

From Dust to Digital

Ten Years of the
Endangered Archives Programme



EDITED BY MAJA KOMINKO

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Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme

Edited by Maja Kominko

Chapter 18



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18. Conservation of the Iranian *Golha* radio programmes and the heritage of Persian classical poetry and music¹

Jane Lewisohn

The *Golha* ("Flowers of Persian Song and Music") radio programmes broadcast on Iranian National Radio for 23 years from 1956 through 1979 comprised approximately 850 hours of programmes. They were made up of literary commentary with the declamation of poetry, and featured singing with musical accompaniment interspersed with solo musical pieces. The programmes were the brainchild of Davud Pirnia, a one-time Assistant Prime Minister, enthusiastic patriot and scholar who harboured a deep love for Persian culture and its rich literary and musical traditions.²

The foremost literary, academic and musical talents of the day offered Pirnia their collaboration and support, and the greatest Iranian vocalists of the twentieth century saw their careers launched on his radio programmes.³

1 The transliteration in this chapter is based on a modified version of the LOC transliteration system for Persian, without diacritical marks, combined with the system for Persian used by the third edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam. Please refer to <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/about/transliteration#.VLT1Wt7hWqM>

2 Davud Pirnia was the son of Mushir al-Dawla (d. 1935), a very popular Prime Minister who flourished during the constitutional period in Iran. He retired from political life in 1955, and for the next eleven years devoted himself to producing the *Golha* programmes. Pirnia received his early education at home from some of the most eminent intellectuals of the day. He went on to study at the French École St. Louis in Tehran, later going to Switzerland to study Law. Personal communication from Bizhan Pirnia (son of Davud Pirnia), Tehran, 12 September 2005. See also Mansura Pirnia, *Ardashir Zahidi, farzand-i khandan-i Zahidi va Pirnia: afkar va andisha, ravayat-i Ardashir Zahidi* (North Potomac, MD: Mehr Iran, 2004), pp. 36-38. For an overview of Pirnia's life and times, see Jane Lewisohn, "Flowers of Persian Song and Music: Davud Pirniā and the Genesis of the *Golhā* Programs", *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 1 (2008), 79-101.

3 Scholars and poets such as 'Alī Dashti, Badī' al-Zaman Furuzanfar, Jalāl-al-Dīn Huma'ī, Lutf-'Alī Suratgar, Zia'-al-Dīn Sajjadi and Rahī Mu'ayyiri provided commentaries for the



Fig. 18.1 Davud Pirnia (on the right) and Rahi Mu'ayyiri (on the left) at the radio in Tehran, c. 1950. Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

programmes. Composers and songwriters such as Habibu'llah Badi'i, Ghulam-Husayn Darvish, Mahmud Dhu'l-Funun, Farhad Fakhradini, Mihdi Khalidi, Ruhullah Khaliqi, Humayun Khurram, Murtaza Mahjubi, Jahangir Murad (Husam al-Sultana), Murtaza Nay-Dawud, Faramarz Payvar, 'Arif Qazvini, Anushir Ruhani, Abu'l-Hasan Saba, 'Ali Akbar Shayda, 'Ali Tajvidi, 'Ali-Naghi Vaziri and Parviz Yahaqqi featured in the *Golha* programmes, along with the finest singers of classical singing (*avaz*) and popular ballads (*tarana*) vocalists such as 'Abbas 'Afifi, Darvish Amir-Hayati, Iqbal Azar (Iqbal-al-Sultan), Marziya, 'Ahdiya Badi'i, Sima Bina, Vigan Dirdirian, Ilahi (Bahara Ghulam-Husayni), Nadir Gulchin, Husayn Khwaja-Amiri (Iraq), Nahid Da'i-javad, Hayida, Mahasti, Nasir Mas'udi, Parvin, Puran, 'Izzat Ruhbakhsh, 'Abd al-Wahhab Shahidi, Muhammad-Riza Shajarian (Siyavush) and Kurush Sarhangzada. Likewise, some of the most talented contemporary lyricists wrote songs for the *Golha* programmes, including the likes of Jamshid Arjumand, 'Ali Ashtari, Muhammad-Taqi Bahar (Malik-al-Shu'ara), Hushang Ibtihaj, Parviz Natil-Khanlari, Rahi Mu'ayyiri, Manuchihr Mu'in-Afshar, Rahim Mu'ini-Kirmanshahi, 'Imad Khurasani, Isma'il Nawwab-i Safa, Muhammad-Husayn Shahriyar, Munira Taha, Bijan Taraqqi, Abu'l-Hasan Varzi, Kayumars Vusuqi, Bahadur Yagana and Zuhra (Mansura Atabaki). See Bizhan Taraqqi, *Az pusht-i divarha-yi khatira*, 2nd edn. (Tehran: Badraqa-yi javidan, 1386 A.Hsh./2007), pp. 146-47; Habibu'llah Nasirifar, *Gulbang-i Golha: shi'r va musiqi*, 2 vols (Tehran: [n. pub.], 1377 A.Hsh./1998).



Fig. 18.2 Parviz Yahaqqi (on the right) and Bijan Taraqqi (on the left) composing a song for the *Golha* programmes. Tehran, late 1950s.
Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.



Fig. 18.3 Rahim Moini-Kermanshahi (on the right) and 'Ali Tajvidi (on the left) composing a song for the *Golha* programmes. Tehran, mid-1950s.
Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

Besides having such a rich pool of talent at his fingertips, Pirnia had the support of the Director of the Iranian National Radio (1950-1960s), Nusratu'llah Mu'iniyan, who transformed the radio from a commercial advertising platform for entertainers and a parking place for relatives of political elites into a respected and influential vehicle for the preservation and promotion of Persian culture.⁴ The *Golha* programmes became bywords of excellence in the sphere of Persian music and literature, setting standards that are still looked up to in Iran today; scholars and musicians often refer to them as being an encyclopaedia of Persian music and poetry.⁵ Most of the great ballads and classic songs in contemporary Persian poetry were commissioned and composed specifically for these programmes.⁶

Pirnia produced five different radio programmes: "Perennial Flowers" (*Golha-yi javidan*, up to 157), "Particoloured Flowers" (*Golha-yi rangarang*, 481), "A Green Leaf" (*Barg-i sabz*, 312), "A Single Rose" (*Yik shakh-i gol*, 465) and "Desert Flowers" (*Golha-yi sahra'i*, 64).⁷ Each featured choice selections from

4 On the basis of interviews that I conducted with the *nay*-player Hasan Nahid, the poet and radio producer Hushang Ibtehaj, the female vocalist Sima Bina, as well as information gleaned from the personal archive of Mahmud Zulfununi, it is clear that all the participants in the *Golha* programmes — whether singers, composers, musicians, conductors, poets or lyricists — were under contract to the National Radio. Their contracts varied between being commissioned to perform in a set number of programmes, or present a certain number of programmes monthly. Participants and performers were paid either upon the delivery or performance of a certain song or poem, or, in the case of a monthly contracts, at the end of the period. The notes and lyrics for the songs along with a copy of the programme were then deposited and preserved in the central Radio Tehran archive. For further information on this, see Anonymous, "Yek tahavvul dar tarikh-i Radio ya pardakht fi al-majlis", *Majalla-i Radio – Radio-yi Tihiran: Nashriyya-i idara-i kull-i intisharat-i Radio*, 2 (Mehr 1335 A.Hsh./1956), 3-4.

