a genuinely engaging, accomplished form of tombak playing, adapting to the circumstances and building my performance around improvisation.

As a teacher, how do you approach the challenge of passing on the Farhangfar method to younger generations while encouraging students to develop their own musical identities? How can a student learn from a master without becoming merely an imitator?

A student must learn the foundations of the instrument and understand the approach of the method in which they are studying. But learning should not end with imitation. Each musician needs to develop an individual identity and discover a personal way of expressing musical ideas. It is important to understand the work of previous masters, but it is equally important to think independently and find one's own voice. A musician should not simply reproduce another person's playing. The aim is to learn, understand and eventually develop an approach of one's own.

You have contributed to tombak education through instructional books, including "The Farhangfar Method: An Instructional Course" and "Siah Mashq". What motivated you to document this musical knowledge in writing, and what do you hope students will gain from these publications?

I have tried to document and transmit the knowledge associated with my father's method. These publications are intended to help students understand the instrument and become familiar with the approaches and techniques developed within this tradition.

Among these works are the first and second volumes of "The Farhangfar Method: An Instructional Course," as well as "Siah Mashq 1" and "Siah Mashq 2". My father's poetry has also been published by Gooya Publications. Writing instructional material is one way to preserve knowledge and make it available to future generations. But books alone cannot replace the experience of listening, practising and playing with other musicians. Students need to combine study with sustained practice and careful attention to the music itself.



Arash Farhangfar (R) poses for a photo with Master Mohammadreza Shajarian (3rd-R) and his son Homayoun Shajarian (L) in August 1998 at Rudaki (Vahdat) Hall on the night of the Aava ensemble's concert.
SOCIAL MEDIA

You began teaching at a very young age, reportedly taking on teaching responsibilities when you were only 15. How did that early experience shape your understanding of the tombak, and what did teaching reveal to you about the relationship between performing, practising and transmitting musical knowledge?

I began teaching in 1988 at the Faravahar Organization, which was associated with the Zoroastrian community. I was only 15 years old and began teaching in place of my father.

At that age, I did not have much teaching experience. Nevertheless, the responsibility helped me learn. Teaching requires you to explain things clearly and to examine your own understanding of the instrument. Through teaching and continued practice, I gradually gained experience.

Teaching and performing are related, but they are not the same. A performer must develop the ability to play, while a teacher must also understand how to communicate knowledge to others. Both require commitment, patience and continued learning.

Instructional methods are essential to learning an instrument, but musical performance also demands flexibility, responsiveness and creativity. How do you balance the value of structured exercises with the need for improvisation? And what concerns you about the relationship between technical virtuosity and the ability to perform effectively with other musicians?

Educational books generally teach students particular patterns and exercises. These are useful for developing technique, but actual performance requires much more than reproducing a sequence of established patterns. It requires listening, responsiveness and the ability to improvise. Students also need to understand rhythmic cycles and meters. They should learn to break rhythms down, understand their internal structure and recognize how different patterns relate to one another. Technical knowledge is important, but it must serve the music.

One problem today is that some performers introduce techniques that do not necessarily contribute to the musical context. A performance can become a succession of difficult movements without a coherent musical purpose.

There are also musicians who perform impressive solos but struggle when they have to play with an ensemble. Solo performance and ensemble playing demand different abilities. In a group, the musician must listen to others, maintain a sense of balance and understand how the tombak contributes to the overall musical texture. Technical ability alone is not enough. A musician must also understand the music, respond to fellow performers and know how to use technique in the service of musical expression.



Arash Farhangfar (top row, 3rd-R), master tombak player, poses for a photo with the participants of the "general rhythm, meter and tombak workshop" at Mehr-e Shargh Music Academy in Rudehen, Iran, on August 20, 2026.
SOCIAL MEDIA

How can musicians avoid becoming trapped in established conventions while continuing to develop their own approaches? Is innovation something that can be taught, or does it emerge through an individual musician's experience, sensibility and understanding of tradition?

The question of how a musician can avoid becoming confined by established conventions while continuing to innovate is not one that can be answered easily. Someone who is genuinely innovative will find a way to innovate. You cannot simply train a musician to become an innovator. You can train a number of musicians, and perhaps one of them will eventually develop the ability to introduce something new. But it is not possible to guarantee that training will produce an innovative musician — or even an artist — in the first place.

> We must preserve our traditions and learn from them, but we must also develop our own identities, establish our own approaches and find our own means of expression. Only then can we begin to innovate. And innovation, in itself, does not necessarily mean something is good. We should not assume that something is beautiful or valuable simply because it is new.



Cover design of Arash Farhangfar's tombak instructional book titled "Siah Mashq 1," featuring a photo of his father, Nasser Farhangfar
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We must preserve our traditions and learn from them, but we must also develop our own identities, establish our own approaches and find our own means of expression. Only then can we begin to innovate. And innovation, in itself, does not necessarily mean something is good. We should not assume that something is beautiful or valuable simply because it is new.

Personally, I do not listen to much contemporary music. I tend to listen more to music from the past, and I am not particularly drawn to many of today's performers or to every instrument in its contemporary form. If someone is playing the tar today, for example, I prefer to listen to the recordings of masters such as Jalil Shahnaz, Farhang Sharif, Lotfollah Majd and Mohammadreza Lotfi. The same applies to other instruments. When it comes to the santur, I enjoy listening to Parviz Meshkatian, Reza Shafieian, Faramarz Payvar and other great masters.

Looking back at the past century of tombak playing, we encounter successive generations of performers and a variety of musical approaches. In your view, which of their contributions and distinctive qualities are most likely to stand the test of time? What enables a particular style of playing to transcend the period in which it emerged and become part of a lasting musical heritage?

Over approximately the past hundred years, several musicians have made outstanding contributions to the development of the tombak. They include Master Hossein Tehrani, Master Amir Nasser Eftetah, Master Bahman Rajabi, Master Mohammad Esmaeili and my father, Master Nasser Farhangfar.

These are five figures whose names deserve to be remembered. In time, the musical community will continue to recognize the immense and valuable contributions they made to Iranian tombak playing. The art of tombak playing will always owe a great deal to the dedication and achievements of these distinguished artists and musicians.

Drawing on your many years of experience as a performer, teacher and custodian of Iran's musical heritage, what do you consider the most important responsibility of today's Iranian musicians toward tradition? And what understanding of the tombak and Iranian music would you like international audiences to gain through your work?

Of course, performing concerts in other countries allows us to introduce the tombak and Iranian music to international audiences. We have done so, and we will continue to do so. But what is even more important is introducing our own instrument and musical heritage to people in our own country.

We need to help our fellow citizens become familiar with the tombak and understand its musical possibilities. We must do much more in this regard. We need to introduce our compatriots to music through live performances and present high-quality music so that they can experience it firsthand, recognize its value and learn to appreciate it.