

The Persian Santurist - Part 1



Andrián Pertout speaks with Persian santurist Siamak Noory about his musical initiation, and his association with one of Iran's greatest contemporary composers and master santurists, Faramarz Payvar.

Siamak Noory was born in Tehran in 1961, and initiated his musical education at the age of five via Orff instruments (children's instruments designed by Carl Orff [1895-1982] such as the xilophon, metalophon, and vibraphon). Following a seven-year period, he then adopted the Persian santur (a 72-string [or 18 quadruple-stringed] box zither), initially learning the instrument under the guidance of Ms Farzaneh Noshad (a student at the Persian Traditional Music Conservatory in Tehran). Three years later he is accepted as a student of “one of Iran 's greatest contemporary composers and master santurists,” Faramarz Payvar. For the next eight years Qmars develops his knowledge and understanding of the complete Persian classical music repertoire. As well as this, he synchronically studies Western music – the pianoforte with Taher Djalili (a pianist from the Music Conservatory), and for a year, the bassoon with Khosrow Soltani.

Tell me about your early years in Tehran, and your initiation into both Persian and Western music.

SN: “I have always been very keen about music, and did listen to all sorts of music, Persian traditional, Persian pop, Western classical, and folk music as well. Anyway, music was a big part of my life and knew that I wanted to become a musician. But I had no opportunity to get to my goal. There was a library near my house, which was built for children and teenagers, and I used to go there to play Chess and read books. I also started to do different courses in all sorts of arts, such as painting, music, film making, theatre, etcetera. I tried all of them, but something stopped me in the music course. I felt that I could not live without music, and started to play Orff instruments until I was eleven years old. Then our leader said that we had to choose a main instrument for our further education. I really loved to play the piano, but there wasn't any possibility for me because my family was poor and nobody could help me to get a piano for me. I was obliged to choose another instrument, and so I chose the santur by accident. Now I am very proud that I put my time to play the santur, because it is a unique instrument. There are not so many people that can play it professionally, and I can express

my feelings via this instrument easily. And people are more interested in the santur, because they do not know much about it and it is quite new to them.

“Later, I worked hard to save money to buy a piano, and I finally bought one and started to practice ten hours a day. I was very thirsty about music, and wanted to play as much as I could to make myself satisfied. I completed the whole Persian radif in four years, which normally takes between eight to ten years. I used to listen to Western classical music a lot in those days with my friend Naser Nazar. We were two close friends, among sixteen music pupils, that continued our musical life. He is still in Iran and has a private music school, and we still talk to each other sometimes on the phone. I also owe very much to my teacher Mohamad Reza Darvishi, who is a great composer and musicologist/ethnomusicologist in Iran (he has been offered the first prize for his book from Etnomusicological committee in 2002). He got his Masters in music - educated at Tehran University – and played the trumpet. Darvishi encouraged me and my friend Naser to continue our musical life and pushed us to work hard. He helped us a lot, and we used to borrow tape cassettes from him to listen to. My friend and I were very poor and didn't even have enough money to eat properly, and Darvishi could understand our feelings and used to lend us a few tape cassettes weekly. Of course the music he lent us was only Western classical music, because at that time we were very keen about this music. When I started to play the santur I realised that I had a special feeling for Persian art music. This music could take my mind to the past, to the ancient time of Persia, a great empire. Today I really love both musics because both of them are art music. These musics are in my mind all the time, and I am very happy because I happen to know both of them.”

How did your association with one of Iran's greatest contemporary composers and master santurists, Faramarz Payvar come about?

SN: “I started to play the santur with Miss Farzaneh Noshad. She helped me a lot with the technique, and understanding the tradition. She was studying at the music conservatorium in Tehran. Later on, while I was working at the Radio and Television in Tehran, I met Miss Mina Oftadeh. Mina was a pupil of Payvar, and one day she took me to the Master's class and introduced me to him. I had always dreamt of studying with Payvar and he had always been my idol as far as santur playing. Oftadeh thought that I had enough capacity, and was ready to work with a great master like Payvar. When I played for the Master for the first time, he was listening carefully and said, 'You are the one that MUST continue studying with me, and I am looking for people like you.' From then on we became very close, and not only for music's sake but also with regards to learning about the tradition.”

Could you describe the relationship between teacher and pupil in Persian art music culture?

SN: “The relationship between a pupil and his teacher in Persian tradition is quite different to Europeans. If you want to become a musician, you have to respect your teacher highly and be with him all the time. This is the tradition which has been taking place for centuries. Your teacher means a lot to you, because he is the unique person who has inherited the written and oral tradition. It is the responsibility of a pupil to respect his/her teacher and obey him in order to learn the tradition. Your teacher must trust you a hundred percent transfer all his knowledge. He must find it out with time, that you are really talented and have a heart of gold. You, as a true pupil, must show him and prove to him that you really want to learn the tradition. It takes time to be close to the masters. Payvar also did not like to take women on as pupils, because he thought that after many years of teaching them they would finally marry

and build a family, and their career would finish. That is true because most women in Iran do not continue their music life after marriage. Unfortunately the religious atmosphere does not let them continue their career. Even for men it is very difficult to be a professional musician. It is shame for a family to have a professional musician in their family, and they always want their children to become a medical doctor.”

'Pardis - Persian Solo Santur' distributed by Siamak Noory. For further information contact Siamak Noory on (0431) 638 358. Email: sianoory@hotmail.com

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