5 Humayun Khurram, "Ghughha-yi sitaragan", *Farhang u pazhuhish, Vizha-yi hunar (Musiqi)*, [Culture and Research Magazine: Special Issue on Art (Music)], 198 (13 Mordad 1384 A.Hsh./4 August 2005), 20-21.

6 We'll mention here only a few such famous "hit" songs: Raftam (lyrics: Navab Safa; composer: 'Ali Tajvidi; singer: Hayida), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/1485#.VBq2n0vxqM>; May-i nab (lyrics: Hafiz; composer: Ruhullah Khaliqi; singer: Banan and Puran), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/1269#.VBq3I0vxqM>; Nava-yi nay or Bang-i nay (lyrics: Rahi Mu'ayyiri; composer: Murtaza Mahjubi; arrangement Ruhullah Khaliqi singer: Banan), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/1338#.VBq3fkvxqM>; Sang-i khara (lyrics: Mu'ini Kirmanshahi; composer: 'Ali Tajvidi; singer: Marziya), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/1264#.VBq3uUvxqM>; Sariban (lyrics: Sa'di, composer: Javad Ma'rufi; singer: 'Abdul-Wahab Shahidi), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/1272#.VBq4CkvxqM>; Baz-amad (lyrics: Mu'ini Kirmanshahi; composer: Javad Ma'rufi; singer: Ilahi), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/1316#.VBq4RUvxqM>; Ghurub-i kuhistan (lyrics: Jahanbakhsh Pazuki; arrangement: Javad Ma'rufi; singer: Nahid Da'i-javad), <http://www.golha.co.uk/en/programme/399#.VBq4kkvxqM>; Man-i bidil (lyrics: Rahi Mu'ayyiri; composer: Murtaza Mahjubi singer: Marziya). See Habibu'llah Nasirifar, *Golha-yi javidan va Golha-yi rangarang* (Tehran: Intisharat-i Nigar, 1982 A.Hsh./2003), 15-17.

7 The *Golha* programmes are available at <http://eap.bl.uk/database/results.a4d?projID=EAP088>

the lyrics of the great classical and contemporary Persian poets, combining song and declamation with musical accompaniment, learned commentary and Persian folk music.

18.1 *Golha-yi javidan* 85, broadcast between 1956 and 1959.



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<http://www.openbookpublishers.com/media/978-1-78374-062-8/Golha-yi-javidan>

18.2 *Golha-yi rangarang* 158, broadcast between 1956 and 1972.



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18.3 *Barg-i sabz* 23, broadcast between 1956 and 1972.



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<http://www.openbookpublishers.com/media/978-1-78374-062-8/Barg-i-sabz>

18.4 *Yik shakh-i gol* 196, broadcast between 1956 and 1972.



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<http://www.openbookpublishers.com/media/978-1-78374-062-8/Yik-shakh-i-gol>

18.5 *Golha-yi sahra'i* 14, broadcast between 1960 and 1972.



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There were three main aesthetic purposes underlying Pirnia's establishment of the *Golha* programmes: to make classical Persian poetry available to the general public; to demonstrate the intimate, inextricable association of classical

Persian poetry with music; and to demonstrate that aesthetic appreciation of music combined with poetry can allow one to better savour and appreciate both art forms.⁸ The inspiration for establishing a radio programme combining poetry and music came from the private gatherings held in the early 1950s at the homes of some of the leading members of the Sufi Order founded by Safi Ali Shah (d. 1898), which was known as the “Fraternal Society” (*Anjuman-i ukkhuwwat*),⁹ and included ‘Abdu’llah Intizam, Nizam al-Soltan Khwajanuri and Pirnia himself.



Fig. 18.4 Vigin Derderian, one of the most popular pop singers from the 1950s. He sang several Armenian tunes for the *Golha* programmes.
Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

8 Ibid., pp. 15-17.

9 Interview with Daryush Pirnia (son of Davud Pirnia), Maryland, U.S., 17 August 2005. Unless otherwise stated, all interviews mentioned herein were conducted by the author. Davud Pirnia also began producing a “Children’s Programme” (*Barnama-i kudak*) on Tehran Radio in 1956, which had an immensely important artistic and cultural impact. See Isma’il Navabsafa, *Qissa-yi sham: khatirat-i hunari* (Tehran: Nashr-i Paykan, 1384 A.Hsh./2005), p. 586.

The socio-cultural impact of the *Golha* programmes in Iran

The *Golha* programmes were a product of the peculiar cultural and political atmosphere in Iran in the early twentieth century. During the reign of the first Pahlavi monarch, Reza Shah (1921-1941), music, cinema and western-style theatre were viewed favourably as having a modernising influence on Iranian society.¹⁰ Although the Shah himself did not directly support these activities, his modernist political policies created a suitable atmosphere in which they could flourish. In 1932, Reza Shah banned the performance of the traditional Shiite passion plays (*ta'ziyeh*),¹¹ which had previously been a major source of entertainment for the general public. Their removal from the artistic and religious scene left a vacuum that was quickly filled by cinema, theatre and musical concerts. Another significant event was the decree issued in 1936 by Reza Shah prohibiting women from wearing the *chador* — an all encompassing black garment which also included a mask-like cloth (*ruband*) covering their face — in public spaces. This paved the way for women to participate in the public sphere physically, intellectually and artistically.¹²

Another significant occurrence took place on 14 April 1940 when Iranian National Radio initiated its very first broadcasts,¹³ which soon became the major source of information and entertainment for the general public. Many

10 One typical example of this attitude appears in a letter (dated 11 July 1931) written by the director of the Tehran branch of His Master's Voice record company to their head office in London, encouraging them to expand their operations in Iran, which states: "the Persian Government considers that the two great factors for the popularisation of modern education are the cinema and the phonograph" (His Master's Voice's Archives for Persia, housed in EMI Group Archive Trust, Hayes, Middlesex, UK). Abbas Milani likewise describes how "the government [of Iran under Reza Shah] was firmly supportive of Vaziri's efforts [at modernising Persian music]. Some of his songs became a mandatory part of the curriculum in all schools, and the government paid for the publication of his three-volume magnum opus, *The Theory of Music*. Abbas Milani, *Eminent Persians: the Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran, 1941-1979*, 2 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), p. 1032. See also Keivan Aghamohseni, "Modernisation of Iranian Music During the Reign of Reza Shah", in *Culture and Cultural Politics Under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran*, ed. by Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner (London: Routledge, 2014), 73-94.

11 Willem Floor, *The History of Theater in Iran* (Washington, DC: Mage, 2005), 197; M. Ali Issari, *Cinema in Iran, 1900-1979* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989), pp. 63-64.

