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Flowers of Persian Song and Music: Davud Pirniā and the Genesis of the *Golhā* Programs

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Abstract

This article examines the 'Flowers of Persian Song and Music' (*golhā*) radio programs broadcast during the third quarter of the 20th century on the Iran National Radio. These programs—some 1,400 of which the author has collected and deposited in the British Library—constitute an unrivalled encyclopaedia of classical Persian music and poetry. The *golhā* programs introduced to the general public over 250 poets from the ancients to the moderns, and it preserved Persian classical music and fostered its future development. The seminal role played by Dāvud Pirniā in founding and producing these programs is examined and explored, while highlighting the various artists, poets, musicians, vocalists and scholars who performed in them.

Keywords

Persian music, Persian poetry, *golhā*, Sufism, Iranian Radio, Dāvud Pirniā

Introduction

The *Golhā* (Flowers of Persian Song and Music) comprise 1400 radio programs consisting of approximately 886 hours of programs broadcast over a period of 23 years from 1956 through 1979.¹ These programs are made up of literary commentary with the declamation of poetry, which is sung with musical accompaniment, interspersed with solo musical pieces. For the twenty-three years that these programs were broadcast, the most eminent literary

¹ Thanks to a generous grant from the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library, I have been able to collect and digitalize the complete archive of the *Golhā* programs, which I have now deposited in the World Music section of the National Sound Archive in the British Library, where they are available and accessible to scholars and musicians for research purposes. I would like to thank Dāvud Pirniā's family, especially three of his sons: Daryoush (and wife Mansoureh), Bizhan and Farrokh Pirnia for their encouragement and support for this project from the outset. I would also like to thank so many of Mr. Pirniā's colleagues, associates and friends both in Iran and the West—there not being enough space to name them all here—who have been so generous with their time and sharing their memories with me.

critics, famous radio announcers, singers, composers and musicians in Iran were invited to participate in them. The programs were not only exemplars of excellence in the sphere of music, but also highly ornate and refined examples of literary expression, making use of a repertoire of over two hundred classical and modern Persian poets, thus setting literary and musical standards that are still looked up to with admiration in Iran today and referred to as an encyclopedia of Persian music and poetry.

Dāvud Pirniā (June 15, 1901-Nov. 2, 1971), the founder and original producer of these programs, was the scion of a distinguished patriotic Persian family, which over generations had made varied and valuable contributions to Persian literature, history-writing and public and political life. Before examining Pirniā's career, assessing his seminal role in the creation of the Radio Programs called 'Flowers of Persian Song and Music' (*golhā*), and reviewing their effect on the revival of Persian music and song in Iran, at this juncture it will be helpful to provide a brief overview of the historical circumstances of Iran immediately after World War II.

In August 1941, the Allied forces of Britain and the USSR invaded Iran. Reza Shah abdicated and went into exile while the Allies took full control of all Iranian communications and the railroad. In 1942 the United States sent a military force to Iran to help maintain and operate sections of the railroad. In January 1942, Britain and Russia signed an agreement with Iran to respect Iran's independence, agreeing to withdraw their troops within six months after the end of the war, which was reaffirmed at the Tehran Conference in 1943. However, in 1945, the USSR refused to leave Iran's northwestern provinces, supporting separatist movements in Iranian Azerbaijan.²

Given these tumultuous political circumstances in the 1940s and early 1950s in Iran, there is little wonder that the condition of Persian music during these decades was any less threatened. During and after World War II, with the increasing interference in Iranian affairs, first by the British, then by the Russians, and eventually by the Americans during the Mosaddeq premiership, Western, Arabic and Turkish influences began to penetrate into and affect the development of the course of Persian music in particular and Iranian popular culture in general. Unfortunately, these influences did not generally hail from the high classical and sophisticated traditions of Western, Arabic or Turkish music, but were mainly derived from the vernacular and street culture traditions. As a result, a kind of tawdry vulgarity infiltrated Persian music, with the repertoire of classical Persian music and the lyrics of its canon of poets gradually being ignored and abandoned. From 1946 onwards, in articles and edito-

² Wilber, pp. 105-06.

rials in contemporary journals, many of the great musicians, composers, song-writers and poets who flourished in Tehran during this period voiced their anxiety about the course of their national music (*musiqi-ye mellî*), lamenting its decadence and decline, while underlining the lack of support and at times interference in the development of music by the Ministry of Culture.³

The critical situation was highlighted by an article written by Moshir Homāyun Shahrđār in the journal *Rādio Irān* in 1956.⁴ Describing the contemporary degeneration of Iranian music, he claims that it was not only being subjected to cheap popular music from abroad, but that the influence of Arabic music had caused Persian music to decline as well. Singers and musicians on the radio were largely imitating international music, performing songs and tunes that not only had nothing to do with authentic Persian music, but did not follow the norms of international music either. In a later interview, Shahrđār elaborated that influence-peddling, favoritism and nepotism had led the music broadcast on the Radio to suffer a chronic decline, effectively becoming an advertising platform for certain performers, enabling them to benefit from their fame financially by performing at private functions and weddings.⁵

Dāvud Pirniā and the Revival of Classical Persian Music and Poetry in Early to Mid-Twentieth Century Iran

Dāvud Pirniā's aristocratic family background, as well as his personal prestige and reputation as a politician and statesman, were important elements in the success of the *Golhā* programs. His mother belonged to Qājār nobility and his father came from a line of prominent Persian political patriots. In order to understand the reasons underlying the cultural significance of the musical and literary success of the *Golhā* programs, it will first be necessary to take a brief look at the place of his family in Persian political history and the role played by his forbears in the history of early modern Iran.

