

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: VIOLA FROM IRAN: CONTINUING AND EXPANDING THE TRAJECTORY OF A RICH CULTURAL HISTORY

Kimia Hesabi Amnieh, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2019.

Dissertation directed by: Professor Katherine Murdock, School of Music

The Middle Eastern country of Iran has been home to thousands of years of art, poetry, and music. The history of classical music of Iran can be traced back to 3000 BCE. This rich history has inspired the composition of a vast variety of music in different genres and styles. While there has been some scholarly research on the topic of Iranian classical music, the contemporary music of Iran largely remains an unknown territory to Western audiences. In the current social and political climate in the United States, there is an urgent need to open a new window into Iran through the arts. Most news in the U.S. regarding Iran appears to create a negative image, portraying it as a country that lacks culture, stability, and the desire for peace. Additionally, there is a gap in knowledge about Iran specifically when discussing the arts. This gap exists not only in an academic setting through scholarly work, but also with regard to performing and displaying works by Iranian artists.

This dissertation introduces works composed for viola by Iranian contemporary composers and aims to display a wide range of styles and approaches in contemporary Iranian music. These works include commissions, U.S. premieres and world premieres; some were performed on a recital and some were included in a recording project.

Each chapter of this document highlights one composer and their represented work in this project. The recital and the recording project can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

VIOLA FROM IRAN: CONTINUING AND EXPANDING THE TRAJECTORY
OF A RICH CULTURAL HISTORY

by

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To my husband Emory, and my parents Majid and Shirin: Thank you for your
constant support and love.

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	v
Recital Program.....	1
Recording Project.....	2
Recital and Recording Tracks.....	3
Chapter 1: Alireza Mashayekhi: Sonata for viola and piano, <i>Variant</i>	4
Chapter 2: Gity Razaz: <i>Chance has spoken</i>	10
Chapter 3: Showan Tavakol: <i>Kamalto</i> for viola and voice.....	12
Chapter 4: Bahar Royae: <i>Tombstone</i>	16
Chapter 5: Nima Atrkar-Rowshan: <i>non-moderato</i>	20
Chapter 6: Amin Honarmand: Duet for violin and viola.....	22
Chapter 7: Niloufar Nourbakhsh: <i>Veiled</i> for viola and electronics.....	24
Conclusion.....	27
Appendices.....	29
Bibliography.....	35
Annotated Bibliography.....	37

Introduction

Growing up in Iran, I had the opportunity to be in a musical family that performed and practiced Iranian classical music. My parents are both professional musicians and they were the first to introduce me to the musical heritage of my country.

When I moved to the United States in 2014, I realized that both the knowledge and awareness of the music of my country is quite limited, and its presence is sorely lacking in the western canon. I was often asked many questions about the music of Iran and what is practiced in my country. These questions and my love for this music motivated me to plan performances of Iranian music, and to find ways to showcase the music in the community.

During my Master's degree I was asked to propose an hour-long program of music for viola by Middle Eastern composers as part of my comprehensive exams. This assignment helped me realize that my knowledge of the literature for my instrument from Iran and the Middle East was very limited.

When I started my DMA, I had several conversations with my teacher about my background and culture. She was curious about the classical and contemporary music of Iran and encouraged me to actively think about and research the music of my country. I became more and more interested in finding and performing Iranian music that featured my instrument, and I decided to shape my dissertation project around this topic.

I began contacting several composers whom I knew personally, and through them found a bigger community of Iranian composers across the world. I contacted

these composers via social media, email, and text messaging, and was positively surprised to see their responses. I was able to find more than fifteen works that featured viola in a variety of genres and styles, some from Iranian composers who lived in Iran all of their lives, and others written by composers who had lived outside Iran for a long time. I then started contacting other composers to see if they were willing to write new pieces for my project; eventually I was able to commission four new works for solo viola.

The works I received during the course of this project are fantastic. They showcase a variety of styles and an amazing use of the instrument in diverse and exciting ways. They are unique, beautiful, and challenging; they tell stories and, overall, they represent a fresh new chapter for viola repertoire.

The most exciting part of the process for me was to understand how deeply I love this music. This project made me appreciate it even more. I learned so much from working with composers first hand, and from participating in the creative process of composition. I loved that I was able to talk to composers, or better yet, text them at 10 pm and ask how they wanted a specific note or passage to be performed. I truly learned a lot.

The responsibility that comes with this project is enormous! I have living composers who can tell me what in my playing is working well and what I might try differently, and with each new piece comes a new challenge. More importantly, I am an ambassador for these composers, their music, and for my country.

An important goal of this project is to depict a positive image of my country – one that differs from the standpoint of the current media coverage, and the challenge

of today's political environment. I hope that by performing and recording these works I reach a greater audience, and reintroduce this audience to the diversity and creativity of Iranian composers. The recording portion specifically plays an important role in enacting this goal.

I feel so blessed to have been able to organize this project and to receive such amazing works from an outstanding group of composers. I am extremely excited to have participated in adding these works to the literature of my instrument, and to present them to the viola community and the world.