12 "Emancipation of women was one of Reza Shah's most effective weapons in diminishing the power of the clergy who had traditionally exerted a great deal of power over women's lives and their freedoms". Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 66.

13 Sipihri, "Radiyu dar 20 sal [20 Years of Radio]", *Radio-yi Iran*, 32 (1338 A.Hsh./1959), 3-5.

of these broadcasts featured both male and female vocal and performing artists.¹⁴ Certain events in the external political sphere also had a huge impact on the artistic scene in Iran at this time. At the height of World War II, after refusing to break his ties with Nazi Germany, Reza Shah abdicated in September 1941 in favour of his young son Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. On the pretext of defending and supplying the Russian front against the German invasion, the Allies took complete control of Iran.¹⁵ Although this was a period of great economic hardship for the general public in Iran,¹⁶ new theatres were opened and musical concerts thrived due to a general lack of censorship and the fact that the Allies supported this kind of entertainment in order to win favour with the Persian people.¹⁷

During World War II and its aftermath, popular foreign styles began to exert their influence on Persian music and performance art in general. Western, Arabic, Turkish and Indian influences began to affect the development of Persian music. As a result, the native classical “art music” of Iran came under threat of disappearing or becoming so distorted as to be no longer recognisable.¹⁸ Compounding this crisis of survival of Persian classical music was the taboo against the performance of serious art music in public, since “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”.¹⁹

14 Tooka Maliki, *Zanan-i musiqi-yi Iran: az ustura ta imruz* (Tehran: Kitab-i Khurshid, 1381 A.Hsh./2002), p. 227.

15 Donald N. Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 105-06.

16 Interview with Iranian historian Bastani Parizi, Tehran, 13 December 2007.

17 Floor observes that “during World War II, theater and concerts thrived as the young Shah was weak and the Allies didn’t mind criticism if it was not directed at them. The Allies also supported local cultural activities in order to gain the support of the people.” Floor, *The History of Theater in Iran*, p. 263.

18 Ella Zonis’s description of the situation a decade later in Iran is applicable to this period as well: “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”. Ella Zonis, “Contemporary Art Music in Persia”, *The Musical Quarterly*, 51 (1965), 636-48 (p. 647).

19 Zonis 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 Hussein, 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 take place. There appears to be a strong feeling on the part of the populace that even rehearsals

In this respect, it should be underlined that musicians in Iranian society in general occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder. Even Colonel 'Ali-Naghi Vaziri (known as the "Father of modern Iranian Music")²⁰ had to constantly move his music club from one premise to another, as the landlords would evict him on various pretexts. He explained that the real reason behind their persecution was that music in general was frowned upon as religiously forbidden (*haram*) by the conservative elements of society. Whether music was taught or performed by men or women, the neighbours, prodded by angry local mullahs, would make trouble for any landlord who allowed musicians access to their premises.²¹

During the period of the Allies' occupation of Iran in the 1940s and its immediate aftermath, down to the Musaddiq crisis of 1953, Iran was virtually free of any serious censorship.²² Vigorous debates flourished in the field of literature. Radical modernist thinkers like Ahmad Kasravi and poets such as Nima Yushij viewed many of the classical traditions in Persian literature as exemplifying apathy, fatalism and impediments to modernisation and social progress. They championed new forms of Persian prose and poetry and advocated for a politically engaged literature. The majority of the Iranian intellectuals of this period were strongly influenced by Soviet communist ideology and dogmatically stressed the need for a new kind of Persian literature that was socially committed.²³ They despised and rejected the introspective and meditative classical tradition of Persian poetry as socially irresponsible and politically irrelevant to modern society. They denounced and jettisoned the classical tradition as an idle, outdated romanticism of no use to their modern progressive, rationalist worldview. In the opposing

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" (ibid., 637). See also similar comments in Bruno Nettl, "Attitudes Towards Persian Music in Tehran, 1969", *The Musical Quarterly*, 56/2 (1970), 183-97.

20 Hamid Raja'i, "Ali Naghi Vaziri: pidar-i musiqi-yi nuvin-i Iran", in *Guzarish-i musiqi* [Music Report], I/6-7 (Tehran 1386 /A.Hsh.2007), 64-68. See also Milani, 2, p. 1033.

21 Sasan Sapanta, *Chishmandaz-i musiqi-yi Iran* (Tehran: Mahur, 2004), p. 185; and Floor, p. 239.

22 By "Musaddiq crisis", I refer to the events of the summer of 1953 during which an oil embargo on Iran was imposed by the British. In a coup orchestrated by Britain and the U.S. intelligence services, Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq (who had nationalised the Iranian oil industry) was overthrown and deposed, and Muhammad Reza Pahlavi returned to the throne. See Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 245-52.

23 Iraj Parsinejad, *A History of Literary Criticism in Iran (1866-1951)* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex, 2003), pp. 41 and 59.

camp stood traditionalist writers such as Muhammad Ali Furughi, Badī' al-Zaman Furuzanfar, Muhammad Taqi Bahar and others, who defended the importance and relevance of classical Persian literary traditions to modern Iranian society.²⁴

Although Pirnia belonged largely to the latter camp, he was well acquainted with all the major modernist intellectuals and writers. His family mansion was situated just off Lalihtar Avenue, where all the theatres, music halls and fashionable coffee houses were located – in its day it was Tehran's equivalent to New York's Times Square or London's Leicester Square. He would have heard and seen all these new and foreign forms of entertainment performed in the immediate vicinity of his home. This caused him great alarm as it did to most of the classical Persian musicians.²⁵ During this same postwar period, one finds many articles appearing in various Iranian music journals written by prominent musicians expressing their concern for the future of Persian art music. They not only bemoaned its decadence and decline, but also complained of the Ministry of Culture's apathy towards the situation, lack of support and involvement in the development of national music (*musiqi-yi milli*).²⁶ Mushir Humayun Shahrदार, who served as Director of Music at Iranian National Radio during the early 1950s, described the lamentable situation of Iranian music during this period:

Persian Music was not only being impacted by influences coming from vulgar pop music from abroad, but the influence of Arabic music had caused Persian music to decline as well. Singers and musicians on the radio were largely imitating international music styles, performing songs and tunes that not only had nothing to do with authentic Persian music, but did not follow the norms of world music either.²⁷

On the public institutional level, there were several organisations that had a lasting impact on the development of Persian music in the nineteenth and

24 See M. A. Jazayeri, "Ahmad Kasravi and the Controversy Over Persian Poetry. Part 2: The Debate on Persian Poetry between Kasravi and His Opponents", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 13/3 (1981), 311-27.

25 Davud Pirnia's son, Bijan Pirnia, told me a story that on returning from a visit to the home of his friend Mr. Vusuqi, his father decided that he had to do something to combat the ongoing corruption of Persian music and literary traditions. Shortly after that, he inaugurated the *Golha-yi Javidan* series of radio programmes. Interview with Bijan Pirnia, Tehran, Iran, 12 September 2005.