³ See Khāleqi, 1946, p. 3; idem., 1947, p. 3. See also in general *Majālla-ye musiqi*. As Ella Zonis observed (p. 647): "Once again, as in the time of her contact with ancient Greece, Persia is undergoing heavy cultural pressure from the West. This has greatly stimulated musical activity, and the long quiescence that preserved Persia's centuries old music has come to an end. However the danger exists here, as it does all over Asia, that native art music either will be replaced by Western Music or will be so westernized as to lose all connection with the native tradition." See also Nettl, 1970, pp. 183-97.

⁴ Moshir Humāyun Shahrđār, p. 13.

⁵ From an interview with Shahrđār re-broadcast on Iranian Radio on August 25, 1999.

Davud's grandfather Nasr Allāh Khan Moshir al-Dawla (d. 1907), had chosen "Pirniā" as his family name from the epithet of his famous ancestor Pir-e Nā'in, one of the last masters of the Kobrai /Nurbakhshi Sufi order.⁶ As the grand vizier, he played an important role in the establishment of constitutional government in Iran during the Constitutional Revolution and became its first prime minister.⁷ He retained the post of prime minister under the new monarch, Mohammad-'Ali Shah, for only two months, resigning from it on March 17, 1907. Shortly thereafter, on Sept. 13, 1907, he died suddenly in circumstances said to be suspicious.⁸

He was survived by three sons: 'Ali, Hosayn and Hasan Pirniā. 'Ali died young while abroad; Hosayn studied politics and law in Paris, while Hasan Pirniā (1871-1935) inherited his father's title of Moshir al-Dawla and carried on the family tradition of civil service, public spirit and politics.

Hasan Pirniā had been educated in military science and law in France and Russia, where he worked in the Iranian embassy in St. Petersburg, having been appointed as Iran's minister plenipotentiary (*vazir-e mokhtār*) to the Russian court at age twenty-seven.⁹ Even at that young age, he had considerable experience as a diplomat, since he and his brother Hosayn (Mo'taman al-Molk) had been instrumental in the drafting of the Iranian Constitution, the Fundamental Law (*qānun-e asāsi*), of Zo'l-qa'da 14, 1324/December 30, 1906 and its Supplement (*motammem*) of Sha'bān 1325/October 7, 1907.

Returning back from Russia to Tehran, he worked both as director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as special secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He founded a school for political science in Tehran, which opened on the 19th of December 1899. This school had a great influence on determining the direction and thought of the later constitutionalist movement¹⁰ and eventually became the foundation for the School of Law and Political Science at Tehran University.¹¹ Hasan Pirniā acted as Mozaffar al-Din Shah's official translator on the latter's trip to Europe.¹² During his first week at work as the minister for foreign affairs he declared that the Anglo-Russian Convention of 31 August 1907, which would divide Iran into to zones of influence of Russia and England to be null and void, since it had not been signed by an official government appointee.¹³

⁶ Bāstāni Pārizi, pp. 44-45; Mazhari, pp. 7-16.

⁷ Mansura Pirniyā, p. 36.

⁸ Mansura Pirniā, p. 37; Browne, p. 155.

⁹ Musaddiq, p. 91, n. 1.

¹⁰ Bāstāni Pārizi, p. 95.

¹¹ Mansura Pirniā, p. 38.

¹² Bāstāni Pārizi, p. 96.

¹³ Mansura Pirniā, p. 38.

Altogether, Hasan Pirniā 'Moshir al-Dawla' held twenty-four ministerial posts during his political career and served four times as prime minister. In 1915, he was nominated to be Prime Minister by the Majlis, and was successful along with the parliamentary deputies in repealing the law of June 1911 which had granted [Morgan] Shuster and then his successor, full powers as treasurer-general of Persia.¹⁴ In 1924, Hasan Pirniā assumed the post of prime minister for the last time, appointing Mohammad Mosaddeq as his foreign minister, and retaining Rezā Khān Sardār-e Sepah as his minister of war.¹⁵ When in October 1925, Rezā Khān became Reza Shah (r. 1925-41), Moshir al-Dawla completely retired from active politics.¹⁶

During his retirement from political life, he wrote a three-volume history of Iran from the most ancient times, totaling 2,866 pages, which was later published in 1932 under the title of *Irān-e bāstān* (Ancient Iran). This was the first modern scholarly account of ancient Persian history written by an Iranian in the twentieth century, for which he became known as the "Father of History" in Iran. Since most of the sources that he relied on for these historical works were originally in Greek and Latin, in order to access these he referred to French, Russian, Arabic, English or German translations of those Greek and Latin sources in his bibliography.¹⁷ He was also instrumental in setting up and supporting the establishment of an Institute for the Preservation of the National Heritage (*Anjoman-e āthār-e melli*) in 1922.

* * * * *

Having grown up in a family atmosphere of patriotism and dedication to civil service, Dāvud Pirniā was inspired with a great sense of public duty and a desire to serve his country and further the advancement of Persian culture.¹⁸ After studying law in Switzerland, he returned to Iran to work in the Judiciary, where he made several important contributions. He established the first Lawyers Guild in Iran in 1931 and wrote its bylaws. He also founded the first vocational school for girls, which he established after Reza Shah decreed the mandatory removal of the veil from all females in Iran. This school was intended to teach young women skills such as sewing, embroidery, and making artificial

¹⁴ Ettehadieh, p. 195.

¹⁵ Musaddiq, p. 249.

¹⁶ Idem, Introduction, p. 13.

¹⁷ He gave all of his notebooks about the history of ancient Iran (particularly that of the Sasanian period) to Sa'īd Nafisi in the last days of his life to publish but the tumult of World War II prevented their publication (Mansura Pirniā, p. 45).

