Tradition and Synthesis

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Perspective

With the appearance of world music in the contemporary repertoire, there have been many attempts to integrate and synthesize traditional musical elements into contemporary music. The synthesis of contrasting musical and cultural worlds is a subject yet to be explored. Merging contrasting musical resources has been always a fascinating subject for many composers, and such integrations are reflected in 20th-century as well as in the contemporary repertoire. However, the contemporary composer's strategy of borrowing musical elements from other cultures can, in specific cases, lead to difficulties. Moreover, searching for one's cultural identity in a musical composition is a dilemma faced by any composer who deals with varied cultural sources. Therefore, replanting the roots in a new cultural territory comes along with multi-dimensional concerns.

As an Armenian contemporary composer who has been seeking his homeland's traditions and roots in his compositions, Tigran Mansurian's perception leads us on an enlightening path. Mansurian's vision regarding musical synthesis is a lesson for all emerging composers who deal with similar subject matter and for whoever searches her/his own identity in a personal musical zone.

"…where is my truth in relation to being a composer [from the West] and a non-composer from the East? where do they meet? A difficult problem which needs to be constantly solved. The classical rationalism of the West, and the unknown discipline of rationalism in the East. You bring things from your roots that you can be honest with, but if you're not coming from [living] there, then who knows if you'll be honest or just adoptive… you have to come from your own truth, [because] your music is your breath…"[1]

Persian Music Overview

(Musical Concept and Diversity)

Persian Music is an ambiguous term applying to a large spectrum of music without anything necessarily in common other than being in the territory of the country. Nevertheless, Persian music can be categorized into two main branches. One, known as *Sonnati* (traditional) and the other known as *Ethnic Regional*, referring to extremely varied music spread out and practiced all across the country. Ethnic music of each region is influenced by neighboring countries, depending on where the region is located. Therefore, a diversity of instruments, performance practices, and even languages/dialects is associated with the border regions. Yet, it is unclear where a certain music initiated at first, because of

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[1]   *"Confessing with Music"*, Tigran Mansurian documentary, YouTube

the country's larger borders in the past (from Anatolia to China) and gradually most provinces separated throughout history. For example, the north of the country, bordering Azerbaijan and Armenia has a very similar musical practice, as both countries belonged to Iran until 1813.

As mentioned before, depending on the region, *Ethnic Regional* music has its own modal system, is usually not notated, and is transmitted by oral tradition generation after generation. On the other hand, traditional music has been separated from the regional music but has become more classified and has been taught at the conservatories for more than a century; this music is based on *Radif* (row): a collection of old melodies, some of it derived from regional music of the past. These collection of melodies is categorized into seven different modal zones called *Dastgah* (system). Each *Dastgah* contains around ten to thirty particular melodies. These melodies eventually become the fundamental material for both the composition and improvisation process.

The history and concepts of Persian music form an extensive subject which would require a separate and profound treatment. Therefore, this article will limit its main concerns to the synthesis of particular Persian musical elements.

Iran's and its neighbor countries. Each region has a musical overlap with the neighboring regions.

This article will examine five fundamental aspects of Persian music which all play a central and characteristic role in the Persian musical concept: 1. Ornamentation; 2. Modes; 3 Rhythm; 4. Phrasal construction; 5. Drone and instrumental tuning (string resonance). Each of these elements creates a structural layer that can be extracted and viewed as a new tool for musical integration. The exposé will examine these concepts in original compositions created mainly for classical guitar in solo, duo, chamber music, and orchestral settings.

Ornamentation

Ornamentation is indispensable to Persian art, and music is no exception. In every historical monument, there is no empty part left without ornamentation, but it is always a challenge figuring out how the ornaments are constructed since in the traditional performance practice, placement of ornamentations is based on oral tradition. Therefore, there is no specific educational material for melisma, and there is no particular model that would decisively apply to ornamenting phrases. However, with lessons and transcriptions of various traditional repertoire and improvisations this fascinating mystery was more or less clarified.

