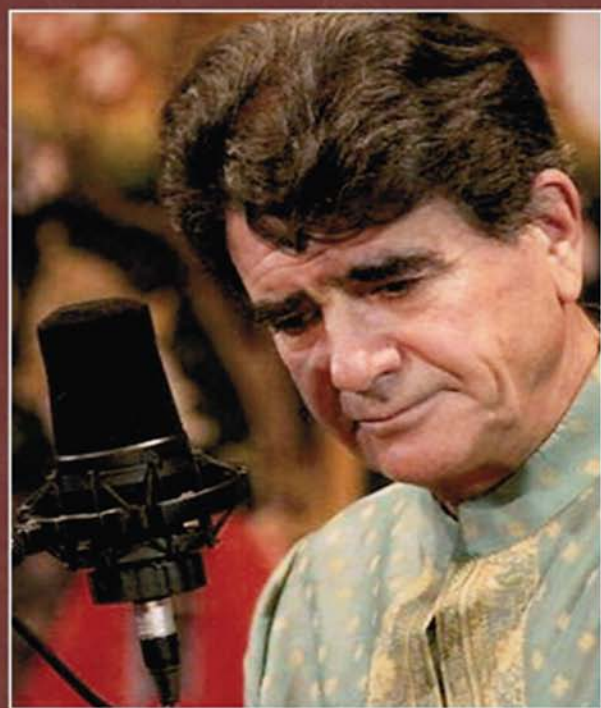


MOHAMMAD
REZA SHAJARIAN'S
AVAZ IN IRAN
AND BEYOND,
1979–2010



ROB SIMMS and AMIR KOUSHKANI

Mohammad Reza Shajarian's Avaz in
Iran and Beyond, 1979–2010

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*Dedicated to
the spirit and freedom
of the people of Iran*

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Preface

This book is the second volume of a three-part study that examines the music and public profile of Mohammad Reza Shajarian as a major artist and figure through the late-twentieth/early-twenty-first century. The first volume, *The Art of Avaz and Mohammad Reza Shajarian: Foundations and Contexts* (Simms and Koushkani 2012) examines Shajarian's musical biography up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 while sketching out the broader context of the tradition of avaz that he inherited. The latter domain includes the following topics and issues: the aesthetic of *iham* or the polysemous quality exploited in poetry and other areas of Iranian culture; the history of avaz; tradition, modernity, and the role of the individual in Iranian culture; Iranian traditions of narrative performance, along with the concomitant activities of rhetoric and "truth-telling." The first volume also contains a detailed examination of Shajarian's creative "toolkit," the materials and processes he engages while weaving together poetry and music into a performance of avaz. The present volume focuses on Shajarian's activities, oeuvre of recordings, and sociopolitical significance in the postrevolutionary period—his ascendancy to national superstar status and an increasingly global presence—while sketching out and placing him within the larger context of Iranian musical culture. The third component of the study is a collection of transcriptions of the complete performances of Shajarian's avaz from his most important albums (Simms 2012), which are discussed in detail in the present volume.

This book picks up the historical-biographical trajectory of the first volume and continues in the "trialogue" format of the latter. Each of the topics and headings that form the narrative flow of the book are directly expounded upon from the very different perspectives and subjective experiences of the artist, the cultural insider, and the ethnomusicologist. Our voices are clearly differentiated and identified through the use of contrasting fonts and the inclusion of our respective initials at the opening of individual statements:

OS: Ostad Shajarian

AK: Amir Koushkani

RS: Rob Simms

Details and the rationale for employing this style of presentation, along with conventions of transliteration and italicization in the text are given in the Preface of the first volume. Likewise, the specific multidisciplinary approach described in the latter carries over to the present volume. All translations of poetry in this book are by Camran Chaichian, Amir Koushkani, and Rob Simms, unless otherwise specified. As noted in the previous volume, Amir Koushkani's personal word-painting glosses, which figure prominently in this book, retranslate selected lines in explicating a particular layer of *ihām*. Translations of Ostad Shajarian's interviews were again primarily crafted by Mahmood Schricker, with occasional contributions by Amir Koushkani and Rob Simms. Due to restrictions of space, this book only includes short excerpts of transcription from the Performance Examples of Chapters 2 and 3. Complete transcriptions of the excerpts discussed in the text, along with the complete comparative transcription of the two alternate performances of *Dastan* discussed in Chapter 3, are posted online at www.yorku.ca/robsimms/shajarian.

The authors again extend their sincere thanks to Camran Chaichian, Jean During, Christy de Felice, Teymour Dowlatshahi, Jim Kippen, Irene Markoff, Pari Azarm Motamedi, Mansour Motamedi, Bruno Nettel, Hossein Omoumi, Ehsan Ovisi, Valorie Salimpoor, Homayoun Shajarian, Vladimir Simosko, Mahmood Schricker, Urszula Starzec, and Shahrokh Tuisrkani and his family, with special thanks to Shabnam Ataei. Our ultimate and deepest thanks go to Ostad Shajarian.

