

Violin from Iran: exploration into Iranian repertoire for the violin

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To the loving memories of my father, Hadi, and my sister, Arezoo, who passed away shortly before I could learn and perform their most favourite music, Iranian Radif.

List of Contents

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Supervisor's Declaration</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Permission for Publication</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Underpinning Research Data or Digital Outputs</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>List of Contents</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of audio and video recordings</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>xiv</i>
1. Introduction	2
2. Basics of Iranian Music	5
2.1 Language and Structure.....	5
2.2 Notation.....	7
2.3 Ornamentation/Tahrir.....	11
2.4 Rhythm.....	14
3. Dastgah-ha of Dashti, Esfahan, Mahour and Chahargah	17
3.1 Dastgah of Dashti.....	17
3.2 Dastgah of Esfahan.....	20
3.3 Dastgah of Mahour.....	22
3.4 Dastgah of Chahargah.....	25
4. Development Project (Edinburgh Iranian Festival)	28
6.1 Concept.....	28
6.2 The Performance.....	29
5. Performance of Radif on Violin	36
5.1.1 Prepared violin.....	36
5.1.2 Intonation.....	39
5.1.3 Sound.....	43
5.1.4 Vibrato.....	43
5.1.5 Harmonics.....	44
5.1.6 Double Stops.....	45
5.1.7 Bow.....	46
5.1.8 Pizzicato.....	49

5.1.9 Improvisation	50
6. Artistic Projects.....	54
6.1 Artistic Project 1: <i>Radif</i> of Saba - Recording.....	54
6.2 Artistic Project 2: <i>Radif</i> of Lashgari - Recording	56
6.3 Artistic Project 3: Selection of Metered Music - Recording	60
6.4 Artistic Project 4: Live Improvisation - Recording	64
7. Conclusion.....	69
<i>Bibliography</i>	70
<i>Discography</i>	72

List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>Deilaman</i> in <i>Dashti</i> . Saba, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	7
Figure 2. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>deilaman</i> in <i>Dashti</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	8
Figure 3. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>Gham-Angeez</i> in <i>Dashti</i> , Saba, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	8
Figure 4. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>Gham-Angeez</i> in <i>Dashti</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	8
Figure 5. <i>Koron</i> , the interval between flat and natural	9
Figure 6. <i>Sori</i> , the interval between natural and sharp	9
Figure 7. Excerpt from my personal toolbox showing different <i>tahrir-ha patterns</i>	11
Figure 8. First example of <i>tahrir</i> . Rahmatollah Badiei (indicating how they are written	12
Figure 9. Second example of the above	12
Figure 10. Third example	12
Figure 11. <i>Beidkaani Va Haajjaani</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	14
Figure 12. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Dashti</i> , Saba, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	15
Figure 13. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Dashti</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	16
Figure 14. Mode of <i>Dashti</i> . Manouchehr Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	17
Figure 15. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Dashti</i> , Manouchehr Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	18
Figure 16. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Dashti</i> , Saba, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	18
Figure 17. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Dashti</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	18
Figure 18. <i>Oshaq</i> in <i>Dashti</i> . Manouchehr Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	19
Figure 19. Note of <i>Moteghayyer</i> in <i>gusheh</i> of <i>Oshaq</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	20
Figure 20. <i>Maqam</i> of <i>Esfahan</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for violin	21
Figure 21. Mode (<i>Maqam</i>) of <i>Mahour</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	22
Figure 22. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>Goshayesh</i> , <i>Mahour</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for the violin	22
Figure 23. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Mahour</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	23
Figure 24. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>Neyreez</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	24
Figure 25. <i>Gusheh</i> of <i>Shekasteh</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	24
Figure 26. <i>Maqam</i> of <i>Chahargah</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	25
Figure 27. <i>Hesaar</i> in <i>Chahargah</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	25
Figure 28. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Chahargah</i> . Saba, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	26
Figure 29. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Chahargah</i> . Saba, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	26
Figure 30. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Chahargah</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	26
Figure 31. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Chahargah</i> . Badiei, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	26
Figure 32. Original score of <i>Jooneh Joonom</i> by Dadvar	30
Figure 33. My orchestration of <i>Jooneh Joonom</i>	31
Figure 34. Original orchestral score of <i>Shoushtari</i> for violin and orchestra, Dehlavi	33
Figure 35. My arrangement and orchestration of <i>Shoushtari</i> for Violin and Orchestra	34
Figure 36. List of different tunings for different <i>dastgah-ha</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	37
Figure 37. Use of natural harmonic in <i>Dashti</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	44
Figure 38. Use of natural harmonic in <i>Dashti</i> , Lashgari, <i>Radif</i> for Violin	44

Figure 39. First pattern of string crossings.....	46
Figure 40. Second pattern of string crossings	46
Figure 41. Third pattern of string crossings	47
Figure 42. Fourth pattern of string crossings	47
Figure 43. <i>Chahar-Mezrab</i> of <i>Dashti</i> . Lashgari, <i>Radif for Violin</i>	47
Figure 44. <i>Chahar Mezrab Mahour</i> . Ali Tajvidi, <i>Radif for Violin</i>	48
Figure 45. Notation of left-hand pizz. Malek, <i>The Instrumental Radif</i>	49
Figure 46. <i>Chahar-Mezrab Mahour</i> . Ali Tajvidi, <i>Radif for Violin</i>	49
Figure 47. Excerpt from my toolbox of different melodic shapes with various <i>Tekye</i>	51
Figure 48. <i>Daraamad</i> of <i>Mahour</i> . Badie, <i>Radif of violin</i>	52
Figure 49. <i>Dashti</i> . Saba, <i>Radif for Violin</i>	55
Figure 50. Primary mode of <i>Dashti</i>	57
Figure 51. Primary mode of with its <i>motoghayyer</i> , <i>B koron</i>	57
Figure 52. Mode of <i>Dashti</i> with <i>C sori</i> for <i>gusheh</i> of <i>oshaq</i>	57
Figure 53. Mode of <i>Mahour</i>	58
Figure 54. Mode of <i>Esfahan</i>	58
Figure 55. Mode of <i>Esfahan</i> in <i>oshaq</i>	58
Figure 56. Mode of <i>Chahargah</i>	59
Figure 57. <i>Chahar mezarab</i> of <i>Esfahan</i> . Saba, <i>Radif for Violin (Vol. 3)</i>	61
Figure 58. Primary melody of <i>chahar mezarab</i> and notations of ricochets	62
Figure 59. Original bowings for <i>chahar mezarab</i> in <i>Mahour</i> . Tajvidi, <i>Radif for Violin</i>	63
Figure 60. My bowings for <i>chahar mezarab</i> in <i>Mahour</i> . Tajvidi, <i>Radif for Violin</i>	63
Figure 61. Marked Checkpoints. J.S. Bach, <i>Six Sonatas and Partitas</i>	68

List of audio and video recordings

Development Project: Edinburgh Iranian Festival – video ([D](#))

[D-1 Eine Kleine Nachtmusik \(Mozart 1778\), First and Fourth Movement](#)

[D-2 Ey Iran \(Khalighi, 1944\)](#)

[D-3 Shoushtari for Violin and Orchestra \(Dehlavi, 1959\)](#)

[D-4 Persian Valse \(Yazdanian, 2007\)](#)

[D-5 Persian Tea \(Yazdanian, 2007\)](#)

[D-6 Eshi No. 2 \(Marawi, 2014\)](#)

[D-7 Sarzamin E Man \(Sarkhoosh, 1998\)](#)

[D-8 Journey Through My Fatherland \(Ibrahimi and Shahbazian, unknown\)](#)

[D-9 Joone Joonom, \(Dadvar 2004\)](#)

[D-10 Carmen/Shaneh \(Sheybani, 1940\)](#)

[D-11 Royal Salute \(Lemaire, 1873\)](#)

Artistic Project 1: *Radif* of Saba - Recording ([AP1](#))

1. *Dashti*

[AP1-1- Daraamad](#)

[AP1-2- Oj](#)

[AP1-3- Gilaki](#)

[AP1-4- Robaie](#)

[AP1-5- Qam-Angiz](#)

[AP1-6- Deilaman](#)

2. *Esfahan*

[AP1-7- Daraamad No. 1](#)

[AP1-8- Daraamad No. 2](#)

[AP1-9- Jaame Daraan](#)

[AP1-10- Bayat e Raje, Oj, Oj va Haziz](#)

[AP1-11- Zarbi Jaame Daraan and Froud](#)

[AP1-12- Masnavi and Bakhtiari](#)

3. *Mahour*

[AP1-13- Daraamad](#)

[AP1-14- Daad/Toos](#)

[AP1-15- Delkash](#)

[AP1-16- Kereshmeh Dar Razavi](#)

[AP1-17- Foroud](#)

[AP1-18- Kereshmeh Shekaste and Foroud be Mahour](#)

[AP1-19- Eraq \(Iraq\), Kereshme Eraq \(Iraq\) and Foroud](#)

4. *Chahargah*

[AP1-20- Daramad](#)

[AP1-21- Pish Zangule](#)

[AP1-22- Chahar-Mezrab](#)

[AP1-23- Zabol](#)

[AP1-24- Mokhalef](#)

[AP1-25- Mansouri, Bastenegar and Foroud](#)

Artistic Project 2: *Radif* of Lashgari - Recording ([AP2](#))

1. *Dashti*

- [AP2-1- Overture](#)
- [AP2-2- Daraamad](#)
- [AP2-3- Beid Kaani va Hajiani](#)
- [AP2-4- Bayat Raje](#)
- [AP2-5- Chahar-Mezrab](#)
- [AP2-6- Oshaq \(Oj\)](#)
- [AP2-7- Shur E Oshaq](#)
- [AP2-8- Gilaki](#)
- [AP2-9- Qam-Angeez](#)
- [AP2-10- Robaie va Zaar va Nazaar](#)
- [AP2-11- Kooche Baaqi](#)
- [AP2-12- Saarang](#)
- [AP2-13- Tabari](#)
- [AP2-14- Bayat E Kord](#)
- [AP2-15- Deilamaan](#)
- [AP2-16- Masnavi](#)

2. *Esfahan*

- [AP2-17- Overture](#)
- [AP2-18- Daraamad No. 1](#)
- [AP2-19- Chaharmezrab](#)
- [AP2-20- Daraamad No. 2](#)
- [AP2-21- Jaame Daraan](#)
- [AP2-22- Do Beiti](#)
- [AP2-23- Hazeen](#)
- [AP2-24- Bayaat E Raje](#)
- [AP2-25- Kereshmeh](#)
- [AP2-26- Oshaq \(Oj\)](#)
- [AP2-27- Shur E Oshaq](#)
- [AP2-28- Foroud](#)
- [AP2-29- Suz O Godaz](#)
- [AP2-30- Bayaat E Shiraz](#)
- [AP2-31- Reng](#)

3. *Mahour*

- [AP2-32- Overture](#)
- [AP2-33- Daraamad No. 1](#)
- [AP2-34- Daraamad No. 2](#)
- [AP2-35- Goshayesh](#)
- [AP2-36- Daad va Toosi](#)
- [AP2-37- Khaarazmi and Majlesafrooz](#)
- [AP2-38- Khosrovaani](#)
- [AP2-39- NaseerKhani](#)
- [AP2-40- Moraad Khaani](#)
- [AP2-41- Azarbajjani](#)
- [AP2-42- Ney-reez](#)
- [AP2-43- Hesaar](#)
- [AP2-44- Tak Moghadam](#)
- [AP2-45- Feili](#)
- [AP2-46- Shekasteh](#)
- [AP2-47- Delkash](#)
- [AP2-48- Neyshaboork](#)
- [AP2-49- Eraq](#)
- [AP2-50- Esfahanak and Bastehnegar](#)
- [AP2-51- Hazeen](#)

[AP2-52- Raak Hendi](#)
[AP2-53- Raak Abdollah](#)
[AP2-54- Safeer Raak](#)
[AP2-55- Foroud](#)

4. Chahargah

[AP2-56- Overture](#)
[AP2-57- Daraamad No. 1](#)
[AP2-58- Chaharmezrab](#)
[AP2-59- Daraamad No. 2](#)
[AP2-60- Pish Zanguleh and Zanguleh](#)
[AP2-61- Kereshmeh](#)
[AP2-62- Zabol](#)
[AP2-63- Bastehnegar](#)
[AP2-64- Shekasteh Ye Mooyeh](#)
[AP2-65- Hessar](#)
[AP2-66- Foroud Va Mokhalef](#)
[AP2-67- Hazeen](#)
[AP2-68- Mansouri](#)
[AP2-69- Foroud](#)
[AP2-70- Hoda Va Pahlavi](#)
[AP2-71- Rajaz](#)
[AP2-72- Chaharmezrab](#)
[AP2-73- Reng](#)

Artistic Project 3: Selection of Metered Music - Recording ([AP3](#))

Abolhassan Saba (1902-1957)

[AP3-1- Chaharmezrab in Esfahan](#)
[AP3-2- Bezendan](#)

Darvish Khaan

[AP3-3- Chahar Mezrab in Mahour](#)

Ali Tajvidi (1919-2006)

[AP3-4- Chahar-Mezrab by Tajvidi – Re-imagined](#)

Artistic Project 4: Improvisation - Recording ([AP4](#))

Live recording

[AP4-1- Improvisation in the studied *dastgah-ha*](#)

J. S. Bach

[AP4-2- Iranian improvisation based on Sonata No. 1 BWV 1001, Adagio in G Minor](#)

Glossary

Aqaaz	Start, usually refers to the starting note or degree of the mode
Arsheh Parani	Flying bow
Avaaz	Singing a song
Bedahe Navazi	Improvisation
Bedahe Sorayi	Improvisation in poetry
Chahar Mezrab	Usually refers to a rhythmic metered piece
Chap	Left
Daraamad	Usually a metered piece that acts as overture to prepare the audience for the chosen mode
Foroud	Descend, Cadence
Gusheh-ha	Plural of Gusheh, refers to small melodies that create a <i>dastgah</i>
Ist	Pause, Cadence
Koron	Interval between flat and natural
Kook	Tuning of the instrument such as G/D/A/E for the violin. It can also refer to intonation
Maqam	Mode
Motheghayyer	Changeable, Alternate – usually refers to a note or degree of the mode that changes
Oj	Peak, Climax
Oshaq	Same as Oj, however only appears in <i>dastgah-ha Dashti</i> and <i>Esfahan</i>
Pish-Daraamad	Prelude

Radif	Row, Order – usually refers to the collection of the <i>gusheh-ha</i> in a certain order
Raast	Right
Reng	A musical form, usually a dance-like metered piece often similar to the form of rondo
Santoor	Persian dulcimer
Shahed	Witness, usually refers to the degree of the mode which is heard more than other degrees around which the melodies usually revolve.
Sori	Interval between natural and sharp
Tahrir	Ornamentation
Tar	String, An Iranian fretted string instrument
Tekye	A type of ornamentation which is most commonly used in Iranian violin playing

ABSTRACT

From the early age, I was affected by a stigma that discourages classical violinists from playing Iranian microtonal music, believing it to be inferior to Western classical music. As an Iranian classical musician, I also often had personal conflicts in my musical choices. Whether as an instrumentalist, conductor or composer – I aimed to remove any traces of Iranian influences in my music. This study is the result of my personal journey to explore some of the Iranian repertoire for the violin from a Western violinist's perspective. Initially, this journey began from resenting Iranian music to having a newfound passion which helped me resolve many of my musical and technical problems in my practice as a violinist, and a musician in general.