One of the very common strummed Persian instruments that can be a model for many technical aspects and performance practices is *setar* (*Se* = three, *Tar* = String). Although named "Three-Strings" it has four strings (one string was added years after its invention). As the distance between strings is narrow, the melodic string is strummed together with the drone strings. A common right hand technique for setar is strumming the strings with the index finger.

A quick up-down index strum is applied to sustain single notes, creating a tremolo-like effect; this ornamental technique is called *riz*. Depending on the musical context, this technique may differ in articulation, tempo, and dynamic. *Riz* technique can be adapted to the guitar. In fig. 4.1, note that the double string strum, the melodic string trill and the index finger tremolo movement all emerge from setar technique.

Figure 4.1. *Riz* technique adapted to the guitar, elaborated with a trill.

Figure 4.2. Ornamentation of G with D as a drone must be played with index finger.
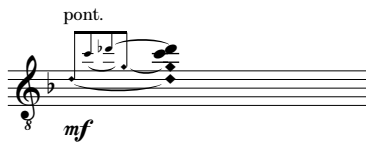

Another common ornament is called *dorrab*. This kind of ornamentation accentuates a single note, adding two grace notes of the same pitch before the main note. As mentioned briefly before, considering most traditional instruments' structure, the melodic string is close to the drone string, and the drone strings resonate along with the ornament. In adaptations of *dorrab* for classical guitar, the best solution is to consider a drone note a harmonic outline which would make a layer on the ornament. As the guitar has a higher string action at the neck as well as much harder strings compared to the *setar*, *dorrab* technique should be played with the help of other fingers, resulting in a similar effect. In

following example, the overall concept of this ornament is integrated into different harmonies creating new possibilities of this ornaments.

Figure 4.3. Accentuation of one note, adapted *dorrab* ornament

Figure 4.4. Accentuation of one note (G harmonic) in addition to outlining a harmony

Another common ornamentation of a single note is called *kandeh* (pull off) which is mostly related to left hand slurring on string instruments (bowed or strummed). In this ornament, three consecutive pitches of a mode are played as grace notes, finally arriving on the main note being ornamented. The first grace note is plucked and the rest of the grace notes should be slurred. In examples below, there are several variations which show the combinations and possibilities of this particular ornament.

Figure 4.5. Ornamentation of a single note (A)

Figure 4.6. Ornamentation of a single note (E) in two different ways.

The following figures indicate an expansion of the common ornamentations except that these ornamentations outline non-traditional harmonies. Here are some examples of this synthesis:

Figure 4.7. Ornamentation of a single note while outlining a harmony.
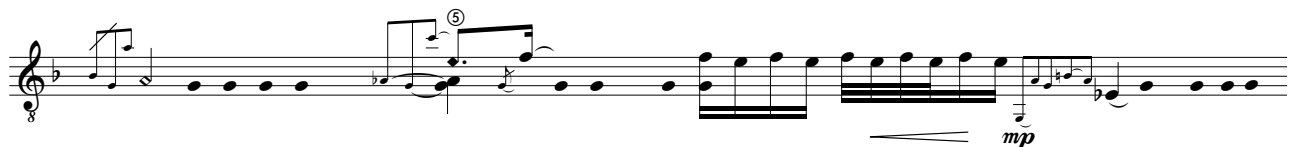
In fig. 4.8, F and E flat are ornamented in the guitar part, juxtaposed with ornaments in the viola part.

Figure 4.8. Combination of ornaments.

Figure 4.9. Ornamentation of a longer phrase.

Sequential patterns are additional approach to constructing longer ornamental phrases. These sequences are played either simple, or accompanied with drone or ornamented. Here is an adaptation of various sequential patterns in the guitar part:

Figure 4.10. Simple sequential pattern with typical articulation.

Figure 4.11. Sequential pattern, not ornamented, accompanied by a drone.