¹⁸ Cf. Navāb Safā, p. 584.

flowers so that they could make a living on their own. He also worked at the Ministry of Finance where he established the first Office of Statistics. He served as assistant (*mo'awen*) prime minister as well as legal adviser and chief inspector to Prime Minister Ahmad Qavām (1946-47). His political activities led him to play a major role in the emancipation of Azerbaijan when it was under Russian occupation. He had been sent to Azerbaijan by the shah to form alliances with the leaders of the resistance in order to combat Russian propaganda and help alleviate the famine caused by the Russian occupation.¹⁹ Following the resignation of Prime Minister Qavām in 1947, according to his son, he was asked to take over as prime minister but declined and retired from government service.²⁰ At this juncture, just as with his father who had turned all his energies towards history-writing upon retirement from political life, a new chapter in Dāvud Pirniā's life began.²¹

From his birth, Dāvud Pirniā had been living in his ancestral family's residence located in the neighborhood of Lālezār-e now Street in Tehran. In the 1940's and 50's this neighborhood was the center of the 'theatre district' in Tehran, full of theatres, concert and music halls, cabarets and fashionable coffee houses.²² Needless to say, as Dāvud Pirniā paced the streets of Lālezār-e now

¹⁹ Dāvud Pirniā later expressed his pride in and admiration for the courage and valor of the Azari freedom fighters whom he encountered during his mission to Azerbaijan under Russian occupation (Radio Interview with Dāvud Pirniā broadcast on Tehran National Radio ND circa 1950).

²⁰ When asked why he resigned from government service so unexpectedly at this "high point" of his political career, his son Daryoush Pirnia (Interview, Maryland, USA, October 11, 2007) said: "After the resignation of Prime Minister Qavām caused by the Iranian-Soviet oil dispute, the Shah vacillated between implementing opposite policies of appeasement and confrontation with the Soviets. The Shah at that time asked my father to become Prime Minister, but on condition that he would agree to introduce a bill into Parliament which would give the Soviets a concession to develop the oil reserves in northern Iran, similar to the concessions that had been granted to the British in the south. This bill was supposed to appease the Soviets and so relieve Iran of the political pressure exerted by them. My father, being opposed to this policy, declined to accept the offer to become Prime Minister and subsequently retired completely from public office. Later, when Ardashir Zāhedi was foreign minister, the Shah invited my father to become a senator, but he again declined the invitation." This reason for Pirniā's refusal to form a government was also corroborated in an interview (Los Angeles, Nov. 27, 20005) with his other son Farrokh Pirniā. See also Dawlatshāhi, 1999, p. 30.

²¹ Navāb Safā, 2005, p. 584.

²² Nettl's description of the situation a decade or so later was by and large typical of the 1940s-50s as well: "Western popular music is performed both by Iranian and foreign performers in nightclubs in Tehran of the same sort that one finds in large European and American cities. The language of the singing was normally English, French, or Italian. Popular music in the various Persian styles . . . is most typically heard in large music halls which in Tehran are concentrated in one district whose center is Lalezar Avenue. These music halls in contrast to the modern night clubs, are patronized almost exclusively by men and each of them has a clientele by an occupation" (Nettl, 1972, pp. 218-39) .

during these years, he too had been acutely conscious of these negative outside pressures on the Iranian musical and literary heritage, which must have caused him great concern. He had strong mystical leanings and believed in the power of music and poetry to provide spiritual guidance and insight.²³ The degenerating state of Persian music and lyrics was a common topic of conversation among his friends who included many of the famous writers, poets, composers and scholars of his day, such as ‘Ali Dashti, Badī‘ al-Zamān Foruzānfar, Lotf-‘Ali Suratgār, Hasan Shahbāz, Rahi Mo‘ayyeri, Kiāmarz Vothuqi and Abu al-Hasan Sabā. One day during the early 1950s, after returning from a visit to the home of his friend Kiyāmarz Vothuqi, Dāvud Pirniā concluded that there was something he could and would do to combat the increasing corruption of classical Persian music and the continuing decadence of literary traditions. He would establish a series of radio programs devoted to classical Persian poetry and music.²⁴

The *Golhā* Programs

Although the concept of these programs was an idea original to Pirniā, it should be mentioned that the major inspiration and model behind what later became the *Golhā* programs, long before the first recorded program (the ‘Immortal Flowers,’ *Golhā-ye Jāvidān* series of 157 programs) was broadcast on Iranian National Radio on March 21, 1956, came from dervish séances and gatherings of Sufi musicians held by Iran’s ex-ambassador to Italy, Nezām al-Soltān Khwājanuri in a villa in his garden in the village of Qalanduyak, today located in Lavāsan in northeastern Tehran. Khwājanuri was himself of dervish persuasion and a great patron of all the Sufis in Iran. In these weekly gatherings, a number of eminent musicians, singers, as well as many notable men of letters and scholars participated. These included such notables and luminaries as master musicians Mortazā Mahjubi (piano), ‘Ali Tajvidi (violin), the Intizām brothers, Abu al-Hasan Sabā (violin etc.), and virtuoso master Hosayn Tehrāni (goblet drum, “*tombak*”). Dāvud Pirniā himself regularly attended and participated in these séances. Darvishes from all paths and orders were invited to participate in these gatherings. A great sense of egalitarianism and unity prevailed among its participants, with generals or viziers, as well as their wives, sitting shoulder to shoulder with servants, wandering dervishes, and working people. The gatherings were devoted to listening to

²³ Nasirifar, 1998, II, p. 529.