Chapter 1

Revolution, War, and Music

RS

Centering on 1979 and the decade of the 1980s this chapter deals with phase transitions¹ and chaos on multiple levels: Iranian politics (both domestic and international), culture, musical life and mediation, as well as Shajarian's consciousness through his meetings with Ostad Dadbeh, and how this changed his music. Shajarian's reaction to the Islamic Revolution, the huge adjustments he had to make in the chaotic and dangerous new order combined with a heightened spiritual and social awareness, the accumulative musical knowledge he had acquired, and the optimum balance of strength and maturity in his vocal mechanism all contributed to establishing his mature, "trademark" style and resulted in a remarkable series of albums (discussed in chapter 2) that were to become landmark recordings in the history of avaz in the late twentieth century, as well as issuing major socio-political statements.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the political and historical events of the revolution itself before describing the radically different musical culture that followed from its ideology and bureaucracy. Shajarian's musical activities are outlined against this background of repressive measures, the new medium of cassettes, important innovations in musical style of the 1980s, modes of musical resistance, shifts in scholarly discourse, and the ways in which Persian music actually benefitted from this otherwise hostile environment.

The Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

Shajarian's most significant musical statements were made in the 1980s, a tumultuous decade in Iran forged by the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The following brief historical discussion of these monumental events is provided for

the benefit of those readers unfamiliar with the history, especially in view of the systemic lack of attention and transparency symptomatic of Western media and public education.

In a century full of revolutions occurring around the globe, the 1979 Islamic Revolution stands out for the prominent function that music played in both reflecting and activating ideology, resistance, and values both collective and individual. In a revolution full of intrinsic contradictions and paradoxes²—suspended between the polar dynamics of pre-Islamic and Islamic national identity, democracy and authoritarian theocracy, revolutionary and reactionary values, multiple political factions with opposing agendas, and a constitution riddled with deep structural contradictions—the historically ambiguous position and conception of music was an apt microcosmic attractor in the chaotic period that followed. As with much of the vast historical and conceptual baggage attached to the *samā'* polemic,³ this is largely due to “music’s semiotic complexity and semantic richness, its capacity to simultaneously symbolize many things and to embody different meanings. This mercurial quality clearly enables musicians and others to choose between a wide range of possible meanings: by the same token, the fluidity of those meanings militates against any attempt to fix and thereby control them” (Nooshin 2005: 262). In a word, music’s intrinsic *ihām*.⁴ Twentieth-century revolutions for the most part bear witness to the futility, if not outright disaster, of rigid authoritarian cultural engineering, the synthetic ramparts of which eventually collapse under the spontaneous flow of human activity and needs for expression. While the Islamic Revolution has been sagging under its own weight for decades, the unmistakable boost given to Persian music in its wake stands in stark contrast to these doomed case histories. Spontaneous cultural responses combined with official state policies employing both carrot and stick to revalue and reinvigorate Persian music, particularly among young people, who became engaged as listeners, students, and inspired performers in their own right. By now other signs of creative stifling, fatigue, and vacuity are apparent but in the 1980s the scene was very dynamic and vital.

The general contours of the revolution are well known.⁵ The longstanding, sustained imperialist interventions of France, Britain, Russia, and the United States interspersed with brief fits of national consolidation and democratization play key defining roles throughout the modern history of Iran. The 1925 implosion of the dysfunctional Qajar dynasty (the culture from which contemporary Persian music emerged) dovetails with the increased intervention of Western oil interests, political manoeuvring and intrigue, resulting in the authoritarian modernization of Reza Shah. A brief period of democratic advance is stymied by an American-British sponsored coup in 1953 against Mohammad Mossadegh, who was intent on nationalizing Iranian oil concessions, resulting in the reinstatement of the exiled Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who henceforth functioned as Washington’s policeman in West Asia and its most reliable supplier of oil.

The Shah increasingly created popular discontent through his policies of modernization, Westernization (locally referred to as “Westoxification”), ruthless authoritarianism, the widening of the income gap, along with his personal conspicuous consumption, and delusional self-aggrandizement. His land policies in dealing with the massive influx of migrant workers from rural areas to Teheran were disastrous (Saunders 2010). He specifically targeted the popular Shi’a clergy with repressive measures, systematically eroding their power. These fatal miscalculations and the general dissent they created culminated in the revolution of early 1979, the Shah’s eventual exile, and the subsequent assumption of power by the charismatic Aytollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The driving force of the revolution was social—it united diverse, multiclass groups across Iranian society in common opposition to the Shah—but quickly veered into being conceived as Islamic (Khiabany 2008: 28; Abazari 2008: 239). The United States experienced serious “blowback” from their sustained covert manipulation of Iranian politics in the form of the hostage crisis that began in November 1979, whereby American embassy staff were held hostage for 444 days, while files were opened to the Iranian public revealing the vast scale of America’s machinations.

Early revolutionary democratization was cut short by the onset of the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980, which critics such as Dabashi consider a “U.S. invasion of Iran camouflaged in the form of the Iraqi army” (2005: 299n21). The ruthless policy of euphemistic “Dual Containment” during this war—in which the U.S., France, and Israel supplied both sides with illegal arms sales to prolong a brutal stalemate in the trenches reminiscent of World War I, killing over one million people—unwittingly helped consolidate the revolution and unify the country through a natural reflex of closing ranks. While the revolution brought massive changes to Iranian society, the war with Iraq was an equally powerful and strategically related shaping force throughout the 1980s. Throughout the decade the tenor (and terror) of daily life ebbed and flowed with the vicissitudes of the war, effecting a rollercoaster ride of emotional madness and material deprivation. Tehran was regularly targeted with devastating Scud missile attacks. Successes and failures on the front translated into parallel civilian spheres, resulting in an overall instability and psychologically ravaged home front throughout the marathon struggle, which was further compounded by the ever shifting revolutionary political ground. This deep duress and instability is the most essential “social context” to be kept in the forefront of any view of the recordings of Shajarian examined in this book.