Recital Program

Performed on April 22, 2019 at 8 PM in Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Sonata for viola and piano
(World premiere)

Alireza Mashayekhi (b.1940)

Ying-Shan Su piano

Chance Has Spoken
For vibraphone and string quartet

Gity Razaz (b.1986)

Emory Hensley, vibraphone
Sandy Choi, violin
Sarit Luban, violin
Erin Snedecor, cello

Tombstone for solo viola

Bahar Royaee (b.1986)

-Intermission-

Kamalto
I. viola and voice
II. solo viola
(U.S. premiere)

Showan Tavakol (b.1979)

Lori Sen, mezzo-soprano

non-moderato
(U.S. premiere)

Nima A Rowshan (b.1985)

Emory Hensley, percussion
Sandy Choi, violin
Ying-Shan Su, piano

Duet for violin and viola
(U.S. premiere)

Amin Honarmand (b.1981)

Myles Mocarski, violin

Recording Project

Session I

Recorded on June 1, 2019 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Kamalto

Showan Tavakol (b.1979)

I. viola and voice

II. solo viola

Lori Sen, mezzo-soprano

Variant for solo viola

Alireza Mashayekhi (b.1940)

Session II

Recorded on August 1, 2019 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Tombstone for solo viola

Bahar Royaee (b.1986)

Session III

Recorded on August 22, 2019 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Veiled for viola and electronics
(Commission)

Niloufar Nourbakhsh (b.1989)

Session IV

Recorded on August 24, 2019 in Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Sonata for viola and piano

Alireza Mashayekhi (b.1940)

Ying-Shan Su, piano

Recital and Recording Tracks

Recital:

- 1- Alireza Mashayekhi, Sonata for viola and piano, I
- 2- Alireza Mashayekhi, Sonata for viola and piano, II
- 3- Alireza Mashayekhi, Sonata for viola and piano, III
- 4- Gity Razaz, *Chance has spoken*
- 5- Bahar Royae, *Tombstone*
- 6- Nima A Rowshan, *non-moderato*
- 7- Amin Honarmand, Duet for violin and viola
- 8- Showan Tavakol, *Kamalto* for viola and voice, I
- 9- Showan Tavakol, *Kamalto* for viola and voice, II

Recording:

- 1- Alireza Mashayekhi, *Variant*
- 2- Bahar Royae, *Tombstone*, I
- 3- Bahar Royae, *Tombstone*, II
- 4- Bahar Royae, *Tombstone*, III
- 5- Showan Tavakol, *Kamalto* for viola and voice, I
- 6- Showan Tavakol, *Kamalto* for viola and voice, II
- 7- Niloufar Nourbakhsh, *Veiled* for viola and electronics
- 8- Alireza Mashayekhi, Sonata for viola and piano, I
- 9- Alireza Mashayekhi, Sonata for viola and piano, II
- 10- Alireza Mashayekhi, Sonata for viola and piano, III

Chapter 1: Alireza Mashayekhi

Sonata for viola and piano, and *Variant for Solo viola*

I met Mr. Mashayekhi at the University of Tehran for the first time in 2009. He was the composition professor, and also taught courses in contemporary music and music theory. I had heard about him long before my arrival at the university, and knew that his music was held in very high regard. He is known for the diverse style of his works and for creativity in his style. I was a student of his in an Introduction to Counterpoint class at the University of Tehran, and remember him as a passionate, fierce, and somewhat intimidating teacher. It was interesting for me to feel the same way about the two works of his that are included in this project. Both of these works were quite challenging and seemed a bit out of reach at first; once I understood Mashayekhi's compositional style more deeply and became more fluent with the works, I grew to sincerely appreciate them.

Mashayekhi is a pioneer in the avant-garde music of Iran. His ideas and works, which have been performed throughout the country and abroad for more than thirty-five years, have greatly influenced Iranian contemporary music. He is one of the first composers of his generation to initiate a new movement in the contemporary music of Iran, and to combine elements of Iranian classical music with twentieth and twenty-first century techniques of composition.

Mashayekhi was born in 1940 in Tehran, and began learning Iranian music under Lotfollah Mofakham-Payan. He studied composition with Hossein Nasehi, and piano under Ophelia Kombajian. He continued his studies in composition at the Akademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Vienna under Hanns Jelinek and

Karl Schiske. His acquaintance with Hanns Jelinek encouraged him to explore a wide spectrum of twentieth century music. These explorations, accompanied by his deep interest in Iranian culture were the cornerstones of his artistic and stylistic development. After completing his studies in Vienna, he went to Utrecht, in the Netherlands to study electronic and computer music. He has been teaching composition at the Music Department of the University of Tehran, Faculty of Fine Arts, since 1970.¹

Mashayekhi has composed numerous works in a variety of instrumentations and styles. Many of his works have been recorded and appear on more than thirty albums produced in Iran and Europe. His other publications include four books and several articles about his own works as well as Iranian contemporary music.

Mashayekhi is the founder of the Iranian Orchestra for Contemporary Music, and a co-founder of the Classic to Contemporary Music Festival in Iran.