²⁴ Interview with Bizhan Pirnia (son of Dāvud Pirniā), Tehran, September 12, 2005.

music, singing and declamation of poetry, as well as the discussion and interpretation of the meaning of classical Persian poetry. The participants in these gatherings wanted to somehow broaden or make the fruits of these gatherings more widely available. Many different solutions were fielded, from writing a book, to taping the gatherings, to putting on live concerts and performances. Eventually the idea of using the national radio was chosen.²⁵

In a radio interview re-broadcast in 1975 (originally broadcast on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Iranian National Radio), Dāvud Pirniā described the history of the *Golhā* programs.²⁶ He related that the Iranian National Radio formally invited him to come to the Radio, where he proposed the idea of a program called *Golhā-ye jāvidān* (Immortal Flowers [of Song and Verse]) to his friend Parviz 'Adl. The idea was readily accepted and accordingly, the first program was broadcast on March 21 (*Nowruz*), 1956, with the collaboration of master *setār* player Ahmad 'Ebādi, the composer and violinist 'Ali Tajvidi and the singer and composer 'Abd al-'Ali Vaziri. As Pirniā relates, this first program, which was only ten minutes long, consisted of a short discussion of the poetry of Hāfēz, followed by declamation and singing of three verses from a *ghazal* by Hāfēz, which were:

Salām-i cho bu-ye khosh-e āshenā'ī/ bar ān mardom-e dida-ye rowshanā'ī
Dorud-i cho nur-e del-e pārsāyān/ bedān sham'-e khalvatgah-e pārsā'ī
Nemibinam az hamdamān hich bar jāy/ delam khun shod az ghossa, sāqi, kojā'ī?

Like a fragrant breeze of loving intimacy, may salutations go
to that pupil of the eye that gives brightness to all eyes!
Like the light in pious hearts, may greetings go
to that candle burning in the hermit's retreat!
None of my friends do I see alive and still in place.
My heart is gutted with grief. Cupbearer, where have you gone?²⁷

In the second program of the 'Immortal Flowers' series that was broadcast, Gholām-Hosayn Banān²⁸ sang Rumi's famous *ghazal* beginning with the verse:

²⁵ Interview with Daryoush Pirnia, Maryland, USA, August 17, 2005. Dāvud Pirniā also began producing the Children's Program (*Bār-nāma-e kudak*) on Tehran Radio in 1956 (Navāb Safā, p. 586).

²⁶ Nasirifar, 2003, p. 23.

²⁷ See Hāfēz, *Divān*, *ghazal* 483, vv. 1-3.

²⁸ Cf. Caton, pp. 671-77.

Man mast o to divānal mā-rā ke barad khāna

I am drunk and you are mad, who shall take us back to home?

This was preceded by a discussion and description of Rumi's *Divān-e Shams*, which at that time was not well known among the general public in Iran,²⁹ the announcer clarifying that it was composed by Jalāl al-Din Rumi, not by a separate author named Shams. The third program was devoted to Sa'di, the fourth to 'Erāqi, containing the following verses from a *ghazal* by him:³⁰

Hama shab bar āstānat shoda kār-e man gedā'i
Be khodā ke in gedā'i nadaham be pādshāhi
Sar-e barg o gol nadāram, ze che ru ravam be-golshan?
Ke shanīda-am ze golhā hama bu-ye bivafā'i.
Be kodām mellat ast in, be kodām mazhab ast in
*Bekoshand 'āsheq-i rā, ke to 'āsheq-am cherā'i?*³¹

Each night I lie upon your threshold like a beggar,
 By God, I'd not renounce this beggary for a kingdom.
 Why should I go to the garden? I care nothing for any leaf or rose,
 For from every rose I've only imbued the scent of faithlessness.
 In which religion, in which denomination is it permissible
 To kill a lover on the charge of being in love?

Dāvud Pirniā concludes by remarking that 'Erāqi's *Divān*, just like Rumi's *Divān-e Shams*, was not particularly well-known in Iran during the 1950s, and in fact only a few members of the literary elite had any idea of who 'Erāqi was.³²

Each program of the Immortal Flowers of Song and Verse (*Golhā-ye jāvidān*) began with a signature tune played on the clarinet by Mohammad Shir-khodā'i in the musical mode of *Mokhālef-e sehghāh*, followed immediately by these verses from Sa'di's *Golestān* that appropriately served to set the mood:

²⁹ Furuzānfar in the introduction to Rumi (1976, I, pp. alif-dal) describes in detail this lack of common knowledge of Rumi's lyrical poetry in Iran during the first half of the 20th century.

³⁰ Dāvud Pirniā, Special Program on the History of Iranian Radio (*Barnāma-ye tārikh-e Rādio*), re-broadcast on Iranian Radio, July 27, 1990.

³¹ Nasirifar, 2003, p. 23; also cf. Moshkin-qalam, II, p. 637, who features a text slightly different from the verses sung in the program.

³² As Bizhan Taraqqi notes in his *Memoirs* (2007, p. 144), "even though Dāvud Pirniā benefited from the collaboration of the greatest literary minds and talents of his day, it was he himself who wrote the introductory remarks and descriptions to the *Golhā* programs."