Iranian music, which is based on a collection of many short melodies known as *gusheh-ha* (singular: *gusheh*), is organised into a 12 modal system known as *dastgah-ha* (singular: *dastgah*). The organisation of the *gusheh-ha* within their respective *dastgah* is called *radif* (row) – mostly improvised unmetered music that forms the majority of repertoire for the violin. Since adopting the *dastgah-ha* system, several masters of Iranian music have put together some 400 *gusheh-ha*. To improvise and create new melodies, the performer must therefore learn as many different *gusheh-ha* as possible.

The theory of practice of Iranian music has been researched and discussed by ethnomusicologists such as Ella Zonis (1973), Hormoz Farhaat (1994) and Mohammad Reza Azadefar (2017). As a result, this study has aimed to focus on the practise of practice within Iranian music from a Western classical musician's perspective starting with studying the Iranian *radif* repertoire for the violin in four of the most popular *dastgah-ha* out of the twelve by two prominent composers, Abollhassan Saba and Manouchehr Lashgari. I will then conclude this study by producing new recordings of performance of Iranian violin repertoire and improvisation in Iranian music. These recordings reflect a personal performance style where it represents my training in both Western and Iranian music training. As a result of this journey, I developed a balanced sense of musicianship and performance style integrating the two musical personalities – a personal take on integration of East and West.

1. Introduction

Since its arrival in Iran in the late 19th century, the violin has been one of the most influential instruments in Iran due to its appearance, sound, range and technical potential. I learned and played Iranian violin from the age of four and subsequently studied the theory of Iranian music as a music student at the Esfahan School of Fine Art High School. My interest in the violin started with my exposure to music of Bijan Mortazavi (b. 1957), an Iranian violinist and composer. Mortazavi has been the most influential figure in the world of Iranian music since 1994 after his world premiere of his concert in Greek Theatre, Los Angeles. This significance is due to Mortazavi's integration of Western classical techniques within his performance of violin in Iranian music supported by an orchestra of Western instruments. There is also a psychological influence behind the idea of Iranian music being presented to the Western world to show the cultural side of Iran. The idea of modernisation within Iranian music is nothing new as Iran music has been heavily influenced by Western and foreign influences, particularly since the late 19th century. Ali Naqi Vaziri (1887–1979) was a member of the first generation of Iranian musicians to be trained abroad. As a result, his approach to Iranian music was heavily influenced by Western music. He took significant steps in modernisation of Iranian music ranging from notation and publication of instructions for Iranian music in 1913, to introducing symbols for the microtones in Iranian music, to establishing a school of music in Iran. However, this modernisation approach was not always welcomed by other prominent musicians in Iran. Arif Qazvini (1882–1934) was an Iranian traditionalist who issued a *fatwa*¹ which represents the clash between traditionalism and modernism and make a statement about the differences in approach to the performance of Iranian music. In his letter to Vaziri, Qazvini writes:

There is nothing I like more than the music of Iran, and I have a right of supervision over it, a right that no one can take away from me as long as I live. Given this record, I ask you to choose between European and Iranian music for those who consider me to be the most learned mujtahid in this art, and for those sensitive young people in whose veins the blood of Iranian- ness flows, who follow my unadorned sentiments, and who know that only my dedication to [our] national characteristics compelled me to write these lines, I declare this new music by this fatwa to be forbidden [haram]. On the authority of my fatwa, pray over its corpse. (Chehabi 1999. p. 143)

¹ A ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority.

Interestingly, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979, issues his take on music. After the 1979 revolution, Khomeini writes:

... music is like a drug, whoever acquires the habit can no longer devote himself to important activities. It changes people to the point of yielding to vice or to preoccupations pertaining to the world of music alone. We must eliminate music because it means betraying our country and our youth. We must completely eliminate it. ("Radio and Television must strengthen the young", Keyhan, 1 Mordad 1358/1979. p. 3)

This conflict certainly influenced my choices related to the stylistics of the performance of Iranian music on violin. On the one hand, violin is a modern and Western instrument. Some traditionalists have questioned its place in Iranian music and gone to great lengths to create substitute Iranian instruments, such as Mohammad Reza Shajarian (1940-2020). Therefore, even if traditionalists permitted the performance of Iranian music on the violin, the stylistic choices and interpretation would reflect Iranian influences almost to the exclusion of Western influences. On the other hand, the likes of Vaziri encouraged the influence of Western classical music. However, the Western influences have been in Iran for over a century and subsequently, have become a part of Iranian culture.

Iranian music is made of a few very interesting elements at its core. Its microtonal nature, and melodic and rhythmic structure and most importantly, improvisation are some its characteristics. Studying the theoretical aspects of Iranian music by scholars such as Ella Zonis (1973), Hormoz Farhaat (1990), Mohammad Reza Azadehfar (2017) as well as Western ethnomusicologists such as Bruno Nettl (1992) do provide a deeper understanding of theoretical aspects of Iranian music. Nevertheless, these theoretical aspects can also become problematic when performing Iranian music. This is particularly true of improvisation since it should come naturally and organically and not be "overthought". In addition, as Zonis puts it, there is theory of practice, and then there is the practice of practice (Zonis, 1973).

Studying Iranian music as a Western classical musician can have its challenges which requires development on elements that are not normally prioritised in Western music. One of these elements is the level of performer's personal input which is heavily encouraged and can appear in the form of improvisation or stylistic choices. Iranian music is based on a collection of many short melodies known as *gusheh-ha* (singular: *gusheh*), which are organised into a 12 modal system known as *dastgah-ha* (singular: *dastgah*). The organisation of the *gusheh-ha* within their respective *dastgah* in a particular order by Iranian masters is called *radif* (row) – mostly improvised unmetered music that forms the majority of repertoire for the violin. In early 20th century, several masters of Iranian music have put together some 400 *gusheh-ha*.

This study focuses on studying repertoire of four different *dastgah-ha* out of 12 *dastgah-ha* of Iranian music. These include *dastgah-ha* of *Dashti*, *Mahour*, *Esfahan* and *Chahargah*. These four *dastgah-ha* represent a diverse range of microtones, rhythmic and melodic structures. In addition, they are among the most widely performed in Iranian music. As a result, they are appropriate *dastgah-ha* to focus on for the purposes of this study. Since, Iranian music usually revolves around series of shorter melodies, *gusheh-ha* and that improvisation is at its core, compositions of *radif* by two prominent Iranian multi-instrumentalists and composers are presented at the Artistic Projects. Section I and II examine the foundations of Iranian music. Section III discusses the development project that culminated in the performance of Iranian orchestral music, in collaboration with the well-known Iranian soprano Darya Dadvar (b. 1971), at the Edinburgh Iranian Festival. Section IV presents a deeper look into the chosen *dastgah-ha*. Section V includes various Artistic Projects embarked on for this study. These projects consist of recordings of Iranian violin repertoire in both metered and unmetered forms. Finally, in acknowledgement of my Western classical background and training, an Iranian-style improvisation of a piece by Johann Sebastian Bach is presented. The conclusion of this study has resulted in a combined way of performing and approaching music which is not only limited to a personal musical personality but also represents both my heritage and my Western classical training.

2. Basics of Iranian Music

To play Iranian music without knowing the radif is the same as one attempting to appreciate the poetry such as Hafez without speaking Farsi. (Ali Tajvidi, 1992. p. 11)

This section is aimed for familiarisation to basics of Iranian music theory, terminologies, and general symbols. In addition, a deeper look into performance and notation of Iranian music, ornamentations and rhythmical structure.

2.1 Language and Structure

Iranian music is rooted in a history of oral teaching. In the early 20th century, Iranian music went through a phase of change and exposure to Western music teaching. Prior to this, Iranian music followed a modal or *maqam* system, divided into 12 *maqam*. These 12 modes later transitioned into a more complex and more organised system that divided Iranian music into 12 *dastgah-ha* (singular: *dastgah*). Each *dastgah* is not a mode but a series of smaller melodies, named *gusheh* (singular: *gusheh*). Each *gusheh* could have a key signature that is either the same or different from the primary mode. To simplify, *gusheh* are like different movements of a piece. *Gusheh*, as a collective, is known as *radif* (row). *Radif* has two slightly different meanings:

1. A *dastgah* is a collection of melodies grouped in a well-organised order by the composer to be performed. This order of *gusheh* is called *radif* (row order).
2. The collection of the 12 *dastgah* and the number of *gusheh* that are composed and organised in a certain order by a certain composer is also called *radif*, for instance, the *radif* of Saba or the *radif* of Mirza Abdullah Farahani. Because educational purposes were one of the primary reasons for the creation of *radif*, the definition of *radif* could refer to teachings or certain composers' "method" of *radif* (Alizadeh, 2015).

Two different types of *gusheh* exist. One is a melodic form that can be seen in more than one *dastgah*. For instance, *gusheh* of *Oj* (also *Oshaq* in some *dastgah*), meaning “peak”, is common in the *dastgah-ha* of *Esfahan* and *Dashti*. The role and character of *gusheh* of *Oshaq* are to revolve around a higher degree of the mode and (usually) contain a changeable note by a quarter-tone sharpened. The second type of *gusheh* is specific to its own *dastgah*. Such *gusheh* have their own names and usually do not appear in other *dastgah-ha*. The melodies of *gusheh* often revolve around four or five notes, which makes Iranian *gusheh* tetra-chordal. Different *gusheh* can have different key signatures/*maqam* and accidentals. They either return to the original/primary mode or facilitate modulations to another *dastgah*.

Different modal degrees of a *dastgah* often have a particular role, such as *ist* (meaning “pause” – not to be confused with “tonic”), *shahed* (“witness” – the note frequently heard and melodies, often in the form of ornamentations or groups of passing notes revolve around), *moteghayyer* (“alternate” – it is a degree of the mode which changes, usually a microtone). Recognising these roles is useful in improvisation. However, when learning the *gusheh*, patterns of notes around which melodies revolve will become clear.

Radif, while mostly consist of unmetered music, also includes some metered music as well which are more common in group playing. Unmetered music – to me, one of the most fascinating aspects of Iranian music – does not have a time signature. Nevertheless, musical forms exist in Iranian music as they do in Western classical music; some of these forms include *Reng*, *Kereshmeh*, *Do Beiti*, *Chahar Mezrab*, *Daraamad* and *Pish Daraamad*, which are often metered.

2.2 Notation

Notations are mainly for the initial learning of *dastgah* and their *gusheh*. Mohammad Reza Azadehfar explained that two types of rhythm are found in Iranian *radif*, structural and ornamental (Azdehfar, 2017). Azadehfar attempts to distinguish the difference between rhythms that are a characteristic part of a *dastgah* or *gusheh*-ha from rhythms that are used as means of *Tahrir*. Some examples of the structural rhythms can be seen in *gusheh*, such as *Choopani*, *Gham-Angeez* and *Deilaman* in the *dastgah* of *Dashti*. The difference between these two types of rhythmic characters can be learnt by studying *radif* by different composers. Identical or similar rhythms can appear in two or more different *radif*, and one can therefore conclude that the rhythm is structural. It is noteworthy that studying different versions of *radif* is not just limited to *radif* for the violin. Studying *radif* for other instruments, such as the *tar* and *santour*, is not only valuable but there are more versions, such as *radif* of Mirza Abdullah. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the same *gusheh* of *Deilaman* and the similarities between the structural rhythms and ornamentations by *radif* of both Saba and Lashgari. These similar rhythms are marked as blue and green. Audio examples of these figures can be found in [AP1-6- Deilaman](#) and [AP2-15- Deilamaan](#), respectively.



Figure 1. *Gusheh* of *Deilaman* in *Dashti*. Saba, *Radif* for Violin



Figure 2. *Gusheh of Deilaman in Dashti, Lashgari, Radif for Violin*

Gusheh of Gham-Angeez is another example of structural rhythms and ornamentations. Figure 3 and Figure 4 and audio recordings [AP1-5- Qam-Angiz](#) and [AP2-9- Qam-Angeez](#) illustrate this element.

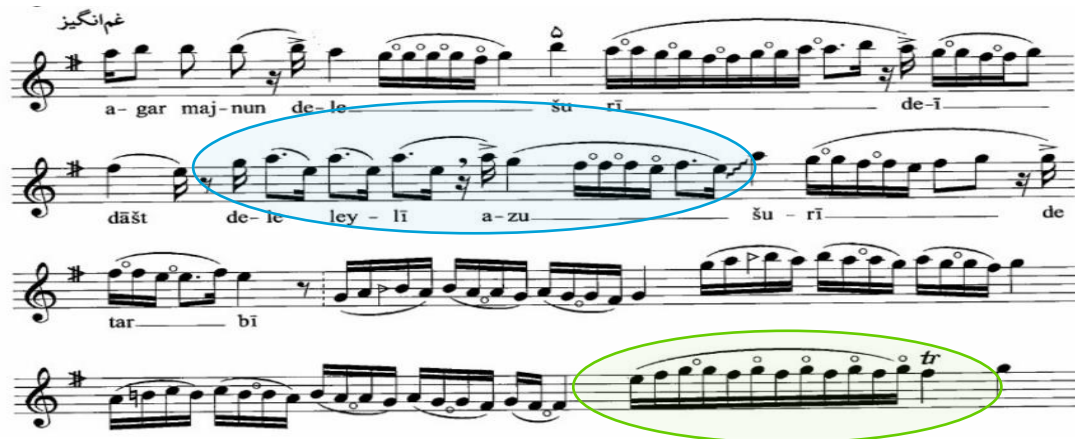


Figure 3. *Gusheh of Gham-Angeez in Dashti, Saba, Radif for Violin*



Figure 4. *Gusheh of Gham-Angeez in Dashti, Lashgari, Radif for Violin*

Another interesting characteristic of Iranian music is intervals between natural and flat, *koron* (Figure 5) – natural and sharp, and *sori* (Figure 6). *Sori* and *koron* are changeable in pitch depending on the *dastgah* in which they are being played.