Still, giants of Iranian music, like Hossein Alizadeh and . . . Mohammad Reza Lotfi, went to the front to perform their own music for the troops. As the war ground on, many young talents died, among them technicians, poets and musicians who might have continued the Chavosh movement [discussed below] or changed the direction of musical production. Instead, the normal development of this movement was arrested. Together with the international isolation of Islamic Republic (answered in kind by the regime), revolution and war put Iranian music into a state of hibernation. (Sadighi and Mahdavi 2009).

The revolution and war provided the motivation, leverage and scripting for the performance of mass public drama on many levels: performing patriotism, anti-Americanism, Islamic piety, martyrdom, and for the new regime, a ruthless and self-righteous despotism.

Music in the New Islamic Republic

The first eight years of the revolution, in which the recordings examined in this chapter were produced, were characterized by revolutionary fervor, authoritarian governance, and mass mobilization. All cultural activities were now cast in an Islamic framework, with religious governance imposing itself in social and (paradoxically) religious areas that were previously private (Abazari 2008: 245). “The profound contradictions in cultural policy during the 1980s were partly a result of a government trying to impose a hegemonic Islamic identity on a people intensely aware of, and unwilling to forfeit, their pre-Islamic heritage” (Nooshin 2005: 236). In a serious miscalculation, the revolutionary government made a concerted but futile attempt to wallpaper over the deeply embedded identity marker of the ancient Iranian/Zoroastrian past with an exclusively Islamic facade. Decades later, many Iranians eventually came to refer to the revolution as the “second Arab invasion,” a fundamentalist ploy that “appears to have strengthened the very ties to antiquity it tried to sever” (Del Guidice 2008: 67). Not surprisingly, the very attempt to enforce the rejection of these deep cultural roots brought about and increased interest among many Iranians regarding their pre-Islamic, imperial identity. This dynamic was given a considerable boost following the discovery of the site of Konar Sandal in 2000 (near Jiroft in the south central province of Kerman), a sophisticated bronze culture currently being excavated that dates from 3000 BC, and thus contemporary with ancient Mesopotamia (ibid: 46).

The pervasive Islamization of culture also immediately led to contradictions and controversy with regard to music, especially given its longstanding heritage of the *samā'* polemic. As documented by During (1984, 1992) and Youssefzadeh (2000), Iranian musical culture went through a sea change from that of the Shah's era. Light (*motrebi*) and popular music (both Western and Iranian) were proscribed, while religious, national folk music, and especially *asil*⁶ genres gradually rose to levels of public prominence never seen before, despite myriad constraints. This veritable renaissance succeeded in both attracting many young people to study and/or listen to Persian music as well as reconnecting the fading transmission lines with the old guard of Ostads (masters), many of whom had been sidelined into obscurity during the Pahlavi period.

Public concerts were severely restricted and when they occurred, the lyrics and musical style were subject to rigorous censorship, measures that are still in effect today. In the zeal of the early postrevolutionary period, virtuosic stylistic features that provoked auditory excitement—*chaharmezrabs*, *rengs*, even vocal *tahrirs*—

were considered illicit (During 1984: 12). The mad terror of institutional purging that swept through all walks of Iranian society in this early period saw many performers blacklisted from engaging in public activity due to possible affiliations with the previous regime (ibid: 14). Along with untold others, many musicians were killed. During the worst years of lawless excess immediately following the revolution, raids on private musical soirees resulted in the destruction of instruments and recordings. Special licenses were required for owning instruments and steep “deposits” placed on instruments leaving the country, to be returned on reentry with the instrument. Expatriate Iranian musicians in Toronto claimed that contraband instruments (especially *setars*) were smuggled like drugs out of the country to Dubai on small boats. Coldly clarifying any lingering doubts as to where music stood in the new order of things, several prominent musicians—Vaziri, Davami, Taj Esfahan, and Adib Khansari—died in the early days of the revolution with no public acknowledgement of their contribution to musical life in Iran (Miller 1999: 50).