*Be che kār āyadat ze gol tabaq-i?
Az golestān-e man bebar varaq-i.
Gol hamin panj ruz o shash bāshad
V' in golestān hamisha khwash bāshad.*

What use are trays of flowers?
Take a petal or two from my rose garden.
Roses last but a few days, yet this rose garden
Of mine will stay perpetually in bloom.³³

Each program concluded with the words: "This has been an immortal flower from the peerless rose garden of Persia Literature, a flower that shall never perish. Good night" (*In ham goli bud jāvidān az golzār-e bi-hamtā-ye adab-e Irān, goli ke hargez namirad. Shab khosh!*). In this fashion, verse by verse, song by song, poet by poet, these programs served to reintroduce the heritage of Persian poetry to the entire population of Iran. In this respect, the first series of radio programs, the *Golhā-ye jāvidān*, which were largely intended to introduce the literary and poetic heritage of Persian literature to the general public, did achieve their aim. Although these programs were well received and appreciated by modernist intellectuals, the unlettered general public and traditionalist Sufi mystics, after some time Dāvud Pirniā came to realize that they were so-to-speak too 'heavy', too 'intellectual' for the broader taste of the general public. As a consequence, he decided to produce another program called 'Multicolored Flowers' (*Golhā-ye rangārang*) with more diversity in literary content, that would contain not only classical Persian singing (*āvāz*) and poetry, but also modern poetry, popular romantic ballads (*tarāna*), and tunes and songs (*tasnif*).

It was in this *rangārang* series of programs that most of the great classical vocalists and of the last half of the twentieth century, such as Marziya, Gulpāyagāni, Shajāriān, Nāhid, Elāha, Parvin, Iraj, and Simā Binā, made their debut, and as a consequence of which they later became acclaimed. As the name suggests, 'Multi-colored Flowers' contained a diverse repertoire of the classical poets such as Hāfez, Sa'di, 'Erāqi, Rudaki, 'Attār and others, as well as contemporary poets like Rahi Mo'ayyeri, Mo'ini Kermānshāhi, Bizhan Taraqqi, Monir Tahā, Simin Behbahāni, Torāj Negahbān and many other well-known figures of contemporary Persian literature. The *Golhā-ye rangārang* contained not only classical *dstgāh* compositions but also some of the most memorable songs (*tasnif*), composed by the likes of Ruh Allāh Khāleqi, Mehdi Khāledi, 'Ali Tajvidi, Parviz Yāhaqqi, Hosayn Yāhaqqi, Homāyun Khorram, Jahānbakhsh Pāzuki and many more. In addition to this, the *Golhā-ye rangārang* preserved

³³ Sa'di, p. 30.

and revived the works of composers and poets such as ‘Āref Qazvini, ‘Ali Akbar Sheydā and Gholām-Hosayn Darvish Khān, to name but a few. The *rangārang* series thus combined classical and contemporary poetry and musical compositions, featuring some of the most memorable songs of the twentieth century.

The first program in the series of 481 programs that began with number 100 opens with a poem by Rumi, followed by some verses by Sā‘eb Tabrizi. Then came a poem composed in a classical manner by the contemporary poet ‘Emād Khorāsāni (d. 2003), before concluding with a famous song composed by ‘Ali Akbar Sheydā and sung by Marziya.

Suratgar-e naqqāsh-e Chin, Row surat-e yār-am bebin
*Yā surat-i barkesh chonin, Yā tark kon suratgari.*³⁴

Oh you, the portrait painter of China,
 Go gaze at my love’s comely visage.
 Either paint an image as good as hers,
 Or leave off all pretence to portraiture.

The signature line of each of the *rangārang* programs concluded by invoking blessings upon the listener: “This then has been a few multi-coloured flowers from the peerless garden of Persian Literature. May joy and cheer always be with you.” (*In ham chand goli bud rangārang az gulzār-e bi-hamtā-ye adab-e Irān. Hamisheh shād va hamisheh khosh bāshid*).

The next two programs which Dāvud Pirniā set up were entitled: ‘A Green Leaf’ (*Barg-e sabz*) and ‘One single flower’ (*Yek shākha gol*).

The Green Leaf (*Barg-e sabz*) programs featured 312 programs each ranging from 20 to 45 minutes, consisting solely of declamation of mystical poetry from the great classical poets, followed by the formal singing (*āvāz*) of their poetry, without any popular rhythmical songs or ballads (*tasnif / tarāna*). In terms of profundity of Persian Sufi themes, erotic and theo-erotic images and ideas, the Green Leaf programs comprise a veritable treasury of classical Persian poetry; as a collection, the *Barg-e sabz* programs form a kind of classical Canon of Persian mystical song and verse that have yet to be rivaled in their wide-ranging literary and musical diversity, in arrangement of theosophical and erotic topics, and in tasteful selection of poets and poetry.

Each program opened with the following mystical verses (attributed to Farid al-Din ‘Attār): “Open your eyes so you may see the epiphany of the Beloved displayed upon each wall and door. When you behold this vision, you will declare: ‘He alone is Lord in all the land’.” (*Chashm bogshā ke jelva-ye*

³⁴ Moshkin-qalam, I, p. 45.

deldār dar tajalli'st az dar o divār. In tamāshā, cho bengari, gu'i: laysa fi l-dār ghayrabu dayyār).

The first Green Leaf program featured Hasan Kasā'i (*ney*), Sayyed Javād Zabīhi (vocals) and Jalil Shahnāz (*tār*), with poetry by 'Attār and Rumi. It opened with a declamation of 'Attār's celebrated *ghazal* beginning: "Tonight, I will set out tipsy and dancing, in hand a pitcher full of wine dregs, and go down to the street where the wild man is, and there gamble away all existence" (*'Az̄m-e ān dāram ke emshab nima-mast/ pāy-kubān kuza-ye dordi be-dast// Sar be-bāzār-e qalandar dar neham/ pas be-yek sā'at bebāzam har che hast*).³⁵ The main part of program was comprised by Zahibī's powerful singing of a *ghazal* by Rumi, before concluding with a Sufi apology: "This then was a green leaf, a humble dervish's gift. May the Most High ('Ali) watch over you." (*In ham barg-e sabz-i bud, tohfā-e darvish. 'Ali negāhdar-e shomā*).³⁶ The same two sentences continued as the regular signature of all the other *Barg-e sabz* programs produced under Pirniā's direction, with the declamation of the above-mentioned verses always comprising the program's prelude.