Moreover, expressive intonation is also common in performances by Iranian violinists. Such intonation is not notated. In fact, these microtones are called “quarter-tones” in Farsi is from theoretical perspective and in practice, they vary.



Figure 5. *Koron*, the interval between flat and natural



Figure 6. *Sori*, the interval between natural and sharp

Improvisation is the foundation of Iranian music. The process involves learning *radif* and creating new melodies, rhythms and ornamentations or *tahrir*. Seeing as Iranian music is based on improvisation and the performer’s personal input, the adverbs “generally” or “usually” are often required in any discussion of the “rules” of this music.

In a solo performance, the performer presents their creativity and personal input by creating variations of *gusheh-ha*. A violinist, for example, would showcase their virtuosity through their vibrato, *Tahrir* and bow techniques or *arsheh parani* (flying bow – off string)

Different tunings of the violin are often used for different *dastgah*. These are due to the ability to use open strings as a fifth or octave as a drone/baseline, ensemble playing or convenience for certain fingerings, as normally, second position is not commonly taught nor used in Iranian violin teachings.

Iranian music has a long history of ensemble playing, going as far back as 6800 BC. Inevitably, with the violin came the concept of orchestral music, which introduced a certain level of sophistication (in terms of musical notation, orchestral work, etc) to musical performance. Ultimately, this development resulted in the birth of what later became the Iranian National Orchestra, a symphony orchestra that had certain Iranian instruments embedded in it. A crucial and unique aspect of this orchestra was that the entire orchestra would play Iranian microtones, *sori* (interval between natural and sharp) and *koron* (interval between flat and natural). This is different from the more common collaboration of a Western symphony orchestra accompanying one or a group of instruments that play microtones.

While the performance of microtones is not uncommon in current Western orchestras, *sori* and *koron* change depending on the *dastgah* in which they are played – adding an extra layer of challenge to perform them within an orchestra.

The term “microtones” is being used in this commentary rather than the direct translation from Farsi of *rob e parde*, meaning “quarter-tone”, the term more commonly used by Iranians. The concept of “interchangeable microtones” has two sources. The first is the context behind the chosen *dastgah/gusheh*. *Dastgah-ha*, by nature, have a certain “mood”. For example, the *dastgah* of *Mahour*, which follows the same tone order as a Western major scale, naturally represents a happy mood. In contrast, the *dastgah* of *Dashti* is normally associated with sorrowful feeling. The context or mood of a *dastgah* can also change in certain *gusheh*. Therefore, a microtone that is heard in one *dastgah* is often different in pitch in another. In *dastgah* of *Mahour*, the *gusheh* of *Delkash* creates drama and sadness by the changing the key signature. In addition, changeable microtones are also played differently by performers as a means of expression.

2.3 Ornamentation/Tahrir

One of the core virtuosic aspects of performance of Iranian music is the use of ornamentation or *tahrir*. Although several different terms in Farsi can be used to describe *tahrir*, the term *chah-chaheh*, meaning “the sound of birds singing” probably explains its roots best. Because unmetered music is a large part of Iranian *radif*, *tahrir* is not just limited to quick notes that are not part of the beat – there is no beat. *Tahrir* sometimes also refers to playing groups of passing notes, often fast, that revolve around a certain degree of the *dastgah*. Therefore, *tahrir* is not only a rhythmical element but can also involve melodic shapes exceeding a whole tone. One sign of a violinist’s mastery is to add many *tahrirs* and fast passing notes to their performance. In *radif* for the voice and other Iranian instruments, many other types of *tahrir* are heard, some of which also appear in violin repertoire. This crossover is often due to the influence of multi-instrumentalists, such as Saba. Two categories of *tahrir* can be identified: ornamental and melodic. Players usually develop their personal style of *tahrir* after years of learning and practicing Iranian *radif*.



Figure 7. Excerpt from my personal toolbox showing different *tahrir-ha* patterns

The basic and most used *tahrir* in Iranian violin performance is known as *Tekye*. This *tahrir* is indicated by a small \circ between two notes, usually either the same pitch or in the interval of second. However, in my performances, to create variety and because of my personal development, I sometimes also play *Tekye* in the interval of three. Figure 8–Figure 10 present a guide to the ways in which different types of *Tekye* are performed.



Figure 8. First example of *tahrir*. Rahmatollah Badiei (indicating how they are written and how they should be performed)



Figure 9. Second example of the above



Figure 10. Third example

As is the case in Western classical music, where one can guess when a piece was written or by whom by identifying elements in the music or recognising a composer's signature, Iranian violinists are often recognised for their ornamentations rather than their vibrato. In an online master class by Itzhak Perlman², he talks about how a performer's vibrato is their signature for life. All the Iranian violinists mentioned in this study were also recognised composers. This becomes obvious in the different ways they perform their ornamentations. For example, ornamentations used in Saba's music are much simpler and traditionally inspired by the *tar* in comparison to players such as Badiei or Malek, who developed their own personal *tahrir-ha*. In Iranian music, ornamentations are most commonly performed in intervals of seconds, for example, minor second higher. However, there are composers/players who have notated/used interval of perfect fourth. Although the notation is the same, Lashgari has instructed that certain specific *tahrir* be played in the interval of perfect fourth. Playing *tahrir* in this way also adds variety to one's performance, preventing it from becoming repetitive and predictable.

In my personal experience, practicing *tahrir* affected my performance of Western classical music. In my recent performances of Bach, I found myself improvising ornamentations, which gave me a sense of freedom and satisfaction.

² <https://www.masterclass.com/classes/itzhak-perlman-teaches-violin/5.vibrato> acc. 18/11/2019

2.4 Rhythm

While notation of Iranian music follows Western rules, particularly since the early 20th century (Binesh 1999, Zonis 1973), some of the new indications and signs that Iranian music introduces require explanation. Moreover, certain phrases and intervals are usually performed slightly differently from how they are notated. This becomes noticeable when listening to the performance of a *radif* while following the score. One example is that close intervals, such as minor second or smaller (microtonal), are often played as glissandos.

The symbols of *sori* and *koron*, different ornamentation notation and an alternate sign for a combination of vibrato and glissando moving up to a tone higher and back, namely the Persian number five symbol, ۵ (shown in green, Figure 11- [AP2-3- Beid Kaani va Hajiani](#)). Though this sign hails from the practice of an older generation of Iranian violinists who were not comfortable with higher positions and would extend their fourth finger, the symbol ۵ can appear to refer to glissando up to a tone higher and back to the original pitch but it can also be indicated on other fingers as well. In some notations and editions, an inverted version of that symbol might appear, which suggests a “juicy” glissando back up to a tone. I often employ this musical expression in my performances. It is worth noting that I usually use this technique for the end of a phrase or on the degrees of the mode, such as note of *shahed* and *ist* even where not notated.

Figure 11. *Beidkaani Va Haajiaani*, Lashgari, *Radif* for Violin

Phrasing in Iranian *radif* for violin can also seem challenging to navigate at first. In addition, there is a subtle difference in notation regarding what is written and what is to be played. Most phrases are often marked as slurred and a pattern can be picked out by noticing the rests and commas (Figure 12 and Figure 13, in yellow). However, that is not always the case. Deciding on phrasing depends on the melody itself; deciding solely on the score can sometimes have an unsatisfactory outcome. Since Iranian music was greatly inspired and influenced by poetry, phrases in question-and-answer form are common. Phrases and half phrases often end in a few ways. One way is through a short (normally a semiquaver) and accented note that connects one phrase to the next – this is more common in the works of Habibollah Badiie (1933–1992). Another way of ending, while similarly notated, is not accented and acts as “damping” the phrase. This is achieved by tapping to finger and stopping the bow at the same time. This ending is more commonly seen in the works of Lashgari. Another ending is with a long note and a pause, which is more common for the end of a full phrase as often observed in Saba’s *radif*. An indication of how stylistic performances evolved and changed by different generations of Iranian violinists. Figure 12 ([AP1-1- Daraamad](#)) and Figure 13 illustrate (in red) my interpretation of such full phrases.



Figure 12. *Daraamad* of *Dashti*, Saba, *Radif* for Violin



Figure 13. *Daraamad of Dashti, Lashgari, Radif for Violin*

Phrasing in Iranian *radif* for violin have been marked to a certain degree, although a subtle difference in notation exists between what is written and what is to be played. Phrases are often slurred. Figure 12 shows the first half of a phrase and how phrases are often divided by a comma (indicated in yellow) or short rests. Another interesting aspect of the musical notation of Iranian music is the relationship between close intervals such as second and even third in some cases. These are often played as a glissando rather than two separate notes (Figure 12 and Figure 13, indicated in blue).

3. *Dastgah-ha* of *Dashti*, *Esfahan*, *Mahour* and *Chahargah*

This section is aimed to discuss more specific details of the chosen *dastgah-ha* of *Dashti*, *Esfahan*, *Mahour* and *Chahargah* which are chosen to be the focus on this study, in particular in relation to the violin.

3.1 *Dastgah* of *Dashti*

The *dastgah* of *Dashti*, originating in the north of Iran, is usually categorised as a sorrowful *dastgah*. All recordings of *dastgah* of *Dashti* are in the mode of B (Figure 14), which makes it easier to follow the musical score and understand what degrees of the mode are changing for the purposes of this study. Otherwise, playing in different modes would require the reader to transpose the music.



Figure 14. Mode of *Dashti*. Manouchehr Lashgari, *Radif for Violin*

As mentioned earlier, certain degrees of a *dastgah-ha* have specific roles. By simply taking note of the roles of different degrees of the primary mode of *Dashti*, it is possible to improvise and understand where to go next. The note B, or the first degree of the mode, is the most noticeable, in the score and in recordings. B is a note of *shahed* (*witness*) – this note will be heard most frequently throughout the performance of this *dastgah*. In addition, in *Dashti*, first degree of the mode is also an alternate note or *moteghayyer* – which is the note B *koron*. This means that B natural, which in this case acts as the note of *shahed*, will often change to B *koron*, the *motoghayyer*. Therefore, throughout the recordings of this *dastgah*, the note B natural is not only heard most frequently but also frequently changes from B natural to B *koron* and the reverse. Figure 15 illustrates the frequency B natural (blue) and B *koron* (green) being played within three lines – excluding the *tahrir*. An audio recording of Figure 15 can be found under [AP2-2- Daraamad](#).

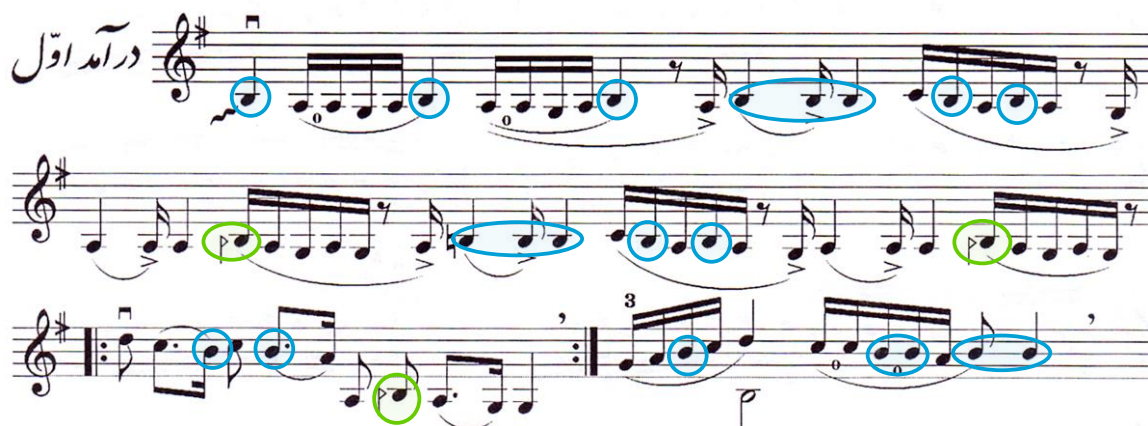


Figure 15. *Daraamad* of *Dashti*, Manouchehr Lashgari, *Radif* for Violin

The third degree below the first degree of the mode (or sixth), in this case, G natural, often (not always – see Figure 15 acts as the note of *aghaaz* (start). Examples of this can be seen in Figure 16 (audio recording [AP1-1-Daraamad](#)) and Figure 17 (audio recording [AP2-2-Daraamad](#))



Figure 16. *Daraamad* of *Dashti*, Saba, *Radif* for Violin



Figure 17. *Daraamad* of *Dashti*, Lashgari, *Radif* for Violin

The second degree of *Dashti*, in this case, C natural, also has an interesting role. Sometimes, C natural can be considered the secondary alternate note. This change can be observed in some *gusheh*, for example, *Oshaq*. However, the change can be performed without being notated, as discussed above. To simplify, the character of *Oshaq*, which means “climax” or “peak”, resembles a bent C sharp.

This is because the melodic progression has an ascending shape. In Western music and some other versions of *Oshaq*, this melodic shape changes the C natural to C *sori* and then briefly to C sharp.

This change acts either as a dramatic effect or it facilitates modulation. In this instance, I argue that this is a C sharp that should be bent back, rather than a C natural that is bent high. This is similar to the difference between a G sharp and an A flat, which is slight but still noticeable. In *Oshaq*, the second degree of the mode usually changes back to C natural in the descend or at the end of the *gusheh*. In addition, since the F or the second degree of the mode is changed to F natural (Figure 18, blue - [AP2-6- Oshaq](#)), as previously discussed, the F is played lower than usual – it normally resolves on the E. This lower F will also sound more sorrowful. Another example of such a change in the *gusheh* of *Oshaq* is when the second degree of the *dastgah* is raised a quarter-tone. Considering the character of *Oshaq*, which means “climax” or “peak”, it resembles a bent C sharp, in my opinion. The melodic progression suggests that the C natural change to C sharp and bending it down to a C *sori* will add more of Iranian character. In *Oshaq*, the second degree of the mode usually changes back to C natural in the descend or at the end of the *gusheh*. In addition, since the F, or fifth degree of the mode, is changed to F natural (Figure 18, blue), as previously discussed, the F is played lower than usual (it normally resolves on the E) to sound more sorrowful.



