

STUDIES IN BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í HISTORY
VOLUME TWO

FROM IRAN EAST AND WEST

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MÍRZÁ 'ABDU'LLÁH

BAHÁ'Í INFLUENCES ON MÍRZÁ 'ABDU'LLÁH, QÁJÁR COURT MUSICIAN AND MASTER OF THE RADÍF

by Margaret Caton

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh (1843–1918 A.D./c. 1259–1337 H.G.) was a noted court musician and master of the *sitár* and *tár* (plucked long-necked lutes). His *radíf* (musical repertoire) is considered to be the main source of contemporary Persian classical music as taught in conservatories and universities in Iran. One of the greatest Persian musicians of the last century, Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was a Bahá'í and received praise and encouragement for his work from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, then the head of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Influence of Religious Attitudes on Music. Since the introduction of Islam into Iran in the seventh century, the attitude of Persian Muslims toward music has been problematic. Debate has continued through the centuries concerning the permissibility of music and the conditions of its use. Attitudes have varied widely—from outright condemnation to advocacy of music as a means of achieving spiritual growth and enlightenment. The predominant attitude, however, has been antimusical.

Since the Qur'an makes no direct reference to music, views on the subject have been based on the sayings and actions of the Prophet, his followers, and the leaders of religion.¹ There

are many traditions that speak against music, including a saying attributed to Muḥammad: "Music and singing cause hypocrisy to grow in the heart as water makes corn grow."² Musical instruments were labelled "The devil's *mu'adhdhin* (caller to prayer) serving to call man to the devil's worship."³ Listening to music, as well as playing it, was condemned.

There are also some texts in favor of music, however. Farmer relates a tradition in which Muḥammad listened to some recited poetry and said, "The poetry is good, and we do not see any harm in a beautiful melody (*lahn*)."⁴ Regarding instrumental music, he is reported to have said, "Publish the marriage, and beat the *ghirbāl* (round tambourine)."⁵ The Prophet's own wedding festivities were celebrated with music.

Opposition to music in Islam has largely come from the Muslim clergy. The traditions attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad on this issue contain contradictions and may not be reliable. At least, however, the antimusic traditions indicate that within the early Muslim community controversy on this issue existed. Even after the Islamic military victory, seventh-century Islam had to fight hard to avoid being swallowed up by the pagan culture of pre-Islamic Arabia. Roychodhury indicates that: "On the whole the entire culture of pre-Islamic Arabia centered around their pleasures, joys, poets, music, singing girls and musical stories."⁶ Thus, the opposition or ambivalence toward music evident in the traditions attributed to Muḥammad may derive from a desire to dissociate Islam from the ideals and practices of pagan Arabia.

Muhammad instituted the *adhān* (call to prayer) and favored melodious chanting of the Qur'an. This chanting, however, was to differ from the singing of poetry. There arose a legal distinction, then, between chanting and singing. Quranic chanting and the call to prayer do not fall under the category "music"—that is, *mūsīqī* (music), *samā'* (listening to music), and *ghinā'* (song)—and are thus considered allowable. But, "we are assured by Ibn Qutaiba (d. ca. 889) that the Qur'ān was sung to no different rules than those of the ordinary artistic songs (*alḥān al-ghinā'*), and the caravan song (*ḥudā'*)."⁷

The four great legal schools of Islam broadly decided against

the legality of music. During the days of the first four caliphs music was banned. As a consequence, the musician fell into disrepute. During the time of Hárún ar-Rashíd (766–809), caliph of Baghdad, musicians were denied ordinary justice in the courts since it was judged that the testimony of any person who indulged in music was untrustworthy.⁸

But despite legal decisions concerning music, the personal practices of Muslims—even the Imams—show that it was not unconditionally banned, but was treated as permissible under certain circumstances. Time, place and association were regarded as the most important factors in determining the position of music in Islamic society.⁹ Moreover, most advocates of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, favored music and a number of Sufi theologians wrote treatises in defense of listening to music. Dhú'l-Nún maintained that: "Listening (*al-samā'*) is a divine influence which stirs the heart to see Alláh; those who listen to it spiritually attain to Alláh, and those who listen to it sensually fall into heresy."¹⁰

After an initial period of repression, music continued to be condemned officially, but was actively fostered in the courts of caliphs and kings and developed to a high degree, along with other Islamic arts. Music especially flourished under the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad (750–1258); here, there was an important confluence of two musical traditions, Arabian and Persian.

However, periods of repression and turmoil reoccurred from time to time. These had their effect on the lives of musicians, who might be executed, maimed, or forced to flee to other regions and countries. Under the Safavid rulers of Iran (from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries) religion was reemphasized and music lost its social approval, a condition that lasted well into the twentieth century. During the late Qájár period, music was still subject to the disapproval of the orthodox Shí'is, but was practiced with some caution both in the court and among the people. Yet the profession of musician held little respectability.

Status of the Musician. In the nineteenth century, professional musicians were drawn from various groups of people, including

religious minorities, members of tribes, *lútis*, and others of low social standing in society. According to Kháliqí, the musician was known by the term *'amalihi-i tarab* or *'amaliyat-i tarab* (merriment maker) which he considered an indication of the low status of the musician.¹¹ This status was greatly influenced by the negative attitudes generally held toward secular music in Shí'ih Islam.

The life of a musician under these circumstances was difficult and sometimes dangerous. The music of the *radif* particularly became a cloistered and closely guarded tradition. The *radif*, or classical repertoire, is a collection of pieces of the traditional Iranian music which is performed with particular rhythms and in a particular order, and especially according to a manner as transmitted from a great master (*ustád*) of the past.¹² *Radif* musicians relied on patronage by members of the court or the aristocracy, or sometimes by spiritual groups such as dervish orders.

Chardin states that among the entourage of the governors of large provinces were their bands of musicians and dancers.¹³ Although this statement was written in the eighteenth century, it apparently held good at least through the reign of Muẓaffarú'd-Dín Sháh (to 1907), since the master of *tár*, Darvish Khán, was employed in such a capacity. Malláh states that, for purposes of patronage and protection, musicians were often forced to go to the Sufi societies, or to wealthy and powerful patrons such as the princes or rulers, where they were retained as part of the patron's retinue and not allowed to perform outside for others.¹⁴

Changes in the traditional system of patronage and private instruction began occurring in the mid-1800s when Western music-making was introduced in the form of a French bandmaster and military band. Military music instruction was established, and this expanded later into a conservatory of music. The political and social changes of that time took Persian music gradually into more public arenas and made it more widely available.