Sonata for viola and piano

When I first saw the score of the Sonata for viola and piano I found its notation daunting. I had already received a guide on Mashayekhi's notation, but in order to be able to decipher the score it seemed I had to find clues to solve a puzzle. Even though this piece was written in the nineteen-sixties, I learned from his assistant that I was the first person to perform the sonata, and the work seemed like unknown territory (See appendix 1). As I spent more time with the score, I realized

1. Alireza Mashayekhi, last modified March, 2015, Accessed October 11, 2019. <http://www.alirezamashayekhi.com/en/>.

this style of notation in fact provides a unique and practical approach to playing the work, and I grew to appreciate the effectiveness of his notation technique.

In this piece, Mashayekhi uses several extended techniques for both instruments. Some of these techniques include playing behind the bridge on the viola and covering the strings inside the piano. Both instruments depict a wide range of pitches and colors, and are equally showcased throughout the work.

The rhythmic structure of this work is created in part by experimenting with the concept of time. In several sections of the piece he gives the performer the freedom to hold certain notes for their own desired length, and in other sections he designates specific timing instructions for notes. These rhythmic experiments in pacing and timing give the piece an improvisatory character, while still maintaining a clear overall structure. The improvisatory character is an example of the influence of Iranian classical music in Mashayekhi's work, as improvisation is a vital characteristic of performance practice in Iranian music.

In several sections of the piece, Mashayekhi creates an atmosphere that resembles a dialogue between the two instruments. He incorporates swift rhythmic patterns that flow rapidly between the two instruments, as if one instrument completes or interrupts the other instrument's thoughts.

The contrast of texture resembles another layer of conversation in this piece, a narrative quality that appears throughout the work.

Mashayekhi creates three different characters in the three movements of this work. The first movement begins with a dramatic and melodic introduction in the viola, introducing a key center of D. This introduction comes to a strong closing with

a D chord and is immediately followed by a completely different character in the piano. In this introduction, Mashayekhi explores many colors of viola, setting the mood for a wild journey ahead, like the calm before the storm.

The rest of this movement captures dialogue-like sections between the viola and piano as they challenge each other in conversation, or sometimes appear to fight! The movement ends with a strong and vibrant coda in the viola part, closing on another strong D tonal center, a full circle back to the key of the introduction.

The second movement introduces a serene and mysterious quality. In a way, the beginning of this movement has the calm before the storm character of the first movement's introduction. We hear motives that move around quietly, sounds that seem like they are from another world, and a feeling of timelessness. Any regular sense of time is challenged in this movement with long rests that create moments of suspension.

In this movement, the strings in the lower register of the piano are covered with towels and pasta packages upon the suggestion of the composer. This effect of dampening the piano strings creates a unique timbre in the instrument that resembles the pizzicato effect of the viola. In other sections, the piano part in the lower register accompanies a legato line in the viola and creates a contrasting texture.

The final movement is fierce and ferocious. It includes angular dramatic outbursts, with rapid contrasts in register. The ending of this movement takes us back to the conversations the two instruments have had throughout the work. This time they are both decisive and agile as they bring us to the conclusion. It seems like

the viola wins this fight as it has the last word with its strong and confident pizzicato chord.

Variant for solo viola

In *Variant for solo viola*, Mashayekhi creates melodies, phrases, and motives that are inspired by the classical music of Iran. Improvisation is as a vital aspect of Iranian music, and the ability to incorporate it masterfully and artistically is well respected amongst musicians.² In this piece Mashayekhi writes melodies and flourishes that have an improvisatory character and are stemmed from a simple motif.

Another aspect of this piece that resembles the characteristics of Iranian Classical music is its vocal quality. The melodies and motives in this piece bring to mind the concept of *āvāz*. *āvāz* is the unmetered vocal section of the mode in Iranian music³. Some music theorists define *āvāz* as follows:

āvāz is used to specify the unique rhythmic texture of the non-metric vocal style of Iran. In this sense, instrumental music, which has been developed primarily as accompaniment to the *āvāz* per se, might as well be called *āvāz*, provided that it is executed in non-metric *rubato* style. In particular the term refers to improvised passages following the original vocal style and adapting it into the instrumental version.⁴

Similar to the above description, Mashayekhi writes melodies for viola that are idiomatically and originally vocal. Along with these song-like and vocal qualities, Mashayekhi creates drama and suspense. Themes at times have a serene

². Danielson, Virginia, and Scott Marcus and Dwight Reynolds. *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, vol. 6., s.v. "Radif and Improvisation." London: Routledge, 2001. https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/glnD/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C326926 (accessed October 11, 2019).

³. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol.3, s.v. "Āvāz." <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avaz> (accessed October 11, 2019).

⁴. *Ibid.*

and simple quality and in other parts increase the intensity with a complicated harmonic texture. The contrast in the texture and the mood in various sections of this work conceive a complex formal and structural foundation.

This piece displays a theme and variation form in which the variations grow in complexity, texture, dynamics, and drama. As these variations progress, more layers of drama unfold until we reach a climax in which we face intertwined and rapid chords. This climax is only the beginning of a set of climaxes that lead us to the end, where rapid passages and chords depict a suspenseful and breathtaking conclusion to this piece.

Chapter 2: Gity Razaz

Chance has spoken for string quartet and vibraphone

As I write this chapter I have yet to meet Gity in person. I first heard about her from a dear friend and pianist who knew Gity from the Julliard School, where they both studied. I quickly researched her works and was mesmerized by her compositional style. I contacted her and learned that she has a work for string quartet and vibraphone. I was drawn to this work specifically because it would give me a chance to perform with my husband, who is a percussionist.

