example, they experimented with variations in the combinations of instruments in ensemble-based articulations, with alterations to instruments, and with ways of playing instruments. Kayhan Kalhor exemplifies this approach to innovation. Speaking to Nooshin in 2012, he explains:

Within Iran I was already known for what I do on kamāncheh, new techniques, playing it differently. But outside Iran there wasn't anything like that of me on the market. I wanted to show young musicians that you can be traditional and you can sound different and modern within the tradition. You can develop your own techniques but use them in a traditional way. So with this album I was saying 'here I am, and here is the modern tradition'. (interview, 16.6.12). (Nooshin 2015, 161)

Beyond expanding the sonic possibilities within radif-based modulation, testing the authority of the radif as something that delimits the structural possibilities in performance is something that new experimentalists are also concerned with. Toeing the line between venerating the activity that the radif facilitates, and being motivated by doing something new is the tension facing Iranian classical music's avant-garde Ostāds today, as Kalhor's 1999 discussion with Nooshin suggests:

Another musician who invokes the discourse of courage is Kayhan Kalhor, a member of the Dastān Ensemble until 2000, when he left the group to pursue a solo career. Talking in 1999, he said: "I think musicians are becoming more courageous and feeling freer to express themselves. This is something that traditional music or traditional anything doesn't teach you. And I see this as an achievement of all these changes. And the position of the radif is definitely different now. (Nooshin 2015, 160)

Some Ostāds are now beginning to push for an even stronger structural break with the radif. Their efforts are considered radical because they attempt to offer in performance, modulation that is not solely based on the radif's structure, but also on novel sound

structures of their own making.

Nooshin's case study of two traditionally trained experimentalists, Amir Eslami (ney master) and Hooshyar Khayam (kamānche performer and pianist trained in the European classical tradition), explicitly articulates how their 2010 collaboration—which they call “a new approach to improvisation”—deviates from traditional performance. The collaboration resulted in the release of an album entitled *All of You*, (on ney and piano with strings plucked) which is the subject of Nooshin's study.<sup>86</sup> Eslami and Khayam discuss their process with Nooshin, juxtaposing what is new about their approach. Their comments imply that an orientation to work-creation is not something that has been a central part of Iranian classical music practice, but is what they are introducing as experimental.

In their collaboration, Eslami and Khayam do not spontaneously re-create the radif based on what they have internalized, but improvise novel sonic content. They use the radif as inspiration but are not specifically oriented to radif-based modulation. As Nooshin points out, the central difference between Eslami and Khayam's approach and traditional performance is their introduction of compositional thinking.

Amir, for instance, described the music as ‘improvisation that is supported by compositional thinking’ (26.11.10) and Hooshyar continued: “We shape it structurally, we think about it. This is where it comes close to composition. They are compositions, we work them out. I think what we are doing has both qualities. We both have the experience of pure improvisation, but the common concept is that of structure. (26.11.10).” This ‘new improvisation’ takes note of... “the science of composition [oloom-e āhangsāzi] and the structure and musical material and its elements such as harmony, form, rhythm, melody and effective aspects of

---

<sup>86</sup> See Eslami and Khayam (2010).

composition such as the development and expansion of themes [tem-hā] and motifs [motif-hā]. (Nooshin 2015, 166)

I imagine what Eslami and Khayam call “pure improvisation” in Iranian classical music is what I call “modulation,” in which the musician’s compositional choices during a performance are not directed by conscious thought about the sound structure being articulated, but rather by the dexterous activity of the hand in motion. Eslami and Khayam’s deviation from the norm is in the application of active thinking about the structuring of sounds that will arise from modulation in the performing moment.

On Nooshin’s probing, Eslami and Khayam go on to juxtapose their process with traditional performance practice. Eslami and Khayam show they identify their experimentalism with a conceptual framing of their activity as an act of creation, something they find absent from traditional, or standard Iranian classical music performance.

We sat and thought about what we could do. First, we could simply compose. I could say ‘Hooshyar, you write a piece for nei and piano’; and I would write a piece for nei and piano, with a score. And then we thought maybe this way of composition [āhangsāzi] would not be fruitful for the kind of work that we wanted to do. We thought to do improvisation. But what kind? We didn’t plan to play radif. All these thoughts and questions brought us to the direction of a kind of improvisation that would be close to our expertise in composition, where there would be some pre-defined [az pish ta’rif shodeh] elements which we had discussed beforehand, in contrast to improvisation in [traditional] Iranian music in which nothing is defined beforehand other than the maqām: they say ‘we’re going to play dashti-e sol’ and they start playing. Everything happens in the moment. Either it creates something good or it doesn’t, you can’t be sure. But in our way of working, as well as agreeing on the tonality and the maqām, we talked about the form and about particular themes. For example, we had a meeting and I brought along an 8-bar theme which I wanted us to agree on a form for ... but once the general discussion had taken place, we just hit the record button and start playing. In other words, it was improvisation where we had discussed aspects of form, material, harmony, and other

details. So, the main difference between our work and traditional [sonnati] improvisation is that we had some idea beforehand about what we wanted to do... (Nooshin 2015, 165)

Eslami and Khayam's "new" approach entails thinking about what they are doing as a constructive act, one in which they pay more conscious attention to the melodic structuring of sounds. They even let the performance length be fixed by the point in time when the sound structure has been articulated. In contrast, traditional performance venerates radif-based modulation that happens for as long as the musician can modulate without lapsing into obvious repetition.

The other main difference is that our improvisation is not limited to those figure melodies, letting the time pass and give as much time as the performer needs to get into the mood, and the singer to get into the mood, and then the audience. It is not like that. Here, we are dealing with closed structures. We think about the structural scheme of the work and the framing of time in one piece. This is why our pieces are much shorter than you generally find in traditional improvisation. (Nooshin 2015, 167)

When asked what the reaction was to Eslami and Khayam's collaboration among less experimental Ostāds, Nooshin answered that remained to be seen.<sup>87</sup> Judging by album sales, Nooshin notes, the experiment was well received by the public. Yet it is clear from her analysis that even Eslami and Khayam consider their work at the margins of traditional practice. Throughout Nooshin's case study Eslami and Khayam characterize their work as a small trend at the periphery of the Iranian classical tradition.