Biography of Mirzá 'Abdu'lláh. The Iranian musical tradition dates from at least the Sassanian period (third to seventh cen-

turies A.D.) when the legendary court musician Bárbud composed melodies for King Khusraw II (590–628) and is credited with the creation of the Persian system of seven *dastgáhs* (musical systems).¹⁵ The early Islamic period brought a rich interaction of Arabic and Persian music and produced great musical theorists and works. Music was regarded as a science along with arithmetic, astronomy, and geometry. The last in the line of these great theorists, 'Abdu'l-Qádir Marághí, died in the fifteenth century. From the Safavid era until the appearance of 'Alí Akbar Farahání at the court of Muḥammad Sháh in Tehran, is considered by many to be the dark age of Persian music.

By the nineteenth century, there had been no major theoretical treatise written on music in several hundred years. Around 1840, 'Alí Akbar Farahání and his nephew Ghulám Ḥusayn came to the court in Tehran from Arák in Farahán, western Iran. 'Alí Akbar became the foremost court musician under Násiru'd-Dín Sháh, and was noted both for his compositions and for his performance on the *tár*.¹⁶ Gobineau praised his performance and hailed him as a great artist.¹⁷ From the time of 'Alí Akbar until the first quarter of the twentieth century, the *tár* was regarded as the primary musical instrument in Iran.

Abu'l-Qásim 'Arif-i Qazvíní has written about 'Alí Akbar in his *Diván*, referring to him as the most famous *tár* player of the Násirí court. The shah encouraged him and spent much time listening to him perform his original compositions.¹⁸ He also wrote poetry and literature. Having no rivals, he was given special favor and encouragement at court. For example, his portrait was drawn by order of the shah in 1856 (1273 H.G.).¹⁹ Kháliqí comments that he appears to be forty or forty-five years old in this picture.

According to Daring and others, 'Alí Akbar produced new music and reorganized the system of classifying music.²⁰ He became the head of a family of musicians and performers of the *radif*. His repertoire is considered to be the basis of the mainstream tradition of classical Persian music as it is known today.

His personal history before coming to Tehran is not known. According to his grandson, Aḥmad 'Ibádí, 'Alí Akbar was born in Arák.²¹ It is likewise not known where he and his nephew

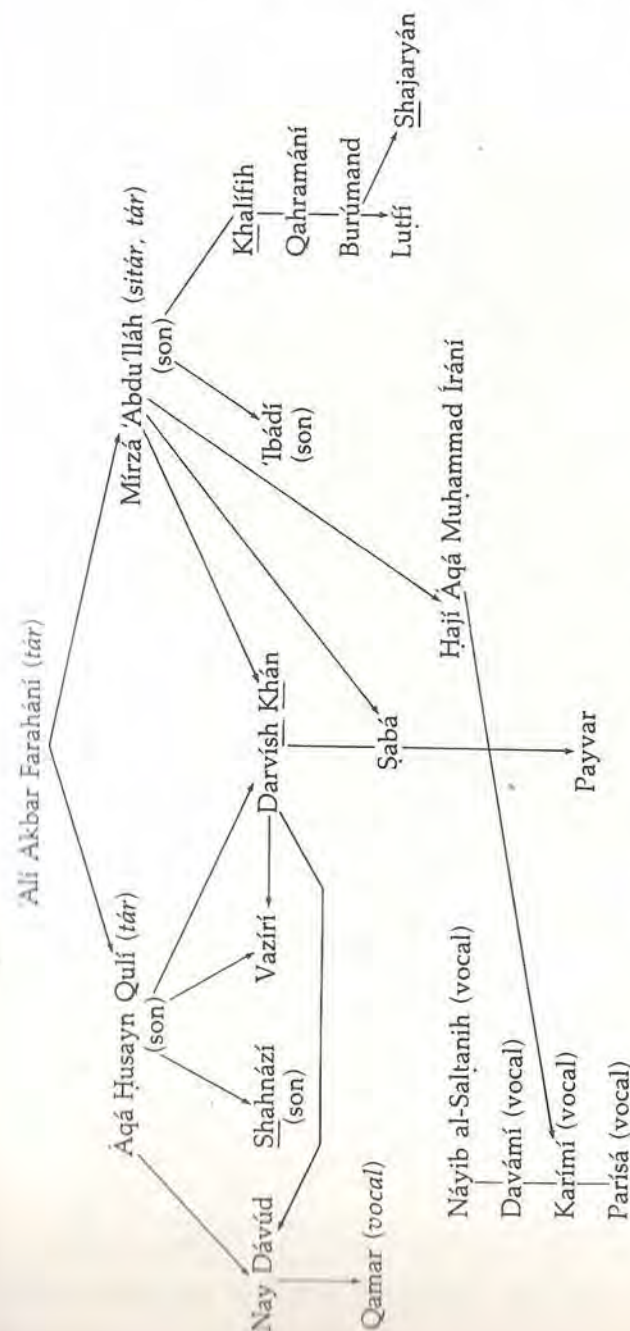
may have obtained their musical training. During suggests that he may have learned his music from the musicians of Sufi orders who kept their musical tradition closely guarded. He was known to be mystically inclined, a dervish in character. Kháliqí relates that people said that following the evening prayer (*namáz*) he would play one of the suras of the Qur'an that the listeners identified as the *Suráh Yásín*.²²

'Alí Akbar had three sons, all of whom became performers on the *tár* and court musicians. The two most well-known masters of the *tár* were Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh and Áqá Ḥusayn Qulí, who were both only children when their father died. After the early death of 'Alí Akbar, his nephew Áqá Ghulám Ḥusayn, who also studied with him, was considered the most proficient *tár* player in court. He married 'Alí Akbar's widow, the mother of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh and Áqá Ḥusayn Qulí. After much persuasion, he consented to teach them to play the *tár*. Kháliqí mentions that Ghulám Ḥusayn, "like most of the artists of that time was a jealous man and did not want to teach his art to others, even to his own cousins."²³

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh received his first musical instruction from his older brother Mírzá Ḥasan. He, in turn, taught *tár* to his younger brother, Ḥusayn Qulí until he became old enough to study with Ghulám Ḥusayn. Despite Ghulám Ḥusayn's unwillingness to teach, the two young brothers were eager to learn to the point that they would secretly sit outside the door when their cousin was playing in order to learn the melodies. Their mother finally persuaded Ghulám Ḥusayn to teach them. They subsequently were to become the successors of 'Alí Akbar and Ghulám Ḥusayn.