Gity has been hailed by the *New York Times* as “ravishing and engulfing,”⁵ and her music ranges from concert solo pieces to large symphonic works. With intense melodies and inventive harmonic languages, Gity’s compositions are often dramatically charged.

Razaz’s music has been commissioned and performed by the Washington National Opera, Seattle Symphony, Ballet Moscow, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, National Sawdust, National Ballet School of Canada, Chautauqua Opera Company, and cellist Inbal Segev, among many others.

Gity describes this piece and her compositional style as follows:

“*Chance has Spoken* for string quartet and vibraphone was commissioned by the New York Choreographic institute in 2011 for a contemporary ballet created by Choreographer Robert Binet. As an original ballet score, the piece—as well as the dance accompanying it—is purely abstract. In general my music tends to be highly dramatic as I strive to create clear trajectories through expansive lyricism, inventive harmonies and unpredictable arrival points. Throughout the collaboration, my choreographer and I came up with an abstract structure for the project that follows a clear dramatic arc while still maintaining a certain level of freedom for the listener’s

⁵.Steve Smith, “A Night of Acoustic and Electronic Exploits,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2011.

personal interpretation.”⁶

When I first heard *Chance has spoken*, I became instantly attracted to its beautiful and soulful melodies. The way the textures unfold in this piece and the contrast of color between the strings and vibraphone creates a magical experience for me.

⁶. Gity Razaz, e-mail message to author, April 5, 2019.

Chapter 3: Showan Tavakol

Kamalto for viola and voice

My first encounter with Showan's piece was through Instagram. I was scrolling through my feed when I saw a short clip of this piece. I was instantly fascinated by the dazzling melodies of this piece and by its folk-like character. I contacted Showan right away and received the score shortly after. Both my collaboration with Showan and working on this piece have been so rewarding, and *Kamalto* has a special place in my heart.

Born in Tehran, Showan Tavakol is the Artistic Co-Director of the Kamaan Ensemble, in which he is also a composer and performer. The focus of the ensemble is performing and showcasing contemporary Iranian music. Showan has appeared as a soloist and chamber *kamancheh* (Iranian bowed string instrument) player in Iran and Canada.

Showan holds a Bachelors and a Master of Music degree in performance of the *kamancheh* from the University of Tehran. After settling in Quebec, Canada in 2015, he obtained a master's degree in instrumental composition from the Université de Montréal, co-supervised by Ana Sokolovic and François-Hugues Leclair. Showan's interest in exploring meeting points in Western and Middle-Eastern music has been a theme in his compositions.⁷

In the title of *Kamalto*, Showan has cleverly combined the two words, *kamancheh* and *alto* (French for viola) to show his vision for creating a combination of the two instruments. His goal in composing this piece was to showcase Iranian

⁷. Showan Tavakol, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2019.

fiddling techniques through viola. To reach this goal he writes the piece for *scordatura* viola, where the two lower strings (G, C) are tuned a step higher (A, D) in order to match the tuning of the kamancheh.

Showan uses elements such as microtones, *sul ponticello* (playing near the bridge), *sul tasto* (playing near the fingerboard), and specific ornaments to bring Iranian fiddling characteristics into this piece. His use of meter gives the piece a very energetic and bohemian character.

According to Showan, in the first movement of the piece written for viola and voice, the role of the viola is to respond to each phrase of the voice part. This is directly influenced by the Iranian technique, *Javab-e-Avaz* (literally translated “the response to singing”), where the vocalist sings a phrase of music and other instruments respond to it by repeating, imitating, and evolving that phrase in an improvised manner (see appendix 2).⁸

The text of the first movement is comprised of the opening verses of the *Mathnavi* by Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī, known also as Rumi.⁹ Rumi was a thirteenth century poet, scholar and Sufi mystic in Iran and had a great influence on the spiritual and literary life of the Islamic lands. Rumi’s *Mathnavi*, a long poem demonstrating his mystical teachings, has been called “the Persian Quran”, and has inspired thinkers and poets across the globe.¹⁰ The *Mathnavi* contains six volumes of poetic tales, anecdotes, and stories that are derived from or inspired by the Quran and other Islamic or Sufi resources. The main theme in the beginning verses of this

⁸. *Ibid.*

⁹. Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), xi.

¹⁰. *Ibid.*

poetic masterpiece is the human soul, symbolically referred to as the *nay* (Iranian wind instrument).¹¹ A text translation of the first verse is as follows:

Now listen to this reed-flute's deep lament
About the heartache being apart has meant:
'Since from the reed-bed they uprooted me
My song's expressed each human's agony,
A breast which separation's split in two
Is what I seek, to share this pain with you:
When kept from their true origin, all yearn
For union on the day they can return.
Amongst the crowd, alone I mourn my fate,
With good and bad I've learnt to integrate,
That we were friends each one was satisfied
But none sought out my secrets from inside;
My deepest secrets in this song I wail
But eyes and ears can't penetrate the veil....¹²

The manner in which the voice and the viola part meet in this movement depicts the true essence of Iranian *āvāz*, a feeling of listening to the wise words of a Sufi (voice) and responding to it with deep admiration (viola). The ending of this movement displays a flourishing passage in the viola part that evokes the feeling of a Sufi dance, twirling and spinning to a graceful end.