26 See Ruhullah Khaleqi, "Hadaf va ravesh-i majalla", *Majalla-yi chang*, 1 (1325 A.Hsh./1946), 3; and idem, "Yek pishnehad-i mofid", *Majalla-yi chang*, 2 (1325 A.Hsh./1946), 3. See also *Majalla-yi musiq* and *Majalla-yi musiqi* (Tehran: 1956-1966), *passim*; and Nettl, "Attitudes", pp. 183-97.

27 Mushir Humayun Shahrदार, "Qadamha-i kih barayi bihbud-i musiqi-yi Irani Radio bardashta shuda-ast", *Majala-yi Radio*, 1 (Shahrivar 1335 A.Hsh./1956), 13.

early twentieth centuries. The first of these was the *Dar al-Funun* (Technical College) in Tehran, founded in 1868, in which Alfred Jean-Baptiste Lemaire taught music classes that were largely devoted to providing the Iranian army with a grounding in military music.²⁸ Secondly, there was the Advanced School for Music Studies (*Madrassa-yi 'ali-yi musiqi*), founded by Colonel 'Ali-Naghi Vaziri in 1923. Thirdly came the National Conservatory of Music (*Hunarestan-i musiqi-yi milli*), founded by Ruhu'llah Khaliqi in 1949, and fourthly the Centre for the Preservation and Promotion of Music (*Markaz-i hifz va ashaya-yi musiqi*), founded by Daryush Safwat in 1968.²⁹



Fig. 18.5 Ali Akbar Shanazi teaching his pupil Pirayeh Pourafar at the Centre for the Preservation and Promotion of Music in Tehran, in 1977. Courtesy of Pirayeh Pourafar, Public Domain.

28 Even before Lemaire, wax cylinder recordings and phonograph records had made it possible for people to listen to quality professional music, whether western or Persian. However, these were luxury items only to be found in well-to-do households. A phonograph player would have cost about £1,500 in today's money and each record would have cost the equivalent of £20. See Sasan Sapanta, *Tarikh-i tahaavvul-i zabt-i musiqi dar Iran* (Tehran: Mahur, 1998), p. 67.

29 Owen Wright, *Touraj Kiaras and Persian Classical Music: An Analytical Perspective* (London: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 3-4.

All of these institutions made important contributions to the shaping of modern Persian music, but their audience was limited and mostly composed of music specialists. No one but a few members of the urban elite could afford the price of tickets to their occasional concerts.³⁰ In this context, the institution that had the most far-reaching and inclusive effect on Persian music and music appreciation was the Iranian National Radio. Broadcast for free throughout the whole nation, music on the radio was avidly followed. Even if at first radios were expensive, people gathered to listen to them in each other's homes or in coffee houses.

Unfortunately, influence-peddling, favouritism and nepotism eventually led to a chronic decline in the standards of music broadcast. In an interview given on Iranian radio in the 1950s, Mushir Humayun Shahrदार explains that the radio effectively became an advertising platform for certain performers, enabling them to hawk their artistic wares and benefit from their fame financially by performing at private functions and weddings.³¹ In the period directly after the Musaddiq crisis of 1953,³² a radio station belonging to the Air Force began broadcasting popular tunes (*ahang-i kucha-bazar*) with weak lyrics set to fast Arabic dance beats. These lyrics — sung by pop singers like Mahvash, Affat and Jibili, who were not formally trained in classical Persian singing — soon became very popular among the general public. Seeing that he was losing his listeners to the Air Force radio station, Mr. Khudayar, who was the assistant to Parviz Adl, the Director of National Iranian Radio, invited these singers to perform on the National Iranian Radio.

Khudayar's disastrous bias towards cheap popular music was coupled with a nepotistic managerial policy that freely handed over all the important jobs and programmes to close family members, and put on the payroll names of people who had never ever set foot in the radio station. This, along with the above-mentioned philistine commercial attitudes and conduct of some of the National Radio's singers, alienated many of its serious musicians such as Abu'l-Hasan Saba, Banan, Khaliqi, Adib Khwansari and 'Ali Tajvidi. Not wanting to have their names associated with this kind of tawdry music and

30 During the Reza Shah period, censorship was tightened and cultural activities that did not support the drive towards modernisation were banned. Satire was tolerated, but only if it was directed towards the discredited Qajar regime. Armenian theatrical performances were banned in 1927. As Floor argues, "The majority of the population was poor and could not afford the luxury of the price of a ticket to benefit the football club and other elite institutions" (pp. 258-59).

31 Interview with Shahrदार that was re-broadcast on Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on 25 August 1999.

32 On these events, see Katouzian, pp. 245-52.

unbecoming behaviour,³³ they resigned their positions at the National Radio and returned to pursue private teaching duties.³⁴



Fig. 18.6 Ghulam Hosain Banan (on the left) and Navab-Safa (on the right) working on a song for the *Golha* programmes. Tehran, late 1950s.
Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

It is at this juncture that Pirnia began his work with the radio and inaugurated the *Golha* programmes. Around the same time, Nusratu'llah Mu'iniyan was

33 The following description by Nettl of the situation a decade or so later was by and large typical of the 1940s-1950s 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 cliental by an occupation". Bruno Nettl, "Persian Popular Music in Iran 1969", *Ethnomusicology*, 16/2 (1972), 218-39.

34 Interview with Nikukar, Los Angeles, U.S., 25 July 2010. Nikukar was one of the original sound technicians employed by the National Radio from the 1940s down to the early 1980s.

appointed Director of the Radio. A man with refined tastes in classical Persian music and literature, he completely overhauled the whole organisation, changing it from a chaotic, shady institution into a highly disciplined, efficient and respectable one that even began to generate income through advertising.³⁵ With the help of President Harry Truman's "Point Four Program", designed to give technical assistance to developing countries recovering from the devastating effects of World War II, the Iranian National Radio, better known as "Radio Tehran", was able to make much-needed technological improvements like the building of professional sound studios and the installation of modern recording and broadcasting equipment.³⁶

Pirnia's personal prestige as a scion of a famous former Prime Minister, and his literary and musical genius in designing these high quality radio programmes, combined with Mu'iniyan's disciplined restructuring of the radio organisation and brilliant managerial talents, proved immediately effective. When the major artists and great maestros, virtuosos and divas who left in disillusionment a few years earlier were invited back to perform, they gladly accepted.³⁷ Soon the radio became a favourite medium for introducing serious Persian music to the nation. In the words of Farhad Fakhradini, composer, conductor and founder of the Iranian National Orchestra:

The *Golha* programmes were the most successful radio programmes produced in Iran those days [...] The programmes made people appreciate music much