---

<sup>87</sup> I posed this question to Nooshin on March 12, 2012, during her presentation entitled "Beyond the Radif: New Forms of Improvisational Practice in Iran" at Senate House, in London. The research findings she presented that day are compiled in this chapter of her book (2015, 162–177).

Nooshin also argues that both feel the need to justify the departure from standard performance practice. In contextualizing her case study, Nooshin shows that both talk of being motivated to seek a new mode of musical expression during the dark times in Iran following the brutal government crackdowns after Iran's 2009 green movement protests (165). They seek to develop a new wave of cultural expression that sits in tandem with traditional practices, while acknowledging the centrality of traditional practice as that from which they deviate by using compositional thinking (175–176). They introduce an orientation to improvisation as a creative act that generates something whose structure has been thought about.

The difficulty Eslami and Khayam have in naming what they do arises because the term “improvisation” is often applied in translation to Iranian classical music's traditional performance practice. It is, as I have noted, what I call modulation. The kind of improvisation Eslami and Khayam tend towards—what they call “new improvisation”—is oriented toward the creation of sound structures. It is different from the spontaneous activity in traditional practice, but, I suggest, more aligned with improvisation as characterized by Alperson, in which performance is an act of creation. What this case study renders explicit is that the modulating activity in Iranian classical music that is usually translated as improvisation—what Eslami and Khayam call “pure improvisation,” and what I call “modulation”—is not placed in service to the creation of something novel. This is why, as Nettl argues, Boroumand is hesitant to apply the term improvisation to Iranian classical music practice, because he feels it implies a freer approach to the structure of a performance than traditional practice allows (Nettl 2009,

194).<sup>88</sup> Whether this will remain the case in the future depends on the extent to which emerging trends in experimental musical practice that tend closer to improvisation become normalized in the future. Nonetheless what is significant about experimentalism in the genre is that the idea of the creation of something work-like in performance enters the discipline from the margins as something new.

### Doing Without Making

In light of all this, I conclude that it would be a mischaracterization to say that Iranian classical musicians are oriented toward creating musical works in the performing moment. The fact that an artist paying attention to the sonic, or structural form of a performance seems so radical shows how little the Iranian classical musicians characterize their standard performance practice as something like an act of creation. The playing that happens in performance is clearly of utmost importance, but it does not seem to be conceptualized as act of creation, because it appears there is no concept of something created. Participants in traditional Iranian classical music practice seem much more oriented to seeing what the musician can do within the boundaries of the radif's structure than what she creates. The musician is, after all, not so much creating something as spontaneously re-articulating the radif. But nowhere is there a sense that what matters about this articulation is the kind of precise identification and repetition that implies the radif functions as something work-like in the practice. If anything, repetition is to be avoided, but, as I have argued, so is too much novelty.

---

<sup>88</sup> See also Nooshin (2003).

It seems that in traditional performance, the musician tries to *do* as dexterously as possible, from which some sonic differences will inevitably arise from activity of the hand in motion, but not so many that the performance is no longer articulating some part of the *radif*. Put another way, it seems problematic to frame the musician's dexterity as something that is placed in service of the creation of a *novel entity* and at the same time still offers somehow a performance of the *radif*. A more accurate description would be that the musician's skillful embodied doing is showcased by her ability to modulate extensively within the structural limitations imposed on her by the *radif*, and that this is understood as a form of creativity. In other words, I suggest that a more accurate conclusion about this tradition is that the performing activity itself—taken as a display of dexterity and not as an act of creation—is really the object of aesthetic attention.

In this sense, an ontology of improvisation of the sort that Alperson offers comes close to, but does not quite capture Iranian classical music. The crucial difference is that the performing activity in Iranian classical music is not strictly directed at the “creation” of something. In conceptual terms, this means that the embodied activity of the musician in the performing moment does not appear to *share* significance with the concept of a work, but rather appears to *be* the significant concept. The concept of a work, it seems, has no explanatory role to play. My claim is that for the Iranian classical musician working at the center of the paradigm of Iranian classical music, performance is conceived not as a making, but as a doing. This is why the Iranian classical musician's appeal to the nightingale is ontologically informative. Short of thinking about anything the nightingale makes, the musician aspires to do as the nightingale does.

## CHAPTER 5

### COMPARATIVE CONCLUSIONS

What I have offered in this study is a reading of a cultural practice that looks for the concepts that regulate the thinking about it. In applying this methodology to Iranian classical music, I have suggested that that the concept of central importance—in transmission, performance, and reception—is the embodied activity of the artist in the performing moment. Notably, there is no conception of musical performance as something work-oriented. I have suggested that Iranian classical music demands an ontology centered on the performative act itself, taken as *doing*, rather than making. The claim differs from ontological theories that address other cases of music, including improvisation, in virtue of making no use of the concept of the musical work. In this chapter, I turn to some general insights about the philosophical uses to which both the case I have addressed, and the methodology I have undertaken to arrive at it can be put, particularly in their comparative dimensions.

#### Comparativist Approaches

I have suggested at several points that my study is a comparative one. I wish to begin this chapter by elaborating on the sense in which my approach is comparative. It is probably the case that all, or nearly all, philosophical considerations of artistic practices are comparative in the minimal sense that they proceed by making some sort of illustrative comparisons. Philosophical discussions commonly compare works with one another,

kinds of art with one another, genres or styles with another, artistic corpuses with one another, historical traditions with one another, represented and expressive contents with one another, and so on. In this—admittedly minimalist—sense my study has been comparative.

I have however offered an approach that is comparativist in a more particular sense. What I have attempted is a philosophical anthropology of sorts, comparing artistic practices in two different cultural traditions. In speaking about “culture” here what I have in mind are the practices, beliefs, and values that are transmitted intergenerationally within particular social groups,<sup>89</sup> in particular the cultural tradition of Iranian classical music as it has been understood through the practices and writings of its adherents, and the cultural tradition of western music, most especially the tradition that comes out of the historical tradition of western classical concert music of roughly the last 400 years. Cross-cultural philosophical discussions of art of this sort have not been a part of the mainstream of analytic philosophical thought about art in general or about music in particular.<sup>90</sup>

Approaching the philosophical study of artistic practices of different cultures must be done carefully, even with respect to the matter of the label of the approach. One could call such a culturally comparative approach “comparative aesthetics”—and indeed the term is sometimes used to talk about comparative approach to the artistic practices of different cultures—but I resist the term because, as I have argued, the term “aesthetic” admits of a variety of understandings. I have not assumed—and in fact, I have argued

---

<sup>89</sup> On this sense of culture see Gracyk (2012, 94).