In the second movement, written for solo viola without voice, Tavakol has used elements and techniques inspired by Iranian traditional fiddling. The uses of two Iranian modes or *Dastgâh* in this movement create an authentic Middle Eastern sound palette. The intervals, phrase structure, and the rhythmic energy give the piece a strongly ethnic character, and the fiddling qualities bring a virtuosic essence to the

¹¹.Rumi, Jalau'din, Reynold A Nicholson, ed. *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi* (London: Luzac and Co., 1925), 5.

¹². Rumi, Jalal Al-din, Javid Mojaddedi, ed. *The Masnavi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

piece. Showan has created an atmosphere where Eastern and Western traditions meet and give way to a truly new sound-world.

Chapter 4: Bahar Royae

Tombstone for solo viola

Bahar is among the composers I have met through social media and through other composer friends. We connected over a phone call where we talked to each other for the first time for over an hour, both feeling as if we had known each other for a long time. Bahar's piece is remarkably different from any piece I have ever played. She explores colors in the instrument that deviate greatly from our idiomatic expectations for viola. The concept that she has created here gives the performer a great deal of freedom in making artistic choices, yet also provides a solid ground for these choices to come to life in the best way possible.

Bahar was born and raised in Iran. She describes her compositions as a mixture of timbral and sound-based atmospheric structures, interspersed with lyrical influences derived from her Iranian background.¹³

Bahar recently received the Pnea award, to make a fixed media piece for Claire Chase. She was also recognized as a runner-up in National Sawdust's 2018-19 Hildegard Competition. Her works have been performed worldwide, including Italy, Greece, Germany, Canada, Iran, and the U.S. She received her Master's degree in composition from the Boston Conservatory, where she studied with Dr. Marti Epstein and Dr. Felipe Lara. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at CUNY where she studies with Suzanne Farrin and Jason Eckardt.

Bahar composed *Tombstone* for solo viola in October, 2017. This piece is based on a poem by Iranian contemporary poet, Yadollah Royae. He has a

¹³. Bahar Royae, e-mail message to author, April 10, 2019.

collection of poems around the theme of Death. Each poem is an imagination of a Tombstone for a fictional or real person¹⁴. This piece is based on the following poem:

*A Tombstone for "Simin":
... and I saw the "death" as a child,
running, exhaustedly, away
from the death.¹⁵*

In describing her piece, Bahar writes:

There are sounds in the horizon; and in the horizon of sound is silenced noise. Tombstone is about Death as a child, who runs away from herself. It tries to deconstruct that noise with the viola's "known-unknown" timbres, and reconstruct the horizon with repetition, embracement of the body and deployment of errors. Tombstone is made economical by its materials. In each movement, the piece develops specific timbres through repetition. The repetitions are in gestures. Dear Musician! The primary importance of performing this piece is you transporting the known-unknown sounds to their horizon with your own inner time. You make the space by relating your inner sense of time to the external measurable time. There is no perfection. Embrace the errors in synchronization with "real" time. Let the timbres develop within your own sense of timing. The notation of the piece needs personal realization. It needs deciphering. Spend some time with this child. Try to practice the gestures mentally away from the instrument, then the gestures in isolation, and then string together the phrases. Familiarize your inner time and your viola's known-unknown with the death in the poetry. Then they get presented as one continual, durational span that reaches the horizon through a gradual process of metamorphosis.¹⁶

Tombstone consists of three movements. The first movement generally explores the high register of the instrument in the area between the end of the fingerboard and the bridge. Bahar uses a hand-drawn score, showing the placement of the left hand fingers on each string, where specific harmonic partials are created. These partials are usually played with a *tremolando* in the bow, performed with varying speeds (see appendix 3).

¹⁴. *Ibid.*

¹⁵. *Ibid.*

¹⁶. *Ibid.*

The use of this high range is not idiomatic to the instrument and creates unique colors and sounds; the contrast between the high register and the *forte* open C strings (the lowest pitch in the instrument's range) generate a surprise effect throughout the movement. The high-pitched effects and the tremolos create an eerie atmosphere, similar to the feeling of walking alone at night in a graveyard, or as the poem reads, "running...away from the death".

In the second movement, Bahar explores different bow speeds, contact points (different locations from the bridge to /on the fingerboard), tremolo speeds and white-noise *glissandi*. The movement begins with a strong quick gesture, created by playing with the bow behind the bridge. It then continues with whispering gliding notes, resembling ghost-like sounds.

The second half of the movement brings a contrasting character with strong, fast and wild *pizzicato* notes, asymmetrically interrupting the rapid virtuosity of bowed passages across the fingerboard. The movement ends with a *pianissimo* gliding note on the G-string, accompanied by repeated left hand *pizzicato* on the open C-string. This sound fades to nothing, as the movement comes to an end.

The final movement is a study in contrasting moments where gentle open D-strings are met with wild, strong, dissonant noises. These sounds are created by playing trilled double-stops with different bow and left hand finger pressures. The final measures are Bahar's depiction of death. Like one final exhalation, the viola plays the quietest notes of this movement with the least amount of bow and finger pressure. The end of this movement returns full circle to its beginning; the open D

string reappears from the opening of the movement, depicting death or, in a sense, a rebirth – the circle of life.