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh learned music only with great effort and difficulty because of the secretive manner of the musicians of his time, and their jealousy of their skills. As a result, he resolved that whatever music he heard he would learn well, that he would memorize the *dastgáhs* completely and without error, and that whatever he learned he would teach freely to his own students so that Persian music would be passed on to future generations.²⁴

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh's contribution to Persian music is so impor-



FAMILY AND STUDENTS OF 'ALÍ AKBAR

(Refer also to Manoochehr Sadeghi, *Improvisation in Nonrhythmic Solo Instrumental Contemporary Persian Art Music*, M.A. thesis, California State College at Los Angeles, 1971, and Daryúsh Şafvat, *Ustádán-i Músíqiy-i Írán va Alḥán-i Músíqiy-i Íráni*, Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Art, 1971)



PERSIAN COURT MUSICIANS

on the day of cooking soup in the shah's summer quarters at Sharistának: (seated, l. to r.) Mírzá Ghulám Husayn (father of Sumá' Hudúr), Matlab Khán (son of Muhammad Šádiq Khán), Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, Áqá Husayn Qulí, Muhammad Šádiq Khán, Sumá' Hudúr, Qulí Khán, Husayn Karím Kúr. (From *Albám-i Buyútát-i Saltanatí*.)

tant that Hájí Áqá Muḥammad Írání Mujarrad referred to him as the book of Persian music (*kitáb-i músíqiy-i Írán*). Music was his life profession, and he became an important musician in the court of Násiru'd-Dín Sháh.²⁵ He organized the classical *radif*, some say with the help of Sayyid Aḥmad. Tsuge states that: "The *radif* which we practice today in Íran (or rather Tehran) is generally known as the one of the Mírzá 'Abdollah school."²⁶

The present *radif* is divided into twelve *dastgáhs*, or seven *dastgáhs* and five subsystems (*áváz*). As interpreted by the performer, it forms the core of a *dastgáh* performance. This *dastgáh* performance includes the following forms: *pishdarámad* (prelude), *chahármizráb* (virtuoso piece), *áváz* (the portion from the *radif*), *tašníf* (composed song), and *ring* (dance).

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh trained a number of important musicians. In those days, music was taught without notation from master to student by oral transmission until memorized. Among Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh's students were Sayyid Husayn Khalífih, Doctor Mihdí Şulhí, Mihdí Qulí Hidáyat, Ismá'íl Qahrimání, Abu'l-Hasan Šabá, and Hájí Áqá Muḥammad Írání Mujarrad. Hidáyat, 'Abdu'lláh's companion for many years, committed his master's entire *radif* to paper. Hidáyat's transcription is one of the best sources of classical Persian music.

Mihdí Şulhí, after the death of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, was recognized as the master's successor by 'Abdu'lláh's students. Mihdí Şulhí played *sitar*. Although Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh played both the *tár* and *sitar*, his best instrument was the *sitar*.²⁷ His brother, Husayn Qulí, was considered the greatest *tár* player of his time. Although the *tár* and *sitar* are both long-necked plucked lutes, the *sitar* is more delicate and has a softer sound. According to Zonis: "It can be played in secret and is ideally suited to Persia, where playing an instrument was traditionally subject to disapproval. Furthermore, to be appreciated, it must be played before a gathering that is both small and quiet. . . . it is often considered the most typical Persian instrument."²⁸

Ismá'íl Qahramání was first a student of Khalífih; he then studied with Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh for twelve years.²⁹ He completely memorized the *radif* and designated each day of the week for



NÁŞIRU'D-DÍN SHÁH
(center) seated in the *bírúni* of the imperial palace, 1895. (From *Albám-i Buyútt-i Saltanatí*)

one of the seven *dastgáhs* of music. He played through the complete *dastgáh* at least once on the designated day. With this method he reviewed them. He continued this practice to the end of his life. Núr 'Alí Burúmand studied with Ismá'íl Qahrimání, learned his *radif*, and tape recorded it. For years this was the *radif* taught by Burúmand and his student, Muḥammad Ridá Luṭfí, at Tehran University.

Abu'l-Ḥasan Šabá (1902–1957) was a famous teacher and violinist. His first teacher was Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, and afterward he studied with Darvish Khán.³⁰ His *santúr* (hammered dulcimer) and violin *radifs* formed the basis of *radif* instruction on those instruments at the Conservatory of National Music in Iran.

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh had two daughters and two sons.³¹ All of them had musical talent and played the *sitár*. The youngest, Aḥmad 'Ibádí, was only a child when his father died. Afterward he learned from his sisters, particularly the older one Mawlúd Khánum. 'Ibádí is considered the leading master of the *sitár* today. He was born in 1906 (1285 H.S.).³² His father required that he learn music and he participated in classes of his father. Aḥmad was about seven years old when he accompanied his father with the *qarb*, and it was not long after that he gave his son the *sitár* to play. 'Ibádí relates that his father felt that he should learn his instrument so well that it might have the same effect as a water-pipe (*qalyán*), and the people seated in the assemblage might take one for the other.³³ However, he had no more than a few lessons on *sitár* with his father before he died.³⁴

The diagram on page 37 illustrates how the family and students of 'Alí Akbar are related to each other, both as master teacher to student, and as father to son.

Musical Life in Qájár Iran. The Qájár period was a time of revival for Persian traditional music. The classical repertoire that is currently taught and performed can be traced directly to the Qájár court musicians.

The secular music, including songs, of this period was performed at dinner parties, evening entertainments (*bazm*), picnics, weddings, and on other special occasions. Entertainers at

these events might include instrumentalists, singers, dancers, actors, jugglers, fire-eaters, and wrestlers. Actual accounts of music during the dinner parties commonly mention the presence of a musical ensemble usually consisting of two melody instruments—typically the *târ* and possibly the *kamânchih* (spiked fiddle)—and a drum—*dayirih* (single-skin frame-drum) or *dumbak* (goblet-shaped drum).