<sup>90</sup> For an important exception see Feagin (2007).

against the idea—that the so-called aesthetic tradition, as it emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century transfers easily or without remainder to the philosophical understanding of Iranian classical music. What I have argued is that certain features, such as the presentation of performative action and the rapt attention to what has been achieved, are common to both musical traditions but other features, such as a concentration on the production, interpretation, performance, and appreciation of musical works, are not.

Similarly, I have not attempted to show that a culturally comparative approach such as the one I adopt requires that there be a single overarching conception of “art” that transcends both cultural traditions, though to be sure some philosophers have attempted to devise cross-cultural definitions of art.<sup>91</sup> In comparing the musical traditions of two cultures I have striven to avoid the twin dangers that face cultural anthropological studies generally: (1) “cultural imperialism” (the unwarranted imposition of the concepts and categories of one’s own tradition on the object of study, assuming their universality and normative force” and (2) “going native” (a naïve attempt to completely suspend one’s presuppositions and values in favor of substituting them for a supposedly radically exoticized “other”).<sup>92</sup> My goal, as I stated at the outset of this study, has been, as much as possible, to determine the regulative concepts that figure into and emerge from the practices and discourses within the target cultures and to engage in a kind of non-reductive cross-reading.

---

<sup>91</sup> See for example Dutton (2006).

<sup>92</sup> Here I follow the formulation of Eliot Deutsch (1998).

## The Aesthetic Attitude, Formalism, and Dexterity

In this connection I return to one particular area of commonality between Iranian classical music and the western musical tradition. In speaking of Iranian classical music, I have centered on a particular feature of musical performance, specifically the dexterity, or skillfulness of the performer in the performing moment. The visibility of this feature of musical practice is heightened in the Iranian classical context because it lies at the center of this tradition and the discourses about it, and because it is not obscured, as it were, by scholarly attention to the work-concept.

Recall, however, that my argument has been that we find in both traditions a certain orientation to the music that we might characterize as rapt attention or even, to employ the terms well established in western philosophical tradition, “disinterested attention”, attention to something “for its own sake,” or “aesthetic attention.”

Interestingly, in the western tradition of the philosophical study of music the concept of the aesthetic attitude or of aesthetic experience has frequently been tied to the idea of formalism. It is not hard to see how such a connection can be made. If one takes the object of aesthetic attention in the case of music to be a work that transcends or grounds individual performances or instantiations of it, then it is reasonable to inquire into what sort of properties might constitute the work, and it is similarly reasonable to think that one candidate set of properties would be formal or structural properties, in particular those forms and designs anchored in the intelligibility of the system of tonality.

Nor is this simply a philosophical “move” that fits the need of a particular theory. People who know music, people who love, compose, perform, and appreciate music are

sensitive to the very real joys that tonally moving forms can promote, especially with respect to melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic development. Hanslick's connection between rapt or "aesthetic" attention and musical form will resonate with many, even if one may not want to follow Hanslick in his insistence that musical forms, properly so-called, need be beautiful or even pleasurable or, indeed, even if one might move farther away from the conceptions of musical tonality and pitch-based structure of which Hanslick would approve.

To put the matter another way, one might say that, from a Hanslickian perspective, the concept of aesthetic attention in the case of music is tied to a particular sort of *content*, namely those aesthetic properties of form and design predisposed to reward aesthetic attention. This is not an approach unique to music. Clive Bell takes a somewhat similar position with respect to visual art:

The starting point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art ... and if we can discover some quality common and peculiar to all the objects that provoke it ... we shall have discovered the essential quality in a work of art, the quality that distinguishes works of art from all other classes of object... What is the quality common and peculiar to all members of this class? ... Only one answer seems possible – significant form. (Bell 1994, 186–187)

It is possible however to understand the idea of aesthetic attention as a particular state of mind without tying it necessarily to a particular range of formal content. This position, which has been a part of the aesthetic tradition since Baumgarten, has been more recently defended by Gary Iseminger who puts the matter by saying that "Someone who is appreciating a state of affairs just in case she or he is valuing for its own sake the

experiencing of that state of affairs” (Iseminger 2006, 99). It is my view that, in the case of Iranian classical music, the “state of affairs” one appreciates is not properly construable in terms of formal structure but rather in terms of human musical dexterity in performance.

In applying terms such as the aesthetic state of mind (or the aesthetic attitude or aesthetic experience) to Iranian classical music I do not advance such a characterization as an example of cultural imperialism, reducing the value of Iranian classical music by attempting to subsume its significance under the western concept of the aesthetic, or otherwise attempting to assimilate Iranian to western culture. What I mean to show rather is that, from a comparative perspective, it is interesting to see how a concept such the aesthetic state of mind can function in different ways in different cultural traditions. It has also been a part of my project to make the complementary point that if one assumes a necessary connection between the aesthetic state of mind and formalism, if one expects to find the sorts of properties one associates with works of musical art in the western tradition, then one is likely to misjudge the achievement of Iranian classical music. The appreciation of musical value in the case of Iranian classical music is theory-laden, just as it is in the case of western music.

And again, not wanting to exoticize Iranian musical culture, it is important to note, as I have pointed out, that the appreciation of what I have called musical dexterity, is not completely foreign to western music. To the contrary, performers move with considerable skill in many musical traditions, and this is no less the case in work-centered musical contexts. This helps us to understand why it is that we care about, or pay attention to *how* performers perform musical works when we attend a concert, even if we

know we are hearing Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*, and even if all the right notes are played when we are hearing it. The satisfaction in appreciating musical dexterity is one important reason why we attend *live* performances at all, and why, as I have pointed out, in certain contexts it might make more sense to conceive of the reception of music as something that has as much to do with watching as it does with listening. This is also one of the reasons why the comparison with western improvisation is apt as far as it goes, for, as I have suggested, there is a dimension of improvisation in which, from a certain perspective, we may say that the hands do the "thinking." I suggest threads like these may be teased out more substantially by the discussions about performance that exist in the scholarship on Iranian classical music, in virtue of its emphasis on this type of musical activity. It is my view that this kind of non-reductive cross-reading—of applying insights about what matters about music in one context to uncover things that might be less visible in other musical contexts—might help to prompt a richer, fuller, and more nuanced understanding of musical practices in general.