Chapter 5: Nima Atrkar-Rowshan

non-moderato for violin, viola, piano, percussion

I became familiar with Nima and his works through a violist friend who had performed several of his pieces. I watched a recording of Nima's *non-moderato* on YouTube and was extremely interested in the ways he had utilized each instrument. This piece is another example of an unexpected sound world, one that is not necessarily idiomatic to the instruments used in the work. It is remarkable for its rhythmic drive, as well as a raw and primal sense of metric activity.

Born in 1985 in Iran, Nima began studying music at a young age. He studied at the Art University of Tehran under Hamed Mohajer and took composition lessons with Alireza Mashayekhi. In 2006 he co-founded Ensemble-M, a contemporary music group in Iran. Nima later moved to France to study at the École Normal de Musique de Paris under the tutelage of Michel Merlet. In 2011 Nima's work "Silence-Rest" was part of an album of the same name, released on Hermes Records in Tehran.¹⁷

Written for violin, viola, piano, and percussion, *non-moderato* is from a set of works titled "non-music". In this set Nima has created works that aim to break away from "traditions" of classical music. He states that he wants to create pieces in this set that sound "non-musical" according to the standards of Western classical music. In his performance notes he invites performers to play "as non-musically as possible".¹⁸

¹⁷. Nima Atrkar-Rowshan, e-mail message to author, April 11, 2019.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Nima creates two separate aural atmospheres by dividing the instruments into two groups. One atmosphere consists of the robust, driving rhythmic character of the violin, viola, and percussion; the other consists of the soft, Debussy-like sound of the piano. Generally the role of the piano is to bring peace and quiet to the wild world of the other instruments. Initially there are longer sections of wildness that are answered by the soft and lyrical melody of the piano, but as the piece progresses these sections become shorter. The rude interruptions of the strings and percussion become more frequent, elevating the excitement level and exaggerating the stark contrast of the two disparate sound worlds.

Chapter 6: Amin Honarmand

Duet for violin and viola

Dr. Honarmand is another teacher that I met while studying at University of Tehran. His knowledge of and passion for contemporary music both in his teaching and in his compositions has always been inspirational. His Duet for violin and viola was particularly exciting for me to discover as Dr. Setareh Beheshti, my former viola teacher at University of Tehran was the first to perform it in Iran in 2015.

Dr. Amin Honarmand was born in Tehran, Iran. He received his bachelor's degree in classical music from the University of Tehran, and completed his graduate studies at the University of Toronto. His teachers include Chan Ka Nin, Alexander Rapoport, Christos Hatzis (composition and orchestration), Ryan McClelland and Mark Sallmen (analysis), and Dennis Patrick (electroacoustic music). Honarmand's compositions have been performed by different ensembles and orchestras in Canada, the United States, and Iran. He has won several awards including second place in the Nightingale Scoring Challenge, Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra call for scores, Jam-e-Jam festival as well as the Theodoros Mirkopoulos and Lothar Klein Fellowships in composition at the University of Toronto. In addition to composing, Honarmand is also active as a writer, and his recent book, *Introduction to Analysis of Atonal Music* has been published by the University of Tehran publications (2014). Dr. Honarmand is an assistant professor of composition at the University of Tehran, where he teaches composition, orchestration and analysis.¹⁹

¹⁹. Amin Honarmand, last modified March 3, 2011. Accessed October 11, 2019. <http://www.aminhonarmand.com/>.

In his Duet for violin and viola, Honarmand combines melodies that are characteristically Middle Eastern with compositional tools of Western classical music. The result is a synergy of unique colors and harmonies throughout the piece. The main theme in this piece, displayed by both instruments at different sections, is directly influenced by the Iranian mode *Chahargah* (see appendix 4).

In Iranian music there are twelve modes or *dastgāhs*, each with an attached series of melodies referred to as *gushes*.²⁰ The mode or *dastgāh* of *Chahargah* differs from the other modes in its distinct tonal and melodic characteristics and in the melodic structure of its *gushes*. These attributes make this *dastgāh* easily recognizable.²¹

Honarmand incorporates this mode creatively in the duo; he avoids a sound that is exclusively “Iranian”, but rather displays a mood that is tastefully authentic and pleasantly approachable.

The rhythmic energy and drive of the piece is created by the motoric eighth-note line that accompanies the main melody each time it appears throughout the piece. This propulsive line adds tension to the music as it evolves. The lively themes alternate between the two instruments to create an intense and exciting dialogue.

The ending of the work is blazing and impassioned, wild and intense. The two instruments take us on a journey that concludes with a dramatic climax of all the moods we have experienced throughout this work.

²⁰. Bruno Nettl, *The radif of Persian Music: Studies of Structure and Cultural Context in the Classical Music of Iran* (Champaign, Illinois: Elephant & Cat, 1992), 41.

²¹. *Ibid.*

Chapter 7: Niloufar Nourbakhsh

Veiled for viola and live electronics

Niloufar and I connected through social media when I learned of the Iranian Female Composers Association and their activities. I was so excited to hear that a group of trailblazing composers had teamed up to showcase the music of Iran. Niloufar was extremely helpful in connecting me to the other members of the group, and I have deeply enjoyed our collaboration. I had an instant connection to Niloufar's piece, and found its style both refreshing and original.