Khâliqî states that the drummer was often also the singer, particularly of *taşnif*.³⁵ The total ensemble described in these parties was male, with the dancers dressed as women. A notable characteristic of this period was that entertainment ensembles were usually either all male or all female.

Browne discusses the evening dinner parties:

As a rule, music is provided for the entertainment of the guests. The musicians are usually three in number: one plays a stringed instrument (the *si-târ*); one a drum (*dunbak*), consisting of an earthenware framework, shaped something like a huge egg-cup, and covered with parchment at one end only; the third sings to the accompaniment of fellow-performers. Sometimes dancing-boys are also present, who excite the admiration and applause of the spectators by their elaborate posturing, which is usually more remarkable for acrobatic skill than for grace, at any rate according to our ideas.³⁶

Before dinner there was wine, with appetizers, smoking, and music. The dinner itself was often served at the end of the evening as appears in the following excerpts from a dinner party given in Isfahân in 1876:

In a rectangular recess, three musicians, sitting on the floor, discoursed strange songs and music. One had a wiry instrument, resembling a small guitar; another produced short screams from a sort of flageolet; and the third, who also contributed the chief part of the vocal entertainment, had a small drum. In the centre of the room, there was a Persian carpet of many and beautiful colours; round the sides were felts, nearly half an inch thick, and five feet wide, upon which most of the guests sat or reclined. . . . The Khan



A GROUP OF PERSIAN FEMALE MUSICIANS

was roaring, the singers twanging, piping, drumming, and shouting monotonous lovesongs, when the first "dish" was served. A servant walked round the room carrying a large bottle of arrack in one hand, and wine in the other. . . . Another servant followed with a plate, in which was laid about half of a sheet of Persian bread, thin, tough, and flabby. Upon the bread was a heap of kababs . . . For three hours this was the form of entertainment; the talk and the music went on while the kababs, the arrack, and the wine circulated. About ten o'clock the real dinner began. . . . For nearly an hour there was little talk, much eating and drinking; then some coffee, and after that the guests were hoisted on to the high saddles of their steady, patient mules, and jogged homewards through the narrow streets, lighted only by the lanterns of their attendants.³⁷

The music of the court was of two types, that of the private gatherings and that of the official occasions and holidays—the latter using a military band, or *naqárih khánih*. The military band was used for public announcements, the signaling of sunrise and sunset, the closing of shops, and for religious dramas and processions. During Náṣiru'd-Dín Sháh's reign Western military music was introduced, and this all but replaced traditional Persian military music.

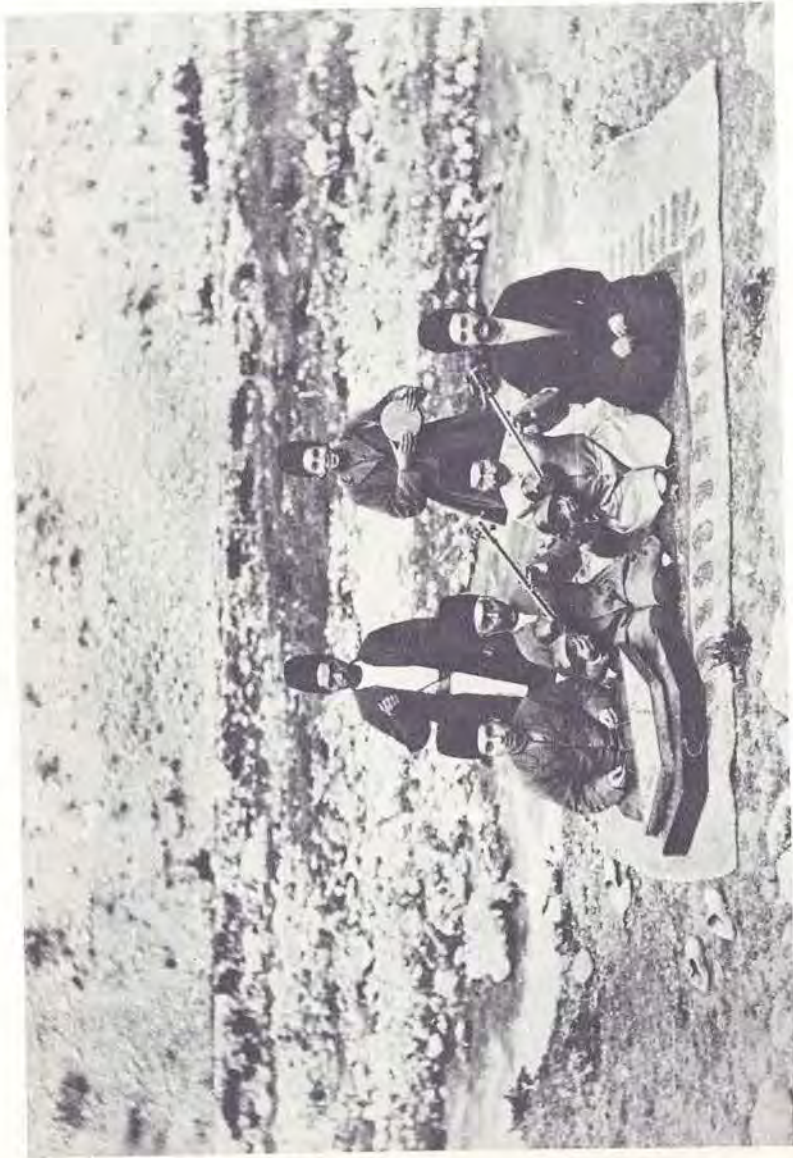
In addition, some other Western instruments were imported, including the piano and the violin. Eventually the school of music established to train military musicians led to other music conservatories, both Persian and Western. Indeed, the influence of Western military bands and training on Persian musicians such as Darvish Khán and Vazírí led to great changes in the composition and orchestration of Persian music.

The life and music of the court was divided into two parts—that which took place in the men's outer quarters (*birúni*) and that which took place in the women's quarters (*andarún*). In the Qájár court there were two separate groups of musicians, male musicians for the activities of the *birúni* and outdoor events and female groups for the events in the women's quarters.

