Masters of Persian Music
Three Generations

Hossein Alizadeh  
*Khosro Angiz, tar

Kayhan Kalhor  
*Kamancheh, five-string kamancheh

Hamid Reza Nourbakhsh  
Vocals

Fariborz Azizi  
Bass tar

Siamak Jahangiry  
Nay

Pezhham Akhavass  
Tombak

Hamidreza Maleki  
Santour

Program

Instrumental improvisation  
Hossein Alizadeh, *Khosro Angiz
Kayhan Kalhor, *five-string kamancheh

Intermission

Hengam Ke Gerye Midahad Saz† (*tasneef)  
Poem by Nima Youshij
*Nay solo

This piece is dedicated to the memory of the renowned Iranian composer and santour player, Parviz Meibakhtian (1954–2009).

Sobh-daman‡ (*tasneef)  
Poem by Shafi'i Kadkani
*Kamancheh solo

Souvaran-e Khamoush‡ (*tasneef)  
Poem by Shafi'i Kadkani
*Tar solo

Chahar-Mezrab‡ (*va Aruz)  
Tar and Kamancheh duo

Az Dowlat-e May (*tasneef)  
Poem by Medhi Akhavan-e Sales
*Avaz and Avaz

Yar Amadast (*tasneef)  
Poem by Salman Savoji

† composed by Hossein Alizadeh
‡ composed by Kayhan Kalhor

Cal Performances’ 2009–2010 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Hengam Ke Gerye Midahad Saz
Poet: Nima Youshij
Translators: Philip Grant & Shervin Emami

As the instrument weeps
This smoke that is the character of the cloud behind it
As the indigo of the sea’s eye
Out of anger the fist strikes a face
From that late journey that left me
That gave the woman’s flirtatious glance and the instrument’s coquetry
I have on familiar pretexts
Captured an image of her
But what weeping, what storm?
Silence is a night everywhere alone
A man on the road plays the nay
And its voice rises dejected
I am another one alone, whose eyes
Stir up a storm of tears
As the instrument weeps
This smoke that is the character of the cloud behind it
As the indigo of the sea’s eye
Out of anger the fist strikes a face.

Sobh-daman
Poet: Shafi’i Kadkani
Translators: Philip Grant & Shervin Emami

Caspian waves from the corner clad in black
The wounded thicket and the plants, all are silent.
Look! Those dark blue garments, horizon of the fierce morning,
Are the soul of the garden, that from this corner are clad in black.
What a spring it is, O God! That in this desert of melancholy
Tulips are the mirror of the blood of Siavash.
Those ruined flowers scatter in the wind
Lifeless from the wine of the chalice of martyrdom,
May their name be the holy spring of the drunkards’ midnight
That it not be said they have been forgotten,
Even if from this most venomous of poisons that has passed through the garden,
The crimson spring flowers have all fallen lifeless.
Once again in your bloody step, O soul of spring,
Thicket with thicket, the trees all embrace one another.
Sougvaran-e Khamoush
Poet: Shafi’i Kadkani
Translators: Philip Grant & Shervin Emami

Your mourners, all of them, are silent today,
When insolent mouths, all of them, roar aloud.

If they silently sat mourning you, it is fair
That they should be, all of them, terror-struck at the gathering of terrible beasts.

Alas for this hypocrite people who in this two-faced city
Are, all of them, by day sheriff and by night wine-sellers.

…

O whichever drop from the horizons of whichever cloud, rain down!
Thickets and gardens, all of them, are listening to your voice.

Although the taverns have been closed and friends and fellows today
Have, all of them, sealed their lips, and cry out not,

Yet from loyalty long suffering libertines
Will never again drink not save in your memory and your name.

Az Dowlat-e May
Poet: Mehdi Akhavan-Sales
Translators: Philip Grant & Shervin Emami

Wine’s realm bestows upon me tonight another mood
Now laughter on my lips, Now tears in my eyes

Anywhere I wish I leap I shine
Like a butterfly, I have a wing and a feather

O heart, what news with you that tonight you wax madder?
I too have news of the cruelty of your moon

Until the moon reappears—a cry of loneliness
I shall reluctantly share my secrets with the stars.

Yar Amadast
Poet: Salman Savoji
Translators: Philip Grant & Shervin Emami

My soul dances—but has the beloved come?
My eye leaps, truly the time of the visit has come.

Tears come to my eyes, kissing the dust of her path;
On my lips it would seem my soul likewise for this has come.

Until I have seen your good face, the auspicious day I have not seen;
Separated from you, day to me, like night, dark has become.

Though thence a gentle breeze has passed to me,
Up from every vein like claws a hundred piteous cries have come.

Day to my eyes from sorrow like night black has become;
Into my fancy that time of those locks and that visage has come.