Figure 18. *Oshaq* in *Dashti*. Manouchehr Lashgari, *Radif for Violin*

3.2 *Dastgah of Esfahan*

With its sweet and romantic character, the *dastgah* of *Esfahan* is one of the most popular in Iranian music. Its resemblance to the Western harmonic minor scale, with a sharpened sixth degree by a quarter-tone, has made it one of the most played *dastgah* on Western instruments and in orchestral music. To maximise the expressiveness of the interval between the music in this *dastgah*, the sixth degree has been played as slightly lower and as a low *sori*. It is noteworthy that the seventh degree of *Esfahan* never used to be played as a sharp – in this case, G sharp – but as G *sori*. However, over time, this changed to G sharp, which is one of the reasons that *Esfahan* became its own *dastgah*. In addition, the current *dastgah* of *Esfahan* does not really have a *motoghayyer* or changeable note as *Dashti* does as part of its fundamental structure. Instead, a *motoghayyer* or changeable note is heard when playing some specific *gusheh* such as *Oshaq*, making it more straightforward to learn in comparison to previous *dastgah*. The only change happens in the *gusheh* of *Oshaq*: It is common practice of for degree of the *gusheh* to be sharpened by a quarter to a semi-tone. Consequently, in the *gusheh* of *Oshaq*, where the third degree of the scale is raised by a quarter-tone, it is played slightly lower than *Oshaq* in other *dastgah-ha*, such as *Dashti*, to have a more consistent and in tune interval of perfect fourth between the third and the sixth degree.

In other words, in the *Esfahan* of A (A harmonic minor with a sharpened sixth by a quarter-tone), F is played as *sori*. As the note C will be raised by a quarter-tone in the *gusheh* of *Oshaq*, the F *sori* and C *sori* are tuned together as a perfect fourth. The tuning for this *dastgah* is the common A/E/A/E.



Figure 19. Note of *Motoghayyer* in *gusheh* of *Oshaq*. Lashgari, *Radif for Violin*

The first degree – in this case, A – is usually the *aqaz* (start) and *shahed* (witness). The note of *ist* (stop-pause) is the sixth of the mode; in this case, F *sori*. The third degree of the mode, C natural, is played lower than usual as it resolves on B natural and the minor third to the tonic or first degree, making it more expressive. Some of the most interesting *gusheh* of *Esfahan* are *Jaame Daraan*, *Oshaq* and *Bayaat E Raje'*.

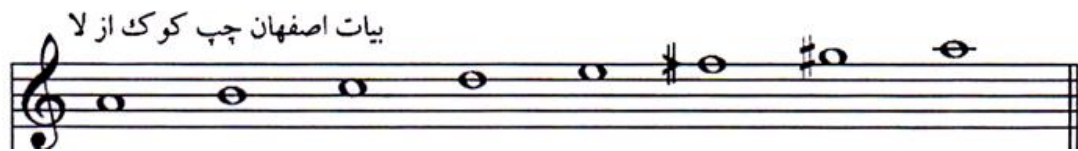


Figure 20. *Maqam* of *Esfahan*. Lashgari, *Radif* for violin

3.3 *Dastgah of Mahour*

Mahour is one of the most popular and widely used *dastgah*-ha in Iranian music. Because of their resemblance to the Western major scale and harmonic minor, respectively, the *dastgah* of *Esfahan* and the *dastgah* of *Mahour* have contributed the most pieces of Iranian music that are performed by orchestras.

The nature of *Mahour* is happier when compared to *Dashti* or *Chahargah*. However, while the primary mode or *maqam* of *Mahour* is in a major scale, some of its *gusheh* have rather different key signatures. As with previous *dastgah*-ha, all the pieces and examples presented here are in the same mode, *Mahour* of D.



Figure 21. Mode (*Maqam*) of *Mahour*. Lashgari, *Radif for Violin*

There are a few notes that often change through expressive intonation. One of these is the third degree of mode, in this example, F sharp. In recordings of other Iranian musicians, the third degree of the *dastgah*, in this stance F sharp, is often lowered to an F *sori* – in particular to high F *sori*. This is an interesting characteristic of *Mahour* that is common practice despite usually not being notated. I always enjoy the sound of changing F natural to F *sori* – it is the performer's decision how dramatic they would like to make the performance. However, in some *gusheh* in *Mahour*, the F is notated as F *sori*. *Gusheh* of *Goshayesh* is an example of this, as illustrated in Figure 22 (audio recording [AP2-35- Goshayesh](#)).



Figure 22. *Gusheh* of *Goshayesh*, *Mahour*. Lashgari, *Radif for the violin*

Another interesting degree of this *dastgah* is the seventh, in this case, C. Sometimes, C sharp is lowered to a C natural, which creates an interesting change in the feeling of the *Mahour*. This lowering of the pitch also creates an opening to repeat some of the melodic phrases in with a C natural which extends an improvisation. It is important to add that the C sharp, or the seventh degree, only changes to a C natural in descending phrases and melodic shapes. An example follows below (Figure 23, [AP2-33- Daraamad No. 1](#)).

Figure 23. *Daraamad of Mahour*. Lashgari, *Radif for Violin*

Some of the best known *gusheh* of *Mahour* include *Delkash*, *Daad* (also known as *Toosi*), *Shekasteh* and *Moraad Khaani*. However, from an educational perspective, there are some *gusheh* with different key signatures/*maqam* from the primary *dastgah*. Learning these *gusheh-ha* will help one understand what notes/degrees of the mode usually change and this will help greatly with improvisation. I therefore consider the study of the following *gusheh* to be important: *Basteh Negaar*, *Nahib*, *Mohayyer* and *Shekasteh*. The name of the latter means “broken” and refers to “breaking” the key signature of the primary mode. Figure 24 and Figure 25 illustrate some of these *gusheh* and their *maqam*.



Figure 24. *Gusheh* of *Neyreez*. *Lashgari*, *Radif for Violin*



Figure 25. *Gusheh* of *Shekasteh*. *Lashgari*, *Radif for Violin*

3.4 Dastgah of Chahargah

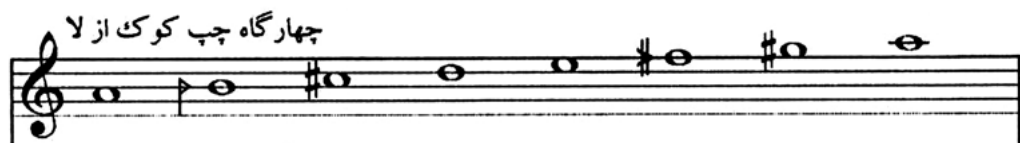


Figure 26. *Maqam of Chahargah, Lashgari, Radif for Violin*

Chahargah is one of the most fascinating *dastgah-ha* in Iranian music. *Chahargah* consists of two identical tetrachords consecutively. I have played every piece in this *dastgah* in the mode of *Chahargah* of A. The note of *aqaz* or start, usually is the fourth below A; in this case, E. The first degree of the mode usually acts as the stop note, but it can be a start as well. Moreover, there is no *moteghayyer* or alternate note in its primary mode, though there are different modes in some of its *gusheh*, such as *Hesaar* and *Mokhalef*. The character of some of the melodies in this *dastgah* suggests a relatively dark sound. As a result, I often play *gusheh* in this *dastgah* in higher positions with different pressures from both the bow and left hand. One of the most interesting *gusheh* of *Chahargah* is *Hesaar* – due to its *maqam*, it creates a distinctly different feeling within the *dastgah* by changing the C sharp to C *sori* and D natural to a D sharp. This creates a modulation feeling, though as it is commonly practiced, at the end of the *gusheh*, we descend back to the original *maqam* of *Chahargah* ([AP2-65- Hesar](#)).

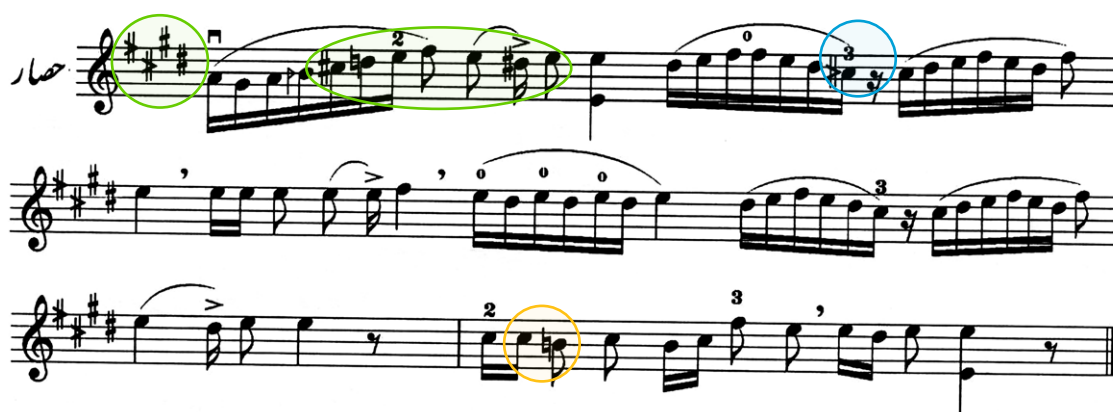


Figure 27. *Hesaar in Chahargah. Lashgari, Radif for Violin*

One of the structural melodic shapes and rhythms that is characteristic of this *dastgah* is presented in the figures below. Figure 28 ([AP1-20- Daraamad](#) and Figure 29 present this element in the *radif* of Saba, Figure 30 the *radif* of Lashgari and Figure 31 the *radif* of Badiei. This melodic shape can be heard throughout the *dastgah*.



Figure 28. *Daraamad* of *Chahargah*. Saba, *Radif* for Violin



Figure 29. *Daraamad* of *Chahargah*. Saba, *Radif* for Violin



Figure 30. *Daraamad* of *Chahargah*. Lashgari, *Radif* for Violin



Figure 31. *Daraamad* of *Chahargah*. Badiei, *Radif* for Violin

Since the age of fourteen and my transition to classical violin from playing Iranian violin, I had avoided any exposure to performances of Iranian music on the violin. After over 15 years, I looked at Iranian music from a Western classical musician's perspective. As a result, it was important to re-learn performance of Iranian music on the violin. This was done through an initial research phase by repeated exposure to recordings of Iranian music on the violin, noting stylistic and technical elements. In addition, I also decided to learn two *radif* by two prominent Iranian multi-instrumentalists including Abollhassan Saba (1902–1957)³ in Artistic Project 1 and Manouchehr Lashgari (1936)⁴ in Artistic Project 2. The fact that both are multi-instrumentalists mean their music would represent elements and techniques inspired by *radif* for other instruments as well. In addition, *radif* by Saba and Lashgari are known as two of the most important and complete versions of *radif* for the violin. Therefore, Artistic Project 1 and 2 acts as evidence of my learning process and some of my observations are discussed in this chapter.

While only the *radif* by two prominent composers are presented in Artistic Projects 1 by Saba and Artistic Project 2 by Lashgari, extensive research into the subject has been taken place through studying scores and recordings by other prominent composers by prominent violinists such as Assadollah Malek (1941-2002)⁵ and Ali Tajvidi (1919-2006)⁶ as well as works by current scholars. The other, was exposure to Iranian music through videos and recordings. These mainly included recordings of prominent Iranian violinists throughout different generations including Assadollah Malek, Habibollah Badie (1933-1992), Homayoun Khorram (1913-2013), Shamlou Karband (b. 1942) and Bijan Mortazavi (b. 1957). The Artistic Project 3 involves recording of a selection of Iranian metered music which represent some interesting Western classical techniques. The result of the research and experimentations throughout the study in the previous Artistic Projects is drawn in a conclusion in Artistic Project 4 which involves my own improvisation in Iranian music in the four *dastgah-ha* focused in this study.

³ *Violin courses radif of ostad Abollhassan (2004)*

⁴ *Radif of Iranian music (2011)*

⁵ *The instrumental radif of Assadollah Malek (2015)*

⁶ *Iranian music by Ali Tajvidi (1992)*

4. Development Project (Edinburgh Iranian Festival)

6.1 Concept

At the time of this project taking place, my stance on Iranian music was very different. As mentioned in the introduction, I had been heavily influenced by my peers in Iran to avoid performing inferior music such as Iranian microtonal music. However, I still always carried a deep desire to combine my passion in both Iranian and Western classical music and represent this music to Western audience – this was my initial reasoning behind playing the violin at the age of four in the first place. One can then imagine the internal conflict a musician can have with these two different musical personalities, particularly with making decisions on musical and stylistic choices. This project which serves as the development project for this study, was part of the Edinburgh Iranian Festival held in 2017. The project was a collaboration between my orchestra, Arezoo Symphony Orchestra founded in 2012, and the Paris-based Iranian soprano Darya Dadvar (b. 1971). One of my main aims at this point of my study and rationale for getting involved in such a project was that I would be collaborating with another musician. This meant I would have to orchestrate, transcribe and/or arrange some of Dadvar's music. I would then be required to work in my full capacity as a musician, acting as a conductor and arranger, rather than only my violinist element. As mentioned in the introduction, I was aware and hoping this study would be a process that would change and evolve my perspective and musicianship, this would then be a more appropriate start. Moreover, Dadvar had obtained permission from composers for pieces included in her repertoire and this concert which was a great opportunity to perform some of the most popular and nostalgic pieces of Iranian culture.

In addition, the aim of the festival, and mine at the time, was to bring Iranian music to a wider audience, in particular non-Iranian audiences. Therefore, I felt it appropriate to feature both Western and Iranian music. Hearing music and musical elements that they recognise and to which they can relate would make non-Iranians in the audience feel more comfortable before we dive into Iranian music. Therefore, in a way, the aim was to create a semi-formal atmosphere within the audience, which is also why I decided to take off my jacket and conduct the orchestra in a more "casual" way.

6.2 The Performance

The resulting performance involved an orchestra of more than 30 players from Asia, Europe, North America and Australia and an audience of more than 600 people. The programme was divided into two sections: performance with the soloist and performance without. This format would allow me to cover a large period of Iranian music history by performing pieces written from 1880s to 2014.