35 Mu'iniyan's efforts are described in detail in Shahrardar, "Qadamha".

36 Interview with Bijan Farazi, Tehran, Iran, 7 September 2005. Farazi was a friend and colleague of Davud Pirnia. Thomas Ricks notes, "On September 22, 1949, Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote the Iranian Ambassador to the United States, Hussein Ala, that Iran would receive both economic and military assistance including technical advisors in agriculture, public health, education, and industrial training under the Smith-Mundt and Point Four programs". Thomas Ricks, "U.S. Military Missions to Iran, 1943-1978: The Political Economy of Military Assistance", *Iranian Studies*, 12/3-4 (1979), 163-93 (p. 176). The "Point Four Program" provided 7,000,000 rials for a purpose-built building to house the offices and studios of Radio Tehran and a further \$55,000 for recording and other technical equipment. This money also paid for the training of Iranian technicians in the U.S. See Anon, "Istudiyyu-yi jadid-i radio-yi Tihiran [A New Studio for Radio Tehran]", in *Majala-yi Radio*, 1 (Shahrivar 1335 A.Hsh./1956), 15. The "Point Four Program" also provided a fifty-kilowatt radio transmitter for Iran that enabled the radio broadcasts to be heard even in the most far-flung hamlets of Iran, and \$18,000 for American experts to train the Iranian radio engineers. For further details about the history of the development of Radio Tehran, see Anonymous, "Suda-yi Tihiran: Bih zudi ba bih-kar uftadan-i dastgah-i jadid-i panjah-kiluvati bih-tawr-i vuzuh dar sarasar-i Iran shinidih khwahad shud [The Voice of (Radio) Tehran: How Shortly a New Fifty-Kilowatt Plant for Radio Tehran Will be Established and Broadcast Loud and Clear Throughout Iran]", *Majala-yi Radio*, 1 (Shahrivar 1335 A.Hsh./1956), 8 and 22.

37 Ruhullah Khaliqi, "Ba in 'ilal dar Radio-yi Iran qabul-i mas'uliyat kardam [An Explanation of Why I Accepted [a Post of] Responsibility at Radio Iran]", *Majalla-yi Musik-i Iran*, Year 7, 4/76 (Shahrivar 1337 A.Hsh./1958), 18.

more and attracted people to good music, and developed the populace's taste and appreciation for classical Persian music. All the artists who participated in the creation of the *Golha* programmes, such as Abu'l-Hasan Saba, Murtaza Mahjubi, Tajvidi, Davud Pirnia and Rahi Mu'ayyeri, were people of high culture and extraordinary individuals. It should be emphasised that we didn't have any other entertainment besides the radio in those days. 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 programme of all at the time was the programme of "Perennial Flowers" (*Golha-yi javidan*), after which came that of "Particoloured Flowers" (*Golha-yi rangarang*). At the start, Messrs. Tajvidi, Mahjubi, and Saba worked on these programmes. They were soon followed by Ruhullah Khaliqi, who had a good-sized ensemble, and who was, in fact, himself the founder-director of the *Golha* Orchestra.³⁸

Akbar Gulpayigani, one of the most colourful and beloved vocalists in Persian music, who sang in all the different *Golha* programmes from a very early age,³⁹ describes the educational effect of the programmes on Iranian culture at large as follows:

38 Interview with Farhad Fakhradini, Tehran, Iran, 3 October 2005.

39 Ali Akbar Gulpayigani was born in 1933 into a religious family of preachers and Quran-reciters who sang the praises of the Prophet and the Shi'ite Imams. He was educated as a professional surveyor. He studied the modal system of classical Persian singing with Nur 'Ali Khan Burumand (1905-1974) and later sang in various *Golha* radio programmes with the support of Pirnia. He created a new style in Persian classical vocals that attracted the general public to Persian classical singing. His method was to strip off the intricate and complex sophistication of the Persian vocal art, transforming classical singing into something simple, appealing, and easy for music lovers to commit to memory; in this manner, he filled the glaring gap that lay between the solemnity of classical Persian vocal art and popular lyrical singing, forming a bridge between the two. He taught classical singing (*avaz*), became a popular singer on Iranian television, a celebrated performer in concerts abroad, the founder of the earliest cassette recording companies, and a cabaret and nightclub owner and performer, where he showed a clever knack for administrative management. He had an eye for commercial profitability and a genius at introducing a kind of Hollywood-like attractiveness into the music scene in Iran. He even enjoyed a brief acting career in Iranian commercial films between 1967-1974. His performances were geared to suit each occasion, such that he performed on the *Golha* programmes in one way, in another manner on television, in still other ways in private gatherings, in public concerts, in cabarets and nightclubs, etc. Gulpayigani trod his own way and has thus enjoyed the warm welcome of Persian society over the past fifty years. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that over the past thirty years (since the Iranian revolution of 1979), he has been banned from holding public concerts in Iran and from performing or having his songs played on Iranian radio and TV. From 1980 onwards, his activities have been limited to either private teaching at home, performance in concerts abroad, or releasing cassettes, albums and CDs that have enjoyed a wide circulation. He himself considers that he owed the illustriousness of his career in the *Golha* programmes largely to Davud Pirnia's expert directorship and refined tastes in music. During his travels abroad, he obtained many decorations, medals, an honorary Ph.D. degree, as well as other honours and titles. Musicologists today regard him as the Frank Sinatra of Persian music. For more on Gulpayigani's career and influence, see 'Ali Riza Mir'ali Naqi's account of the singer at <http://www.golha.co.uk>

One of the biggest effects of the *Golha* was to immortalise the names of any artist who performed in them. [...] Ask anyone today involved in Persian music in any capacity what the best exemplar of Persian music is – they will invariably reply: “the *Golha* programmes”. The *Golha* had their own particular inimitable fragrance which makes their place in the history of Persian music irreplaceable. ... In Persian literature, we have grandees such as Hafez, Sa’di and Rumi, but the *Golha* programmes introduced the public to poets of all the ages. Anyone who bothered to assemble a collection the *Golha* programmes in their home also necessarily collected the works of most of the Persian poets.⁴⁰



Fig. 18.7 Akbar Golpaygani (on the left) and Farhang Sharif (on the right) in the late 1960s. Courtesy of Alireza Mirnaghabi, Public Domain.

Iran’s greatest living classical vocalist, Muhammad-Reza Shajarian, had this to say about the legacy and significance to the *Golha* programmes:

Persian music owes a huge debt to Davud Pirnia in my opinion. At a crucial moment in the history of Iran he effectively rescued our music from perdition. If it were not for his efforts, Arab music, Turkish music, or Western pop music would have all but drowned out and obliterated Persian music. In establishing the *Golha* programmes, Mr Pirnia created a sanctuary where Persian music could survive and flourish amongst all these debilitating and corrupting

40 Interview with Akbar Gulpayagani, Tehran, Iran, 2 October 2005.

influences, so that even today the *Golha* programmes are still cherished among the populace at large.⁴¹

