

# The Musical Culture of Gilan

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Survey of the music culture of Gilan, a northern province in Iran

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My purpose in pursuing an overall survey of the musical culture of the southwestern Caspian region of Iran, a province called Gilan, is to bring this area's rich culture of oral music to the attention of those outside the area, including urban Iran and the West; to illustrate how it is transmitted, controlled, and changed; and to show possible effects of urban culture on the music community. Within Gilan are many music traditions, none of which have been studied in the context of structure, variation, relationship to each other, integration with the area communities, and relationship to outside sources such as urban or tribal culture. In this study, I am attempting to discover how music functions as a part of the community, what types of music are associated with what aspects of community life, what are the musical dynamics that form the basis of a cohesive musical system, and what are the factors of transmission and change, including that change introduced by acculturation.

Persian music has been my specialty in the Department of Music and the Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA, and I have studied it for the past three years from the theoretical, historical, and applied aspects from Mr. Manoochehr Sadeghi, a well-known Persian musician. During the summer of 1970 I studied the Persian language and music in Tehran, Iran under a program sponsored by the University of Utah, American Center for Iranian Studies in Tehran. During that time I investigated the various facilities available for music study, including the Folkloric Institute, Radio Station, Conservatories, and Fine Arts Department, searching in all these places for work done on folk music, particularly that of Gilan. At that time I established contact with Mr. Lutfollah Mobeshari, who is Director of the Folkloric Institute and who has done much field collecting. I also made a short music-collecting trip to

Gilan under the guidance of the National Television Music Director and Chairman of the Music Department at the University of Tehran, Dr. Hormoz Farhat, from whom I have received much assistance. I have established contacts with the Fine Arts Department in Rasht, the Director of the television station, and the Music School in addition to those contacts I have established in Tehran. I am also writing to the American Institute for Iranian Studies in Iran.

The Thesis for my Master's degree, "The Kamanche Performance of Ostad Fayzullah of the Province of Gilan, Iran," based on work conducted during the summer of 1970, contains a general historical and musical survey of Gilan, an analysis of compositions performed by a well-known local musician, and a comparison of these compositions to both folk and classical traditions. An article, "Vocal Ornament Taki-ye in Persian Music (to appear in the 1973 issue of Selected Reports, a publication of the Institute of Ethnomusicology, UCLA)" used vocal material collected on that same trip. This work is the basis for an in-depth project concentrating on Gilan's oral music culture itself.

Because ethnomusicology is the study of music within its cultural context, my proposed study will consider both music and its place within the community. A brief outline of the topic is as follows:

- I. The Role of Music and the Musician in Gilan
  - A. Urban Areas
    1. Media
    2. Performers
  - B. Agricultural Areas
    1. Work
    2. Leisure
    3. Festivals
    4. Religion
  - C. Mountain Areas
    1. Work
    2. Leisure
    3. Festivals
    4. Religion