Television and radio broadcast of music was suspended, except for revolutionary propaganda songs (*sorudha-ye enqelabi*), the composition and dissemination of which flourished. While ‘Aref Ghazvini had harnessed the *tasnif* to support nationalist causes in the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution of the early-twentieth century, the modern *sorud* (the word has pre-Islamic origins to refer to songs) emerged directly from the Western influence of the march and martial songs of the brass band. This military context was the initial entry point of Western music to mass Iranian society, as indeed it was around the world (Flaes 2000). *Soruds* were upbeat, set in Western tonality (usually major) with Western-style melodies (though occasional local nuances could slip in), with lyrics extolling the virtues of one’s country, province, school, the Shah (i.e., a pride and solidarity of the in-group, of “us”), and sung in a choral unison. *Soruds* were particularly cultivated under the reforms of Reza Shah in the 1920s and 1930s (Chehabi 1999:147). In short, the *sorud* was typical of other non-Western appropriations of military marches for propaganda purposes, such as the “Songs for the Masses” during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Throughout the monarchy, *surud* singing was the mainstay of Iranian school children’s musical education. Young Iranians learned neither to distinguish the various *dastgahs*, nor to read music properly nor play an instrument: they sang in unison martial songs that taught them to love their country, exhorted them to be ready to sacrifice their lives for it, and suggested that they were superior to their neighbours. The nationalism for which this type of music was a vehicle was organic nationalism of the *Blut und Boden* (*khak u khun*) variety, not a civic nationalism stressing the rights, duties, and equality of citizens. The romantic preoccupation with a mythical past, the intolerance for ethnic and linguistic diversity, and the disdain and disinterest for neighbouring peoples that, alas, still characterise much of the Iranian intelligentsia are the legacy of an educational system that inculcated these values into the mind of the young, but that did not teach them to value freedom, tolerance, and the rule of the law. And so the transition from the libertarian and patriotic *tasnif* to

the nationalistic and monarchist surud illustrates the authoritarian turn that Iranian politics took after World War I. The transformations of *tasnif* and *surud* are telling indicators of the evolution of Iranian nationalism, and of the political culture of which it has been a part. (Chehabi 1999: 151)

Cassettes continued to be produced throughout the 1980s but were subject to strict censorship, their proliferation playing a major catalytic role in accelerating stylistic change establishing standards; the restrictions on concerts necessitated that these were largely studio recordings (During 1992: 152, 154). Continuing the longstanding heritage of the *samā'* polemic, government decrees regarding music were appropriately vague and unsystematic (During 1984: 13, 1992: 137). Throughout the following decades, musicians got good at finding and exploiting loopholes in making their music, "subtly pushing at boundaries without appearing to contest them openly and thus averting a reaction from the authorities. In large part, this is made possible by the cleavages opened up by contradictions in cultural policy, which are in turn symptomatic of deep divisions within the government itself" (Nooshin 2005: 246).

In a seemingly strange paradox for a revolution vilifying Westoxification, Western music was viewed as a relatively innocuous genre wherein even female vocal soloists were considered acceptable, in stark contrast to the strict proscriptions against female vocalists of Iranian genres (During 1984: 14, 1992: 141; Nooshin 2005: 256 and note 74). It was, and still is, illegal for women to sing solo for "mixed" audiences of men and women. DeBano argues, however, that the strictly segregated state-sponsored public musical events such as the Jasmine Festival, established in 1999 in the wake of President Khatami's reforms, have counterintuitively strengthened the role of women in public (albeit an exclusively female public) musicking (2009). Various educational institutions were engaged in propagating the transmission of Persian music at an unprecedented level, along with new compositions in the traditional idiom. This high public profile of Persian music in the fresh wake of the revolution was buttressed by a concomitant surge in private musicking (During 1992: 150), which, lying outside the enforceable reach of the authorities, has always been its refuge and venue for resistance in periods of political turbulence throughout history. While public and private domains rose in synergy, there are always sharp qualitative differences between them in Iranian culture. Modes of public and private behavior are always differentiated in any culture, but Iranians (along with many millions of people around the world subjected to authoritarian regimes) have to maintain double, quasischizophrenic lives in this respect simply in order to stay safe and sane.⁷ Under such conditions public space becomes a stage for performing obedience to the dictates of a revolutionary ideology that increasingly loses any true basis or legitimacy among the majority of people. By rigidly separating public and private worlds, many Iranians feel that the authorities "don't really control us, because they can't control what's inside us" (Del Giudice 2008: 64).

With the competition of *motrebi* and popular music kept at official bay, the number of people participating in Persian music as both listeners and performers soared. The wonderful paradox here is that playing Persian music was both an expression of nationalistic and “traditional” identity as espoused by the revolution, salvaged from the losses of the Shah’s era, and at the same time an open defiance against the regulation of culture by revolutionary authorities. The sheer activity of playing music in an Islamic Republic, with its attendant baggage of the *samā’* polemic, was a platform for personal resistance (ibid.; Nooshin 2005: 241). Despite the government’s attempts at constructing a unifying ideology of music, a diversity of forms and lack of stylistic and aesthetic consensus among musicians prevailed (During 1992: 156).

While most musicians were either fleeing in exile or reduced to “silence and despondency” (Wright 2009: 18), Shajarian remained in Iran and took center stage, both figuratively and, whenever it was possible, literally: his voice very much heard. At the peak of his powers, he remained active and prolific, producing a remarkable series of recordings that are regarded by the general public, connoisseurs and musicians alike as masterpieces of the art of *avaz*. His meeting and continued study with Ostad Gholam Reza *Jahān Suz* (“World Burnt”) Dadbeh would play a significant role in everything he did thereafter.

Shajarian’s Activities in the Postrevolutionary Period

Ostad Dadbeh

OS

In terms of cognition and consciousness, no one has influenced me the way Ostad Dadbeh did (2009).