Figure 4.12. Sequential pattern, ornamented and accompanied by a drone.

Ornaments can be expanded and varied in different ways as in fig. 4.13.

Figure 4.13. Combination and variation with *dorrab* technique (excerpt *Paintings*).
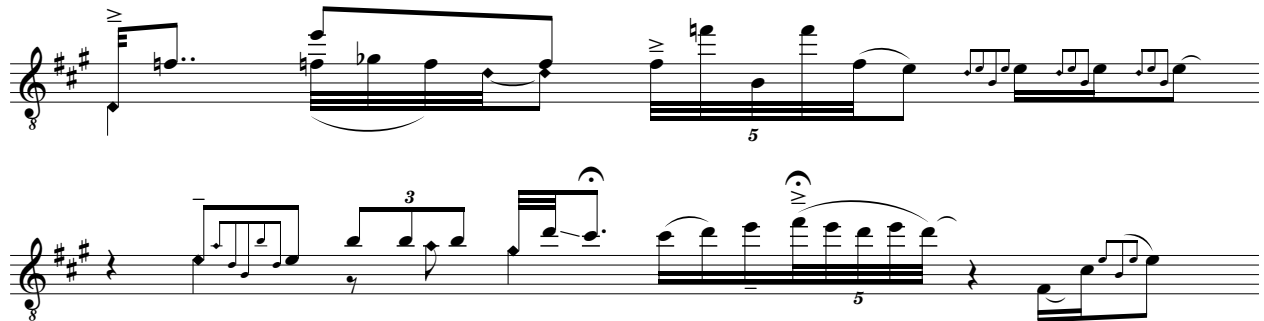
Following example is taken from "*Solitude*," concerto for guitar and orchestra; the combination of mentioned ornaments appears in the orchestra.

Figure 4.14. (excerpt Solitude)

Modes

In Persian traditional music, there are seven different modes (*Dastgah*) that are presented in the *Radif*. In traditional performance practice, the performer generally explores one mode and remains in the same modal zone throughout most of the improvisation. Some of the traditional modes have overlaps with the occidental modal system and some of them have microtonal intervals that can be explored in different ways.

The following figure shows the modal progression of *Duochrome* for viola and guitar. This progression is based on typical Persian modes yet merges into non-typical modes. Eventually the integration of all these modes arrives to octatonic scale which is not a typical Persian mode.

Figure 4.15. Modal progression of *Duochrome*.
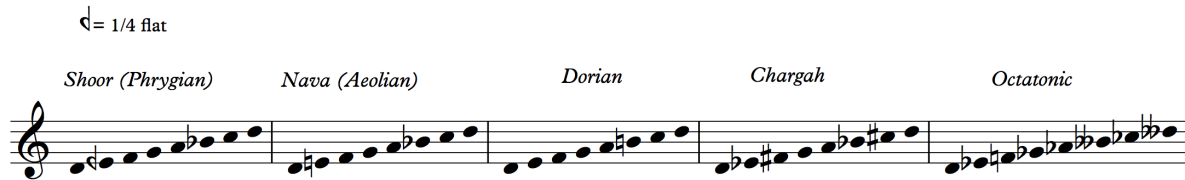
Fig. 4.16 features the modal zone of *Chargah*; however, the F natural, which does not belong to this modal zone, leads the melodic contour into octatonic scale.