In short, the effect of the *Golha* programmes on Persian literature and literary appreciation cannot be underestimated. However, we should also consider the effect of the *Golha* programmes within the context of the entertainment and education industries in mid-twentieth-century Iran. According to studies carried out by UNESCO, the official illiteracy rate in Iran was somewhere around 85-90% in the 1950s.⁴² For the largely rural population of Iran, the only form of mass media available was the National Radio. The modernisation programmes launched earlier in the century by Reza Shah had discouraged most of the other traditional pastimes such as coffee-house recitation (*Qahva-khana naqqali*) and town-square (*maydan*) entertainments like theatrical storytelling (*pardihdari*), juggling and puppet shows (*shu'bada-bazi*, *khaymih-shabbazi*) and magic tricks (*ma'rikigiri*) as being backward and old-fashioned.⁴³ A few of the larger towns had cinemas, but for the majority of the rural population of Iran, radio was one of the only form of entertainment and information at their disposal.⁴⁴

With the introduction of battery-powered transistor radios in the 1960s, even the most remote villages and tribal areas — many of which did not have electricity at the time — began listening to the radio.⁴⁵ The *Golha* programmes suddenly became a national fad. Families would arrange their schedules to make sure they were home in time to listen to the *Golha* programmes on the radio, while those who did not have radios — either because they could not afford them or because of the religious convictions

41 Interview with Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, London, United Kingdom, 5 November 2005.

42 See *World Illiteracy at Mid-Century: A Statistical Study*, UNESCO Monographs on Fundamental Education, 11 (Paris: UNESCO, 1957), p. 39.

43 Peter Chelkowski, "Islam in Modern Drama and Theatre", *Die Welt des Islams*, 23/4 (1984), 45-69.

44 Amin Banani, "The Role of the Mass Media", in *Iran Faces the Seventies*, ed. by Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 325-28.

45 Mohammad Ali Issari refers to the spread of cinema entertainment throughout Iran during this period. However, the backward socio-cultural situation also led to the prominence and importance of the radio in peoples' lives. Two events occurred in Iran that made cinema the foremost source of mass entertainment for the people. The royal decree prohibiting *Ta'ziyih* and a decree banning *chador* contributed to the growing role of cinema as a source of mass entertainment. From 1936 until 1978, men and women could sit next to each other in cinemas, a freedom denied them even during such religious ritualistic gatherings as *Rawzih* and *Ta'ziyih*. See Issari, pp. 63-64 and 71.

and opposition of their elders — would go to their neighbours' and relatives' houses to listen to them.⁴⁶

The *Golha* programmes introduced to the general public approximately 700 Persian poets from the Samanid dynasty (819-999) down through the Pahlavi monarchy (1925-1979). The programmes combined literary commentary with singing and declamation of their poetry, all accompanied by the finest Persian music. Because the radio was freely accessible to all, whether literate or not, this had a very positive effect of raising the awareness and literary appreciation of both the intelligentsia and the general public:

The *Golha* programmes served to preserve the classical tradition of Persian music and poetry which was under threat from forces that wished to modernise, and — in some cases — eradicate the love and cultivation of traditional Persian music and poetry in Iran. However, because of the airing of these programmes, interest in classical Persian literature was revived so that the *Divans* of poets that had been out of print for years, or never properly edited and published before, suddenly became in high demand and booksellers were astounded at the demand for and sale of these classics.⁴⁷

The quality and sophistication of the *Golha* raised the bar for all other radio programmes, and helped to bring about what many refer to as the “Golden Age of Iranian Radio”, a period that lasted a little over a decade from 1954 to 1967. After this time, public radio and television merged into a single organisation: the National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT).

18.6 *Golha-yi taza* 200, broadcast between 1972 and 1979.



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code or follow this link:
<http://www.openbookpublishers.com/media/978-1-78374-062-8/Golha-yi-taza>

⁴⁶ In my interviews with Fakhradini and Shajarian (London, 4 November 2006), both described how, despite not having radios in their own homes during their youth, they would go daily to their cousins' and neighbours' houses to listen to the *Golha* programmes. Both told me that *Golha* programmes constituted the chief inspiration for them to pursue careers in music.

⁴⁷ Interview with Prof. Shah-Husayni, Tehran, Iran, 6 November 2007. Shah-Husayni served as Director of the Literary Committee under Davud Pirnia at the Iranian National Radio during the production and broadcasting of the *Golha* programmes. He was also editor of the journal *Radio-yi Iran* from 1956 to 1967.



Fig. 18.8 Left to right: Shaf'i Kadkani, Hushang Ebtehaj and Bastani Parizi. They were all poets whose work was featured in the *Golha* programmes, c. 1970. Courtesy of Alireza Mirnaghibi, Public Domain.

In the words of Hushang Ebtehaj, one of the most important contemporary Persian poets and the producer of the “Fresh Flowers” (*Golha-yi taza*) programmes:

Davud Pirnia was extremely successful in promoting both Persian music and poetry. He did something very important, which was by combining poetry with music, he made people pay closer attention to poetry itself. At that time, there was nobody else except for him who was thinking about or paying attention to these matters. The National Radio pervaded Iranian social life in an all-inclusive manner. With the turn of a knob on the dial one could broadcast music throughout the whole country. With his attention to detail, his enthusiasm, dedication and passion for the subject, Mr Pirnia tried to select the very best repertoire of poems and to choose the very best musicians for participation in the *Golha* programmes.

In both respects he was quite successful, gathering all the best musicians around him to produce the *Golha* programmes. Beyond these programmes, we didn't hear much other music of high quality. There was some popular music being broadcast, but since it started at a level suitable to the masses, it soon degenerated into cheap music of the lowest quality. The *Golha* programmes played a very important role in the development of the musical and literary culture of Iran during the particular historical moment that they appeared. The *Golha* programmes were not without faults – faults that we can see plainly now with hindsight. That is to say, there were some things missing and other things that could have been added to or improved on – but at that time there was nothing better around. One could say that the *Golha* programmes were the very best our culture had to offer the world. In his day, Mr Pirnia made the best possible imaginable contribution to Persian music.

After experiencing the impact of the *Golha* programmes, looking back now in retrospect, we can recognise their faults and shortcomings in light of what subsequently came after them. But at the time when the *Golha* programmes were broadcast, all the participants were of the highest calibre and they enjoyed a very high place and were held in high esteem by the greater public.⁴⁸

I have given such a long quotation from Ibtehaj because he was one of the main advocates of the neoclassical movement (*bazgasht*) in Persian music. In his capacity as the producer of the *Golha-yi Taza* programmes in the 1970s, this great modern Persian poet had aimed to revive styles of Persian music performed *before* the introduction of western musical notation by Colonel Vaziri. Despite the fact that many followers of the *bazgasht* movement criticised the *Golha* programmes for including western elements of harmony, polyphony and counterpoint, as well as other “innovations” in some of its ballads and orchestral pieces, Ibtehaj’s remarks clearly indicate that the *Golha* programmes were nonetheless still largely understood as a force for the preservation of traditionally “native Iranian” values and “classical Persian” music in all their authenticity.



Fig. 18.9 Mohammad Reza Lutfi (on the left) and Hushang Ebtehaj (on the right) in the mid-1970s. Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

In an interview, Nasir al-Din Shah-Husayni, who directed the Literary Committee that vetted the contents of the *Golha* programmes at the Iranian

⁴⁸ Interview with Hushang Ibtehaj, Tehran, Iran, 19 November 2009.