If troubles are too much, Salman, go, be a butterfly;
To men have in love great troubles come.
Masters of Persian Music: Three Generations

Persian Classical Music

From high mountain ranges to vast desert plains and fertile coastal areas, Iran is a land of contrasts. Iranians often explain the profound spirituality of their music and poetry as a response to this landscape as well as to the country’s turbulent history, marked by successive invasions from the ancient Greeks onwards. Rooted in a rich and ancient heritage, this is a music of contemplation and meditation which is linked through the poetry to Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam whose members seek spiritual union with God. The aesthetic beauty of this refined and intensely personal music lies in the intricate nuances of the freely flowing solo melody lines, which are often compared with the elaborate designs found on Persian carpets and miniature paintings.

Developed at the royal courts of Iran over many hundreds of years, Persian classical music is of indeterminate age. The sparse documentary record dates it back to the pre-Islamic era before the Arab invasion of 642 AD, and later medieval treatises written during the golden age of Middle Eastern scholarship mention names of pieces that are still performed today, but the extent to which the music has changed over time is not clear.

Until the early 20th century, Persian classical music was largely restricted to the royal courts, but with the declining influence of the monarchy following the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, the music found a new setting in small, informal gatherings at the homes of musicians and aristocratic supporters of the arts. Although still very much a private and elite affair, this marked the beginning of an increasingly public presence, which gained momentum with the arrival of sound recording, broadcasting (Radio Tehran was established in 1939) and European-style public concerts (from the first decade of the 20th century, but regularly from the 1930s onwards). By the 1960s, Persian classical music had become available to a wide audience, but at the same time the growing pace of modernization and Westernization in Iran created a demand for all things Western—including Western music and Western-style Iranian pop, which seemed to be more in tune with people’s increasingly modernized lifestyle—and Persian classical music gradually became sidelined as a minority interest. Many fine classical musicians were performing and recording at this time, but in the context of a society which seemed little interested in its own culture, it is not surprising that many of these musicians became preoccupied with trying to preserve the musical tradition rather than exploring new ways of developing and enriching that tradition. The headlong rush into modernization and Westernization reached crisis point in the late 1970s and eventually culminated in the Revolution of February 1979. One of the most interesting aspects of post-1979 Iran was a “return to roots” reawakening of national consciousness in which Persian classical music played a central role. Such was the popularity of this music that by the mid-1980s—and despite the many religious proscriptions against music-making and the long period of austerity during the Iran-Iraq war—Persian classical music had attracted a mass audience of unprecedented size, with many young people in particular learning the music.

Persian classical music has experienced significant changes over the last 20 years, partly through a new confidence among those musicians willing to explore new musical avenues. The music you will hear tonight is deeply rooted and imbued with a sense of tradition and continuity, but at the same time they speak with a contemporary voice.

The Musical Tradition

Creative performance lies at the heart of Persian classical music. The importance of creativity in this music is often expressed through the image of the nightingale (bol bol). According to popular belief, the nightingale possesses the most beautiful voice on earth and is also said never to repeat itself in song. A bird of great symbolic power throughout the Middle East, the nightingale represents the ultimate symbol of musical creativity. To the extent that Persian classical music lives through the more or less spontaneous re-creation of the traditional repertoire in performance, the music is often described as improvised. The musicians themselves talk freely of improvisation, or bedaheh navazı (literally, “spontaneous playing”), a term borrowed from the realm of oral poetry and which has been applied to Persian classical music since the early years of the 20th century. Musicians are also aware of the concept of improvisation in styles of music outside Iran, particularly in jazz and Indian classical music. But as in so many other “improved” traditions, the performance of Persian classical music is far from “free”—it is in fact firmly grounded in a lengthy and rigorous training which involves the precise memorization of a canonic repertoire known as radif (literally, “order”) and which is the basis for all creativity in Persian classical music.

Like other Middle Eastern traditions, Persian classical music is based on the exploration of short modal pieces: In Iran, these are known as gushehs, and there are 200 or so gushehs in the complete radif. These gushehs are grouped according to mode into 12 modal “systems” called dastgah. A dastgah essentially comprises a progression of modally related gushehs in a manner somewhat similar to the progression of pieces in a Baroque suite. Each gusheh has its own name and its own unique mode (but is related to other gushehs in the same dastgah) as well as characteristic motifs. The number of gushehs in a dastgah varies from as few as five in a relatively short dastgah, such as Dashiri, to as many as 44 or more in a dastgah, such as Mahur. The training of a classical musician essentially involves memorizing the entire repertoire of the radif. Only when the entire repertoire has been memorized—gusheh by gusheh, dastgah by dastgah—a process which takes many years, are musicians considered ready to embark on creative digressions, eventually leading to improvisation itself. So the radif is not performed as such, but represents the starting point for creative performance and composition.