### Self-expression and Creativity

In a similar vein Iranian classical music casts an interesting light on the matters of self-expression and artistic creativity. Of course, as I have pointed out, the scholars with whom discussions about musicality rest in Iran are the *Ostāds*, the tradition's most learned artists. One might suppose that, on that account alone, it is hardly surprising to find so much emphasis on the artist's musical dexterity as a mode of artistic production. In other words, when artists provide the commentary it is not surprising to find an artist-

centered perspective. But such a characterization of the situation would be too rash. The theoretical significance of what I have called musical dexterity goes deeper than this.

It is common, especially in the popular mind, to regard western music as an art of self-expression. This commonplace is a result of several complicated and interrelated factors that I can only indicate in passing. There is for a start the influence of the romantic idea that art is primarily the expression of personal feeling, a view that has its classical formulation in Wordsworth's dictum about poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth 2013, 111), but whose extension to music seems virtually guaranteed in virtue of the powerful connection between music and the emotions. On such a view one might say, to take a familiar example, that in his middle works such as the *Fifth Symphony*, the *Emperor Concerto*, and *Fidelio*, Beethoven expresses his sense of struggle and isolation and the nobility of character required to prevail, occasioned by political conflict in the Napoleonic conquest of Europe, Beethoven's own sense of loneliness, despair, and hope, and so on.

What I would like to focus on here is not so much the intellectual and cultural lineage of this way of thinking about music but rather the picture it gives us of the musician as an expressive artist. Beethoven, as composer, expresses himself musically but this expression entails an externalization of the felt emotion by means of the musical work he creates. The work, by means of the notation, provides the template for the further realization of the musical expression in auditory manifestations: performances for the audience. Self-expression and creativity may be hallmarks of musical activity, then, but these qualities are apprehended through, so to speak, the intermediaries of musical performances which themselves are understood as instantiations of the works that

manifest the artist's creativity.

In the case of Iranian classical music, these intermediaries do not exist. Or perhaps we should say the intermediaries are more attenuated. From the standpoint of the audience, what we have in Iranian classical music, as in the case of western music, are performances. However, the object of aesthetic appreciation is not the musical performance considered as a performance of a work or even considered as a recovery or interpretation of the musically self-expressive meaning of the composer but rather a performance *in itself* whose chief aesthetic features lie in the dexterity of the performing musician. Beethoven may have been able to compose in his head without needing a piano or without writing his compositions down but we have no access to that kind of activity, nor would we have even had we been sitting next to him.

It might be implied that in the case of Iranian classical music we are faced more closely with the creative activity itself. Again, care must be taken not to overdraw the difference. There is a sense in which every intentional human action and every human artifact can be understood as the result of human agency and creative activity. I have already acknowledged that an important feature of musical improvisation is the kind of creativity it evinces, and surely creative activity can be delighted in across the entire spectrum of musical activity. What is especially interesting about Iranian classical music in this regard is the centrality of the creative activity in the context of Iranian musical culture and the particular role that musical dexterity plays in this regard. Musical dexterity, I have argued, is the mark of musicality in the case of Iranian classical music. As in the metaphor of the nightingale, the musical value lies in the central activity of

“making,” an activity that is not eclipsed by attention to other dimensions of musical practice.

### Coda

In this study, then, I have sought to combine a philosophical and a musicological approach to the world of Iranian classical music which, in light of its focus on musical modulation and musical dexterity in the context of a non-tonal melodic system and the aural transmission of repertoire and technique, stands in relief to certain aspects of the western classical music tradition which, standardly, relies on the creation of notated scores in the context of the western diatonic system for the presentation of ontologically distinctive works of art. From this point of view, Persian classical art music calls for a somewhat different conceptual scheme than does music in the western tradition. At the same time Iranian classical music is not totally alien to the western tradition of classical music. To the contrary, it appeals to some of the same aesthetic interests with which western musicians and listeners are familiar, in particular the aesthetically rewarding presentation of musical development. This presentation, however, is not something mediated through musical works ontologized as tokens of types but rather as a particular kind of embodied activity I have characterized as musical modulation with a focus on musical dexterity. In this way, the philosophical study of Iranian classical music offers a different way of thinking about music, interesting for what it shows about both Iranian and western musical cultures. In that sense, my study is a contribution to the understanding of global musical practices.

At another level my study raises questions about the very possibility of understanding—and misunderstanding—practices in different cultural traditions. As I have tried to demonstrate, we operate with tacit conceptual presuppositions about cultural practices and conventions, some of which go very deeply into our understanding of how culture is constituted within a tradition and how we understand ourselves as standing within a culture. That is to say, the constellation of cultural practices and beliefs embodies hierarchies of value that are related one to another in complex ways. It is my belief, as I have tried to demonstrate in this study, that those concepts and values that are regulative within a cultural tradition must be discerned from the practices themselves. And, in this vein, it will be interesting to see how entrenched or authoritative the concept of embodied activity will remain in Iran as new artists test the traditional paradigm.<sup>93</sup> The implication is that there is much to be uncovered about cultural practices and their conceptual histories when we consider not only turning *to*, but also staying *with* them as they evolve.

My study then is offered as a philosophical examination of Iranian classical music and its possible development as well as an opportunity to arrive at a richer understanding of a central strain of western musical culture when it is seen through a comparative lens. In this endeavor I hope I have embraced something of the spirit of the Persian nightingale, who strives to sing his tale in many subtly different ways.

