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Where rhythm meets roots in Persian music

Hejazi: Persian music speaks in its own voice



By **Hamideh Hosseini**
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Iranian traditional music is deeply embedded in the culture, lived experience, and historical memory of a people who have kept it alive generation after generation. Kourosh Hejazi, a percussionist and leader of the Nava-ye Hengam ensemble, is among the artists who, emerging from a music-loving family and trained by distinguished masters, embarked on a professional path in Iran's classical music tradition. With extensive domestic and international performance experience, Hejazi has sought to serve as a worthy representative of Iran's traditional and folkloric music on global stages.

On the night of Yalda, Hejazi and his ensemble performed at a special ceremony held at the Iran Cultural and Press Institute, where they were guests of journalists and media staff from various departments of the institute. On the sidelines of the event, Iran Daily spoke with Kourosh Hejazi. In this interview, he reflects on his entry into music, the formation of Nava-ye Hengam, and his perspective on the international standing of Iran's traditional music.

IRAN DAILY: First, please tell us briefly about yourself and how you entered the world of music.

HEJAZI: My name is Kourosh Hejazi, born in 1991, and I am the director and leader of the Nava-ye Hengam ensemble. We are four brothers: the eldest plays the Setar (a stringed instrument with a small, pear-shaped soundbox

and four metal strings); the second is a member of the IRIB Symphony Orchestra and plays the violin; I play the tombak (Iranian goblet drum); and our youngest plays the Santur (hammered dulcimer).

Our passion for music comes from our parents. Though they were not professional musicians, they were discerning listeners. From childhood, authentic Iranian music filled our home, profoundly shaping our musical interests.

I began studying the tombak, the principal Iranian percussion instrument, around age 11 or 12. Today, as a percussionist, I would like to respectfully acknowledge my esteemed teacher, the late Master Bahman Rajabi, one of the great masters of percussion, with whom I had the honor of studying. I also studied in Qazvin under Master Mirza Ali-Akbar Khoram Qazvini, a distinguished figure of Iranian music, working on the instrumental Radif (a modal system composed of several Dastgahs (modes) and Gushehs (melodic fragments), each with its own tonal character, emotional color, and internal logic). He was both a poet and a Setar player, and one of the cultural luminaries of this land.

What led you to believe that you could form a music ensemble?

Forming an ensemble was always one of my aspirations; I intended from the start to work in group performance. My main profession is selling musical instruments in Baharestan Square, in the traditional instrument-makers' bazaar. Our shop was next to a very old workshop with a distinguished history in instrument craftsmanship. From around 2005, the area became a hub for music conservatory students, and many prominent masters, whom I knew personally, regularly visited our shop. My deep in-



Members of the Nava-ye Hengam ensemble perform during a Yalda Night cultural event at the Iran Cultural and Press Institute in Tehran on December 21, 2025, blending traditional Persian rhythms and melodies.

● **IRAN DAILY**

terest in authentic Iranian music, combined with this inspiring environment, sparked the idea of forming an ensemble, Nava-ye Hengam.

The group consists of eight musicians with complete instrumentation, including percussion, plucked strings, and bowed strings. I was about 24 or 25 when we gave our first formal performance, presenting our first official concert at Azadi Tower in 2015. Having studied music academically, I had a university professor, Rahman Moradi, son of Master Farman Moradi, one of Iran's great instrument makers. I dedicated my first performance to him. Since then, I have performed in numerous venues.

Have you also taken part in festivals and international performances?

Yes. Last year, my ensemble and I performed at the United Nations in the European cities of Bern and Geneva. We were invited by the Iranian Embassy in Switzerland to perform at one of the events dedicated to Iranian cultural traditions. I have also participated individually in various festivals. Last year, I performed at the Fajr Music Festival with the Nava-ye Aftab Orchestra. Together with different ensembles, we have had numerous international performances, including in Switzerland, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey.

Mr. Ali Haddadian, a Tar player and one of



the current members of Nava-ye Hengam, is the son of Mohammad Ali Haddadian, one of the country's eminent musicians. Amir Zamani, the ensemble's vocalist, is a student of Master Mirza Ali-Akbar Khoram Qazvini. My colleagues and I in Nava-ye Hengam have always taken pride in our Iranian identity. This land has produced great cultural figures and literary giants, and we have tried to be worthy representatives of our country on various artistic stages.

Why did you choose to work in traditional music? What makes Iranian traditional music stand out internationally?

Persian traditional music has much to say to the world. However, I am genuinely concerned about the current situation, because

much of our pure and authentic music has been marginalized, while music with no clear identity has become more prevalent. We have had great musicians who have been profoundly influential in the course of global music history. Iranian folkloric music is unparalleled worldwide, and in terms of diversity, it is incomparable to any other tradition. This diversity stems from the varied ways of life and the wide range of rhythms found across different regions of Iran.

Our folkloric music, both in its rhythmic structures and in its use of intervals, is highly appealing to international audiences. In our ensemble, we strive to represent Iran's traditional and folkloric music and to present it to audiences in the best possible way.

Last voice of Shajarian comes alive

By **Alireza Sepahvand**
Journalist

The unveiling ceremony of two previously unreleased albums by Master Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, 'Bang-e Dohol' and 'Sar dar Gariban', took place on December 20 at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Part of the 'Eternal Memory' project, the albums feature Shajarian's final live performance during his 2014 European tour. Homayoun Shajarian, alongside composers Majid Derakhshani and Saeed Farajpour, shared details of the project. Homayoun noted, "These albums feature works composed by Majid Derakhshani and Saeed Farajpour, arranged by Majid Derakhshani, and performed with the Shahnaz ensemble."