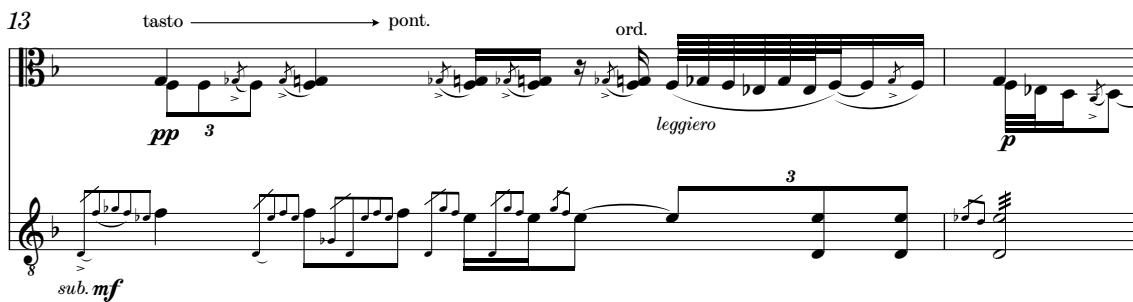Figure 4.16. Modal zone of *Chargah (Duochrome)*.

Fig. 4.17 is part of the climax section of *Duochrome*; the climax occurs when all the previous modes confront and result in an octatonic scale which is not a typical mode in the Persian tradition. The guitar part presents the harmonic outline of the octatonic scale in scattered registers.

Figure 4.17. Integration of previous modes resulted in octatonic scale (Duochrome for Viola and Guitar)

Rhythm

Rhythmic structure in Persian music historically has been closely linked to the structure of Persian poems and dances. In general, common meters include 6/8, 2/4, 4/4, 5/8, 7/8, and 16/8, all of which appear either as an independent elements or as a layers linked to certain musical forms. This is comparable to some of the melody-types in the *Radif* which are recognized by their rhythmic outline.

Traditional performers variate rhythms by differing groupings, subdivisions, and over-bar phrasing. This notion is adapted in the example below where the composition is in 10/8, but the phrase implies a meter of 15/8.

Figure 4.18. Rhythmic variation of 10/8 (Layers).
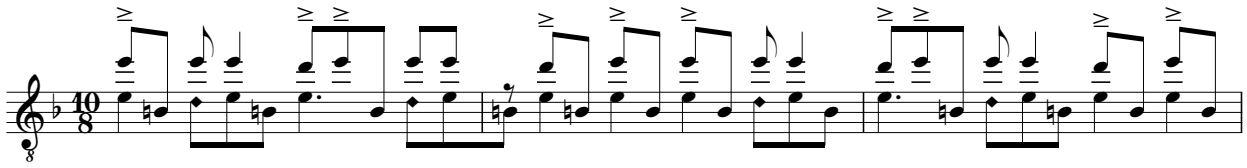
In fig.4.19, a melodic line as an over-bar phrase is superposed on 10/8 ostinato. This is a common practice in traditional ensembles, where percussionist and performer or singer superpose different rhythmic groupings and melodic lines. In this example (measures 36-37), the grouping of the over-bar melodic line conveys 7/8 + 6/8 + 7/8 = 20/8; therefore, after two measures the music returns to a 10/8 grouping.

Figure 4.19. Superposition of a 10/8 ostinato with a melodic line (excerpt *Layers*).
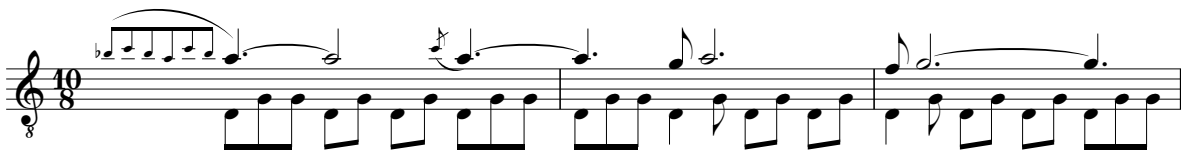
In figure 4.20, a common rhythmic pattern of 5/8 is ornamented.

Figure 4.20. Ornamentation of a common rhythmic figure in 5/8 (excerpt *Paintings* for 10 guitars).

Juxtaposition of two rhythmic figures; a melody type in an over-bar phrasing superimposed onto a ornamented 5/8 rhythm (excerpt *Paintings*.).

Figure 4.21. Ornamented ostinato in 5/8 (excerpt *Paintings*).