Niloufar is the winner of the second Hildegard Competition, and recipient of the 2019 Female Discovery Grant from Opera America. Nourbakhsh's music has been commissioned and performed by Symphony Number One, Spark and Echo Project, Women Composers Festival of Hartford, PUBLIQuartet, Forward Music Project, Calidore String Quartet, Cassatt String Quartet, Akropolis Reed Quintet, and Ensemble Connect.²²

A founding member and co-director of the Iranian Female Composers Association, Nourbakhsh is a strong advocate of music education. Niloufar was a Global Citizen Scholarship recipient of Goucher College, as well as a Mahoney and Caplan Scholar from the University of Oxford.²³

In her piece *Veiled*, Niloufar combines live and pre-recorded electronics to create a particular sound world for the viola. This through-composed work features beautiful singing melodies along with distinctive sound and special effects.

²². Niloufar Nourbakhsh, last modified September 17, 2018, accessed October 11, 2019. <https://niloufarnourbakhsh.com/>.

²³. *Ibid.*

In the beginning section of the work, the viola plays a sliding *glissando* note up and down the fingerboard that is picked up by a contact microphone and transformed with the live electronics. This note then is replaced by a whispering theme in the high register of the instrument.

In the middle of the piece the live electronics are combined with a pre-recorded file. This recorded file includes a female voice that sings a tune taken from Iranian modes. The viola accompanies and imitates the recorded line with varying effects, such as *pizzicato*, *glissandi*, and *sul ponticello*. The mix of the viola sound, the pre-recorded file, and the live electronics result in a mystical and compelling atmosphere.

This section continues with the pre-recorded voice and the viola, as they both ascend into higher pitches and stronger dynamics. The viola part explores evolving slides on the A string that suggest an explosive quality, and appear more rapidly as we approach the ending. The piece concludes with an abrupt *pizzicato* chord that stops the pre-recorded file at its strongest dynamic point. This sudden stop in all the live and pre-recorded files creates a surprising and eerie effect.

Throughout *Veiled*, the initiation of each new section is activated by the performer; this is done, using an electronic pedal which is connected to the computer generating the electronic files. This creates a challenge for the performer; it demands high levels of coordination as one faces not only the typical technical and musical challenges of executing the piece on the instrument, but also synchronizing the specific timings and initiations of each section with the electronic pedal (see appendix 5).

The underlying theme in this piece depicts an image of the life of Iranian female vocalists who are banned from singing in public under the country's current administration. The female voice in this piece represents the voice of all women in Iran; singing for peace, for freedom, and simply for the sake of singing.

Conclusion

An important goal of this project has been to reintroduce the music of Iran to a greater audience and to show that this country goes beyond its negative portrait in the politics and the media.

By performing the repertoire from this project in various venues I have been able to present it to audiences from different backgrounds and culture. The conversations I have had with the audiences, their curiosity about the works, and their feedback has been illuminating. Most have been surprised to hear the diverse range of colors, sounds, and styles of composition in these works, and have mentioned they have not heard pieces similar to them. Some admitted that they never realized Iran had a contemporary music scene, female composers, or electronic music. Comments such as these have shown me that I am reaching my goal – I am reintroducing them to my country, a home to great music and great musicians, just like many other countries in the world.

I believe that my project does not end with this dissertation; it will continue and evolve through more performances and especially with my recording project. I aim to reach an even greater audience with the recording portion, potentially across the world. I hope that these recordings will reach listeners from a wide variety of backgrounds, from professional musicians to music lovers and amateur performers, from people who know Iran well to others who know little about the country.

I have been able to commission three new works as I write this document, which I hope to perform and record very soon. My goal is to continue searching for

other pieces by Iranian composers, and to commission, perform, and record more works in the near future.

Appendices

The following images are used with permission from the composers.

- 1- This example is taken from the second page of the first movement of Sonata for viola and piano composed by Alireza Mashayekhi.

Handwritten musical score for the first system. The top staff is for Viola (Viola) and the bottom two staves are for Piano (Piano). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *poco f* and a tempo marking of *ff*. The Viola part features a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The Piano part features a bass line with a dynamic marking of *pp*. A box containing the number '15' is present in the Viola part.

Handwritten musical score for the second system. The top staff is for Viola (Viola) and the bottom two staves are for Piano (Piano). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score features dynamic markings of *ff*, *mf*, and *ppf*. The Viola part includes a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *ppf*. The Piano part includes a bass line with a dynamic marking of *ppf*. A box containing the number '15' is present in the Viola part.

Handwritten musical score for the third system. The top staff is for Viola (Viola) and the bottom two staves are for Piano (Piano). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score features dynamic markings of *ff*, *pp*, and *ff*. The Viola part includes a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The Piano part includes a bass line with a dynamic marking of *ff*. A box containing the number '15' is present in the Viola part.

2- *Kamalto* for viola and voice composed by Showan Tavakol.