The court musicians were the masters of the *radíf*, the classical repertoire. In addition to the events at court, they performed for the shah when he went outside the city. On his annual trips



THE COMEDY TROUPE (*majlis-i taqlid*) of the court, taken on the day of cooking soup at Sharistának. (From *Albám-i Buyútát-i Saltanatí*)



THE COURT MUSICIANS (*amaliyát-i tarab khawás*)
taken on the day of cooking soup at *Sharistának*. (From *Albám-i Buyútát-i Salṭanatí*)

to the summer quarters, the king took from seven thousand to ten thousand people with him, including half his wives.³⁸ On his return, he would stop at a place called *Sharistának* (and in later years at *Surkh-i Hīšār*) for the *Rúz-i Tabkh-i Ásh* (day of cooking soup), which customarily took place during the month of *mīhr* (September/October). Princes and members of the aristocracy were invited to the event, and entertainers were brought in—clowns, jesters and court musicians.

Early in the spring, the shah would hold an *ásh* (soup) party for his wives and the wives of the aristocracy. They ate out in a garden, where the women musicians and blind musicians were interspersed playing music.³⁹

In the *andarún* at the end of the evening, it was customary for the court musicians to be present at the time the shah went to bed. The shah's sleeping quarters had four doors, one of which opened onto a place where the male court musicians would play.⁴⁰

Náṣru'd-Dín Sháh had photographers record the various events and people during his rule and kept the pictures in what is now known as the *Albám-i Buyútát-i Salṭanatí* (the album of the imperial palace). These pictures include representations of religious, Western military, folk, and court musical performances.

The pictures of musicians who performed for private court gatherings include the *majlis-i taqlíd*, what appears to be a comedy troupe, and the court musicians, known as '*amaliyát-i tarab* (*khawás*). The pictures of the comedy troupe show them to have been a group of all male entertainers, varying in number from eight to fourteen with musicians, boys dressed as women, and other actors or bystanders. Of the musical instruments, the *kamánchih* and *dumbak* are present in all the pictures, with the *dayirih* and *bálabán* (double-reed wind instrument) appearing less frequently.

There was a total of fifteen different photographs of the court musicians. The settings of these pictures vary: six were outdoor gatherings in the summer quarters on the occasion of *Rúz-i Tabkh-i Ásh*, five were at *Sharistának*, one was in *Surkh-i Hīšār*; another was at a different summer location; two were

either indoors or in a tent; and eight were taken in a courtyard or at the side of a building.

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh appears in six of these pictures. Five of these six were taken on *Rúz-i Tabkh-i Ásh*. Two of the pictures are dated, one 1895 (1313 H.G.) and the other 1889 (1307 H.G.). 'Abdu'lláh's brother, Ḥusayn Qulí, appears in some of these pictures. The photograph dated 1889 (1307 H.G.) indicates that it was taken upon the shah's return from his third trip to Europe. It is not clear that Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh accompanied him on this trip. However, he is in the photo and it is known that the shah took other musicians with him on his trips to Europe.

'Ibádí relates a story of how his father was given his title *Mírzá*.⁴¹ One day in one of the buildings of the palace of the shah, some courtiers were eating lunch. After lunch they played *ás* (a card game). Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh sat and played the *sitár* for himself. Násiru'd-Dín Sháh could not sleep and came into the garden. He went over to that building and heard the *sitár*, put his foot on the door sill, and listened intently. Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh did not see the shah as he played. The gamers noticed, and all got up flustered. Then Násiru'd-Dín Sháh signalled them to sit down and said, "Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, do you have a handkerchief (*dastmál*) in your pocket?" "Yes." "Put it down in front of you." Then he ordered gold and silver coins to be put in the handkerchief.

Another incident at court was related by Hidáyat.⁴² One night, the shah wanted Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh alone. He came beside the stove and told Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh to sit and play his instrument (*tár*). "We want to play the *ḍarb*," he said. And with the rim of the drum next to the stove, the shah played the *ḍarb*.

Persian Music and Mystical Philosophy. The close affinity of Persian classical music to Persian mystical philosophy has been mentioned by a number of authors.⁴³ Persians regarded music as having a direct influence on the human constitution and emotion. Music was often regarded as one of the means for becoming united with God and was given a special place among the arts, "for it deals with material forms and shapes less than



THE COURT MUSICIANS WITH THE COMEDY TROUPE

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, seated left. Note young boy dressed as a woman (center). Taken on the day of cooking soup after the shah's return from his third trip to Europe, 1889. (From *Albām-i Buyūtāt-i Saltānati*)

all the other arts do and is connected more directly with the world of spiritual essences."⁴⁴ Sufi doctrine taught that listening to music could lead to ecstasy (*ḥál*) through which ultimate truth might be achieved.⁴⁵

Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, developed over a number of centuries, beginning as a reaction against formalism and luxury and a desire to form a personal relationship with God. The ultimate objective of Sufism in its purest and simplest form is perfection of the individual and union with God.⁴⁶ The Sufis teach that before man was born, he lived in essential union with God. At the time of birth, he experienced a profound sense of separation and a longing to return to that essential union. The way (*ṭarīqa*) of the Sufi is a method of spiritual development which leads the seeker back to that union, the final step of which is annihilation of the ego (*faná*).

An important aspect of certain Sufi fraternities is *samá'*, which refers to a gathering specifically for listening to music, and may include prayers, repetition of the names of God (*dhihr*), religious readings and lectures, song and accompaniment, and dance. The Sufis who practiced *samá'* believed that music is like a ladder to heaven, a way to achieve union with God.⁴⁷ One symbolic description of the function of *samá'* explains that in preexistence man listened to the angels singing hymns of praise. But when God put man onto this earth he induced a forgetfulness in order that he would not be so filled with longing that he would die. *Samá'* again brings to man's consciousness those hymns of praise. He can thus momentarily achieve a state of reunion corresponding to the level, or *maqám*, he has reached and the state (*ḥál*) conferred upon him at that moment.⁴⁸

There may be some correlation between the *maqáms* (levels) of the *ṭarīqa* and the *maqáms* (modes) of classical music. The *dastgáh* system is based on a conjunct ascending progression of pitch levels until the highest point (*awj*) is achieved, after which the music returns to its original level. The number of *maqáms* prescribed by the mystic Farídu'd-Dín 'Aṭṭár (d. 1193) and the number of *dastgáhs* in present-day Persian music is seven. There may also be an association between the states of grace

(*ḥál*) and the state of inspiration or mood (also called *ḥál*) of the performer while playing one of the *dastgáhs*. Some of the moods associated with different *dastgáhs* are melancholy, serenity, suffering, force, mysticism, and majesty.⁴⁹

The Sufi orders in Iran, as elsewhere, were subject to continuous criticism and examination as to their orthodoxy—that is, their strict observance of the laws of Islam. Therefore, they could only make use of music with caution. The Sufis themselves were concerned that music should only excite spiritual sensibilities, rather than carnal ones, and were thus careful that a novice, one who had not mastered his own desires, not be included in the *samá'*.