The following example is a combination of 5/8 rhythm and ornamentation.

Figure 4.22. Ornamentation and rhythmic patterns (excerpt *Paintings*).

As mentioned before, rhythm can be closely related to a formal structure. A musical form in Persian music which is characteristic for its rhythmic structure is *Chahar-Mezrab* (four-strums). *Chahar-mezrab* is a virtuosic instrumental piece with rhythm in 2/4 or 4/4 that is often interchangeable with 6/8. "Arioso," a composition for guitar and clarinet, is an adaptation of this rhythmic form which appears in the guitar part; this monophonic formal structure conveys intermingled strands of phrases, rhythmic figures and the drone. However, different accentuations and various placements of the motives result in diverse metric illusions. Therefore, there is the implication of a hidden polyphony in this monophonic composition. In fig. 4.23, the melodic line migrates from the third and sixth sixteenth notes to the first and fourth; this is indicated by articulation markings.

Figure 4.23. Replacement of melodic phrases (excerpt *Arioso*).

Figure 4.23. (Continued)

In the following example, measure 26, the first and fourth 16th notes carry one melodic outline which is layered against another melodic outline placed on the third and sixth, and the rest of the group drones over these melodic layers.

Figure 4.24. Three layers: two melody lines and drone (excerpt *Arioso*).

Melody-Types

Melody-Types are essential component of the *Radif* in Persian music. There are numerous themes, melodies, and phrases that are implemented in improvisation and composition, where ornamenting melody types is a fundamental approach in performance practice. Yet ornamentations are not notated and stem from an oral practice through generations. A skillful performer elaborates a modal zone based on these melody-types but generally respects several rules that are traditionally practiced: 1. No leaps greater than a perfect 4th (in other words, staying in one tetrachord in a modal zone); 2. Ornamentation of a single note; 3. Ornamentation of a phrase; 4. Sequential patterns.

The following example demonstrates melody types in a limited range of motion; in measure 24, the perfect 5th leap between A and low D is not a descending melodic movement, on the contrary D is part of the drone and the following A is the continuation of the melodic line.

Figure 4.25. The viola's melodic movement is kept in one tetrachord (excerpt *Duochrome*).

Drones

It is always intriguing how in traditional Persian music, the performer-composer creates a whole recital based on one drone, and the whole concert is built around one tonality. Nevertheless, the emergence of colors, variations of rhythmical patterns and motives dissolving into ornaments, all create a most engaging performance that deeply involves the listener.

Drone is an important layer of instrumental Persian music that is present almost all the time in instrumental music. On string instruments, because of the instrumental structure and performance practice, the drone strings (depending on the mode and different tuning) always resonates. As mentioned earlier, this is related to the structure of traditional instruments in which the drone string is very close to the melodic string. In some wind instruments, there are two pipes, one droning and the other for melodic phrases. In non-rhythmic composition-improvisations, drones become an intuitive reflection. Nonetheless there are no regulations in performance practice of drones.

The following examples denote the possibilities of drone disposition in synthesis with diverse elements. In order to transmit freedom to a performer, drones without stem (indeterminate in rhythm and number of repetitions) would be a suggestive notation conveying free rhythm and an improvisatory structure.

Figure 4.26. Juxtaposition of ornamental phrases and drone (excerpt *Sospiro*).

The following figure shows other possibilities of a drone's disposition in a larger scale:

Figure 4.27. Featuring drone B in guitar and string part (excerpt *Improvisation for guitar and chamber ensemble*)

In the following examples the drone layer and the melodic outline are fused together. This is easily done on the guitar, as one note can be played on different strings. Therefore, a single note can be created with an elusive timbral texture; in this case, one note (F♯) as a drone and the other as part of the melodic line are played on two different strings. Please note that in mes.42 the first F♯ is part of the melodic line, and the second F♯ is part of the drone layer.