National Radio, related how popular the *Golha* became throughout Iran. His office typically received thousands of letters from *Golha* fans every week, many of whom requested copies of various poems they had heard on a particular programme. Although it was impossible to answer them all, the committee devoted two centre pages of the *Radio-yi Iran* monthly journal to publishing the transcripts of the *Golha-yi Javidan* and the *Golha-yi Rangarang* programmes.⁴⁹



Fig. 18.10 Text of the *Golha-yi javidan* and *Golha-yi rangarang* programmes printed in the *Radio-yi Iran* journal. *Majala-yi Radio*, 16-17 (1335 A.Hsh./1956), Public Domain.

The standards of the *Golha* were so high that all the musicians and singers wanted to participate in them,⁵⁰ and many of them became famous due to

⁴⁹ Interview with Shah-Husayni. My own research indicates that no copies of these journals are currently available in any public library in Iran, although stray copies of various issues can be found in the British Library, the Library of Congress and Princeton University Library. Complete copies of all numbers of these journals are currently housed in my own private collection.

⁵⁰ In my interview with Shajarian (2006), he informed me that the reason he came to Tehran from his birthplace of Mashhad, was that “there were no musicians to speak of in

their participation.⁵¹ Everyone knew that Pirnia did not invite just anybody to participate in the *Golha*, and that he chose the participants according to their artistic merits, not because of the strings they could pull for him or in return for favours.⁵² Due to Pirnia's personal integrity, reputation and the quality and sophistication of the programmes, the musicians and singers in the *Golha* programmes soon acquired a social "star" status and respect that helped in turn to elevate the status of musicians and singers in the eyes of the general public in Iran. 'Abd al-Hamid Ishraq, one of the editors of the journal *Musik-i Iran (Iran Music Magazine)*,⁵³ explained to me that in 1953, when he was a young man, he was quite an accomplished musician who played the *tar* in the National Radio's orchestra with well-known performers like Dardashti, Muluk Zarrabi and Bahram Siyah. This was a few years before the inauguration of the *Golha* programmes. Despite his talent, he was discouraged from playing music by the merciless taunting and mockery of passers-by: when they saw him waiting for the bus with his *tar* in hand, they would ridicule him so much that he abandoned playing music altogether. However, once the *Golha* programmes hit the airwaves, public attitudes shifted dramatically, such that music suddenly became a respectable, even envied profession to pursue.⁵⁴

Mashhad at that time. I actually wanted to come and participate in the *Golha* programmes and to work with their musicians. I was a high school teacher at that time. I struggled to get myself transferred to work in Tehran. However, my main aim was to work with the *Golha* musicians – artists such as Mr. 'Ibadi, Mr. Shahnaz, Mr. Badi'i and Majd. So with great difficulty, I got myself transferred to Tehran. I was still teaching in high school when I began singing in the *Golha* programmes".

51 Interview with Gulpayagani.

52 Parviz Yahaqqi notes that "Mr. Pirnia never allowed himself to be influenced by anyone when it came to the *Golha*. It wouldn't matter if his father, mother or even the Shah recommended someone for participation in the *Golha*. If he did not think their talents were up to the standard of the *Golha*, he would not accept them". Interview with Parviz Yahaqqi Tehran, Iran, 9 September 2005. Yahaqqi, who died in 2012, was one of Iran's major violin virtuosos and a composer for the *Golha* programmes.

53 This was a monthly journal published between 1952-1963, produced by Bahman Hirbud, and edited by 'Ali Reza Rashidi and 'Abd al-Hamid Ishraq.

54 'Abd al-Hamid Ishraq notes that "Everyone in the Radio was jealous of the popularity of Mr. Pirnia and the *Golha* programmes. Everyone wanted to be in them. Yet he insisted on focusing on the general quality of the *Golha* programmes and hardly gave the time of day to anyone who did not have talent. There were some singers like Bahram Siyah who, although had a good number of fans, were disappointed not to be chosen for the *Golha*. There were many other singers who tried to gain admittance among the performers on the *Golha* programmes, but Pirnia, who placed great emphasis on a singer's ability to convey both the poetic meaning and the rhythmical ambience of the poems, wouldn't accept them. And he was right—not everyone was up to that". Interview with 'Abd al-Hamid Ishraq, Paris, France, 30 May 2008. Ishraq is an architect and historian of Iranian music.

Conservation of the *Golha* programmes through the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme

I first became aware of the socio-cultural and artistic significance of the *Golha* programmes during my undergraduate studies at Pahlavi University in Shiraz in the early 1970s. I lived with a well-educated and cosmopolitan Iranian family who were regular weekly listeners to these programmes, and we constantly discussed and debated their contents and merits during our conversations about Persian literature and poetry. I had to leave Iran in 1979, and I took with me a substantial collection of cassette recordings of the *Golha*.

In 2004, I began exploring the possibility of collecting and digitising the *Golha* programmes. Much to my surprise, I found that almost no information about them was available, and no in-depth studies had been undertaken.⁵⁵ Given the ambiguous social and religious position of music and musicians in Iran after the 1979 Islamic revolution,⁵⁶ it was unclear how much of the archive of the *Golha* programmes held at the Iranian National Radio had survived. It seemed highly likely that, due to the enormous popularity of the programmes, good copies of them might have been preserved in private collections in Iran and abroad.

In the Autumn of 2005, I began a pilot project sponsored by the British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS) and the Iran Heritage Foundation (IHF) in London. My goal was to investigate the whereabouts of the *Golha* recordings in private or public collections both in Iran and the west, in an effort to find out whether or not it might be possible to reassemble the whole archive. During an initial trip to Iran in 2005, I managed to establish contact with almost all the leading musicians, vocalists and participants who had starred in the *Golha* programmes — at least those still living in Iran. Among them were Farhad Fakhradini, Farhang-i Sharif, Firidun Hafizi, Giti Vaziritabar, Akbar Gulpayigani, Hushang-i Zarif, Muhammad Isma'ili, Muhammad Zarif, Javad Lashgari, Humayun Khurram, Hasan Nahid, Mansur Narimun, Ophelia Partaw, Parviz Yahaqqi, Muhammad Zulfunnun, Farimarz Paywar, 'Ali Tajvidi, 'Alireza Izadi, Ravin Salih (Zarif), Simin Behbehani, Darvish Amir-Hayati and Husayn Dehlavi.

⁵⁵ All that existed was the article by Daryush Pirnia and Erik Nakjavani, "Golhā, Barnāma-yi", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 16 vols (New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2003), 11, pp. 92-95.

⁵⁶ Ameneh Youssefzadeh, "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations", *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 9/2 (2000), 35-61 (p. 39).