One theorist speaks of physical music and real music:

It is only the former, physical music, that causes hypocrisy to grow in the heart, like as water promoteth the growth of corn. Real music will not lead man astray, since it is a spiritual experience. . . . Music in changing man could not introduce any new element into his character, only condition that which was already within him.⁵⁰

This attitude of music for the senses and music for the spirit is to a certain extent reflective of traditional Islamic attitudes which place varying degrees of prohibition against music, but which exempt the chanting of holy verses from these proscriptions. Caron and Safvate describe the two types of music: one is creative, diversified, original, sober, balanced, condensed, and spiritual; the other is imitative, repetitious, standard, ostentatious, contrasted, extended, and sensual.⁵¹

The classical musician, in keeping with this dichotomy, is expected to live a clean and devoted life so that his art will reflect spirituality rather than sensuality. The true performer of spiritual music should play in a state of *ḥál*, or communion with God. From its associations with Sufism music acquired an aura of both secrecy and sacredness.

To be found worthy of spiritual instruction in the spiritual path of the Sufi the disciple had to establish an affinity with his *shaykh*. Otherwise, he would not be accepted. Many times the

seeker might be rejected, treated rudely, or subjected to a number of rigorous disciplines or tests before he would be admitted into the service of the *shaykh*. Then the master had almost unlimited authority over his disciple. Certain aspects of this relationship survive in various forms among present-day Persian musicians. Teachers often make it difficult for students to study with them, imposing in some cases tests of sincerity, worthiness and endurance. Many musicians emphasize the spirituality of the tradition and the necessity of guarding and preserving the essential character of the music. A distinction is often made between the entertainer and the master musician—the former playing for worldly gain and the latter playing for purposes of meditation or to achieve true *hál*.

Another aspect of the relationship between music and Sufism is seen in the existence of the Islamic craft guilds, notably from the tenth century to their decline in the nineteenth century. The life of an Islamic city was organized around craft associations which included guilds of musical groups, of singers, of musicians, and of instrument makers. These guilds became linked with Sufism and the Sufi brotherhoods. Each guild had a *shaykh* or *ustád* as the head of the order who would determine the admittance, time of study, and discipline of an apprentice. And, according to Lewis, the guilds "always had a deep-rooted ideology, a moral and ethical code, which was taught to all novices at the same time as the craft itself."⁵²

Bahá'í Attitudes Toward Music. The Islamic community felt the tremendous power of music and feared its influence on human beings. Thus developed the prohibition against music, which was thought to drive the believer away from both faith and reason. This stricture might be compared to the prohibition against wine. Muslims, however, did make use of music in the form of chanting, specifically for religious texts and tracts. Such chanting was not classified as "music," however. Sufi groups especially made use of music—even making use of musical instruments and dance to elevate the soul and to draw nearer to God. The Sufi song texts extolled music, wine, and the beauty

of the Beloved. But, Sufis too believed in the power of music to influence and drew a distinction between spiritual music and worldly music.

The Bahá'í Faith came to terms with the arguments presented by both the orthodox Muslims and the Sufis concerning music by lifting the prohibition against music and giving it acceptability and importance, while at the same time delimiting its uses. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the Kitáb-i Aqdas, his book of laws: "We have made music a ladder by which souls may ascend to the realm on high. Change it not into wings for self and passion."⁵³

In line with the philosophers, Sufis and orthodox Muslims, the Bahá'í approach confirms the power of music to influence the spirit and affirms that it must be used with wisdom. It condemns superstitions of the past and gives music great importance. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Although sound is but the vibrations of the air which affect the tympanum of the ear, and vibrations of the air are but an accident among the accidents which depend upon the air, consider how much marvellous notes or a charming song influence the spirits! A wonderful song giveth wings to the spirit and filleth the heart with exaltation.⁵⁴

And:

If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies.⁵⁵

And again:

Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance: if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne; but if bad thoughts are in the heart, such as hatred, it will increase and multiply. For instance: the music used in war awakens the desire for bloodshed. The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase.⁵⁶

The Muslim debate concerning music continued for centuries and provides the general background for a study of Bahá'í attitudes. This legacy remains with the current generation of Iranian Bahá'ís and may be seen in the absence of music in some households on certain holy days, the disapproval of dancing, and the disallowance of musical instruments on certain occasions and in certain places. The prohibition against music, however, is clearly lifted in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* and music is regarded as an exalted and worthy art.

How far Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh and the mass of the Bahá'ís of his time were aware of these writings is not known. It is likely that each individual, according to his background, held his own opinion under the overriding influence of Islamic philosophy and religious attitudes. Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh himself, coming from a musical and mystically inclined family, was influenced by positive attitudes toward music in the life of the spirit. He was the recipient of tablets (letters) from 'Abdu'l-Bahá which praised music and gave it high purpose and station—tablets which have helped to define Bahá'í attitudes toward music.

Religious Life of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh. A number of musicians have spoken of the good character of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, that he had a spiritual temperment, was *darvish* (humble), and exemplified the ideal of the spiritual master of music. According to his son Ahmad 'Ibádí, he was a seeker in religious matters and met with many different types of dervishes.⁵⁷ 'Ibádí mentioned that he was a friend of Zahiru'd-Dawlih and went to the gatherings of the *Anjuman-i Ukhuvat*, a Sufi organization that encouraged music and had musical gatherings. 'Abdu'lláh Davámí maintains that Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was a member of this society, although I have found no evidence to support this at the *Anjuman-i Ukhuvat* itself.⁵⁸

Murtaḍá Nay Dávúd claimed that Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was not religious, at least not in the sense of following Islamic practices. He says that he was an enlightened thinker, and very *darvish*, so that people guessed that he was a Bahá'í.⁵⁹ 'Ibádí had also heard that he was a Bahá'í, and felt that, since he investigated many things in this line, it was possible. But he was only a child



MÍRZÁ 'ABDU'LLÁH
(seated with *tár*) with the court musicians, taken on the day of cooking soup in the
shah's summer quarters at Surkh-i Hīšár. (From *Albám-i Buyútát-i Saltanatí*)

when his father died and could not confirm this with his own knowledge.