The programme for the performance is as follows:

- ***Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (Mozart, 1778)** [D-1 Eine Kleine Nachtmusik \(Mozart 1778\), First and Fourth Movement](#)
- ***Ey Iran* (Khaliqi, 1944)** [D-2 Ey Iran \(Khaleghi, 1944\)](#)
- ***Shoushtari for Violin and Orchestra* (Dehlavi, 1959)** [D-3 Shoushtari for Violin and Orchestra \(Dehlavi, 1959\)](#)
- ***Persian Valse* (Yazdanian, 2007)** [D-4 Persian Valse \(Yazdanian, 2007\)](#)
- ***Persian Tea* (Yazdanian, 2007)** [D-5 Persian Tea \(Yazdanian, 2007\)](#)
- ***Eshi No. 2* (Marawi, 2014)** [D-6 Eshi No. 2 \(Marawi, 2014\)](#)
- ***Sarzamin E Man* (Sarkhoosh, 1998)** [D-7 Sarzamin E Man \(Sarkhoosh, 1998\)](#)
- ***Journey Through My Fatherland* (Unknown–folk song)** [D-8 Journey Through My Fatherland \(Ibrahimi and Shahbazian, unknown\)](#)
- ***Jooneh Joonom* (Dadvar, 2004)** [D-9 Joone Joonom, \(Dadvar 2004\)](#)
- ***Carmen/Shaneh* (Sheybani, 1940)** [D-10 Carmen/Shaneh \(Sheybani, 1940\)](#)
- ***Royal Salute* (Lemaire, 1873)** [D-11 Royal Salute \(Lemaire, 1873\)](#)

In preparation of this project, I wanted to have a better understanding of how Iranian orchestral music works in terms of harmony and elements of orchestration. This would enable me to make better decisions in my arrangements and performance stylistics. For this reason, I purchased several Iranian orchestral scores from Iran through private contacts with the composers (or their relatives) themselves. This included the works of Dehlavi, which represent some of the earliest Iranian orchestral music, one of which is included in this performance ([D-3 Shoushtari for Violin and Orchestra \(Dehlavi, 1959\)](#)); the Love Songs Series by Iranian-Armenian conductor and composer Loris Tjeknavorian, whose works are later than Dehlavi's and therefore more contemporary; and five pieces by Peyman Yazdanian, two of which were world premiered in the performance ([D-4 Persian Valse \(Yazdanian, 2007\)](#) and [D-5 Persian Tea \(Yazdanian, 2007\)](#)). Moreover, this would ensure these hard-copies of scores to be digitised not only for means of preservation but to also create orchestral parts for performing them. Those considerations informed my choice of how music was to be arranged and performed. One example of this is my arrangement of *Jooneh Joonom*. Figure 32, illustrates the original score I was given by Dadvar. As it can be seen, the original score is a basic notation of the main melody with the harmony and the form of the repeats pencilled.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the piece 'Jooneh Joonom' by Ar. Danya Dadvar. At the top left, there are handwritten letters 'A B C', 'B A B', and 'FF H F H F'. The title 'Jooneh Joonom' and the composer's name 'Ar. Danya Dadvar' are written in the center. The score is written on three systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line (labeled 'Voice') and a piano accompaniment (labeled 'Piano'). The second system also includes a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system shows only the piano accompaniment. The score is marked with various notes, rests, and dynamics, and includes section markers 'A', 'B', and 'C'. There are also some handwritten annotations like 'Abdim' and 'A E7'.

Figure 32. Original score of *Jooneh Joonom* by Dadvar

Figure 32 shows my orchestration for the performance. It has been orchestrated for the instruments present within the orchestra. The rationale behind not using brass instruments is that it is a common orchestration in works of Iranian microtonal music, such as Dehlavi's. In addition, the set-up of double winds and strings goes back to times of radio in Iran with the programme of *Golha* in 1940s (Haghdar 2022) which this set-up was featured by AbolHassan Saba and Badiei. Therefore, this orchestration does have a distinctive familiar colour to Iranian audience and to the Western audience, represents part of our music with familiar instruments and influences. Figure 33 also shows that I aimed to add more counter-point and moving voices within the arrangement where appropriate – an example is marked in blue (D-9 Joone Joonom, (Dadvar 2004)).

The image displays a musical score for an orchestration. The score is written for the following instruments: Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets in Bb, Bassoons, Soprano, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The music is in a key signature of two sharps (D major) and a time signature of 8/8. The score is divided into measures, with dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte), *dolce* (softly), and *pizz* (pizzicato) indicated. A blue oval highlights a specific section of the score, likely the example mentioned in the text, which shows counter-point and moving voices. The highlighted section includes parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass.

Figure 33. My orchestration of *Jooneh Joonom*

Another example of a significant piece which was personally very important to me was Shoushtari for violin and orchestra by Hossein Dehlavi. This piece represents a very interesting colour and style of Iranian orchestral music and for over 18 years, I kept the desire and hope of performing and representing this angle of Iranian music to the Western audience. In the original score of this piece published in 1955, this piece is written in *dastgah* of *Homayoun*, *gusheh* of *Shoushtari*. As mentioned earlier, *dastgah* of *Esfahan* has originated from *dastgah* of *Homayoun* – therefore, the similarities and the general *maqam* of the piece is the same as *Esfahan*. As a result, this piece does contain a microtone, the sixth degree of the *maqam*, as well as been orchestrated for the set-up of Iranian National Orchestra (usually double winds and strings with brass substituted by Iranian instruments such as tar and oud). Realistically, it was not practical to play the microtone simply due to the fact that *Esfahan* and *Homayoun* are widely the chosen *dastgah-ha* for Western instruments to choose, it would be more appropriate to play the sixth degree as a natural rather than a *sori* as we did not have the Iranian instruments within the orchestra. Moreover, I was still uncomfortable with the concept of microtones within orchestral performance, particularly with very short rehearsal time. Upon reflection now, I am regretful of not adding and performing the microtones in that concert as it would represent a more authentic sound out of the orchestra. Figure 34 is an illustration of the original score and Figure 35 is the first page of my orchestration. The voices for instruments such as *Tar*, *Santour* (in Dehlavi's publication, *Santur*) and *Oud* have carefully been spread between the winds and strings.

شوشتري برای ویولون و ارکستر بر اساس اثر ابوالحسن صبا

SHOUSHTARI for Violin and Orchestra

Based on a piece by A.SABĀ

حسین دهلوی

H. DEHLAVI

Allegretto ♩ ca 88

2 Flauti
1 Oboe
2 Clarinetti in Sib
Clarinetto basso in Sib
Santur I
Santur II
Tār I
Tār II
Ud
Violino Solo
Violini I
Violini II
Viole
Violoncelli
Contrabassi

Figure 34. Original orchestral score of *Shoushtari* for violin and orchestra, Dehlavi

Shoushtari for Violin and Orchestra

A. Saba/H. Dehlavi
Orchestration by M.A.Keshmiri

Allegretto ♩ = 88

Flute *p*

Oboe *p*

Clarinet in Bb *p*

Bass Clarinet in Bb *p*

Violin

Violin I *sf p*

Violin II *sf p*

Viola *non div.* *sf p*

Violoncello *sf p*

Double Bass *sf p*

Figure 35. My arrangement and orchestration of *Shoushtari* for Violin and Orchestra

Upon reflection, this piece has very rarely is performed without a conductor guiding the orchestra throughout the piece. Although I was aware of this issue prior to the concert from previous concerts involving the same piece, I was also aiming to create a particular persona and showmanship, inspired by Mortazavi (though not as a conductor capacity in his case). Particularly, there are sections with the woodwind which just simply due to their distance from the rest of the orchestra is a tendency for them to sound slightly behind. This is visible in my performance where I had to turn away from the audience in multiple occasions and to guide the orchestra. This, alone, can be too much of a burden on the conductor who is also the soloist. While more rehearsal time could have significantly improved issues such as this, in a previous performance of this piece in 2016 conducted by Sian Edwards, there were no issues. Moreover, I was able to focus on my performance than be conscious of directing the orchestra. In addition, the expression of “*less is more*” is very true here. I had also made the orchestra more reliant on my cues than perhaps needed. Reflecting back, while having a separate conductor would have resolved the performing challenges, one might wonder if my rehearsing technique and making the ensemble reliant on cues could have led to this problem. I was working with a selection of great professional musicians and I believe at a certain level, my heritage may have given me a sense of authority over the music and exaggerated the desire to control the orchestra.

Another missed opportunity is in performance of *Ay Iran* which has been the Iranian “Finlandia” in terms of its place as the de facto Iranian national anthem. It was created during the foreign invasions and was first performed in 1944 with music by Khaliqi and poem by Hossein Gol-E-Golab (1895 -1985). *Ay Iran* is written in *Dashti* which without microtones, still can identify as being in this *dastgah* and *Ay Iran* is often performed with piano and other Western instruments without its microtones. However, bearing in mind that that another piece performed in this performance was the first Iranian national anthem, ironically, by the French musician Alfred Lumaire (1842-1907) which is more Western influenced than *Ay Iran*. Playing the microtones would have been a much better representation of both pieces from different times in Iranian history – one emphasising more Western influences by Lumaire and the other by Khaliqi stressing Iranian music within its nationalist context.

5. Performance of Radif on Violin

As a result of my repeated exposure to Iranian music, I noticed a series of interesting characteristic elements in style and performance which are presented here. These specific elements relating to the violin include tuning and intonation, sound, vibrato, harmonics, double stops, bow techniques and improvisation.

The microtonal nature of Iranian music makes a musician step out of their comfort zone and look at their practice differently. The nature of the violin also offers violinists the chance to practice expressive intonation within the microtones and to produce different types of sound by using different tuning systems, for example, the technique known as scordatura or “prepared violin”. In addition, there are many Western influences in the performance of Iranian music on the violin, allowing one to pick and choose a wide range of violin techniques to add to their performance.

5.1.1 Prepared violin

One of the most interesting aspects of Iranian violin playing is scordatura or “alternate tuning”. Tuning the violin differently from the standard Western tuning is not that uncommon in other genres of music, such as jazz, and in the folk music of other countries. In fact, alternate tuning is not unheard of in Western classical music itself, for example, in Mozart’s *Sinfonia Concertante* for Violin, Viola and Orchestra, and Camille Saint-Saëns’s *Danse Macabre*. More than 12 tunings are used in Iranian music by different violinists, some of which are presented in Figure 36. The many different tunings exist to create a variety of colours in each *dastgah*, to improve performance with other instruments, to allow for personal preference, and to enable the use of open strings as a continued bassline. Consequently, the use of different tunings for the violin is also referred to as “male voice” (*chap kook*: tuning left) and “female voice” (*raast kook*: tuning right). However, the difference is only a perfect fifth higher or lower. For instance, if we are playing in *dastgah* of *Esfahan* of D (D harmonic minor with a quartertone sharpened sixth), the *raast kook* will be A, meaning everything is transposed and played a perfect fifth higher. For the ease of navigation, the recordings presented here are based on a *chap kook* (male voice).

« Index »

« فهرست »

	Tune	کوک	
Āvāz-e-Bayāt-e-Tork..... 10			آواز بیات تُرک..... ۱۰
Āvāz-e-Segāh..... 28			آواز سه‌گاہ..... ۲۸
Āvāz-e-Shour..... 48			آواز شور..... ۴۸
Āvāz-e-Afshāri..... 68			آواز افشاری..... ۶۸
Āvāz-e-Abouatā..... 82			آواز ابوعطا..... ۸۲
Āvāz-e-Dashti..... 96			آواز دشتی..... ۹۶
Āvāz-e-Homāyoun..... 112			آواز همایون..... ۱۱۲
Āvāz-e-Esfahān..... 132			آواز اصفهان..... ۱۳۲
Āvāz-e-Chāhārgāh..... 146			آواز چهارگاہ..... ۱۴۶
Āvāz-e-Māhour..... 162			آواز ماهور..... ۱۶۲
Āvāz-e-Navā..... 182			آواز نوا..... ۱۸۲
Āvāz-e-Rāstvāpāndjgāh..198			آواز راست و پنج‌گاہ..... ۱۹۸

Figure 36. List of different tunings for different *dastgah-ha*, Lashgari, *Radif for Violin*

Initially – and in the recordings presented in Artistic Projects 1 and 2 – I followed the suggested alternate tunings by the authors. While being aware the aim is to also represent my Western training, it was also important to approach my initial practice of Iranian music in a stylistically informed practice order. This enriching experience is one that every violinist should have. Tuning the violin in a lower pitch than the standard, such as G3/B3/A4/E5 for *dastgah* of *Dashti* ([AP2-2- Daraamad](#)), creates a unique and colourful sound. The experience can be likened to playing the violin and viola as one instrument.

The intervals also become much wider on the D string which also creates more flexibility with *sori* and *koron*. In addition, the performer is encouraged to rely much more on their ear than on muscle memory. This has been one of the most important changes in my personal approach to violin playing. While the very act of playing *sori* and *koron* makes the performer listen more, playing in an alternate tuning further enforces this process. In my experience, this type of performance frees the player from consciously thinking about what note, position or string to play. Instead, the focus is on sound and the music itself.

After more than three years of performing Iranian *radif*, my choice of tuning varies depending not only on the repertoire or *dastgah* but also on the overall performance. String players are overly aware of the challenge of constantly changing the tuning of their instrument in the course of a single performance. I therefore used two different violins during my recording of these projects. However, I believe it is of great importance to practice and play the Iranian *radif* in the standard violin tuning as well. While I enjoyed creating different tone colours with other tunings, such as A3/E4/A4/E5 or G3/D4/G4/D5, I personally prefer to play Iranian *radif* in the standard G3/D4/A4/E5. I am aware of my personal history of bias towards Iranian violin performance, and this could be the reason for my preference for the standard tuning. However, in the context of a performance and using only one violin, the standard tuning does allow me to cover any *dastgah*. In addition, while improvising, the standard Western tuning of G3/D4/A4/E5 will usually be my preference because of the natural harmonics that I tend to use frequently. Assadollah Malek (1941–2002) was known for his unique tunings for the violin. Interestingly, his unique choice of tunings go as far as E3/A3/A4/C5 and F#3/C #3/A4/E5.

Specific pieces of music written for a prepared violin would create major challenges or simply be unplayable in the standard Western tuning. One example is *Chahar Mezrab* in *Esfahan*, which is part of the submission ([AP3-1- Chahar Mezrab in Esfahan](#)).