There is very little documentary information before the middle of the 19th century, so the history of the radif is quite speculative. The evidence suggests that for many generations each ostad (master teacher) would have developed his own individual repertoire of pieces based on a broad tradition shared with other musicians. These versions of the traditional repertoire were passed down orally from one generation to the next, each generation developing its own variants. Around the middle of the 19th century, there were moves to standardize the repertoire, and Ali Akbar Farahani (1810–1855), master of tar (plucked lute) at the court of the Qajar monarch Nasser-e Din Shah (c.1848–1896) in Tehran, is credited with organizing the diverse materials of the traditional repertoire into a coherent structure in which modally related pieces (the gushehs) were grouped together into the 12 dastgahs. It was also around this time that this repertoire acquired the name “radif.” Farahani’s work was completed after his death by his son, Mirza Abdullah (1843–1918), and this particular version of the repertoire came to be known as radif-e Mirza Abdullah (“Mirza Abdullah’s radif”). A proficient performer, Mirza Abdullah was also active as a teacher, and was more aware than most musicians of his day of the importance of transmitting the repertoire to the next generation. Many of his numerous pupils became prominent musicians and they, in turn, taught this radif to their own pupils. There are, in fact, a number of different radifs in existence today (including interesting regional variations), mostly rooted in a shared tradition and each one usually associated with the particular master who developed it. Indeed, students of Persian classical music are often expected to learn a number of radifs of different schools (mektab) of with a series of teachers in order to consolidate their musical knowledge. At the same time, in the course of the last century, Mirza Abdullah’s radif (as developed and transmitted, and later recorded and published by his pupils and grand-pupils) attained authoritative status, particularly in the version taught to many contemporary musicians by Ostad Nur Ali Borunam at the University of Tehran in the 1960s and 1970s.

A performance of Persian classical music is usually based in one of the 12 dastgahs (although there is a technique known as monakkhab navazlı by which musicians can move between different dastgahs using shared gushehs as “bridges”). The musician (or musicians in the case of a group performance) selects a number of gushehs from the learned repertoire of the chosen dastgah, and presents these in turn, using each one as the basis for improvised performance. This progression of gushehs takes the music gradually away from the opening “home” mode of the dastgah, through a series of increasingly more
The Poetry

Poetry has played a central role in Iranian culture for centuries. At times when Persian language and identity were under assault, it was poetry in particular which kept the essence of the culture alive. Such a time, still remembered as one of the darkest periods of Iranian history, was the Mongol invasion of the 13th century through which the sufi poet Mowlavi (also known as Jalal-al Din Rumi, 1207–1273) lived. The fact that such a period produced some of the finest poetry in the Persian language but is a testament to the passion with which the culture was maintained against the odds. Moreover, it was through the poetry, particularly that of Mowlavi, that the message of mystical sufism found its most potent voice. With religious proscriptions against music, dance and representational art at various times over the past few centuries, the creative energies of the artistically minded have often found an outlet through poetic expression. It will be no surprise then, to find that an art form so imbued with history and which addresses some of the most fundamental and eternal philosophical issues of human existence, should play such an important role in the lives of Iranians today. Poetry is also central to Persian classical music—it is still unusual to hear a performance without a singer—and vocal sections are usually set to the poetry of medieval mystic poets such as Baba Taher (11th century AD), Sheikh Attar (12th century AD), Mowlavi and Hafez (1325–1389) and, less often, to the words of classical contemporary poets.

Notes by Laudan Nooshin, City University of London, from the CD Without You on World Village label.

Masters of Persian Music features two of Iran’s most important figures in Persian classical music touring with the next generation of musical masters. Following previous sold-out tours, this edition of Masters of Persian Music features Hossein Alizadeh, the tar (plucked lute) maestro who is considered an inspiration to an entire generation of Iran’s musical culture; Kayhan Kalhor, the kamancheh (Persian spiked-fiddle) virtuoso who, through his many musical collaborations, has been instrumental in popularizing Persian music in the West and is a creative force in today’s music scene; and the remarkable young vocalist Hamid Reza Nourbakhsh, leading disciple of the renowned Mohammad Reza Shahjarian, who is touring North America for the first time. They are accompanied by Pezhham Akhavass on percussion, whose unique approach to rhythm and style has gained him recognition as one of the most distinguished and capable players of his generation; Siyamak Jahangiry on ney, who has studied with one of Iran’s most eminent ney players, Mohammad Ali Kiani Nejad; and Rouzbah Rahimi on santur (hammered dulcimer).

The Masters of Persian Music are managed by Opus 3 Artists, 470 Park Avenue South, Ninth Floor, New York, New York 10016.