*Dadbeh is one of the Ostads of thought and mystical people who also had musical skills. I got acquainted with him through meetings that concerned discussion and debates about art, the foundations of art, sociology, the historical periods of art. . . . We didn’t work on *radif* and *tasnifs* but I learned some parts of the *Dashtestani* style of singing from him. Meeting him was possibly the most important contribution to my artistic life (ibid.: 138).*

Question: You have mentioned previously that when you pick poetry from Hafez, Sa’di or Attar the poems are no longer theirs but rather their poetry becomes yours.

Yes, that poetry becomes mine. You see, in the process of life one gains experience, and when you are young you are only concerned with your dreams and ambitions. Some of these ambitions and goals become a reality and others don’t, and you realize that you should probably think differently and look at life from a different perspective. I personally reached that point when I met someone very special who was very important to me and he gave me many crucial keys that

enabled me to open many doors and many things became clear to me. This person was Ostad Dadbeh, who was a philosopher and a great thinker. I have never seen anyone like him, despite the fact that I have met many people, including scientists, ayatollahs, and poets and I have read many books. But this man could actually move into the world of any subject and analyze it. He taught me many things, including the fact that man is God, that he is everything, and he is an impression of God. Anyway, since 1979 I spent time with Dadbeh, until he passed away about seven or eight years ago. (2009)

AK

To my understanding, the people who were around Ostad Dadbeh kept this as a kind of closed group. My sense was that he was a leader and teacher of only select, special people. He was working with people who had a particular kind of character. I knew people who were trying to get to know him through those who were already in his circle. His teaching was oral; I've never seen or heard of any book or writings of his but they may exist. It's certainly not well known, if that is the case. He kept a very discreet, low profile.

Ostad Dadbeh was a teacher of a spiritual idea of how a person should be as a human being, and this has affected Shajarian's character and later work. As I understand it through my teacher Mr. Pirniakan, who was a student of Dadbeh's, his teaching included some pre-Islamic ideas, and I later realized that it had a direct connection to *ā'in-e mehr*, "the path of *mehr*." Through Dadbeh it seems that my teacher and Ostad Shajarian believe in this specific path of living. *Mehr* means "kindness" and we see this word a lot in Persian culture: the month of Mehr, night of Mehr, festival of Mehr, and so on. A key idea in the path of *Mehr* is *farhang-e pulmani*—"the culture for being a bridge for others"—being a bridge, helping other people to get what they seek, providing a service that people can pass from and through you to their goal. This corresponds to teachings that were later central to Sufism wherein you have to be selfless.

There is another element that Ostad Dadbeh helped instill in Ostad Shajarian that is very important: confidence. Because when you are a student and you don't have a lot of concerts and exposure you cannot claim lofty changes in *avaz*. You cannot change direction very well, especially with Ostad Shajarian's humble behaviour and attitude. So the confidence gained from presenting a lot of music and getting the approval of so many people gave Shajarian freedom and confidence. I think this is a very important concept here because when he went to regular classes with Ostad Dadbeh the main thing he learned was the philosophical aspect of his art, and not so much the technical side, as Shajarian was able to master the musical techniques he was taught very rapidly. On the other hand, a very important musical point regarding their relationship that is not often noted is that Shajarian studied how to sing Baba Taher with Ostad Dadbeh, who was a master

of that. You really hear this influence in the album *Astan e Janan* (see chapter 2). Shajarian mastered this Dashdestani style even though Dadbeh sang with a lower voice and a slower tempo.

Furthermore, as Shajarian's confidence continued to build, he found himself going further, and speaking *for* people. This could be regarded as a shift to a higher, more noble level in art: from being an entertainer or singer of Persian classical music on radio and television to becoming a voice of sixty million people or at least those people who are listening, maybe ten million people. That's powerful, he has a lot of power. These are new goals. In other words, Shajarian's art progressed from art as entertainment to art as a meaningful expression of humanity.

RS

Shajarian first met Ostad Dadbeh at the home of master calligrapher Morteza Abdolrasuli (see photo 1). We will look at Shajarian's activity as a calligrapher in chapter 3 but note that the circle of master calligraphers in Iran is very exclusive, one of the most difficult social cliques to gain access to in Iranian culture. Shajarian mentions regular "classes" with Dadbeh between 1979 and the Ostad's death in 2002, implying a study group. Photo 2 shows Dadbeh and Shajarian together with the musicians Kasa'i, Taj Esfahan, Manouchehr Ghaouri, and Sa'idi; Dariush Pirniakan was also in this circle, as was ney-player Mohammad Musavi (see photo in *Daftar-e-Honar* 2003: 2182).

Abdollahi's timeline describes Dadbeh as being a master of unity (*yegāne*) philosophy, followed by some further qualifications that are rather obscure (2003: 2070). From his own accounts quoted above, Shajarian clearly received the transmission of esoteric teachings from Ostad Dadbeh over a period of twenty-two years. Two aspects of Dadbeh's "unity philosophy" recur in Shajarian's allusions to the teachings in interviews: the intrinsic divinity of humans and the importance of practicing and living loving-kindness. Both principles are of course central to many esoteric traditions. In the Sufi tradition the former is emblematic of al-Hallaj's archetypal statement of enlightened blasphemy (according to orthodox Islam) "I am the Truth," echoing the older Vedantic formulation "Thou art That." Shajarian even includes aspects of this principle on his Delawaz Persian homepage mission statement (termed *mardomkhodāsāz*, www.delawaz.com). The second principle is even more universal, included as it is in exoteric religious teachings (particularly emphasized in Buddhism and Christianity) and indeed, secular ethical values found in all cultures. Amir Koushkan pointed out that in the photos of Dadbeh attending the wedding of Shajarian's daughter Asfane Shajarian and Parviz Meshkatian in 1984 (published in *Daftar-e Honar* 2003: 2181), he is wearing a hat associated with Zoroastrian priests, along with what appears to be a white suit in the black and white photos. Amir also noted that Dadbeh's philosophy highlighted the Zoroastrian concept of *mehr*, which was taken up as a central tenet by a lineage of Iranian Sufis.