5.1.2 Intonation

Intonation in Iranian violin playing can initially be a terrifying experience for any classical musician. Even though I grew up with Iranian music, a great deal of my study is still spent obsessing over intonation. While the idea of microtonal music is nothing new to Western musicians, *sori* and *koron* dramatically varies in certain situations. *Sori* and *koron* vary from one *dastgah* to another, from one performer to another, and, as a means of expression intonation, from one phrase to another. Furthermore, the *sori* and *koron* are not simply used as “effects”; they are in fact a large component of identity in Iranian music.

The first challenge often faced in learning Iranian *radif* is finding where *sori* and *koron* are located and how they are meant to sound in the context of a *dastgah* or *gusheh*. If a violinist strictly plays *sori* and *koron* exactly a quarter of a tone higher/lower, which is the first step in learning them, there will initially be a tendency to play the notes followed by *sori* or *koron* to be a quarter sharper or flatter. For instance, playing an F *sori* on the D string of the violin might not be too difficult to achieve. However, because violin playing relies heavily on the relation between notes, there will be a tendency for subsequent notes to be played a quarter too sharp. This task will become even more complex in tunings that differ from the standard G3/D4/A4/E5. One reason is reliance on the resonance of the other open strings and their harmonic series. For instance, when playing the note D on the A string in the standard tuning G3/D4/A4/E5, the lower D string will be resonating. Similarly, the note A on the G string, if played in tune, will make the open A and E strings resonate – this is what I rely on for intonation accuracy. However, in different tuning systems, such as A3/E4/A4/E5, the resonance of harmonic series often happens on notes that are “unexpected” to a classical violinist’s ear. I often found it difficult to play a “satisfying” resonant D on the A string in these tunings compared to what I had grown accustomed to over the years.

Obsessing over intonation is something that I expect from classical violinists who are interested in Iranian music. In my case, this obsession reached a point where I would use software, such as Sonic Visualisers, to measure the quarter-tones by different performers and in different *dastgah-ha*. This exercise helped me understand the differences in the placement of *sori* and *koron* in different *dastgah-ha*. My practice of *sori* and *koron* started in the following three ways:

- Finding F *sori* on the D string on the violin: For me, the second finger seemed the easiest to divide into a quarter because I could visually place it between F natural and F sharp. Having something to relate the tuning to helped me tune the octave. By finding F *sori*, the violinist can simply move to the G string and repeat the same process to find B *koron* and, on the A string, the octaves. I would then repeatedly check every *sori* and *koron* with its open string to allow my ears to learn the interval. For example, after locating F *sori* on the D string, I would play F *sori* and then open-string D to train my ears and my muscle memory – even though I had already realised that I should not be reliant on muscle memory given that the microtones are changeable. More importantly, I would also practice the microtones located in different positions on the same string or in higher positions on the adjacent strings. I believed that the more I immersed myself in this process, the less intimidating the performance of Iranian microtones would become.
- Using a drone pitch: I was inspired by the way in which Indian musicians use the drone, which can be described as a sustained, monotonous and usually low note, not only in their music but also as a means of practicing intonation. The use of drones proved to be useful when practicing and tuning microtones.

- Becoming comfortable with quartertones: Following the suggestion of Hossein Alizadeh in *Fundamentals of Iranian Music Theory* (2015) I tuned the *sori* and *koron* in intervals of perfect fourth and fifth in most of my performances. As I became more comfortable with quarter-tones, it became necessary to push the boundaries and think of *sori* and *koron* more as microtones; in other words, they would not be exactly quarter flattened or sharpened. As Alizadeh stated, the *sori* and *koron* vary from one *dastgah* to another. In addition, even players of fretted instruments, such as the *tar* and *setar*, move the frets constantly. This is a routine part of tuning their instruments before a performance (they can also bend the string), which depends on the *dastgah* they will be playing. Conscious of the idea of expressive intonation, I next divided *sori* and *koron* into two: high *sori*/low *sori* and high *koron*/low *koron*. This also follows the principle that, depending on the note the *sori* and *koron* are resolving to, a degree of flexibility exists that allows them to be played slightly higher or lower. However, it means that any other *sori* and *koron* that follow need to be adjusted accordingly, in intervals of perfect fourth or perfect fifth. For instance, if I play C *sori* as a low *sori*, and if it is followed by the higher F *sori* shortly after, I will make sure the C *sori* and F *sori* are tuned in a perfect fourth.

Expressive intonation is an aspect of performance that brings me great joy. The freedom it gives me makes me feel more in control and engaged. In addition, I believe that it makes my performance more authentic and expressive – both in Iranian and Western repertoire. The question that arises is when, where and how expressive intonation can be practiced in Iranian music. The first point to remember is that there are almost no restrictions. While this idea is liberating, such freedom can also be terrifying. The first step is listening to recordings of Iranian music and attending performances as often as possible. In my view, Iranian music comes from the performer's subconscious. It is the music, techniques and creative skills already practiced that organically emerge during a performance. After weeks of exposure to Iranian microtonal music, I found myself humming Iranian *radif* while going about my daily tasks. Given that I would often hum new melodies inspired by the *radif* that I had learned and been listening to, I realised that my exposure to Iranian music was working. Therefore, the important role that time plays in learning Iranian music cannot be underestimated.

By listening to recordings of the same piece by different violinists, particularly if a score was available, I began to understand the flexibility in microtones and how expressive intonation is practiced by others. After “imitating” the flexibility with microtones displayed by other violinists, I felt that I had “permission” to practice my own ideas next.

5.1.3 Sound

Performance of Iranian *radif* has inspired me to create variety in my sound. From videos of performances by Iranian violinists, such as Bijan Mortazavi, Habibollah Badiei, Ali Tajvidi and Assadollah Malek, it appears that *sul tasto* is the common technique that is used to create a warm sound. *Sul tasto* is also used as an effect in Iranian fiddle playing.

In my own experimentation, I often attempt to create a difference in sound with repeated phrases. To develop a more personal stylistic performance, I often play phrases in higher positions by changing the weight of the fingers on the string to vary the sound and its intensity. This is particularly helpful in improvisations as I find it a challenge to create a balance between my personal input and the *gushes* I have learnt. Playing on higher positions, particularly in prepared violin, is truly a unique experience for any violinist. One of my favourite phases of learning Iranian *radif* was learning the *dastgah* of *Dashti* with the prepared violin of G3/B3/A4/E5.

5.1.4 Vibrato

Vibratos are often a violinist's signature, which makes them personal. In Iranian music, no single definition for "Iranian vibrato" exists. In addition, it is part of a classical violinist's education to develop different types of vibratos in terms of speed and width. Interestingly, I have noticed characteristic types of vibratos in the recordings of Iranian violinists. Generally, the vibratos are either slow and wide or wide and fast. The width could go as far as a semitone. An Eastern European combination of vibrato-glissando can sometimes be heard in performances by some Iranian violinists (similar to glissando/vibrato of *Zigeunerweisen* by Pablo Sarasate (1844-1908)). The recordings of Assadollah Malek in *Esfahan* on the album *Ghorub E Kouhestan* are an example, although they vary slightly from the term the 'gypsy vibrato-glissando' (cited here owing to its usage anecdotally) that is practiced in classical music. The vibratos tend to happen on the original and landing notes rather than occurring all the way through in combination with glissandos.

5.1.5 Harmonics

Using natural harmonics is common among Iranian violin players. The harmonics used are normally the higher octave and higher fifth. However, it is noteworthy that since there are different tunings for the violin, the harmonics are also different. Consequently, when first heard, natural harmonics might sound highly unusual. It is also important to note that because of changes in the tuning or *scordatura*, the placement of harmonics on the fingerboard will vary slightly. Some of the natural harmonics might also feel less resonant and need to be touched more accurately to create a clean and resonant sound. The usage of artificial harmonics seems to be extremely uncommon: None of the music by any of the composers and violinists mentioned in this study include artificial harmonics. In my personal improvisations and final recording, I aimed to add some artificial harmonics for the sake of balance.

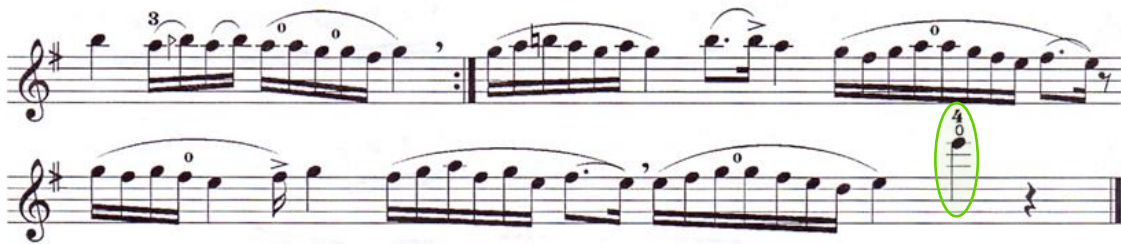


Figure 37. Use of natural harmonic in *Dashti, Lashgari, Radif for Violin*



Figure 38. Use of natural harmonic in *Dashti, Lashgari, Radif for Violin*

5.1.6 Double Stops

Using multiple strings at the same time is common in the performance of Iranian music on violin, for example, in metered music, such as *Chahar Mezrab*. This is usually achieved by playing an open string to have a continued baseline or drone and using fingers on another string. Because Iranian music is usually modal and melodic, double stops can pose a challenge to intonation while playing *sori* and *koron*. *Sori* and *koron* are usually only played as double stops with an adjacent open string that acts as a drone. Other harmonic intervals with *sori* and *koron* are rarely played. If they are, they only appear as *Tahrir* or quick passing notes. Double stops in intervals of thirds, fourths, sixths and octave can be heard in works of later generations of Iranian violinists since Saba, such as Ali Tajvidi, Habibollah Badiei, Homayoun Khorram and Bijan Mortazavi. However, after practicing Iranian violin repertoire for over three years, I do not find microtonal double stops such as thirds to be “out of tune”. In fact, I have recently started using them in my performances. These are usually intervals of thirds, sixths and, occasionally, tenths.

The interval of the tenth, like repeated up-bow staccato, is extremely rare. Therefore, I have attempted to be mindful and use this interval in my performances of Iranian music. This can be heard in my final project, [AP4-1- Improvisation in the studied *dastgah-ha*](#)) and [AP3-4- Chahar-Mezrab by Tajvidi – Re-imagined](#).

5.1.7 Bow

When one studies Iranian *radif*, for the violin in particular, much evidence for Western influence is found. During a solo performance, the performer represents their creativity and personal input by creating variations of *gushes*. Technically, a violinist's virtuosity is displayed through their vibrato, *tahrir* and bow techniques or *arsheh parani* (flying bow – off string). Although *arsheh parani* is an ambiguous term, it often refers to Western bow techniques that have influenced Iranian music, such as spiccato, staccato and even ricochet. *Arsheh parani* can also refer to certain string crossings that show the influences of other string instruments, such as the *tar* and *setar*. A few different patterns of string crossings are common in Iranian violin playing. Some of the most common string-crossing patterns are presented in Figure 39, Figure 40, Figure 41 and Figure 42. The figures show that it is more common to start on an up bow, probably because the teachings of earlier generations did not focus on the role of the right-hand's little finger to balance the bow at the frog. These patterns can be practiced separately and most string crossings in Iranian violin repertoire are included in the below figures.

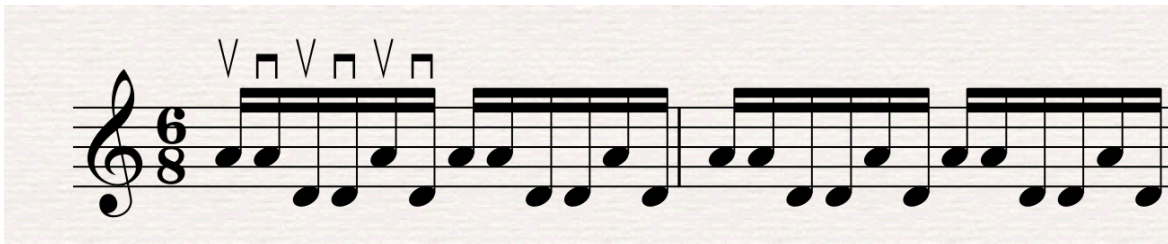


Figure 39. First pattern of string crossings



Figure 40. Second pattern of string crossings

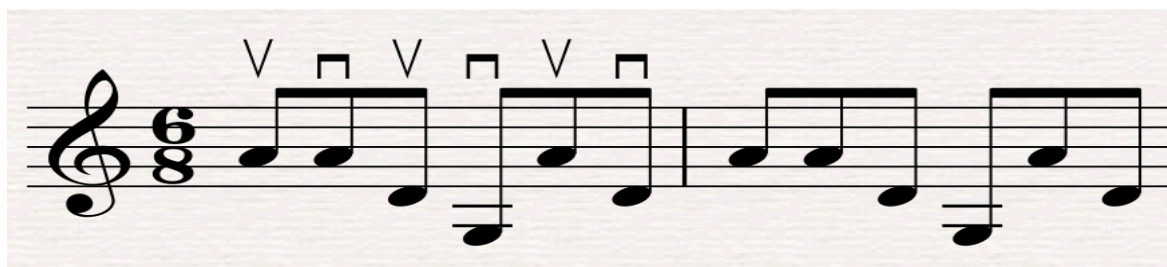


Figure 41. Third pattern of string crossings



Figure 42. Fourth pattern of string crossings

Samples of these string crossings can be heard throughout the recording of the *Chahar Mezrab* in *Dashti* ([AP2-5- Chahar-Mezrab](#)). Figure 43 shows the string-crossing patterns depicted in Figure 39 and Figure 41 in *Chahar Mezrab of Dashti* by Lashgari.



Figure 43. *Chahar-Mezrab* of *Dashti*. Lashgari, *Radif* for Violin

Spiccato, staccato and tremolo are commonly used by Iranian violinists. More surprising is the unexpectedly common use of the ricochet. As a show of virtuosity and drawing inspiration from other instruments, such as the *tar* and *setar*, that continuously pluck a lower octave to create a drone bass line, ricochet meets both the showmanship and technical requirements. However, in Iranian music, ricochets more commonly start with an up bow; this is the opposite of what is commonly practiced in Western classical music. Figure 43 shows the notation of ricochets and the instruction to start on an up bow in *radif* of Tajvidi for *Chahar Mezrab* of *Mahour*, as opposed to the famous ricochet in Paganini's Caprice No. 5, which starts on a group of three down bows and one up bow.