As its name suggests, the 'One single flower' (*Yek shākha gol*) programs concentrated on one individual theme for each program; these were shorter programs, each of 12-18 minutes' duration, with 465 programs being broadcast in all. Thematically they were devoted to the introduction of a particular poet, whether classical or modern, or a particular composition, event or musician. In particular, they introduced such poets as Vahshi Bāfqi, Parvin E'tesāmi, Amir Firuzkuhi, Naziri Nayshābori, Malek al-Sho'arā Bahār, Āzar Bigdeli, Mansura Atabāki (Zohreh), Parvin Dawlatābādi, along with their bio-bibliographical data to name just a few.

Finally, there were the Desert Flowers (*golhā-ye sahrā'i*), 64 programs of 10-30 minutes of traditional folk tunes from the various regions and ethnic groups of Iran. These tunes had been first collected and then orchestrated by great musicians such as Ruh Allāh Khāleqi and Javād Ma'rufi.

* * *

All of the *Golhā* programs were highly acclaimed by both the intelligentsia and the general public. Thousands of fan letters were received on a weekly basis

³⁵ *Divān, ghazal 55*, p. 41.

³⁶ Among educated Persian Sufis, the reference to 'Ali in this phrase is not considered to be an invocation of, and thus a quasi-polytheistic reference to, the Shi'ite Imām 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (600-661 C.E.), but rather understood as a supplication of the divine Name *Al-'Alī* (the Most High, the Tremendous, the Exalted One) found in several Qur'anic verses (e.g. 2: 255; 42:4), and this oft-cited dervish litany (*verd*): "There is no force and no power save in God, the Exalted and Glorious One" (*lā hawla wa lā qowwata ellā be'llāh al-'ali al-'azim*).

from listeners throughout Iran, so Pirniā was even forced to convene a special committee at the Radio to compose replies and respond to their comments.³⁷ Several factors lay behind the extraordinary success of the *Golhā* programs.

Firstly, there was Dāvud Pirniā's eminent standing in Persian society and the respect that he and his family name and reputation commanded, which made it possible for him to attract musicians, singers, composers and songwriters who might not otherwise have been willing to participate in public performances.³⁸ Dāvud Pirniā was not only a master diplomat and statesman who had held some of the highest posts in the Iranian state during his lifetime in public service, but a supremely refined connoisseur of Persian music who was able to create a genuine atmosphere of comradery, respect and appreciation among all the participants in the *Golhā* programs and their co-workers at the Radio.³⁹

The second important factor behind the *Golhā* programs' success was the support, complete confidence and respect shown Dāvud Pirniā by Nosrat Allāh Mo'iniyān, who was both Minister of Information and Head of the National Radio at the time. Without his support, Pirniā would not have had the independence—whether culturally, intellectually or financially—to produce programs of such high quality and lasting calibre.

Thirdly, there was the matter of his own economic independence. During the eleven years that he worked on the *Golhā* programs, Dāvud Pirniā survived on his own independent income and was never paid a regular salary for his service at the Radio. Often, in the spirit of Persian chivalry (*javānmardī*) he would have lunch brought to the Radio from his home for the musicians, singers and other guests.⁴⁰ In fact, the creation of the *Golhā* was completely separate and independent from the rest of the operation of the Radio in Iran during the 1950s and 60s under Pirniā's direction, both in respect to content and budget (both of which unfortunately became a bone of contention after Mr. Mo'iniyān left the Radio).⁴¹

³⁷ Interview with Prof. Shāh Hosayni (former Director of the Committee of Radio Writers and Editor of the *Radio Iran* journal under Dāvud Pirniā) on Nov. 3, 2007 in Tehran.

³⁸ All the musicians and singers in the *Golhā* programs who I interviewed during 2005-07 stressed this.

³⁹ While interviewing Mr. Haqiqi (who had been in charge of paying salaries, "*sanduqdār*," for the *Golhā* programs' musicians and singers during the 1950's and 60's) in 2006 at the Radio station at Maydān-e Arg in Tehran where he was working in the archive, the mere mention of Dāvud Pirniā's name was enough for him to burst into tears of nostalgia. Interview conducted by the author, Dec. 2, 2006, Maydān-e Arg, Tehran Radio, Tehran.

⁴⁰ Interview with Bizhan Taraqqi, Dec. 2, 2007 in his home in Tehran.

⁴¹ Navāb Safā, 2005, pp. 584-586.

Fourthly, Pirniā's genius, intellectual acumen and educated literary tastes must be taken into account. He took great care in the production of the *Golhā*, sometimes listening to, editing, demanding changes and revisions in a program as much as thirty times over. One of his assistants told the present author that, while working with Dāvud Pirniā, he had listened to most of the programs so often that he has most of them memorized to this day.⁴² On most days Dāvud Pirniā's office would be filled with the great and the good of Persian society who would come to listen firsthand to the latest *Golhā* programs, offering their remarks and opinions. They would bring along blank tapes in hope that, if they were lucky, they might obtain a personal copy of a particular program for themselves.