---

<sup>93</sup> On this point in the context of western music, see Goehr (2008a).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alpers, Philip. 1984. "On Musical Improvisation." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1): 17–29.
- . 1991. "When Composers Have to be Performers." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49 (4): 369–373.
- . 2010. "A Topography of Musical Improvisation." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68 (3): 273–280.
- . 2014. "Musical Improvisation and the Philosophy of Music." In *Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*. Edited by George Lewis and Ben Piekut. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Asadi, Hooman. 2012. Interview with Erum Naqvi. Personal Interview. Tehran, Iran, August 22, 2012.
- Babiracki, Carol M. and Bruno Nettl. 1987. "Internal interrelationships in Persian Classical Music: The Dastgah of Shur in Eighteen Radifs." *Asian Music* 19 (1): 46–98.
- Beeman, William O. 1973. "You Can Take the Music Out of the Country, But...: The Dynamics of Change in Iranian Musical Tradition." *Asian Music* 7 (2): 6–19.
- Bell, Clive. 1994. "Art." In *Aesthetics and its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*. Edited by Stephen David Ross. Albany: State University of New York Press, 186–191.
- Bertinetto, Alessandro. 2013. "Musical Ontology: A View Through Improvisation." *Cosmo. Comparative Studies in Modernism* 2, 81–101.
- Bristow, William. 2011. "Enlightenment." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed January 16, 2015.  
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/enlightenment/>>.
- Brown, Lee. 2000. "'Feeling My Way': Jazz Improvisation and Its Vicissitudes—A Plea for Imperfection." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (2): 113–123.
- . 1996. "Musical Works, Improvisation, and the Principle of Continuity." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (4): 353–369.
- Cassirer, Ernst. 1951. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Caron, Nelly and Dariush Safvat. 1966. *Iran, Les Traditions Musicales*. Paris: Buchet.
- Caton, Margaret and Stephen Blum. 2008. "The Classical Music of Iran: An Introduction." In *The Concise Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 1*, 881–888.

- Coltrane, John. *Offering: Live at Temple University*. Resonance Records, B00JDB4N46. 2014, compact disc.
- Conway-Morris, R., Cvjetko Rihtman, Christian Poché, and Veronica Doubleday. 2015. "Daff." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 4, 2015, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/07050>>.
- Currie, Gregory. 1989. *An Ontology of Art*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Daniel, Elton L. and Ali Akbar Mahdi. 2006. *Culture and Customs of Iran*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Davies, David. 2004. *Art as Performance*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Davies, Stephen. 2001. *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dehghan, Saeed Kamali. 2014. "Iran broadcaster breaks rule over musical instruments played on TV." *The Guardian*, January 22. Accessed July 27, 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/22/iran-broadcaster-rule-musical-instruments-tv>>.
- Deutsch, Eliot. 2008. "Comparative Aesthetics." In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics, Vol. 1*. Edited by Michael Kelly, 409.
- Dodd, Julian. 2002, "Defending Musical Platonism." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 42:4, 380–402.
- . 2000. "Musical Works as Eternal Types." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 40 (4): 424–40.
- . 2007. *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014. "Upholding Standards: A Realist Ontology of Standard Form Jazz." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72 (3): 277–290.
- During, Jean. 1989. *Musique et Mystique dans les Traditions de l'Iran*. Paris: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran.
- . 1984. *La Musique Iranienne: Tradition et Evolution*. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilizations.
- . 2010. *Musiques d'Iran: La Tradition en Question*. Paris: Geuthner.
- . 2015. "Tombak." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 10, 2015. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/52322>>.

- During, Jean and Alastair Dick. 2015. "Setār." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 10, 2015.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/46904>>.
- During, Jean, Robert Atayan, and Johanna Spector. 2015c. "Tār." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 10, 2015.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/27502>>.
- During, Jean, Robert Atayan, Johanna Spector, Scheherazade Qassim Hassan, and R. Conway-Morris. 2015a. "Kamāncheh." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 10, 2015.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/14649>>.
- During, Jean, Scheherazade Qassim Hassan, and Alastair Dick. 2015b. "Santur." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed March 10, 2015.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51800>>.
- During, Jean, Zia Mirabdolbahi, and Dariush Safvat. 1991. *The Art of Persian Music*. Translated by Manuchehr Anvar. Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers.
- Dutton, Denis. 2006. "A Naturalist Definition of Art." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 64 (3): 367–377.
- Elyasi, Atabak and Mahsa Vahdat. 2012. Interview with Erum Naqvi. Personal Interview. Tehran, Iran, August 24, 2012.
- Ernst, Douglas. 2014. "Iranian TV shows musical instruments for 10 seconds—and religious controversy ensues." *The Washington Times*, January 23. Accessed July 27, 2014. <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jan/23/iranian-tv-shows-musical-instruments-ten-seconds-a/>>.
- Eslami, Amir and Hooshyar Khayam. 2010. *All of You*. Hermes Records, digital album.
- Farabi School. 2014. "Instruments: Qanoon." Accessed May 19, 2014.  
<<http://www.farabisoft.com/Pages/FarabiSchool/InstrumentsDetails.aspx?lang=en&PID=4&SID=27>>.