Two bow techniques I often use when performing Iranian *radif* are groups of up-bow staccato and ricochet. Apart from being among my favourite bow techniques, a group of up-bow staccatos are rarely heard or seen in Iranian violin repertoire. This absence encouraged me to use the technique more in my performances. Furthermore, as mentioned above, ricochets are a common feature of the Iranian violin repertoire. Ricochets can be heard in some of the music presented here and in the performances of Bijan Mortazavi and Mohammad Baharloo and Habibollah Badie. However, given that the ricochets in the Iranian violin repertoire usually start on an up bow, I decided to include ricochets that start with both up and down bows in my performances.



Figure 44. *Chahar Mezrab Mahour*. Ali Tajvidi, *Radif* for Violin

5.1.8 Pizzicato

In Iranian violin playing, left-hand pizzicato of open strings is much more common than right-hand pizzicato. In performances by Tajvidi, Badiei and Malek, this is audible but rarely notated. Most of the left-hand pizzicatos heard in Iranian violin performances is an improvisation element. However, in certain pieces, these left-hand pizzicatos are crucial. Assadollah Malek used this technique often in his performances. Because of the rare tunings he employed, he often made use of the open strings to include some melodies in the form of pizzicato. His recording of *Gerye Ye Leili(y)* in *Dashti* in the tuning of A/C/D/E is one of his most famous and an example of the use of left-hand pizzicato as a core component of a piece. In Figure 45, the left-hand pizzicatos are indicated by a + and highlighted in green.



Figure 45. Notation of left-hand pizz. Malek, *The Instrumental Radif*

Saba also wrote pieces that specifically featured left-hand pizzicatos, for example, the music of *Karevaan* in his third volume of his book of Iranian *radif*. This example is particularly interesting because of its unusual scordatura of E/B/A/E. In almost all cases, the pizzicatos are in intervals perfect fourth, perfect fifth and octave.



Figure 46. *Chahar-Mezrab Mahour*. Ali Tajvidi, *Radif for Violin*

5.1.9 Improvisation

Improvisation, or *Bedahe Navazi* (spontaneous playing), has its origins in the *Bedahe Soraie* (vocal improvisation) of Persian poetry. The idea of improvisation is that the performer has learned the *radif*, meaning the *dastgah-ha* and their *gusheh-ha*, and is familiar with the theory of Iranian music. This skill and knowledge allow the musician to create new melodies in their performance. Since each *dastgah* and *gusheh* have their own characteristics, ranging from melodic and rhythmic structure to ornamentations, learning the *radif* will make the task of improvisation less complex than it may appear. Nevertheless, the degree of “freedom” with which a musician improvises varies according to their creativity and, most importantly, their knowledge of different *gushes* and the level of control and mastery they have achieved on their instrument. However, the challenge to create new ideas, melodies, *tahrir-ha* and more is ongoing.

One can argue that improvisation in Iranian music has been the most interesting yet challenging topic of study for Western musicologists and ethnomusicologists. Nettl (1992), Zonis (1973) and Farhat (1990) all wrote extensively on what is considered to be improvisation. Nettl stated:

[In] Iran, the area of my experience, the most desirable and acceptable music is improvised, and within the improvised genres, those lacking metric structure and thus rhythmic predictability are the most prestigious (1998 p.3).

Questions soon arise about whether improvisation can be distinguished from a freer or ad-libbed piece. If a performer varies a rhythm slightly, is that improvisation? One issue that comes into play is the term “improvisation” itself. The term is a relatively new word in Iranian music and has been used as the equivalent of *Bedahe Navazi* (Nooshin, 2006). Similarly, the term “mode” has been used to describe *dastgah-ha* in Iranian music. *Bedahe Navazi* is an often-used term, in literature as well, that has a clear meaning to native Persian speakers and is rooted in their culture. Therefore, distinguishing between what can be defined as interpretation, improvisation and extemporisation poses a challenge to Western musicians. Because this phenomenon has such a broad spectrum, the term “composition in performance” (Nooshin 2006) can also be used.

Another important consideration to bear in mind is that the composer and performer of Iranian music was often the same person until early 20th century. Interestingly, in pre-modern Indian music, which follows the *maqam* system and is similar to Iranian music in terms of modes being series of melodies, the idea of certain responsibilities falling on the performer, not the composer, can be seen (Nooshin, 2006). Though in those cases the performer and composer would ideally be the same person.

To practise and become more confident in improvisation of Iranian *radif*, I took the following steps:

- I learnt *radif* by different composers. This familiarises the performer with the range of variations that are possible for the same *gusheh-ha*. These variations include both melodic and rhythmical options, which can inspire the performer to make a wide range of different choices.
- I created a toolbox. This took the form of a notebook in which I recorded different rhythmic and melodic shapes to assist me in my improvisation and creating new variations.

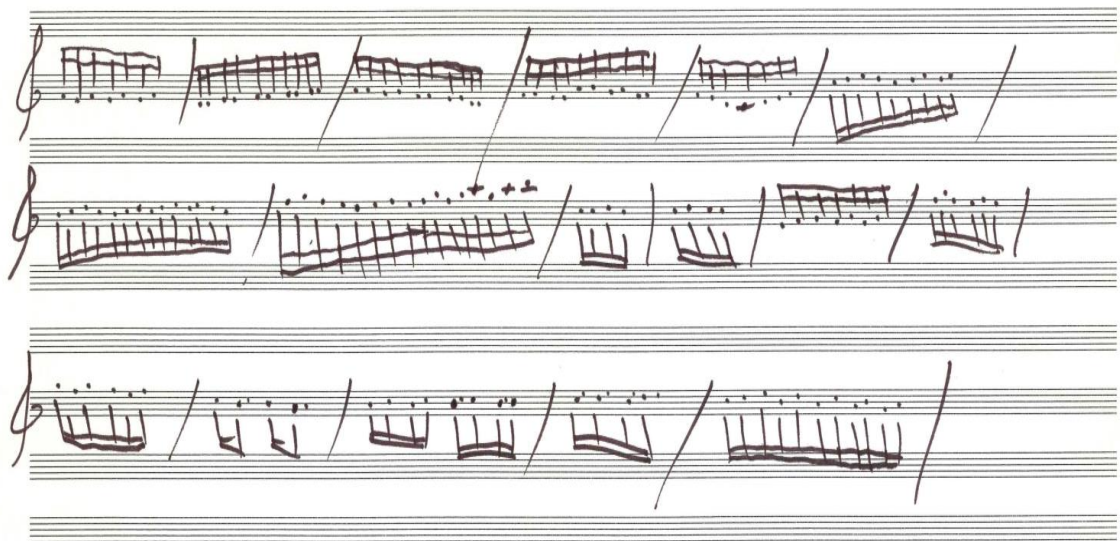


Figure 47. Excerpt from my toolbox of different melodic shapes with various *Tekye*

- I found that the performer can vary the octave and range in which the *radif* is being played. As a violinist, I strongly recommend practicing without using open strings. This will help the performer develop a strong muscle memory. Eventually, performing a desired phrase in different octaves will be the same fingering but using a different position and string. In addition, using second position can be extremely useful to avoid unnecessary string crossings and the use of open strings, in particular while playing passages. However, one could argue that the use of open strings is a stylistic choice that is commonly used by Iranian violinists. However, personally, I decided to create a balance between using open strings and fourth finger/other positions to create a more personal performance that represents both my musical personalities.
- I found that the performer can vary the rhythm of the melody. Using *tahrir* is a component part of improvisation in Iranian music. By having this awareness and understanding the degrees of the *maqam* and their roles, the performer can add *tahrir* to extend a phrase or create a new one. Figure 48 illustrates the use of *tahrir* to extend and create a melody over an interval of perfect fourth.



Figure 48. *Daraamad of Mahour. Badie, Radif of violin*

- I identified inversion as a common compositional technique in Iranian *radif*. Melodic shapes and *tahrir* can be inverted to create variety.
- I found that the “question and answer” format, inspired by Iranian poetry and common in Iranian music, can be achieved by inversion or changing the octave of the phrase(s). To create variety in the “question and answer” format in my improvisation, I vary the sound by changing both the contact point of the bow and the pressure of both the bow and the left hand. I also create variety by playing the question in first position and the answer on the eighth position on the lower string to change the tone.

6. Artistic Projects

This section is the report of the artistic projects revolving the four *dastgah-ha* of *Dashti*, *Esfahan*, *Mahour* and *Chahargah* by different composers, particularly Abolhassan Saba and Manouchehr Lashgari. In addition, a live improvisation is presented which acts as the conclusion of this doctoral study.

6.1 Artistic Project 1: *Radif* of Saba - Recording

Project 1 was my first performance/recording of Iranian *radif* after 15 years of playing the Western classical violin. As mentioned above, since the creation of *dastgah-ha* system, several of the greatest Iranian masters endeavoured to collect and agree on some 400 *gusheh-ha*. Studying and recording all 12 *dastgah-ha* and their *gusheh-ha* would not be possible in a single doctoral study. I therefore limited my selection to four *dastgah-ha* that represent a diverse range of *gusheh-ha* and the emotions they portray. One of these masters was Abollhassan Saba (1902–1957), a multi-instrumentalist whose compositions of *radif* are the first step in establishing a foundation for learning *radif* for violin. Saba was also one of the first to publish a book of *radif* specifically for the violin. As *radif* of Saba normally constitutes the first step in learning the *radif* for the violin, I decided to start there too.

In *radif* of Saba, *gusheh-ha* are connected to each other (Figure 49, red). While commas and rests are notated, unlike *radif* of Lashgari, the *gusheh-ha* are not presented separately with only a double bar line (green) between them. However, for the sake of ease of navigation and clarity, all the *gusheh-ha* are presented in separate tracks.

Figure 49. *Dashti. Saba, Radif for Violin*

As is the norm with any *dastgah-ha* in *radif*, these recordings start with a *Daraamad* or *Pish-Daraamad*, which is performed to familiarise and prepare the audience for the *dastgah* they will be hearing. *Daraamad* or *Pish-Daraamad* often act as an overture or prelude. One of the elements that make *Dashti* an interesting *dastgah* for the violin is the tunings in which the *radif* is written. In Saba's *radif*, the suggested tuning for the violin is A3/E4/A5/E5. However, in *radif* of Lashgari, the tuning for the violin is G/B/A/E. This tuning adds an interesting and unique colour to the tone of the violin. As most of the melodies in *Dashti* revolve around B, this tuning, with its open B string, creates a deep resonance and different harmonic series. The tuning of the violin for the remaining *dastgah-ha* for *radif* of Saba, such as *Esfahan* and *Chahargah*, are also in A/E/A/E. For *Mahour*, the tuning is A3/D4/A5/E5.

When I listened to and reflected on my performance of this piece, the first element that struck me was the sound. My sound is very "Western classical" and, admittedly, rather basic in the context of Iranian music. The tone lacks variety, and while the sound is healthy and steady/even, I find it to be "out of style" to a certain degree. The next aspect is my use of microtones. On reflection, it is evident to me that my initial use of microtones are out of tune. The reason is that I was struggling to know them in the context of a *gusheh*; I had learnt them more as an interval of exactly a quarter sharp or flat. Also noticeable is the difference between my performance of Saba in Artistic Project 1 and in Artistic Project

2: An increase in my confidence and ease with *tahrir* is obvious. The evolution in my playing can be observed from the very first track, *Daraamad* of *Dashti*, in both projects. The passages and *Tahrir* seem rather “laboured”, and the rhythm and phrasing have a “robotic” and “soul-less” feel. Clearly, I was still in the process of familiarising myself with *radif* and was still slightly reliant on musical scores. For the *dastgah-ha* of *Dashti* and *Esfahan*, I learned them by score. However, I was becoming more aware that my performance was still lacking a certain “Iranian accent”. As *radif* of Saba is a significant subject of study, there are many recordings of this *radif* by different violinists such as Homayoun Khorram and Shamlou Karband and Kamancheh⁷ by Ameneh Mardaneh. As a result, I decided to learn the *dastgah-ha* of *Mahour* and *Chahargah* by ear – a process which was not new to me since I was a young boy learning music in Iran without access to scores.

6.2 Artistic Project 2: *Radif* of Lashgari - Recording

Artistic Project 2 took place in the second year of my D. Perf studies and involved recording the *radif* by Manouchehr Lashgari (1936). The decision to study this *radif* was an obvious choice: It is one of the most complete (in number of *gusheh-ha* presented) and respected *radif* in Iranian violin playing, and Lashgari is a member of the generation that came after Saba. Therefore, throughout this project, my main aim was not only learn more *gusheh-ha* in the selected *dastgah-ha* but also learn how different these *gusheh-ha* are from each composer’s version. This would benefit me greatly in my improvisation.

In my recordings of this *radif*, the improvement in my sound and general understanding of Iranian music is evident. When this project was recorded, I had been practicing Iranian music for much longer. The varying melodies and *tahrir* reflect an increase in my personal input. Moreover, in particular in *dastgah* of *Dashti*, the unique tuning of G3/B3/A4/E5 also inspired me to make different types of sounds and use left-hand pizzicatos.

While the quality of my sound in this project reflects my increased comfort with performing Iranian music, the variations of melodies and *Tahrir* that I produced was even more a result of time and exposure to Iranian music. I had included certain exercises in my daily practice routine. These were scale exercises

⁷ Iranian bowed instrument, played vertically. Almost all the violin repertoire for the violin is also for Kamancheh as well.

in the different forms of the four *dastgah*, specifically in terms of accidentals and their *moteghayyer* or changeable notes. Figure 50 - Figure 56 illustrate transcription of my daily routine of the chosen *dastgah-ha* with alternate notes depending on their *gusheh*.



Figure 50. Primary mode of *Dashti*



Figure 51. Primary mode of with its *motoghayyer*, B *koron*



Figure 52. Mode of *Dashti* with C *sori* for *gusheh* of *Oshaq*



Figure 53. Mode of *Mahour*



Figure 54. Mode of *Esfahan*



Figure 55. Mode of *Esfahan* in *Oshaq*



Figure 56. Mode of *Chahargah*

Upon listening back to my recording of *Lashgari*, I could sense the improvement in my stylistic choices, sound and ornamentations. I realised I had achieved my goal in order to learn, understand and internalise what I had learned through studying Saba's *radif*.