## II. Music

### A. By Area

1. East-West
2. Mountain-Plain-Seashore
3. Urban-Rural
4. 4 major area divisions

### B. By Economic Division

1. Rice growers
2. Tea
3. Herding
4. Landowners
5. Fishing

### C. By Social and Religious Function

1. Prayer
2. Music associated with the mosque
3. Religious ceremonies
4. Weddings
5. Birth, death
6. Leisure

### D. By Historical Considerations

1. Old
2. Traditional but widespread currently
3. New
4. Acculturated

## III. Music Structure and Style

### A. Instrumental Styles

1. Flute
2. Kamanche
3. Zurna
4. Drum
5. Groups

### B. Vocal

1. Avaz (poem set to unmetered singing style)
2. Folk Song
3. Prayer

### C. Modal Structure

### D. Area Differences

## IV. Transmission and Change

### A. Urban to Rural

1. Media
2. Travelers
3. Gypsies
4. Structural continuity and change

### B. Rural to Urban

C. Area to Area

D. Village to Village

E. Within Villages

1. Community control
2. Range of variation
3. Introduction of change

Gilan is primarily rural, with a provincial capitol and many towns and small villages. Basic industries include fishing, rice and tea cultivation, and sheep and goat herding. The climate is humid, with moderate temperatures, and supports lush vegetation, allowing for extensive cultivation. Gilan has its northern boundaries on the southwestern shore of the Caspian Sea and its southern boundaries as the northern slopes of a range of mountains. Thus, geographically Gilan is an isolated, self-contained unit and has been so politically for centuries. Within the last hundred years, however, Gilan has been touched by outside influences to a much greater extent than in its past. The sea coast has now many resorts which yearly bring people from Tehran and other parts of the country. Gilan will increasingly open up to technological advances and urbanization due to (a) Gilan's ideal climate and beautiful landscape, (b) closeness to the modern capitol Tehran, and (c) more efficient means of transportation, namely air transport and paved highways, both very recent in Gilan's history. Television, radio, and telegraph have also been recently introduced. The sea coast resorts and Rasht have been the first areas to be influenced by modernization.

Gilan has one of the major Iranian folkloric traditions. Gilaki songs, stories, and dances are popularly known in Tehran but little effort has been made to seriously study Gilan's musical life. This music is closely connected with the work cycle, religious celebrations, and with the life cycle of the people and is an oral, not written tradition. This requires that a researcher live in Gilan and become involved in the activities of the Gilaki community itself.



The importance of a project in Gilan is the

1. extent to which Gilaki music is part of classical Persian music tradition (similarity of modal structure, instruments, language and thus musical text, number of pieces of Gilaki origin in the repertoire of Persian music),
2. popularity of Gilaki music and present strength of musical life,
3. rapid modernization, influence from Westerners and urbanized Iran, factors, which are changing the structure of life and with it the folkloric traditions and arts starting with Rasht and the sea resorts spreading to towns and villages on the plains and then to the mountain regions.

Thus a certain time factor is involved if Gilaki traditions are to be recorded and kept for the people of Gilan and Iran to use or to refer to as a part of their cultural heritage and identity. My purpose in Gilan is not to study one particularly aspect of musical life, but to, as much as is possible, conduct a sample documentation of items mentioned in my outline. Also, I wish to show musical change with a progressive differentiation from capitol to town to village to mountain region. Certain areas and villages will be chosen for just this purpose. I hope to illustrate some of the effects of outside, particularly Western influence in a formerly fairly isolated area. This change affects the function of music (work versus entertainment), role of musicians, method of instruction, instruments, and musical structure itself. Certain elements will be retained in old and new styles of music, thus indicating determining characteristics of Gilaki music and possible guidelines for modern composers wishing to preserve these elements in their works. An understanding of change and at the same time continuity of Gilaki musical tradition would also have application to other musical traditions undergoing rapid change.

Travel will be limited to Gilan itself. I intend first to spend approximately a month in Tehran, working with Mr. Mobeshari of the Folkloric Institute and musicians at the National Conservatory, refamiliarizing myself with the language, and completing arrangements for working in Gilan. In Gilan my central residence will be in Rasht, the capitol of Gilan. While Persian is useful for communication in Tehran and also for Rasht, I will need to learn the Gilaki dialect for working with musicians and village people. Trips would be made to representative towns and villages, staying in each about two weeks. Some consultation might be necessary with Dr. Farhat of the University of Tehran or Mr. Mobeshari in Tehran. Depending on the nature of my affiliation, travel to other areas in Iran, contacting musicians and researchers, further collecting or coordination of music stored at different facilities in Tehran would be included. I wish to begin this project either in July or in late November, so as to have preparation time in Tehran and Gilan before the main seasonal music events, which come in autumn and spring.

Equipment for use in the study would include tape recorder and microphone and still and if possible motion-picture cameras. Since little has been collected, during the course of my stay in the different areas I plan to record vocal and instrumental music; to photograph instruments, musicians, and musical events; to film dances and certain events associated with music such as agricultural work, wrestling, and weddings in order to facilitate the study of musical structure and its relation to the community and to make available musical and pictorial representations of Gilan. In addition to direct recording, the methods of indirect questioning, studying under certain folk musicians, observation, and living within selected villages will be used.