- Farhat, Hormoz. 1990. *The Dastgāh Concept in Persian Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2014a. "Pāyvar, Farāmarz." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed January 16, 2015.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51405>>.
- . 2014b. "Sabā, Abolhasan." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 15, 2014.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/51405>>.
- Feagin, Susan, ed. 2007. Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics (special issue). *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (1): 1–146.
- Ferdowsi, Abolqasem. 2007. *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*. Translated by Dick Davis. New York: Penguin.
- Goehr, Lydia. 2007. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1989. "Being True to the Work." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1): 55–67.
- . 2008a. "For the Birds/Against the Birds." In *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 79–107).
- . 2008b. "Three Blind Mice: Goodman, McLuhan, and Adorno on the Art of Music and Listening in the Age of Global Transmission" *New German Critique* 35 (2): 1–31.
- . 2000. "'On the Problems of Dating' or 'Looking Backward and Forward with Strohm'." In *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Edited by Michael Talbot. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 231–246.
- Gerson-Kiwi, Edith. 1963. *The Persian Doctrine of Dastgāh Composition*. Tel-Aviv: Israel Music Institute.
- Goodman, Nelson. 1976. *Languages of Art*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Gould, Carol S. and Keaton, Kenneth. 2000. "The Essential Role of Improvisation in Musical Performance." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (2): 143–148.
- The Glass House*. 2009. Directed by Hamid Rahmanian. Brooklyn: Fictionville Studio. DVD.
- Gracyk, Theodore. 2012. *The Philosophy of Art*. Malden: Polity Press.
- . 1996. *Rhythm and Noise: An Aesthetics of Rock*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Hafiz. 2004. *New Nightingale, New Rose: Poems from the Divan of Hafiz*. Translated by Richard Le Gallienne. Oregon House: Bardic Press.
- . 2007. *The Poems of Hafez*. Translated by Reza Ordoubadian. Maryland: IBEX.
- Hanslick, Eduard. 1986. *On The Musically Beautiful*. Translated by Geoffrey Payzant. New York: Hackett Publishing Company.
- . 1950. *Music Criticisms 1846–99*. Edited and translated by Henry Pleasants. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Hassan, Scheherazade Qassim, and Jean During. 2015 “Ney.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press*, accessed March 10, 2015, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/19644>>.
- Herodotus. 1954. *The Histories*. Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Iseminger, Gary. 2006. “The Aesthetic State of Mind” In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Edited by Matthew Kieran. Malden: Blackwell, 98–110.
- Kania, Andrew. 2011. “All Play and No Work: An Ontology of Jazz.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69 (4): 391–403.
- . 2006. “Making Tracks: The Ontology of Rock Records.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64 (4): 401–414.
- . 2008a. “New Waves in Music Ontology” in *New Waves in Aesthetics*, edited by Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomson-Jones. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 20–40.
- . 2008b. “Works, Recordings, Performances: Classical, Rock, Jazz.” In *Recorded Music: Philosophical and Critical Reflections*. Edited by Mine Dogantan-Dack. Middlesex: Middlesex University Press, 3–21.
- . 2014. “The Philosophy of Music.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/music/>>. Accessed October 14, 2014.
- . 2013. “Platonism vs. Nominalism in Contemporary Musical Ontology.” In *Art and Abstract Objects*, edited by Christy Mag Uidhir. New York: Oxford University Press, 197–222.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kivy, Peter. 2004. “Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense.” In *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*. Edited by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen. Oxford: Blackwell, 92–102.

- . 1999. “Feeling the Musical Emotions.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (1): 1–13.
- . 1993. “Platonism in Music: Another Kind of Defense.” In *The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 35–58.
- . 1989. *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kristeller, Paul Oskar. 1951. “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (I).” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (4): 496–527.
- . 1952. “The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics (II).” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1): 17–46.
- Langer, Susanne K. 1953. *Feeling and Form*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- Levinson, Jerrold. 1980. “What a Musical Work Is.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77:1, 5–28.
- . 1990. *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Miller, Lloyd. 1999. *Music and song in Persia*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.
- Mostaghim, Ramin and Alexandra Sandels. 2014. “Iran state breaks decades long taboo on showing instruments.” *The LA Times*, January 23, 2014. Accessed July 27, 2014. <<http://www.latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-iran-tv-music-instruments-20140123-story.html>>.
- Naqvi, Erum. 2012. “Teaching Practices in Iranian classical music.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy in Music Education*. Edited by Wayne Bowman and Ana Lucia Frega. New York: Oxford University Press, 180–191.
- Nettl, Bruno. 1974a. “Aspects of Form in the Instrumental Performance of the Persian Avaz.” *Ethnomusicology* 18 (3): 405–414.
- . 2013. *Becoming and Ethnomusicologist: A Miscellany of Influences*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.
- . 1978. “Classical Music in Tehran: the Process of Change.” In *Eight Urban Musical Cultures*. Edited by Bruno Nettl. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 146–185.
- , ed. 1978. *Eight Urban Musical Cultures: Tradition and Change*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- . 2002. *Encounters in Ethnomusicology: A Memoir*. Warren: Harmonie Park Press.
- . 1984. “In Honor of our Principal Teachers.” *Ethnomusicology* 28 (2): 173–175.
- . 1994. ““Musical Thinking” and “Thinking about Music” in Ethnomusicology: An Essay of Personal Interpretation.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1): 139–148.
- . 1980. “Musical Values and Social Values: Symbols in Iran.” *Asian Music* 12 (1): 129–148.

- . 2010. *Nettl's Elephant: On the History of Ethnomusicology*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- . 2009. "On Learning the Radif and Improvisation in Iran." In *Musical Improvisation: Art, Education and Society*. Edited by Gabriel Solis and Bruno Nettle. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 185–199.
- . 1972. "Persian Popular Music in 1969." *Ethnomusicology* 16 (2): 218–239.
- . 1992. *The Radif of Persian Music*. Champaign: Elephant and Cat.
- . 1963. "Speculations on Musical Style and Musical Content in Acculturation." *Acta Musicologica* 35 (1): 35–37.
- . 2005. *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- . 1974b. "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach." *The Musical Quarterly* 60 (1): 1–19.
- Nettl, Bruno and Bela Foltin Jr. 1972. *Daramad of Chahargah. A Study in the Performance Practice of Iranian classical music*. Detroit: Information Coordinators.
- Noone Knows About Persian Cats*. 2009. Directed by Bahman Ghodabi. Paris: Wild Bunch. DVD.
- Nooshin, Laudan. 1999. "The Art of Ornament." In *World Music: The Rough Guide: Africa, Europe, and the Middle East*. London: Penguin, 355–363.
- . 2003. "Improvisation as "Other:" Creativity, Knowledge and Power: The Case of Iranian Classical Music." *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 128 (2): 242–296.
- . 2015. *Iranian Classical Music: The Discourses and Practice of Creativity*. London: Ashgate.
- . 1998. "The Song of the Nightingale: Processes of Improvisation in Dastgāh Segāh (Iranian Classical Music)." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 1998 (7): 69–116.
- . 2014a. "Two Revivalist Moments in Iranian Classical Music." In *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*. Edited by Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill. New York: Oxford University Press, 277–299.
- . 2005a. "Subversion and Countersubversion: Power Control and Meaning in New Iranian Pop Music." *Music, Power, and Politics*. Edited by Annie J. Randall. New York: Routledge.
- . 2005b. "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran." *Iranian Studies* 38 (3): 463–494.
- . 2014b. "Vaziri, Ali Naqi." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed March 29, 2014.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/48514>>.