6.3 Artistic Project 3: Selection of Metered Music - Recording

At this stage in my research, I had studied the four *dastgah-ha* of *Dashti*, *Mahour*, *Esfahan* and *Chahargah*. Although only my exploration of *radif* of Saba and Lashgari are presented here, I had also studied the *radif* by other virtuosic and important Iranian violinists, such as *radif* by Ali Tajvidi and Assadollah Malek, and several limited, transcriptions of performances by Habibollah Badieli. I was therefore much more comfortable with not only the performance of Iranian *radif* but also with improvisation. I had also developed an interest in what could be described as “virtuosic” features, particularly Western-inspired techniques, in the Iranian repertoire for violin. Although signs of one’s skills is showed within their performances of Iranian un-metered music through improvisation, ornamentation and technical instrumental elements, Iranian metered music also represents these in a more ‘Western-like’ setting. My goal was to include these techniques in my future performances in Western concert settings. Since the major focus of this study was on the un-metered part of Iranian music, as is the most challenging aspect, this project presents some of the many interesting metered pieces that I learned while researching Iranian violin repertoire.

- ***Chahar Mezrab* in Esfahan – Saba** ([AP3-1- Chahar Mezrab in Esfahan](#))

This *Chahar Mezrab* is in *dastgah* of *Esfahan*. Its resemblance to Western music makes it an interesting piece to consider. The *Chahar Mezrab* is written in the tuning of A/E/A/E and features a “theme and variation” form. This piece is a prime example of pieces previously referred to that are unplayable in the standard G/D/A/E. While the performance of this piece did not pose a major challenge, I often struggled to really catch the middle natural harmonic because of the different tuning of the violin. This struggle signalled that I needed to return to practicing in different tunings. I was still too accustomed to the sound and resonance of the harmonic series in the standard G/D/A/E. The low E string in the tuning of A/E/A/E can also sound bright in colour. Perhaps this is another reason that many Iranian fiddle players prefer the tuning of G/D/G/D instead.



Figure 57. *Chahar mezrab of Esfahan*. Saba, *Radif for Violin (Vol. 3)*

- **Bezendan – Saba** ([AP3-2- Bezendan](#))

It is said that Saba was inspired to write this piece by a song sung by prisoners as soldiers led them away. Hossein Dehlavi later orchestrated, arranged and extended this piece under the title, *Shoushtari* for violin and orchestra, which has since been performed internationally. This piece is therefore representative of Iranian music at an international level and, for this development project, it was also performed with my orchestra. The original tuning for this piece (by Saba) is also notated as A/E/A/E.

- **Mahour Chahar Mezrab - Darvish Khan, Tajvidi** ([AP3-3- Chahar Mezrab in Mahour](#))

Many have claimed that this *Chahar Mezrab* was composed by Darvish Khan. In his book *Iranian Radif for Violin*, Ali Tajvidi represents a violin arrangement of the piece and states that students of Saba reported that Darvish Khan wrote this piece in 2/4 for *setar*. Saba later notated it in 6/8. This piece features some of the virtuosic aspects of Iranian violin playing, including left-hand pizzicato and, more importantly, series of ricochets. Although I have performed Paganini caprices and other pieces that include ricochets, this piece was challenging. As commonly seen with many bow markings in Iranian violin repertoire, the ricochets also start with an up bow, the opposite to what is commonly played in Western classical music.



Figure 58. Primary melody of *Chahar Mezarb* and notations of ricochets in *Mahour* by Darvish Khan, Tajvidi, *Radif for Violin (Vol. 2)*

- ***Chahar Mezarb* – Re-imagined, Tajvidi** ([AP3-4- Chahar-Mezrab by Tajvidi – Re-imagined](#))

This piece is a combination of two *Chahar Mezarb* by Ali Tajvidi in his *Iranian radif for the violin vol. II*. Because they are in the same *dastgah* (*Mahour*) and in the same section of the book, it seemed a good opportunity to perform them as part of the same piece, with one acting as the prelude to the other. While both pieces feature double stops, fast passages, string crossings and spiccato they appeared relatively easy to play. I realised the pieces offered opportunity for technical and musical innovation, which would personalise my performance. I therefore decided to record this piece in a “re-imagined” way. That meant the personal techniques and musical elements were “made up” on the spot while the skeleton of the piece remained largely intact, all guided by an awareness of where the piece starts and needs to go.

The first personal change I noticed when listening to my performance is at the opening of the piece. As demonstrated in Figure 59, the opening of the first *Chahar Mezrab* arranged by Tajvidi, starts with an up-bow. This is common in Iranian violin repertoire. However, in my recording, I performed a triple-ricochet bowing to add a virtuosic element. Figure 60 is a transcription of the bowing I created and played in my version of the piece.



Figure 59. Original bowings for *Chahar Mezrab* in *Mahour*. Tajvidi, *Radif for Violin*



Figure 60. My bowings for *Chahar Mezrab* in *Mahour*. Tajvidi, *Radif for Violin*

6.4 Artistic Project 4: Live Improvisation - Recording

This section acts as the conclusion of everything I have learned and developed in my performance of Iranian *radif*. Artistic Project 4 is a recording of improvisation inspired by all my research and exposure to Iranian music, whether in the form of recordings of other Iranian violinists' performance or scores. The most notable influences in addition to the material provided here are performances of Bijan Mortazavi in his Greek Theatre concert in 1994 which was released by Caltex Records in 1996, recordings of Assadollah Malek from his albums including *Saz O Navaz III (Duo for violin and santour)*, *Gerye Ye Leili(y)* 2004, unofficial transcriptions of private performance of Habibollah Badie and of course other publications of *radif* or violin repertoire including three volumes of *radif of Iranian music for the violin* by Ali Tajvidi, *Iranian radif for the violin and Kamancheh* by Homayoun Khorram and further inspirations from my own experimentations. Artistic Project 4 is the result of combining my musical personalities and education. This project takes place in the form of two recordings, a live performance recording of improvisation which recorded in the Ledger Recital Room at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland – second is a personal improvisation on a piece by Bach.

- **Live Recording ([AP4-1- Improvisation in the studied *dastgah-ha*](#))**

My approach to this project was to consider it a concert. There would be no cuts and the entire recording had to be done in one go. Because of its microtonal nature, performing Iranian music poses a particular mental challenge to violinists trained in the Western classical tradition. This challenge will dominate the performer's mind until they have mastered this type of playing to the point where they are able to improvise. After all, it is during improvisation that technical challenges arise more.

As mentioned above, improvisation demands the higher level of skill and mastery from the violinist, who needs to be able to play melodies and passages they have never played before. Intonation, for one, can be challenging. It is therefore necessary to not only be in good shape as a classical violinist but also to practice Iranian scale exercises. Such exercises develop muscle memory for fast passages and finger patterns that feel comfortable for each performer. The next challenge is for the violinist to always be one step ahead in their improvisation to prevent them from playing a phrase that is uncomfortable or “too risky”, given that it is not possible to stop mid-performance. In addition, I found it crucial to practice how to correct and recover in the event of playing the wrong or an out-of-place note.

Since I intended this project to be a recording of an organic performance inspired by what happens “in the moment”, I decided to use the standard Western tuning for the violin. This was simply a personal choice. I suggest that violinists explore improvising on the tuning of A/E/A/E or G/D/G/D because they might find those tunings more comfortable – therefore, when making these tuning decisions, it is also important to be mindful of the resonance of harmonics. Because my goal was to challenge myself and experience the pressure and problem-solving demands of improvising in a performance, I invited several fellow musicians to attend the recording. I believe that the magic of music, in particular improvisation, happens when it is shared through performance, even with just one person in the audience.

The improvisation of the *dastgah-ha* is in the order of *Dashti*, *Mahour*, *Esfahan* and *Chahargah*. I was very aware that the performance of Iranian music must come “naturally”. I therefore planned only a few details in advance to represent in the performance. These details included what *dastgah* to play and in which order, and which playing techniques I would include that are not common in Iranian violin performances. Based on my previous experimentation, I also decided in advance to add a short blues passage to my improvisation in *dastgah* of *Esfahan*. Furthermore, I decided to specifically add the *gusheh* of *Hejaz* in my performance of the *dastgah* of *Chahargah*. The reason for this addition is that it creates a significant change in the key signature and the general feel of the *dastgah* compared to its other *gusheh*.

It is important to note that this recording does include small mistakes and certain elements that may not have been successful. However, it seemed appropriate to not cut or edit them out. The rationale is that I wished not only to be transparent about the process but also to present things as they are – organically. Some of these mistakes were technical, such as not catching a high harmonic on the A or E string in a fast-ascending passage. Because the music is being improvised there and then, this is understandable, if not excusable.

As I progressed through the recording, I grew increasingly comfortable and confident. This emboldened me to try more ideas in my improvisation. However, at a certain point in the *dastgah* of *Esfahan*, I tried to add more short accidentals to create variety in my improvisation. This may not have worked well. Although I had practiced improvisation and how to “solve” a problem should I play an out-of-context note, I overlooked the exhaustion that more than 35 minutes of improvisation would cause.

However, this an important lesson to learn. With friends in the audience, I experienced the pressure of an extended period of improvisation in the context of performance. I realised that coming up with ideas on the spot demanded more brain power than performing a piece already learnt. While muscle memory does help with *tahrir* and certain melodic shapes previously practiced, I found myself focusing all my attention on what I would play next in an attempt to stay one step ahead. The exhaustion caused by this performance was not physical – for me, playing the violin had become relatively effortless in the physical sense compared to before I embarked on this journey. The mental challenge was significant, however. I was forced to pause briefly between some *gusheh* to wipe the sweat from the violin and my face. Moreover, I lost track of how long I had been improvising. My goal was to play for 45 minutes, dedicating about 10 to 15 minutes to each *dastgah*. However, the performance went on for about 51 minutes of improvisation. Another lesson learnt is to set a timer!

Lastly, during this project, I experienced a subconscious pressure to keep adding more virtuosic Western techniques in my playing, particularly techniques that Iranian violinists have not commonly used. These techniques included the ricochet (combined with left-hand passages), grouped up-bow staccatos, artificial harmonics, the use of higher positions and different types of sound, and the use of double stops, such as tenths. My hope is that my experiences during this project, even with its imperfections, will shed some light on not only the challenges but also the rewarding process of practicing Iranian music as a classical violinist.

- **Bach Meets Iranian Music** ([AP4-2- Iranian improvisation based on Sonata No. 1 BWV 1001](#))

As a personal tribute to the journey, I embarked on for this study, I took this opportunity to apply the lessons I had learnt to a well-known piece of Western classical music. I regarded this as an appropriate step on which to conclude this journey that saw me return to Western, leaving me a little wiser and perhaps more mature as a player and a person.

The Adagio in G minor from Sonata No. 1 BWV 1001 by J.S. Bach is a regular part of my repertoire. I have often performed it in my recitals, including my final undergraduate recital. I knew the piece by heart and had the privilege of studying it with different teachers. Returning to it was a short process; however, improvising on it was not. I was aware that the outcome would be an evolved result that would be different from the initial practice. I also had to decide how far I would go and how different from the original score and historically informed practice the final result would be – my goal was to create a unique and “naturally produced” (“organic”) recording. Improvising in this piece is certainly different from doing so in Iranian music. In Iranian music, improvisation is based on *gusheh-ha* and their characteristics, whether melodic or rhymlical. In the case of Bach, my improvisation was based more on the chord progressions of this piece. Otherwise, one might run the risk of the piece being unrecognisable.

My initial practice of this improvisation was to just add *tahrir*; more specifically, a mix of trills both starting on and from the upper note and vibratos – something I had trained myself for years not to do. I then moved on to altering the passing notes, which, to my surprise, created memory slips and struggles with bowings and other technical issues. This goes back to the discussion of improvisation in earlier chapters. When playing this piece, my “classical” personality would automatically take over. I could only play the repertoire that I had practiced in a routine through repetition. Therefore, on the one hand, a significant amount of muscle memory is involved. This cycle of repetition, while effective, seems to mainly serve the purpose of playing certain passages in a certain order.

In addition, the freedom offered by improvisation requires the performer to play patterns that they may not have played before. The fact that I could play the Bach “classically” without technical or memory issues but struggled when improvising was interesting though somewhat alarming. I believed I knew the piece well, but it seemed I did not. I decided to memorise the chords and step away from the music completely. This gave me a significant amount of space to alter the melodic shapes and create greater variety in the piece. In addition, I could improvise double stops as well. Because it was important to me that the piece would be recognisable but different, I established some mental checkpoints. These checkpoints would help me keep the general skeleton of the piece. Some of these checkpoints are marked in green in Figure 61.

3

Sonata I
BWV 1001

Adagio

Violino

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of J.S. Bach's Sonata No. 1 in G major, BWV 1001. The tempo is marked 'Adagio' and the instrument is 'Violino'. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four staves of music. Several measures are circled in green, indicating marked checkpoints. A measure in the fourth staff is circled in red, indicating a specific improvisation. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, trills (tr), and ornaments.

Figure 61. Marked Checkpoints. J.S. Bach, *Six Sonatas and Partitas*

It was also important to me to add at least one microtone somewhere in my improvisation. I did not plan where it would be and, in the performance, it happens more than once. One main example of this is at the checkpoint marked in red in Figure 61: The B flat is played as B *koron*. Therefore, the recording presented here is the result of an evolved process of improvisation.

7. Conclusion

As a result of my experience with Iranian music, my personal relationship with the violin has dramatically changed. I believe through my experimentations with microtones, particularly expressive intonation and my tone production, I have gotten to learn the violin itself on a much personal level. I notice these influences in my performances of Western Music as well. The awareness I now imply by playing certain notes slightly sharper or lower while still staying within the 12 tone scale has certainly made my performances both as a violinist and conductor different and more matured. My idea of correct intonation has also changed - something many string players, including myself, can become obsessed over. The less reliance on the muscle memory in my left hand, made my ears work much more effectively. I am also significantly more relaxed and comfortable playing the violin.

This has been a fascinating journey. I have developed my sense of musicianship so much more than ever before. The freedom I have felt within Iranian music has encouraged me to let go of the rules I had learned as a classical music student and to now break them. I will admit that I did not use to enjoy my performances of Western repertoire to full extend as I felt restricted in ways I was “allowed” to express myself. The way I have been able to express my emotions within Iranian music is something I have never felt before. As a result of this, I developed a different approach to how I play the violin also. Listening back to my initial recordings of Saba, I believe it will become evident to any musician that my tone production on the violin has greatly changed. It will also be more noticeable, my comfort with microtones and their flexibility as well as how I have developed my own *tahrir* and personal way of playing which features a lot of Western music influences, making my performances a relatively more modern way of playing Iranian *radif*.

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