General Shuá'u'lláh Alá'í told of seeing Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh when he was sixteen or seventeen years old.⁶⁰ He had gone to a Bahá'í gathering in a garden—a party, not a meeting, but only Bahá'ís attended. It was sunset in summertime. They sat on a carpet and ate dinner by kerosene lamp. Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was there and played the *tár* while a singer sang Bahá'í poems (*shi'r-i amrí*) and other poems. Alá'í related that in those days they used to sing mostly Sa'dí and Háfiz, with Qurrátu'l-Ayn and others.

Houshang Seihun, a well-known Iranian architect and artist, is a grandson of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh. He is the son of Mawlúd Khánúm, the oldest daughter of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, who taught 'Ibádí to play *sitár*. Seihun's father played violin. Seihun's father and mother were both Bahá'ís, as is he himself. 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed four tablets to Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh which were in Seihun's father's possession and which are quoted below.⁶¹

Fadíl-i Mazandarání writes one paragraph about Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh in his *Taríkh-i Zuhurú'l-Haqq*:

Another of the Bahá'ís of Tehran was Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh, the well-known teacher of music and *tár*. A number of discourses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá include references to the great beauty of his music.⁶²

Dr. Yunis Khán Afrúkhtih has written about a Bahá'í meeting in Tehran to which Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh brought one of the great Muslim clergymen around 1899–1900. This man was later given the title Šadru'l-Šudúr, and became a famous Bahá'í teacher. Afrúkhtih asks himself how a teacher of music and former entertainer in the court of Násiru'd-Dín Sháh could reach the station of belief (in the Bahá'í Faith) and then teach one of the great Muslim ulama. He says,

Knower nor seeker revealed God's Word,
Oh, wonder at where the wine seller heard!

He describes the Mírzá as an old man, luminous (*núrání*), who believed from the time of his youth, but kept his belief confi-

dential until now. He says, "Meeting with him was exciting and joyful, especially when he played *shúr* and *máhúr* (two *dastgáhs*)."⁶³

Kháliqí mentions that everyone spoke of the noble and *darvish* character of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh. "He was a good-natured and kind man and all benefited from the treasure of his art."⁶⁴ His resolve was to teach whoever asked to learn from him, and it is said that he had great patience with his students. Even those with little musical talent who went to his classes were not turned away. In contrast to the usual severe demands of *ustáds*, he worked with his students with patience and forbearance, and "never did the seekers of music become cold-hearted or hopeless."⁶⁵

In accord with the ideal character of the Iranian musician—which should be spiritual, reclusive, and humble—'Abdu'lláh is reported to have preferred the companionship of close friends to parties and large gatherings. One of Kháliqí's friends relates an incident:

I was a child and sometimes in the afternoon, with one of my playmates, I would go beside the moat of Dúláb. Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh and 'Isá Áqá Báshí, who knew *áváz* and *qarb*, sat on the moat far from society. Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh played *sitár* for hours, and Áqá Báshí, who was old and no longer able to sing, whispered. We sat beside them and listened. Afterward, Áqá Báshí put us on his shoulders and carried us to the house and gave us to our father, whom he knew."

Kháliqí says that the point of this is that the musicians sat and enjoyed playing for themselves, rather than only showing themselves off or playing for material gain.⁶⁶

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Correspondence with Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote four tablets to Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh. One was a comparison of the relationship of John the Baptist and Christ to that of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh with regard to chronological proximity. Three of the tablets discuss music.

In the tablet which begins "O Thou divine Bárbud," he refers to the names of traditional Persian melodies, and uses these

names with double meanings. For example, '*ushsháq* is both the name of a melody and means *lovers*; '*aráq* is both the name of a melody and the name of a place; and so forth. Weaving musical terms into a text about music, with double meanings, the use of internal rhyme and assonance, were part of the art of composition and showed the skill and abilities of the writer to compose elegant prose. Not only does it add to the beauty and lyricism of the tablet, which can be fully appreciated only in the original Persian, but it indicates acceptance and approval of the classical Persian music that Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was performing. The tablet also refers in positive terms to important musicians, musical theorists, and philosophers of the past.

The original reads:

هو الله
ای باربد الهی هر چند سلف در فن موسیقی مهارتی
نمودند و الحانی بدیعه بسرودند شهیر آفاق گشتند
و سرور عشاق ابیات عاشقانه بالحن بیات بنواختند
و در انجمن عالم نوائی بلند نمودند در صحرای
فراق بآهنگ حجاز ولوله در عراق انداختند ولی نغمه
الهی را تائیری دیگر و آهنگ آسمانی را جذب و ولهی
دیگر. در این عصر طیور انس در حقائق قدس بایستد
آواز شهنازی بلند کنند که مرغان چمن را بوجد
و پرواز آرند و در این جشن الهی و بزم ربانی
چنان عود و رودی بسرود آرند و چنگ و چغانه
بنوازند که شرق و غرب را سرور و شادمانی دهند
و حبور و کامرانی بخشند. حال تو آهنگ آن چنگ
را بلند کن و سرود آن عود بزن که باربد را جان
بکابد دهی و رودکی را آسودگی بخشی فاریاب را
بی تاب کنی و این سینا را بسینای الهی دلالت نمائی.
وعلیک التحیه والتناء ع

I will paraphrase the tablet as follows:

He is God!

O Thou divine Bárbud! Although those of former times excelled in the art of music, sang wonderful melodies, were celebrated throughout the world, and became the prince of lovers ('*ushshaq*), per-

formed love poetry (*abyát*) to the tune of *bayát*, and raised a melody (*navá*) in the assemblages of the world, in the desert of separation wailed in 'Aráq to the tune of Hijáz—yet the divine song (*naghmih*) has a different effect and the heavenly melody another attraction and interest. In this age, the birds of amity must in the gardens of holiness raise the song (*áváz*) of *shahnáz* to bring the birds of the grass to ecstasy and flight.