- Poché, Christian. 2015. "Qānūn." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 4, 2015. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/22608>>.
- Polanyi, Michael. 1962. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- . 1966. *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Poole, Edward Stanley, ed. 1914. *A Thousand and One Nights: Commonly Called the Arabian Nights...* New York: Hearst's International Library.
- Rahbari, Alexander, Ahmad Pejman, Aminollah Hossein, Hossein Dehlavi, Houchang Ostovar, and Mohammad Taghi Massoudieh. 2006. *Symphonic Poems from Persia*. Colloseum Records, compact disc.
- Rothenberg, David. 2005. *Why Birds Sing: A Journey Into the Mystery of Bird Song*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ryle, Gilbert. 1945. "Knowing How and Knowing That." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 46: 1–16.
- Saeedi, Malihe. 2010. Interview with Erum Naqvi. Personal Interview. Tehran, Iran, October 21, 2010.
- . 2002. Interview in *Tosheh Daily Newspaper*, October 4, 2002. Accessed May 6 2014. <[http://www.parstimes.com/music/female\\_musicians.html](http://www.parstimes.com/music/female_musicians.html)>.
- Shiloah, Amnon. 2001. *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-Cultural Study*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Tala'i, Dariush. 2000. *Traditional Iranian classical music: The Radif of Mirza Abdollah*. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers.
- Talbot, Michael, ed. 2000a. *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- . 2000b. "The Work-Concept and Composer-Centredness." In *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Edited by Michael Talbot. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 168–186.
- Telegraph Media Group. 2010. "Faramarz Payvar" *The Telegraph*, accessed April 15, 2014. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/music-obituaries/7038131/Faramarz-Payvar.html>>.
- Tsuge, Gen'ichi. 1975. *Avaz: A Study of the Rhythmic Aspects of Classical Iranian Music*. PhD. diss., Wesleyan University.

- Vahdat, Mahsa. 2006. Video interview with Kristina Funkeson. Freemuse.org. Accessed March 15, 2014. <<http://freemuse.org/archives/601>>.
- Vaziri, Ali Naqi. 1923. *Dastur-i Tār*. Berlin: Kaviyani.
- White, Harry. 1997. “‘If it’s Baroque, don’t fix it.’ Reflections on Lydia Goehr’s ‘Work-Concept’ and the Historical Integrity of Musical Composition.” *Acta Musicologica* 69:1, 94–104.
- Wilde, Oscar. 2008. *The Happy Prince and Other Stories*. London: Collector’s Library.
- Wordsworth, William. 2013. “Preface, Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and Other Poems, 1802.” In *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 95–116.
- Young, James and Carl Matheson. 2000. “The Metaphysics of Jazz.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (2): 125–34.
- Zonis, Ella. 1973. *Classical Persian Music: an Introduction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

**APPENDIX A**  
**SCHOLARS OF IRANIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC**

The most famous of Iran’s modernizers who taught at the Honarestān (State Music School) is Ostād Ali-Naqi Vaziri (1887-1979). Vaziri studied under Ostād Mirza Abdollah, was an influential master of the tār and also a competent violinist.<sup>94</sup> Having studied music both in Iran and in Europe, he was the first scholar to attempt notating the radif using European staff notation in the early twentieth century.<sup>95</sup> He notated Ostād Mirza Abdollah’s radif, and attempted to remodel Iranian classical music in the Honarestān (State Music School) by bringing the tradition in closer alignment with European classical music’s theory, use of polyphony, and use of harmony. His views are subject to controversy among Ostāds and musicologists both inside and outside Iran today.<sup>96</sup>

Loosely associated with the Honarestān are Ostād Abolhasan Saba (1902–1957) (who studied European classical music theory there after completing traditional training with Mirza Abdollah and Darvish Khan), and one of his apprentices Farāmarz Payvar (1932 – 2009). Saba was known as a master of the setār, santur (Persian dulcimer), kamānche (three-stringed bowed instrument, literally “little-bow”), and the tombak

---

<sup>94</sup> For a short biography of Vaziri, see Nooshin (2014b). For a summary of Vaziri’s contributions to Iranian classical music’s development in twentieth century Iran, see Nettl (2013, 114–115).

<sup>95</sup> Vaziri published his notation in his book *Dastur-i-Tar*. The title loosely translates as “Tar Manual.” Nooshin cites the manual’s original publication date as 1913 (Nooshin 2014a) and Farhat cites the publication date as 1922 (Farhat 1990, 9). Both theorists attribute publication to an Iranian publisher in Berlin. See Vaziri (1923).

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Farhat (1990, 8–10).<sup>107</sup>

(Persian goblet drum, also called zarb). Later in his life he was known as one of the foremost violinists of his time in Iran. Well versed in both traditional and foreign styles and methods, he published several recordings, books, and notations in his lifetime.<sup>97</sup> Ostād Farāmarz Payvar (1932-2009) was a famed santur master and renowned music scholar. He was an apprentice of Abolhasan Saba. Payvar founded the Iranian National Orchestra in 1959. Silenced by Iranian censors for the decade following the 1979 revolution, he taught privately after the revolution until his death in 2009. Renowned for his agility in performing the radif, he was also known for several stylistic peculiarities, including playing the santur with felt on his hammers resulting in a more piano-like sound, and experimenting with stylistic influences from European classical music like arpeggio patterns. Before his death he published a number of scholarly texts in Iran and several santur recordings that are available internationally.<sup>98</sup> I also cite violinist Ruhollā Khaleqi (1906–1965) who studied at the Honarestān and later became prominent in Iran’s public music programming circles before the 1979 revolution.

Two of the leading figures considered traditionalists are Ostād Dariush Safvat (1928–2013) and Ostād Nur-Ali Boroumand (1905–1977). Safvat (1928-2013) was master of the setār and santur. Like Farāmarz, he was an apprentice of Abolhasan Saba. Safvat founded and directed the Center for Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Music (known in Iran simply as the Markaz, “Center”) in 1968 in Tehran in an attempt to preserve traditional instruction methods following the influx of foreign music theories

---

<sup>97</sup> For a short biography of Saba, see Farhat (2014b).