Kamalto
1er mouvement

La partition a été écrite en son transformé pour Alto

Basée sur la poésie de Rumi (1297)

SCHWAN TAVAKOL

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-5) features a voice part in 3/4 time with a tempo marking of ♩=82 and a dynamic of *p*. The lyrics are "A... hä hä hé... hä hä hé". The alto part is in scordatura (3/4 time) with dynamics *pp* and *p*, and includes performance instructions "sul pont." and "sul tasto". The second system (measures 6-12) features a voice part with a dynamic of *mf* and a tempo marking of ♩=82. The lyrics are "ä hä... ä hä hé_hä... hä- héi amän eydäd...". The alto part has a dynamic of *pp* and *p*. The third system (measures 13-17) features a voice part with a tempo marking of "sans tempo, libre" and a dynamic of *mp*. The lyrics are "Bésch -no az... néy... tchune hé -kä... ya_ t". The alto part has a dynamic of *mp* and includes a "gliss." marking.

18

Voix  *mi-i-i-i* ko - nad. vaz jo-dä i *gliss.* hä ché-kä


Alt. 


23

Voix  *ya t mi ko - nad a häy da hä hä hé hä y*

Alt. 

28 $\text{♩} = 82$

Voix  *ä hä- hä ä*

Alt.  *arco II-III*

p <

32

Voix 

Alt.  *En alternant ré (quart ton) vers la corde vide*

pp

3- This example is taken from the first page of the first movement of *Tombstone* for solo viola composed by Bahar Royae.

The image displays a handwritten musical score for solo viola, consisting of three systems. Each system includes a staff for dynamics and fingering, a staff for notes and rests, and a staff for fingerings. The score is written on blue-lined paper and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

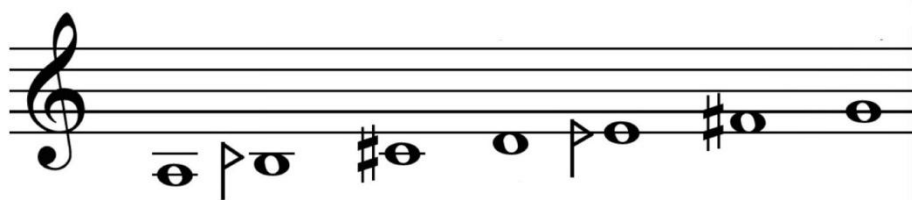
System 1: The first system starts with a circled '1' and a vertical bar line. It features a dynamic staff with markings for pp , f , pp , f , pp , mf , p , mf , f , mf , mp , and mf . The note staff shows chords and single notes with stems. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4.

System 2: The second system begins with a circled '2'. Its dynamic staff includes mf , f , pp , ff , f , mf , mp , f , and ff . The note staff continues with complex chordal textures and single notes.

System 3: The third system starts with a circled '3'. The dynamic staff shows f , mf , pp , sfz , ff , sfz , ff , f , and mf . This system includes more complex chordal structures and some triplets.

The score concludes with a circled '1' at the bottom right corner.

4- The following example shows the beginning section of the mode of *Chahargah*. The beginning section of each mode is called *Daramad*. The second and fifth notes of the mode as shown in the picture, have to be played a quarter of step lower.



For an audio example of this mode, use the following link.

<http://en.pish-radif.com/pish-radif/homayun/dastgah-e-chahargah/>

5- The following example is taken from the first page of *Veiled* by Niloufar Nourbakhsh. The performer of this piece needs the following material:

- A computer with the Max software installed
- Pedal for activating the electronics from the software
- Contact microphone attached to the body of the viola

Score

Veiled

for Kimia Hesabi

Niloufar Nourbakhsh

Score

Veiled

for Kimia Hesabi

Niloufar Nourbakhsh

Viola

① ON

② OFF

$\text{♩} = 60 - 66$
Sul. Pont.

V. 6

③ Phaser Activation

*pp*³ *p* *mf*

p *mf* *f* *pp* *mp*³

V. 11

f *p* *mf* *ff*

V. ④ Cellist sings the C#

pp *N.*

⑤ ON Tap emphasis on C#, A-rhythmic

Contact Mic Bow

⑥ OFF

FM. 16

p *mf*

V. 22

MicroTonal on all repeated C# notes

Sul. Pont. ($\text{♩} = \text{♩} \cdot \text{.}$) Normal

p

FM. 22

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Nettl's book explores the background, structure, and details of the *Radif* (the modes, scales, and melodic structure) in Iranian classical music. He includes information about the origins and resources of the *Radif*, its literature, and its different versions. He offers detailed information about each *Dastgāh* and its relative *Gushes*.

Rumi, Jalal Al-din, Mojaddedi, Javid, ed. *The Masnavi*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Mojaddedi has translated the text of the *Masnavi* and has provided historical background to Rumi's life. The translation reads easily and offers clear explanation of the text in a rhymed manner.

Rumi, Jalalu'ddin, Nicholson, Reynold A, ed. *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*. London: Luzac and Co., 1925.

Nicholson uses the oldest manuscript available of Rumi's *Mathnawi* as his resource and offers critical notes, translations, and commentary on its text. The first volume of this book includes the Farsi text and the second volume offers the English translation.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *The Triumphal Sun : A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Schimmel provides a detailed background of Rumi's life and his career. She includes information on Rumi's imagery, his theology, and his influence on eastern and western culture.