Mehr refers to a range of related meanings in modern Persian, including love, affection, friendship, kindness, reconciliation, mercy, compassion, and promise. It was synonymous with Mithra (Avestan; Mitra in Sanskrit), one of the five Zoroastrian divinities (*Yazata*), associated with the sun and petitioned for kindness and mercy. In addition to “the sun,” *mehr* literally meant “covenant” or “contract” and had a strong association with relationship, responsibility, and faithfully keeping promises. The new Islamic Republic of Iran as it was forged after the revolution conspicuously lacked *mehr* in its various senses. Khomeini’s vision of Islam likewise paid little heed to Qur’anic verses such as “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256) or the famous *hadith* (tradition of the Prophet) that above Allah’s throne is written: “*Verily, My Mercy prevails over My Wrath.*” Shajarian—whose birthday on the autumnal equinox is coincidentally the first day of the month of Mehr, according to the Iranian calendar—released two albums that include *mehr* in their titles: *Peyvand e Mehr* (“Relationship of *Mehr*,” though translated as *Bond of Affection* on the album) in 2000, and *Sorud e Mehr* (“Anthem of *Mehr*”) in 2007. The former title explicates the quintessential notion of relationship, while the latter associates *mehr* with a pre-Islamic word for music or song (despite its early twentieth-century denotation of martial songs, discussed above).

Shajarian’s study with Dadbeh also included mystical musics (*musiqihāyi ‘erfāni*) and Dashtestani, a style of folk singing from the southern province of Bushehr (Shajarian et al. 2004: 101). It is interesting to note that Shajarian’s first Delawaz release in 1978, *Golbang* (vol.2), includes a recording from the previous year made with Ebadi in dastgah Mahur, wherein his singing in Delkash copies almost exactly Ostad Dadbeh’s rendition of the Baba Taher *robaiyyat* “*Dele diram kharidare mohabbat*” (“*My heavy heart, the buyer of affection*”) from his *Barge Sabz* 115 performance that Shajarian so admires. According to the recording date (1977) of this obvious salute, Shajarian knew of Dadbeh before they met. A translation of the quatrain follows:

My heavy heart, the buyer of affection
 Bought from you, if drunken with bitter affection
 I’ve sewn clothes to the size of my heart
 From the loom of suffering and the string of my affection

Shajarian performed a beautifully moving commemoration to his spiritual mentor on the album *Saz e Khamush* (“The Silent Instrument” or “Instrument of Silence”), a short Dashtestani on two *dobeytis* of Baba Taher performed in his lower register with a relaxed vocal tone reminiscent of the Ostad entitled “*Be Yāde Dadbeh*” (“In Memory of Dadbeh”). Here is a translation of this short but intense tribute:

At the time of joy, I have the desire for your dwelling
 I have a replica of the signet of your moon-aspect

Oh my idol, my Ka'aba, my altar
 Oh you who are every direction, I gaze towards your direction

There is no one who finds his way to my cry,
 There is no one who would take news to my freedom tree,

Should all the good of creation gather together
 There is not one who can erase your memory from my memory

We noted in our companion volume (chapter 4 of Simms and Koushkani 2012) that the *gushe* Dashtestani has a wide distribution in Shajarian's oeuvre of recordings. It seems reasonable to posit that Shajarian's admiration of Dabeh's vocal tone contributed to his somewhat surprising preference for the bass register (*ibid.*), given his trademark tenor and remarkable abilities in his upper register, along with his exploration of his lower range beginning with the album *Nava (Morakab khani)* in 1982 (discussed in chapter 2) and especially characterizing his work of the early 1990s.

Shajarian intimates some general features of his time spent with Ostad Dadbeh but given the profound impact this experience had upon him and the ultimately personal and inexplicable nature of such things, we will leave the matter with this brief but emphatic notice of its transformative significance.

Professional Activities

Despite the huge disruption and redefinition of public musicking brought about by the revolution, Shajarian forged ahead with both live and studio work. The latter was more easily accomplished, as cassette sales continued throughout the uncertainties of the early revolution. Following the initial euphoria of the Shah's exile, amidst the fogginess of what would happen next, Shajarian recorded and released a total of five nationalistic *soruds*—the only music allowable in the legal cassette market at the time—between February and July of 1979. These were later collected and published by Lotfi's Chavosh Institute as the B-side of *Chavosh 7: Be Monāsebat-e Salgard-e Enqelab* ("On the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Revolution"), the A-side containing seven *soruds* sung by Shahram Nazeri. But as the hopes of post-revolutionary Iran transformed decisively into an ostensibly theocratic Islamic republic through the machinations of Khomeini, Shajarian abruptly changed course and henceforth "discontinued further collaborations with government organizations. On his own, in the privacy of his home, he continued his research of the collection and reorganization of the vocal *radif* and sometimes also taught former students. He hated (*motanafer*) all political parties and shunned all political activities" (Nasirfar 1990: 402).