In addition to attending to and responding to letters from listeners, Pirniā also enlisted the opinion of his friends and guests and took great stock in their comments in refining the production of the programs. He solicited the services of all the eminent scholars then living in Iran (e.g., Badī' al-Zamān Foruzānfar, Jalāl al-Dīn Homā'i, 'Alī Dashti, etc.) in composing program notes for individual poets.⁴³

The *Golhā* orchestra performed only one public concert, which was held in the open air at the then Hilton Hotel in benefit of the victims of the Lār earthquake in 1960.⁴⁴ Dāvud Pirniā even famously charged the *performers* for attending the concert. After ten years of devoting himself to the *Golhā*, Pirniā retired from his position at the radio for personal reasons. He continued to practice law and to write articles in various journals until his death of heart failure in 1971.⁴⁵

Conclusion: The Legacy of the *Golhā* Programs

Pirniā's *Golhā* programs marked a watershed in the appreciation of music in Persian culture, leading to the enhanced respectability of musicians and their art. However, their influence on the evolution of Persian musical culture needs to be considered within the context of the religious society of traditional Iran. Heretofore, due to the conservative anti-music bias of the traditional religious

⁴² Personal Interview with Mr. Qorbāni, Radio Tehran, Maydān-e Arg, March 6, 2007.

⁴³ Interview with Prof. Shāh-Hosayni on Nov. 3, 2007 in Tehran.

⁴⁴ "6.7 Earthquake Hits Lar Devastating the City," in B. Tavakoli and M. Ghafary Ashtiany, eds.

⁴⁵ From 1965 to 1971, the *Golhā* programs were produced and directed with the help of Rahi Mo'ayyeri, Mohammad Mirnaqibi, and Jahānbakhsh Pazuki. In 1972 Hushang Ebtehāj began producing the *Golhā-ye tāza* programs which continued until 1979.

establishment that dominated Persian society music had been practiced behind closed doors. In the words of Ella Zonis, “the predominant trend in Islamic culture was anti-musical. . . . When music was practiced at all it was directly in the face of social and religious disapproval. As a result, art music was rarely performed in public.”⁴⁶ Where performed in public spaces, the performers were tarred with the same brush as popular street minstrels. Until the advent of these programs, it had been taken for granted by a large section of the society that any female performers and musicians were less than respectable.⁴⁷ However, due to the high literary and musical quality of these programs, public perception of music and musicians in Iran shifted forever, insofar as its participants came to be considered—virtually for the first time in Persian history of the Islamic period—as maestros, virtuosos, divas and adepts of a fine art, and no longer looked down upon as merely cabaret singers or denigrated as street minstrels.

In this respect, Dāvud Pirniā and the *Golhā* programs performed an immense service to both Persian literature and Persian music, by gathering together the most talented musicians, singers and literary figures of his day in an atmosphere of encouragement, camaraderie and respect. These programs not only preserved, nurtured and fostered the future development of Persian classical music, but also introduced to the general public over 250 poets from the ancients to the moderns.

There was an 80% illiteracy rate in Iran during the 1950s and 60s and there were only two types of mass media—the printed page and radio—the latter being the only form of mass communication that the majority of the general public could take advantage of. With the introduction of the transistor radio, the *Golhā* programs quickly penetrated into every village and hamlet throughout Iran. In accustoming the general public’s ear to the highest quality of Persian music and musicians, the *Golhā* programs elevated general musical awareness and appreciation. They not only deepened the literary appreciation of the wider

⁴⁶ Ella Zonis, p. 637. Bruno Nettl (1970, p. 186) points out that “the most devout [Iranian Muslims] rejected music. . . . The effect of the religious prohibition has considerable impact on musical life. On religious holidays (most of which are days of mourning for the death of martyrs such as Ali, Hasan, and Hossein, early Imams of Islam), there is no music on the radio and no public musical events or rehearsals, even if these are days on which other sorts of business takes place. There appears to be a strong feeling on the part of the populace that even rehearsals should not be held, for example, some musicians (of Western music) have told me that while they themselves had no objection to rehearsing on at least minor holidays, they did not like to be seen carrying a musical instrument in public. Similarly, on such holidays the music department of the University of Tehran is closed, while other departments hold classes.”

⁴⁷ Today in revolutionary Iran, it is still forbidden to broadcast female voices singing on the Iranian radio and television or in any public venues with mixed audiences.

public by individually introducing so many poets and having their poetry sung and read on the radio but also raised the public profile of classical Persian poetry by giving descriptions and short biographies of hundreds of poets, many of which even literary historians today would be hard pressed to name.⁴⁸ Bizhan Taraqqi, one of Iran's living poets and famous song-writers, thus summarizes the legacy of the *Golhā* programs established by Dāvud Pirniā:

All the major names in Persian letters and poetry in contemporary Iran participated in these programs—all reputable musicians, radio announcers, famous song-writers, poets, composers, and scholars worked side by side with Pirniā, a man of incredible competence and ability, to make the *Golhā* orchestra and its programs a success. Abetted by them, Pirniā created a work that will be impossible to ever again duplicate, since all these cherished artists, aside from a handful, have now withdrawn themselves beneath the lids of the earth. Yet in the realm of Art their works of genius remain immortal just like the 'Immortal Flowers of Song and Verse' themselves.⁴⁹

To conclude this survey of Dāvud Pirniā and the *Golhā* programs, I can do no better than offer three learned opinions about them gleaned from recent interviews with some of the greatest living figures in classical Persian music:

Farhād Fakhreddini, at present (2008) Conductor of the National Orchestra, pronounced,