Fig. 18.11 Faramarz Payvar (on the left) and Hosain Tehrani (on the right), at the Tomb of Hafiz, Shiraz Arts Festival, c. 1970. Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

During the same trip, I established contacts with several of Davud Pirnia's sons, and some of his closest collaborators and friends, including Bijan Faraz and Mu'in Afshar. I also contacted — and in many cases interviewed — eminent Iranian musicologists and leading figures in the field of Persian music, such as Daryush Safwat, Shahin Farhat, Habibu'llah Nasirifar, Shahrukh Nadiri, Muhammad Sarir, Sa'id Mir-'Ali Naqi, Fatima Va'izi (Parisa), Khatim Asghari and Pari Banan.⁵⁷ Out of these conversations emerged some 28 hours of taped interviews, from which I learned that many private individuals as well as several institutions possessed substantial collections of the *Golha* programmes.

Collecting and digitising the entire archive of the *Golha* programmes now became a distinct possibility. I also discovered that there were four private collectors with major collections of Persian music including the *Golha* programmes, as well as phonograph records and recordings of private performances. Four of these collectors had had a personal or professional relationship with Pirnia. It was Pirnia's custom to supply recordings to

⁵⁷ The wife of Ghulum Husayn Banan, one of the original singers in the *Golha* programmes.

friends who admired a certain *Golha* programme and provided their own blank tapes.⁵⁸



Fig. 18.12 Left to right: Turaj Nigahban, Gulshan Ibrahimy and Humayun Khuram.
Courtesy of Forugh Bahmanpour, Public Domain.

In July 2006, I received a grant from the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) to collect and digitise the *Golha* programmes and to deposit a copy of all materials in the British Library's World Sound Archive, where they would be preserved and made available to all.⁵⁹ Through the generous support of the EAP and the backing of the Music Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, I made several more trips to Iran and also travelled to Germany, France, the United States and Canada to consult with collectors and exchange *Golha* programmes with them.

I was able to hire the necessary research assistants, technicians and secretarial support to properly collect, research, record, digitise and index the entire vast *Golha* archive. I managed to collaborate with three of the major surviving collections of Persian music, as well as with the archive housed at the Iran National Radio.⁶⁰ In addition, many private collectors of Persian music

58 Interview with Mu'in Afshar, Tehran, Iran, 28 September 2005. Afshar was a colleague and personal friend of Pirnia, who had produced the *Barnama-yi kudak* ['Children's Programme'] at Tehran Radio.

59 EAP088: The *Golha* radio programmes (Flowers of Persian Song and Poetry), http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP088

60 Three major collections in Tehran have been digitised. One, the collection of Gulshan

in Iran, France, Germany, Canada and the United States (whose names are unfortunately too many to mention here) generously shared the recordings held in their personal archives with the project. In May 2008, the entire digital archive accompanied by a complete index of the *Golha* programmes was delivered to and deposited in the British Library's World Sound Archive.

The *Golha* Project Website

All the programmes in the *Golha* archive were numbered consecutively. However, some numbers were skipped due to a singer or musician not appearing in the studio for a performance.⁶¹ Enthusiastic collectors of the *Golha* programmes would then sometimes take the initiative of piecing together various parts of other programmes and present these as a missing programme corresponding to one of the blank numbers. In order to discern whether each and every newly discovered programme was in fact genuine, I compiled a detailed searchable index of the whole archive against which I could check any new programmes that resurfaced.⁶²

My index of the *Golha* programmes proved to be a very useful tool for putting this vast archive in order. The need to compile a large searchable digital index of the archive soon became evident. In this fashion, the concept of a *Golha* website was born. In 2008, a generous grant from the Iran Heritage Foundation in London (the largest and most effective organisation in the western world

Ibrahimi, an amateur musician who enjoyed collegial relationships with all the leading musicians of his time is preserved in the Museum of Music. The other, the collection of Murtaza 'Abdu'l-Rasuli, a master calligrapher, a friend of Pirinia and all the major musicians and literary figures of the day, is preserved in the House of Music. The third major collection was compiled at the same time as the broadcasting of the *Golha* programmes by Mr Mahmudi, a railroad employee with a passion for music collecting. He was a friend of Pirnia and would receive from him copies of the *Golha* programmes. His archive remains in private hands. There was also a fourth collection belonged to Ahmad Mihran whose house was a favourite gathering place for all the musicians and singers as well as the poets. It contained not only recordings from the radio, but also recordings of private performances of his friends, recorded in his home. Unfortunately, his archive did not survive his death. Concerning the Mihran Archive, see Furugh Bahmanpur, *Cheraha-yi mundagar-i taranaha va musiqi*, 1 (Tehran: Javidan, 1382 A.Hsh./2003), 108-11.

61 Occasionally, due to sickness or accident, a performing artist did not appear in studio. Consequently, numbered programmes whose recording had been pre-planned were postponed to a later date. If such a programme was never rescheduled and recorded by the producer, its number remained blank.

62 In this task I was graciously assisted by many lovers of the *Golha* programmes. I remain in the debt of Sayyid 'Ali Reza Darbandi's research, both published and unpublished, as well as his many private communications. See his *Golha-yi taza: pazhuhishi dar siri-yi barnamaha-yi Golha-yi taza* (Tehran: Nashr-i Paykan, 1384 A.Hsh./2005).

sponsoring Iran-related subjects) allowed me to begin the project. In early 2009, together with a team of research associates (mostly based in Iran), we began working with computer programmers and technicians in the west to construct an online platform. The construction of the website took three full years of constant work. Over these years (2009-2012), the project generated a great deal of media interest, as a result of which it has been featured countless times on television, radio, and in the print media in Iran, Europe and North America.

The upshot of this project was the creation of a dedicated portal, the *Golha* Project Website,⁶³ that has made not only the audio files for the complete *Golha* archive freely available over the Internet, but has also provided a searchable, relational database for all the *Golha* programmes. The sound files of each and every programme are searchable, and the website is completely bilingual (Persian and English). The site also includes biographical data for all 700 poets from the tenth to the twentieth centuries mentioned in the *Golha* programmes, biographies in both Persian and English of all the performers in the *Golha* programmes, transcriptions of all the songs and poetry, as well as the sheet music for the popular ballads (*tarana*) stored in the archive. The archive is searchable by eighteen different rubrics: programme name; number; singer of the *avaz* and *tarana*; song writer; poet of the *avaz*; first line of the song or poem sung; name of the song; instrument; musician; composer; name of poet whose poetry is sung or declaimed; poetic genre; musical mode (*dastgah* or *avaz*) and musical melody (*gusha*) of the music performed; name of the commentators and announcers; and names of the sound technicians. It is also equipped with a radio player that allows the compilation of bespoke playlists of chosen programmes.

Since its launch in 2012, the *Golha* Project Website has received over three and a half million visitors; as of 2014 it has over 29,000 registered users. In 2012 it was awarded the prize for the best Persian music website by the House of Music (*Khana-yi musiq*). From the launch of the pilot in 2005, people from all over the world have been sending in their precious archives of Persian music produced in Iran prior to the Revolution, with the hope that they can be preserved and made publicly accessible to future generations.

63 <http://www.golha.co.uk>

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