

# A Review of Mahoor Music Quarterly

## *(Fasl nāmehi' mūsīqi māhūr)*

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October 1, 2010

Mahoor<sup>1</sup> Music Quarterly (hereafter referred to as MMQ) is a journal publication of Mahoor Institute of Culture and ART (hereafter referred to as MICA) in Farsi (a.k.a. Persian). MICA has been the most renowned musical/ethnomusicological organization in Iran since its establishment in 1987. Their mission has been to promote and release works on Iranian Music. The main activities of MICA include publication of music books, pamphlets, periodicals, cassettes, CD's and DVD's. They cover mainly two genres of Iranian music, namely classical music and folk music. Other genres of Iranian music, such as contemporary music, film music and children music, have also been produced (but apparently to a lesser extent).<sup>2</sup>

MMQ has been published in Tehran since 1998. The contributors to the journal are researchers and musicians living in Iran, as well as those from other countries (non-Iranians or those of Iranian origin, who conduct research on the music of the region). Although the texts are in Farsi, the English title of articles from all issues can be found online<sup>3</sup>.

The topics covered in the journal can be categorized as follows (Fatemi, Asadi, & Musavi, 2008, p.8): 1) Iranian classical music: approximately 100 articles were published by 2008, on the structural analysis of Iranian music, *radif* and *dastgahs* (i.e. the repertoire and the modal systems), techniques of music playing, theories and history of the music, of which approximately 90% were authored by Iranian scholars. 2) Folk and popular music of Iran: by 2008, approximately 30 articles were published on such topics as religious music, folk music of various regions of Iran, entertainment music, pop music and Iranian dance, of which approximately 75% were authored by Iranian scholars. 3) Music of the neighboring and related cultures: the articles that fall in this category are mostly on the music of the Islamic world, which includes Iranian, Arabic and Turkic music. These articles have been trying to introduce to the readers the common heritage and related musical cultures of this region of the world. Most of these articles are on classical music and some are on folk music and popular music. Approximately 30 articles were published in this category by 2008, approximately one third of which were authored by Iranian

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<sup>1</sup> The word mahoor refers to one of the main *dastgahs* (or simply modes) of Iranian classical music. Scale-wise, it is the counterpart of 'major' scale in western music. The two words appear to have the same Indo-European root.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mahoor.com>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mahoor.com/quarterly>.

scholars and the rest were translations. 4) Theoretical views, musicological and interdisciplinary topics: by 2008, over 70 articles were published in this category (which overlaps with some of the above-mentioned topics). Approximately 70% of these articles were authored by Iranian scholars and the rest were translations. 5) Western music: approximately 20 articles were published in this category by 2008, of which approximately 80% were translations and the rest were authored by Iranian scholars. 6) Phonology/acoustics: by 2008, approximately 13 articles were published in this category, of which approximately one third were authored by Iranian scholars and the rest were translations.

MMQ has also published three special editions, which were on the following topics: 1) the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of making phonographic records (Issue No. 29). 2) Music critique (Issue No. 34). 3) Improvisation (Issue No. 37). By 2008, over 570 articles were published in 40 issues, for which over 300 authors from Iran and abroad made contributions.

Aside from the range of topics and the corresponding statistics, it is also important to note the socio-political issues in Iran regarding music. MMQ is published in a country, and in an era, that music per se has an unclear and controversial position. A glance at the preface of the first issue of MMQ reveals that the editor-in-chief could not resist complaining about the status of music in Iran (in different aspects, such as teaching and learning, performance, publication, and scholarship) (Eftekhari, 1998). Obviously, a discouraging or restrictive policy imposed by the government and the clerics would affect the musical and ethnomusicological research in the country; something that the counterpart publishers in the rest of the world (for instance *Ethnomusicology*<sup>4</sup> in the United States) did not have to deal with.

The above-mentioned issue is in addition to an inherent challenge in the study of music of Iran. There is no agreement in the theory of music of Iran and that makes the framework of research unfounded to some extent. Any theory presented on the music structure of scales and modes is usually attacked by the supporters of a different theory. Also, there is a wide range of positioning with respect to tradition vs. modernism in music that adds to the heated discussions and split among the musicians and scholars. These types of confrontations, which is reflected in the articles published in MMQ, although interesting to some readers (who enjoy awareness of different points of view), may be discouraging to some scholars, particularly when the language of confrontation (as evident in the articles) is slightly hostile and non-diplomatic. Citing poetry that calls the rivals ignorant and uneducated is an example of the old culture of debate in Iran (even in the scholarly written articles). The language and tone of articles in the west, when questioning or even refuting an opinion, is much more controlled and 'professional'. Overall, one may find the atmosphere in Iran not so suitable to conduct research on music as it is in most other countries in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ethnomusicology* is a publication by [University of Illinois Press](#) on behalf of [Society for Ethnomusicology](#).

Considering such unique characteristics of the society of Iran, MMQ initiated the publication of its scholarly articles in 1998, hoping to create a friendly yet informative forum that encourages free expression of opinions and increases tolerance among the scholars and the readers. It is noteworthy that adopting a critical approach towards the arts/music policies of the government and some organizations was stated to be among the objectives of the publication (Eftekhari, 1998, p.6).

A hurdle in front of the editors of MMQ was the quality of the submitted articles and the writing style of the authors (of the older generation), who were not familiar with the language and literature in musicology or ethnomusicology. The editors of the journal had to raise the standards for accepting articles so that only those that were based on new research or analysis and were written 'scholarly' would be accepted. This policy that was adopted since Issue No. 16 had apparently some negative impact on the popularity of the journal among the older generation of musicians and researchers and a decrease in the number of publishable articles for a period of time, although without any argument it was a necessary measure to improve the quality of the articles. This situation has improved recently since the new generations of the university graduates, who are contributing to the journal, have been educated properly in the field of musical research and familiar with the writing techniques required for publishing.

MMQ, although not the first or only journal on music in Iran<sup>5</sup>, strives to be the most renowned journal on music scholarship and ethnomusicology of Iran.

## Bibliography

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Fatemi, S., Asadi, H., & Musavi, S. M. (2008). Preface. *Mahoor Music Quarterly*, No. 40, pp. 7-15.

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<sup>5</sup> Two important, previously published periodicals on music are 'Music of Iran' (*musike Iarn*) and 'Music Magazine' (*majaleye musiqi*).