In general, Shajarian seems to have a good intuitive sense of how political winds are blowing and how to best adjust his sails to maintain course or weather a

storm. As with his previous experiences in the 1970s with the national radio and the *Center for the Propagation and Preservation of Iranian Music* (detailed in chapter 3 of Simms and Koushkani 2012), he carefully distanced himself from the new government and official political affiliations. Despite Shajarian's quite understandable decision to record the *soruds* given the circumstances of the time, it left a bad impression for some Iranians during this hyperpoliticized, polarized, and dangerous period. I met one expatriate Iranian intellectual in Toronto in the mid-1990s who was a great fan of Shajarian but regarding the *soruds*, gravely declared "I'll never forgive him for that." Perhaps by now people like this view the episode in its larger context and see Shajarian's unquestionable integrity over the past three decades.

Concerts were severely restricted—if nothing else because a large gathering of people in public under any pretext was highly volatile during these uncertain times—but Shajarian managed to appear in the few concerts that were permitted. The first such concert was in October 1979 with the Payvar Ensemble in Rudaki Hall, performing poems by Hushang Ebtehaj in Dashti; the concert was recorded and later released several times at different dates, usually under the title *Raz e Del*.⁸ He also performed with Lotfi's *Sheyda* Ensemble in Rudaki Hall the same month, singing different poetry by Ebtehaj in dastgah Mahur; the same program was performed in November⁹ at the *Dāneshgāh Beheshti (Melli)* [National University]. The latter was recorded and quickly released under the title *Sepideh* ("Dawn"). It was wildly successful, largely due to the concluding tasnif *Iran ey sarāye omid* ("Iran, a House of Hope"; alternately entitled *Sepideh*) composed by Lotfi to the text of Ebtehaj. The defiant nationalistic pride of the lyrics and the uplifting, triumphant setting in Mahur perfectly captured public sentiments at this turbulent juncture, transforming the piece into an "unofficial national anthem" (Nooshin 2005: 241). The lyrics are translated below:

Iran, a house for hope
 The first light of day illuminates your crown
 Witness that through this blood-filled road
 A blessed sun has arisen
 Although the heart is filled with blood
 The splendor of happiness has risen
 Our dawn is rosy red, it is rosy red
 That the hand of the enemy is in blood
 Oh Iran, have no sorrow
 Long live your eternal glory
 Our path is the way to truth, the way to prosperity
 Unity, Unity is the secret to victory
 Long live peace and eternal freedom in all the world,
 Oh, Long live the fresh spring of generosity in this blooming grass

Despite its huge success, reports emerged within Tehran's musical community that the concert did not sit well with Shajarian. Both Lotfi and Ebtehaj were involved with the leftwing Tudeh Party, and unbeknownst to Shajarian, there was a decidedly

Tudeh atmosphere prevailing at this public event. Given his experience earlier in the year with having his artistic intentions hijacked by politics that he did not necessarily agree with, and his concomitant stance of neutrality with regard to political organizations, the concert presented a familiar danger. His political intuition was quite correct here, as the Tudeh party would soon become the target of a severe crackdown by the government, whereby Ebtehaj was imprisoned and Lotfi had to leave the country. An untold number of Tudeh affiliates, both real and perceived, were executed in the early 1980s.

Public concerts were completely forbidden in Iran shortly thereafter. The Iran-Iraq War settled into the deadly and draining holding pattern it would maintain throughout its eight-year duration, and some of the worst chaos of police and judicial excesses were perpetrated on the dazed, terrorized public during the early years of the 1980s. The image of blood in the lyrics to *Sepideh* began to take on a chilling prescience. Shajarian had little choice but to retreat to the privacy of the recording studio, often the one he set up in his home. In the latter part of 1979 (or perhaps early 1980, the month is unclear) he recorded a Hafez ghazal in Segah with Payvar and his ensemble with a large string section that was released on two different albums: an abbreviated version as one side of the cassette *Entezar e Del*, a longer unedited one as the first side of *Sazeghesehgu*. Another session with Payvar around the same time but with a smaller ensemble, featuring a Hafez ghazal in Afshari, supplied the B-side of the album *Entezar e Del*, which was packaged together with *Raz e Del* (the Rudaki Hall concert of October 1979) for a double-cassette entitled *Peygham-e Ahl-e Rāz* (“Message of the Secret People”) released in 1980, the sole Delawaz release until 1983. In 1980 he recorded again with Payvar (and Musavi), a Hafez Ghazal in Shur that was released over a decade later as the A-side of *Khalvat Gozide* (“Voluntary Seclusion”). Shajarian keeps an extensive archive of his performances and often releases recordings on Delawaz even decades after they were recorded. Just as often, he will release recordings immediately after the performance or with a delay of a year or two. One assumes that this is the case when he is particularly pleased with the performance.