The music of these artists provided a foundation for my father's voice to reach its peak, making each performance a memorable moment."

He added, "One of the reasons for the delay in releasing these works was the difficulty of separating my father's voice from the orchestra with low-quality audio. With great effort and the collaboration of friends, we were able to prepare versions suitable for release."

Homayoun spoke about the significance of the release, "These albums capture a period of my father's artistic life, when he performed with unparalleled power. Their release is more than an album; it is a tribute to a legacy of love, suffering, and effort."

Homayoun explained that the reason for not releasing his father's collaborative albums with Sohrab Pournazeri was personal resentment. He emphasized, "These decisions were



Homayoun Shajarian (L) unveils two previously unreleased albums by his father, Master Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on December 20, part of the 'Eternal Memory' project featuring the maestro's final live performance from his 2014 European tour.

● **ISNA**

not made out of hostility; Master Shajarian was always committed to quality and professional principles and wanted each work to represent the authenticity and artistic ability of his music." He further elaborated, "My father had grievances with the Pournazeri brothers, which is why some collaborative works were not released. Perhaps if he were alive today, these disagreements would have been resolved and the works would have been officially published."

Street concerts and women's singing

Shajarian spoke about his dream of holding street concerts, "As long as there are streets and people, this dream remains, but past experiences have shown that all aspects must be carefully considered."

Regarding the participation of women in music, he said, "Restricting women's activities is unacceptable, and conditions must be provided for them to present their works. I have published several works so far, and this path continues."

He also spoke about his meeting with Abdolhossein Khosropanah, Secretary

of the Council of Public Culture, saying, "The purpose of the meeting was to review restrictions and provide practical solutions to improve conditions for women's activities."

Production process

Saeed Farajpour explained the album details, "The album includes two CDs, and I composed the section 'Sar dar Gariban'. In 2014, Master Shajarian requested that these works be performed in Europe. The program was performed in 10 European cities. Afterwards, the program in Iran and Armenia was canceled, making these works the last tour of Master Shajarian."

Majid Derakhshani, composer of 'Bang-e Dohol', spoke about collaborating with the master, "We tried to include the master's opinion and vision in the work process. His students assisted in singing, focusing more on composition and instrumental performance. The master invested great effort in the instruments to create new works."

Homayoun added, "My father's motivation for creating new instruments was to emphasize the necessity of hearing new sounds so that audiences and in-

terested musicians could experience them."

Photo, instrument exhibition

Simultaneously with the album unveiling, an exhibition of Master Shajarian's photographs, taken by Afshaneh Shajarian, and his invented instruments was held at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

Homayoun expressed gratitude for the museum's cooperation, "This exhibition provides an opportunity for the public to become familiar with less-seen aspects of the master's activities."

Future plans and Shajarian award

Homayoun spoke about future plans, "We are planning concerts in Iran, but venue capacities are limited. We intend to organize a grand outdoor event next year, accommodating 8,000 to 10,000 people per session."

Regarding an award in the master's name, he said, "We are exploring the idea of establishing an award to be given to young singers and artists."

Significance of works

Homayoun emphasized that these albums include the last live performance of his father and that their release was handled carefully and meticulously to maintain high quality. He added, "My father has many works that are not of sufficient quality, and plans for their release are also underway."

Saeed Farajpour and Majid Derakhshani stressed the importance of the Shahnaz ensemble's collaboration and the quality of performance, considering this project a complete example of the fusion of experience, passion, and skill of the artists.

From Yalda to ...

In the grand Yalda celebration, marking the second

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night of the series and the presentation of the Nowruz Plaque, Young women dressed in traditional costumes from Nowruz-region countries recited Persian poetry and stories around a table set with foods traditionally associated with Yalda night. Music groups from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan also performed. In her remarks, Mona Rahmani, executive secretary of the event, said participants had gathered to reflect on two ancient Iranian heritages, namely Nowruz and Yalda, that have transcended geography and traveled through history to the present day. "At first glance, these celebrations may seem like occasions for joy, gathering, and cultural rituals," she said. "But a closer look shows that both Nowruz and Yalda carry within them a form of cultural diplomacy and civilizational dialogue."

She concluded by emphasizing that this cultural legacy celebrates the continuity of life rather than destruction, praises the renewal of nature rather than ruin, and gives meaning to peace rather than the erasure of the other. "If every country, every nation, and every policymaker understood the message of Nowruz and Yalda, perhaps our world would fear violence less and look to the future with greater hope," she said. "Let us see Nowruz as the shared language of the region's nations and Yalda as a lesson in togetherness during times of darkness."

Professor Balram Shukla, cultural attaché of the Indian Embassy, spoke about commemorations of the longest night of the year in the Indian subcontinent and concluded his remarks by reciting a verse from Hafez, the Iranian poet whose works are read on Yalda, along with its translation into Sanskrit.

Renowned Iranian musician Keyvan Saket spoke about the beauty of Yalda night before performing a solo piece. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the Nowruz Plaque was awarded to ten social activists in recognition of their efforts during the 12-day war, as a symbol of empathy and solidarity. Among the recipients were a music producer and documentary filmmaker, a journalist and documentary director, a child rights activist, and a rescue and relief pilot.