In this divine celebration and at this heavenly banquet so sound the '*úd* and *rúd* (lute and strings) and play *chang* and *chagháníh* (harp and bells) to give both the East and West gladness and joy and grant them happiness and felicity. Now raise the melody of that *chang* and play the song of that '*úd* that will give spirit to the body of Bárbud and grant Rúdakí repose, make Fárábí exultant and guide Ibn Síná to the divine *Síná* (Sinai).

And upon thee be greetings and salutations.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás

Bárbud was a Sassanian court musician (590–628) who was famous for his virtuosity on the *barbat* (lute) and for his compositions. He has become a legendary figure for Iranians, who revere him as the father of Persian music, in a sense, and the archetype symbol of a musician. Rúdakí, the tenth century harpist, has also become a legend: the story of the song he performed to persuade the Samanid prince to return to his native city of Bukhara indicates the power attributed to music and poetry by Iranian tradition. The great Muslim philosophers Al-Fárábí (d. 950) and Ibn Síná (980–1037) were also two of the principal Islamic music theorists.

While referring to traditional melodies, instruments and musicians, 'Abdu'l-Bahá urges Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh to elevate and transform classical music. The themes of the poetry used for this music centered around separation and longing. 'Abdu'l-Bahá urges 'Abdu'lláh to bring an end to this separation and accomplish reunion—a condition that was always longed for but seldom, if ever, achieved in traditional poetry and song. He urges him to infuse hope and joy into his music, for the East and for the West. Referring to the existence of several levels of music in Islamic philosophy, he calls on Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh to

raise his music to the highest level, that of soul-stirring and inspiring music. In a play on words, he exhorts him to guide Ibn Síná to the divine Sinai, to bring traditional music to a new, more spiritual level.

In another tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforces these themes:

هو الابی
ای سمی حضرت مقصود آهنگ ملکوت ابی بلند است
و ترانه بلبل وفا در گلبن معانی روح بخش هوشمند.
گاهی نغمه حجاز ساز کند گاهی شهنواز عراق بلند
نماید گهی مقام عشاق نوازد و دمی آه و انیــن
مشتاق نماید. تو نیز در انجمن عالم انسان آهنگ
بدیعی بلند کن تا سرهنگ طیور گلشن تقدیس شوی
و در گلبن توحید الحان مقامات معنوی بسرائی.
وعلیک التّحیّة والثناء ع

I will paraphrase the letter as follows:

He is the All-Glorious.

O Thou Namesake of the Intended One! The melody of the Kingdom of light has been raised, and the song of the nightingale of faithfulness is reviving the souls of the enlightened ones from the rose of meaning. He will sometimes play the tune of *Hijáz*, sometimes the music of 'Aráq, perform the mode of *'ushsháq* (lovers), and for a moment raise the sigh and moan of *mushtáq* (longing, desire). Do thou also before the assemblage of the world of humanity raise a new melody (*áhang-i badí'*) that you may become the commander of the birds of the garden of holiness, and from the rose of unity sing the melodies of the stations of meaning.

And upon thee be greetings and salutations.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás

In the third tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá unequivocally states the exalted position which music is given in the Bahá'í religion:

هو الابی
ای عبد بهاء موسیقی از علوم ممدوحه درگاه
کبریاست تا در جوامع کبری و صوامع عظمی با بسند
نغمات ترتیل آیات نمائی و چنان آهنگی از مشرق
الاذکار بلند کنی که ملاء اعلی باهتزاز آیده. ملاحظه
کن که نظر باین جهت فنّ موسیقی چه قدر ممدوح
و مقبول است. اگر توانی الحان و ایقاع و مقامات
روحانی را بکار بر و موسیقی ناسوتی را تطبیق بر
ترتیل لاهوتی کن. آنوقت ملاحظه فرمائی که چقدر
تأثیر دارد و چه روح و حیات رحمانی بخشد. نغمه
و آهنگی بلند کن که بلبلان اسرار را سر مست و
بیقرار نمائی.
وعلیک التّحیّة والثناء ع

The passage has been translated as follows:

O servant of Bahá'! Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty, so that thou mayest chant verses at large gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody and raise such hymns of praise at the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* as to enrapture the Concourse on High. By virtue of this, consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mysteries to be filled with joy and ecstasy.⁶⁷

It is not known what influence these tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá may have had on the development of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh's art. It is clear that by gathering together, reorganizing, and promoting classical music 'Abdu'lláh greatly expanded its influence. His open and generous nature, and his willingness to teach, transformed the image of music from a secret and jealously guarded tradition to an art available to all who desired to participate in its performance, expansion and development.

Conclusion. The position of music in Iran at the time of Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was religiously suspect. Musicians were persecuted,

held in low esteem, associated with debauchery, and thought of as questionable in character. This situation often created musicians who were reclusive, secretive, fearful, vindictive, and miserly. In this atmosphere, Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh gave new importance and dignity to Persian classical music and expanded its influence. His position as a member of a suspect profession and his employment in the private court of a pleasure-loving shah did not prevent him from becoming a Bahá'í and associating with persons with a mystical persuasion.

Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh was one of the most influential masters of Persian classical music. Because of his desire to collect and assemble a large repertoire of traditional pieces, and because of his openness, his generosity of spirit, and his willingness to teach others, the particular rendition of Persian music he collected has become the most widely known and the most practiced among contemporary Persian musicians. His association with the Bahá'í Faith, and mystical orders, was certainly an influence on his openness, his generosity, and his desire to broaden the basis of the musical tradition, both in content and practice. His reputation for tolerance, patience, generosity, spirituality, and modesty is regarded by present-day artists as a model for the true musician.

The correspondence he received from 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested the preservation and expansion of the classical musical tradition, urged the uplifting of that tradition from its preoccupation with themes of suffering, sadness and regret to those of hope, reunion, and spiritual joy, and unambiguously legitimized the musical tradition of Iran and the profession of the musician in the Bahá'í religion. Certainly in his performance, his teaching, and his transformation of the *radíf* Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh followed these exhortations and was able to greatly influence future generations of musicians. His work enabled Persian music to prosper on a strong foundation, making him a major figure in the revival of art and culture that sprang out of nineteenth-century Iran.

NOTES

Please see bibliography at the end of this volume for full citations for the books mentioned below.

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5. Ibid., p. 28.
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37. Arnold, *Through Persia by Caravan*, pp. 17, 19-20, 21.
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