<sup>98</sup> For a short biography of Payvar, see Farhat (2014a). An obituary of Payvar published by *The Telegraph*, a British newspaper, on January 20, 2010, reflects on Payvar’s struggles with censors following the 1979 revolution (Telegraph Media Group 2010).

and ideologies into Iranian music practices in the mid-twentieth century. Safvat was also an internationally renowned scholar of Iranian classical music who often worked with foreign musicologists. The work of musicologists Caron, During, and Miller is based on collaboration with Safvat. During and Safvat have also collaborated with zarb master Zia Mirabdolbaghi, who was traditionally trained by zarb master Djamchid Chemirani in France, who I also cite in my analysis.<sup>99</sup>

Nur-Ali Boroumand (1905-1977) was an apprentice of Darvish Khan, and master of the *tār*, *setār*, and *santur*. He dedicated his life to studying and teaching Iranian classical music in Iran after abandoning medical studies in Berlin when he went blind in his late twenties. Unusually favoring teaching over performing, Boroumand was one of the foremost instructors of Iranian classical music in Iran his lifetime. He taught at a number of schools including the Markaz and the University of Tehran. Boroumand is known for his pedagogical conservatism in strictly adhering to traditional aural instruction methods.<sup>100</sup> The work of musicologists Blum, Nettle, and Tsuge is based on exposure to Iranian classical music through Boroumand.<sup>101</sup>

In addition to Ostād Safvat and Ostād Boroumand, there a number of scholars associated with the Markaz who have published, or been cited in research about, Iranian

---

<sup>99</sup> See Caron and Safvat (1966); Miller (1999), During (1984, 1989, 2010); During, Mirabdolbaghi and Safvat (1991).

<sup>100</sup> For a short biography, see Nooshin (2014b).

<sup>101</sup> For a biographical recounting of Nettle's experiences working with Boroumand, see Nettle (1984; 2013, 115–120). For a summary of Boroumand's work with the Markaz see Miller (1999, 40). Musicological scholarship based on collaboration with Boroumand includes Babiracki and Nettle (1987), Nettle (1963, 1974a, 1974b, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1992, 1994, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2013), Nettle and Foltin (1972), and Tsuge (1975). Blum worked with Boroumand on his doctoral research and recorded Boroumand performing in 1967 (see Nettle 2013, 116).

classical music. These include vocal master Ostād Karimi (b. 1927) and tār and setār master Ostād Hormozi (1897-1976), who both taught at the Markaz, and santur master Ostād Majid Kiani (b. 1941) who studied at the Markaz under Boroumand and Safvat. Kiani has served as the director Markaz since 2000.<sup>102</sup> Other apprentices of Boroumand include tār and setār master Ostād Dariush Tala’i (b. 1953), who published a musicological study of Mirza Abdollah’s radif in 2000,<sup>103</sup> and tār and setār master Ostād Hossein Alizādeh (b. 1951) who was trained according to the traditional ethos by Boroumand, but advocates a more modernizing approach to teaching and scholarship in his own practice.

Other widely cited twentieth-century musicological studies of Iranian classical music are authored by Iranian-born composer and musicologist Hormoz Farhat (1990), and foreign musicologists Edith Gerson-Kiwi (1963) and Ella Zonis (1973). Among more contemporary musicologists, Laudan Nooshin’s work centers on Iranian classical music. She is well known both inside and outside Iran. Her research is often based on fieldwork with artists and Ostāds active in Iran today, including many of those cited above, and most recently Amir Eslami, nei (Persian flute) master and Lecturer at Tehran Art University, and Hooshyar Khayam, pianist and former faculty at Tehran Art University, both experimenting with new wave approaches to Iranian classical music’s practices.<sup>104</sup> Nooshin is of the only theorists outside Iran working on contemporary trends in Iranian classical music.

---

<sup>102</sup> For a detailed overview of the history of the Center, and the scholars associated with it, see Miller (1999, 29–56).

<sup>103</sup> See Tala’i (2000).

<sup>104</sup> See Nooshin (1998, 1999, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2014a, 2015).

There are, of course, other scholars (particularly women) in Iran who fall outside the pool of Ostāds most commonly cited in research on Iranian classical music. In addition to the published work that I cite, I was able, from personal interviews conducted in Iran in 2010 and 2012 to ask some of these scholars to describe the practice of Iranian classical music, and their central concerns about it today. These are musicologist Hooman Asadi (Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology, Tehran University), setār master Atabak Elyasi (Professor at Tehran Art University), vocal master Mahsa Vahdat (b. 1973),<sup>105</sup> and qanun (Persian zither) master Malihe Saeedi (b. 1948).<sup>106</sup> As female artists, Vahdat and Saeedi's participation in public and institutional forums in Iran is heavily regulated, although both are well known artists. Vahdat is married to Elyasi and the two often perform together. Vahdat, an advocate for artistic freedom in Iran, chooses to perform and record in public outside Iran rather than in heavily regulated all-female public concerts in Iran.<sup>107</sup> Vahdat's recordings are widely distributed in Iran. Saeedi rose to prominence as one of Iran's best qanun masters before the 1979 revolution, and is widely credited with reviving the use of qanun in Iranian classical music practice. She ran a heavily policed privately funded music school for women after the revolution,<sup>108</sup> and currently teaches privately. I have offered here an overview of the artists taken as central

---

<sup>105</sup> I am indebted to Laudan Nooshin for facilitating my introductions to Hooman Asadi, Atabak Elyasi, and Mahsa Vahdat, and to my cousins Arzhang Mirshahi and Yazdan Zamani for accompanying me on interviews with these artists.

<sup>106</sup> I am indebted to my aunt Parisa Akbari for facilitating my introduction to Malihe Saeedi.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Vahdat (2006).

<sup>108</sup> See Saeedi's discussion of her music school in an interview in Iran's *Tosheh Daily Newspaper* (Saeedi, 2002).

historical scholars of Iranian classical music in Iran, the most cited historical and contemporary musicological scholars who have published outside Iran, and the contemporary Iranian artists and scholars I have interviewed in Iran. My analysis draws on all three types of sources.