After a two-year enforced hiatus from the concert stage, Shajarian hit upon the loophole of performing at foreign embassies and cultural institutes in Tehran, a strategic move that signaled his readiness to seek global outlets for his art, here in the microcosm of Tehran’s diplomatic community (decimated though it was following the revolution and American hostage crisis). Among the first (if not the first) of these “internal international” concerts was a duet performance with Lotfi in the German Cultural Center on March 4, 1981. Lotfi was the head of the besieged, soon-to-be closed Music Department at the University of Tehran at the time and was caught up in a large student and faculty demonstration just prior to the performance, one that erupted into a violent clash with revolutionary factions. Many students and faculty were arrested or detained by police, including an enraged Lotfi, who arrived to the Center an hour after the scheduled performance time and took another half hour to gain his composure before heading to the stage.¹⁰ The concert was recorded and released by Delawaz as *Eshq Danad* in 1997 and in the same year

by the California-based Kereshmeh Records. Shajarian sets a ghazal by Hafez redolent in thinly veiled criticism, debuting what would become his trademark technique of mining classical poetry for atavistic messages that he would marshal to devastating effect under the strict censorship musicians were subjected to. Set in Abu Ata, he takes considerable liberties with reordering and omitting some of the beyts in the original ghazal (#188) in order to have it say what we wanted to say. Below are a few select lines:¹¹

Those without awareness are bewildered by our eye-play.
I am that which I seem. The rest, they know.

The rational are a compass point of existence, but
Love knows that in this circle their heads are spinning.

Boasting of love and complaining of the friend? Splendid the
lying boast!
Such players at love as this merit desertion.

Perhaps your dark eye will teach me how to act.
But otherwise, not everyone is capable of temperance
And drunkenness.

If the Magian children become aware of our meditations,
After that will they not take as a pledge the Sufi gown?

The opening two beyts are set to the *daramad* and introduce a theme (at least on the most immediate layer of *iham*) that Shajarian emphasized throughout the decade: that in the current polarization of society amidst great chaos, one must hold strong to inner knowledge, perception of the real nature of things, of interior values. There are those who know this and others who don't. The title of the album is taken from the second beyt: "Love knows." The third beyt given here, deriding hypocrisy and again, advising that one only keep company with those "who know," is set to the *gushe Hejaz* and therefore an emphatic moment in the performance. One layer of interpretation of the following excerpted beyt offers further advice that Shajarian will repeat throughout the decade: to be shrewd and intelligent in negotiating the dangers at hand laid by those who "don't know." The final line is, among other things, a cautious nod at pre-Islamic currents in Iran—"Magian children"—and the Sufis of esoteric Islam, the deeper, esoteric spiritual currents that the fundamentalists also revile, at least in part alluding to the possibility of a deeper continuity of living based on the truth that overrides denominational affiliation and dictates. Of course, other meanings abound. It is curious that Shajarian chose to not recite the seventh beyt of the ghazal:

The description of the sun is quite beyond the scope
of the blind bat,

When those possessed of vision are amazed at this mirror.

Perhaps he felt it best to ease in gradually with this, his initial deployment of veiled critique; the situation outside the porous walls of the German Cultural Center was indeed dangerous. Omitting the final beyt is more understandable, for the same reason as the latter and the fact that its second *misra* can be spun to turn his argument on its head:

If the devout one doesn't understand Hafez's *rend* behaviour,
 what of it?
 The devil flees those folk who recite the Qur'an.

These were incredibly difficult years for Iranians on various fronts, where life-and-death issues were a daily concern. Continuing professional musical activities was practically out of the question. And yet, as is often the case in such conditions, artists dig in deep and operate on a level wherein continuing to work becomes a matter of survival, remaining human, and flying free. Like a profound form of judo or miraculous alchemy, they flip the pervasive negative energy into positive energy through inspired art. Shajarian thus set to work.

Amidst the bleakness of 1982, he recorded landmark recordings, masterpieces that are discussed in detail in chapter 2. He also continued recording his Qur'an recitation, a project begun in 1978 that he would work on through to 1982, although the recordings were not released until 1999, dedicated to his father (*Be Yad e Pedar*). While this project was initiated shortly before the revolution, possessing and documenting his great skill as a reciter at this time also provided credibility and respect from the new fundamentalist regime, perhaps even a limited amount of insurance against harassment. Nineteen eighty-three initiated a brief period wherein he stripped down to essentials, recording a series of duets (with and without tombak accompaniment). The first two of these were with his long-time colleague, tarist Farhang Sharif. According to Gudarzi et al. (2000: 222) this session was released in 1983 as *Chahargah* but there is no trace of the recording otherwise; perhaps it was a very limited printing and distribution, which is understandable given the date. In April/May of 1984 he recorded again with Sharif and veteran tombak-player Jahangir Malik, a performance of ghazals by Sa'di in Shur that was released as *Peyvande Mehr* (literally "Relation/Union of *Mehr*," translated on the Delawaz release as "Bond of Affection") considerably later, probably the late 1990s. Near the end of 1984 his duetting partner was santurist Mansur Sārami, a performance that was released as *Homayoun Masnavie* in 1995. Amir Koushkhani considers this underappreciated album to be one of Shajarian's greatest masterpieces; Ostad Shajarian also holds it in high regard among his oeuvre.

While Shajarian had been busy recording and performing in private contexts, the revolution had severely impeded the productivity of Delawaz releases. Nineteen eighty-five proved to be a pivotal year, for the release of the