Hossein Alizadeh is considered an inspiration to an entire generation of Iran’s musical culture. He was born in Tehran in 1951 and has studied with various masters of traditional Persian music including Ali Akbar Khan Shahnazi, Nur Ali Borumand, Abdollah Davami, Mahmoud Karimi and Houshang Zarif. He further expanded his formal education by studying composition and musicology at the University of Berlin. Mr. Alizadeh was awarded a position with the National Orchestra of Iran and later became the conductor and soloist of the Iranian National Radio and Television Orchestra. He founded the Aref Ensemble and performed with the Shyada Ensemble, both dedicated to the promotion and advancement of Iranian classical music. Mr. Alizadeh participated in the orchestra of the Bejart Ballet Company in a performance of Gulistan, by Maurice Bejart. In 2000, the Ministry of Culture in Iran declared him the best contemporary artist. He has composed many works of contemporary and neo-classical Iranian music and published a number of etudes for tar and setar. Notable works include Hesar, Ney Navat and Song of Compassion as well as several film scores such as Gabbeh, A Time for Drunken Horses and most recently Turtles Can Fly. In addition, Mr. Alizadeh has recorded the entire body of the radif based on the interpretation of Mirza Abdollah. He has performed extensively throughout the United States, Europe and Asia and has appeared on many radio and television programs around the world. He has taught at the University of Tehran, the Tehran Music Conservatory and the California Institute of the Arts.

Three-time Grammy Award nominee Kayhan Kalhor is an internationally acclaimed virtuoso on the kamancheh, who through his many musical collaborations has been instrumental in popularizing Persian music in the West and is a creative force in today’s music scene. His performances of traditional Persian music and multiple collaborations have attracted audiences around the globe. He has studied the music of Iran’s many regions, in particular those of Khorasan and Kordestan, and has toured the world as a soloist with various ensembles and orchestras including the New York Philharmonic and the Orchestre National de Lyon. He is co-founder of the renowned ensembles Dastan, Ghazal: Persian & Indian Improvisations and Masters of Persian Music. Mr. Kalhor has composed works for Iran’s most renowned vocalists Mohammad Reza Shahjarian and Shahram Nazeri and has also performed and recorded with Iran’s greatest instrumentalists. He has composed music for television and film and was most recently featured on the soundtrack of Francis Ford Coppola’s Youth Without Youth in a score on which he collaborated with Osvaldo Golijov. In 2004, Mr. Kayhan was invited by composer John Adams to give a solo recital at Carnegie Hall as part of his Perspectives series and in the same year he appeared on a double bill at Lincoln Center’s Mostly Mozart Festival, sharing the program with the Festival Orchestra performing the Mozart Requiem. Mr. Kayhan is a member of Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Project, and his compositions appear on all three of the Ensemble’s albums.

Sightlines

Saturday, February 13, 2010, 7pm, Zellerbach Hall

Pre-performance talk by Francesco Spagnolo, Director of Research, Judah L. Magnes Museum. This Sightlines talk is free to all event ticket holders.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**Hamid Reza Nourbakhsh** is considered one of today’s finest Iranian vocalists. He studied under the supervision of Mohammad Reza Shaharian, a living legend in Iranian classical music. He has performed with renowned artists and groups, including the Shams Ensemble, the Aref Ensemble, the Ukraine Philharmonic Orchestra and the great *santur* maestro Faramarz Payvar. He performed with Kayhan Kalhor at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and is currently the director of Iran’s House of Music.

**Fariborz Azizi** was born in Tehran in 1961. He has performed *tar* and *setar* for more than 30 years. Before devoting himself to classical Persian music, he obtained a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering from Tehran University. He first became attracted to music during his teenage years listening to the radio show Golchin Hafteh. He was heavily influenced by Chavosh musical masters, including Hossein Alizadeh, who has been his master for more than 10 years.

**Siamak Jahangiry** is a rising star in the world of Iranian classical music. Born in northern Iran, he began playing the *nay* at age 12. His learned first from Abdolnaghi Alsharnia before going on to study with Iran’s most eminent *nay* players, primarily with Mohammad Ali Kiani Nejad. He received his degree in music from Tehran University of the Arts and has written a book on the *nay*, its playing techniques in the 20th century and its masters.

**Pezhham Akhavass** was born in 1980 and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in music from Tehran’s Sureh University. He began learning youth music theory under the instruction of Naser Nazar at age five. With the support of his father, Pezhham began studying the *tombak* with the guidance of Naser Farhangfar. He also became acquainted with members of the Masters in Persian Music and performed with them both locally and on tour in Iran and Europe. These masters include Kayhan Kalhor and Hossein Alizadeh.

**Hamidreza Maleki** joins the group for the first time representing the third generation of Masters of Persian Music.