Figure 4.28. Two different positions of the same note in guitar part (excerpt *Sospiro*).
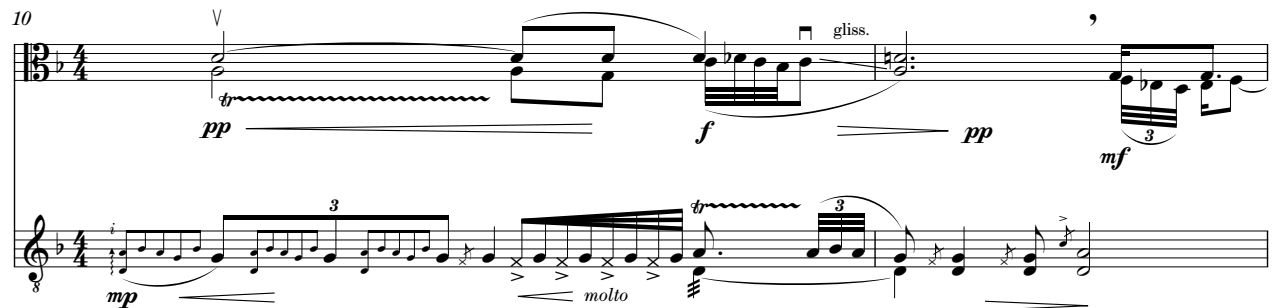
In fig. 4.29 the drone is rhythmically combined with the melodic outline.

Figure 4.29. Drone and melodic line are rhythmically merged (excerpt *Arioso*).

In fig. 4.30, drone and melodic section for viola are written as double stops, imitating the structure of traditional bowed instruments.

Figure 4.30. Viola double stops: drone D along with melodic line on G.

In the next example, drones, ornamentation and 5/8 rhythm are superimposed.

Figure 4.31. B as a drone, ornaments and 5/8, 6/8 meter are juxtaposed *(Paintings)*.

Drone- Synthesis in a Larger Context

"*Solitude*", a quasi-concerto for guitar and chamber orchestra is a search for the drone concept as a central element in traditional music in a large scale work which follows underneath the classical form of concerto. Nevertheless, in "*Solitude*" the drone is being presented with distortions, harmonic reinterpretations, modal modulations and ornamental textures where this leading central role has become a remote element, bringing the music into various unpredictable, contradictory regions. In a larger perspective, the introduction and the coda are based on the drone E, whereas the whole piece is constructed on F♯.

Fig.4.32 indicates the drone element presented with various timbral effects, as well as ornamentation scattered throughout the ensemble.

Figure 4.32. Drone F♯ being presented with different timbral effects (*Solitude*).

Musical Form

A contrapuntal form common in traditional music is "*Javab-Avaz*" (song-respond), which is one of the rare musical form with contrapuntal texture in Persian traditional music. This music is improvised by two or three musicians: a leading singer who recites and sings a poem, along with one or two performers who follow the singer with imitative phrases. *Javab-Avaz* is rhythmically free and entirely improvised: the singer initiates the improvisation from the low register and sings melismatic motives around a tetrachord, concluding the section with a cadential phrase, and then moves to a higher register. This musical form's climax occurs when the singer is in the highest range of his/her voice.

Duochrome's overall form suggests a personal perspective of *Javab-Avaz* for two instruments with alternating roles. The adaptation of this musical form has been challenging, particularly compiling a precise notation for occidental musicians who would play this music from score, in addition to expressing an improvisatory, non-rhythmic structure.

In fig.4.33, the viola part imitates the guitar motive in augmentation. The guitar elaborates the same motive with ornamentation in measure 27.

Figure 4.33. Imitation of the viola in augmentation (excerpt *Duochrome*).

As mentioned before, *Javab-Avaz* is a sectional form. Each section concludes with a cadential phrase and the musicians move further to a higher register. This example shows the cadential phrase before the climax. Note that the melodic material is juxtaposed in both parts.

Figure 4.34. Ornamented cadential phrase (excerpt *Duochrome*).

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