The *Golhā* programs were the most successful radio programs in Iran in those days... They made people appreciate music much more and attracted people to good music, because they gave people a taste for it. All those who participated in the creation of the *Golhā* program, such as Abu'l-Hasan Sabā, Mortazā Mahjubi, Tajvidi, Dāvud Pirniā and Rahi Mo'ayyeri, were people of high culture and extraordinary human beings. It should be emphasized that we didn't have any other entertainment at that time. One might go to the movies once a week, but there was no TV for us to watch. We would turn on the radio, and the best program of all at the time was the Program of Immortal Flowers. Then came the Program of Multi-colored Flowers. First, Messrs. Tajvidi, Mahjubi, and Sabā worked on these programs, and then Ruh Allāh Khāleqi, who had a good-sized ensemble (he was in fact the founder of the *Golhā* orchestra) appeared on the scene.⁵⁰

Dāryush Safwat, founding member and former Director of the Society for the Preservation and Propagation of Music (*Anjoman-e hefz va eshā'a-ye musiqi*), recently opined:

⁴⁸ See also Daryush Pirniā and Erik Nakjavani, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁹ Bizhan Taraqqi, pp. 146-47.

⁵⁰ Interview conducted with the author in Tehran on October 2, 2005.

The *Golbā* programs constituted an effort to perform authentic Persian music. They were inspired by private gatherings in which the best musicians participated. Many of these musicians were getting old and it would not have been appropriate to ask them to give public concerts. But they had a musical knowledge that was in danger of becoming lost forever, which they wished to put at the disposal of the people. Mr. Pirniā performed an invaluable service in producing these programs. The *Golbā* not only had a great influence on Persian music, but significantly increased peoples' appreciation of Persian literature. When the *Golbā* were being broadcast, it was a common practice for people to drop whatever they were doing to listen to the radio.⁵¹

I shall leave the last word to Iran's greatest living classical vocalist Mohammad-Rezā Shajāriān, who voiced his opinion about the legacy and significance to the *Golbā* programs as follows:

It is my belief that Persian music owes a huge debt to Dāvud Pirniā, since at a crucial moment in the history of Iran he effectively rescued our music from perdition. If it wasn't for his efforts, Arab music, Turkish music, or Western pop music would have all but drowned out and obliterated Persian music. In establishing the *Golbā* programs, Mr Pirniā created a sanctuary where Persian music could survive and flourish amongst all these conflicting and corrupting influences, so that even today the *Golbā* programs are still cherished among the populace at large.⁵²

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Dāvud Pirniā in his private office in Moshir al-Dawla's House in Lālezār-e now, Tehran



Rahi Mo'ayyeri and Dāvud Pirniā at Maydān-i Arg Radio Studio Tehran.



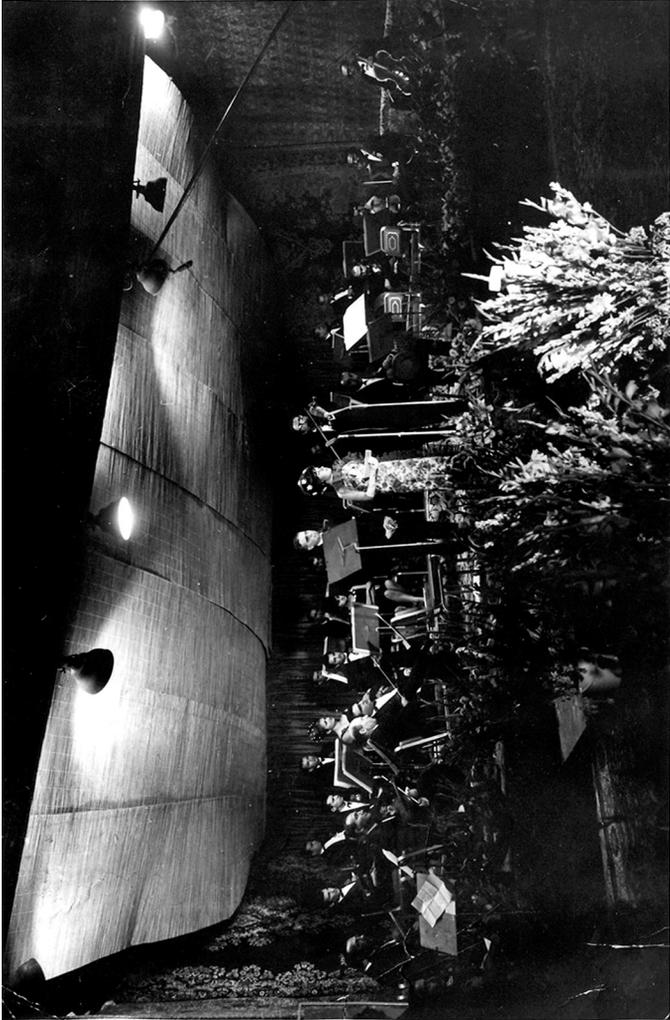
Adib Khwānsārī, Mortazā Mahjubi, and Marziya at Maydān-i Arg Radio Studio, Tehran.



Abu'l-Hasan Sabā, 'Ali Tajvidi, Mortazā Mahjubi at Maydān-i Arg Radio Studio Tehran, circa 1955.



***Golbā* female singers. From left to right: Purān, Yāsamin and Elāha (seated), with Iren (the actress).**



Golhā Benefit Concert for Lār Earthquake Victims at the Hilton Hotel, Tehran (1960)



Seated (right to left): Ahmad Ebrāhimi, Bizhān Taraqqi, Hosayn Tehrāni, Parviz Yāhaqqi. Second row (right to left): Solaymān Amir-Qāsemi, Farhang Sharif, Zabih Malekpur, Mortazā Mahjubi, Ebrāhim Sahbā, Sādeq Sarmad. Above Mortazā Mahjubi: Nabizādeh (Toyuri).