



TARA KAMANGAR

EAST OF MELANCHOLY



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Piano Music From Russia to Iran

Tara Kamangar, piano

GLINKA: The Lark (arr. Balakirev)

HOSSEIN: Prelude No. 1, "Homage to Omar Khayyam" ♦ Caravan ♦ (from *Persian Miniatures*): Solitude ♦ Call of the Desert ♦ Call of Remembrance ♦ Invitation to the Spell ♦ (from *Mosaics*): Scenes from Summer ♦ Sérénade Tartare (arr. Hakimova and Kamangar)

KHACHATURIAN: Adagio from *Spartacus* (arr. Cameron)

SHOSTAKOVICH: (from Preludes, Op. 34): No. 10 in C-Sharp Minor ♦ No. 12 in D Minor

RACHMANINOFF: (from Preludes, Op. 32): No. 12 in G-Sharp Minor

KAMANGAR: Etude "East of Melancholy"

TJEKNAVORIAN: (from *Fantastic Dances*): Festive Dance ♦ Lyrical Dance ♦ Dance of Elegy ♦ Dance of Ecstasy

Total Time: 60:56



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P.O. Box 343, Sonoma, CA 95476-9998
(800) 364-0645 • (707) 996-3844
contactus@delosmusic.com
www.delosmusic.com



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EAST OF MELANCHOLY

Piano Music From Russia to Iran

Tara Kamangar, piano

1. **Mikhail Glinka, arr. Mily Balakirev:** The Lark (5:09)

2. **Aminollah Hossein:** Prelude No. 1, "Homage to Omar Khayyam" (6:11)

3. **Aram Khachaturian, arr. Matthew Cameron:** Adagio from *Spartacus* (7:49)

4. **Aminollah Hossein, arr. Delbar Hakimova:** Caravan (2:27)

Dmitri Shostakovich: from Preludes, Op. 34

5. Prelude No. 10 in C-Sharp Minor (1:53)

6. Prelude No. 12 in D Minor (1:15)

Aminollah Hossein, arr. Tara Kamangar: Excerpts from *Persian Miniatures*, Op. 25

7. Solitude (3:46)

8. Call of the Desert (1:05)

9. Call of Remembrance (1:31)

10. Invitation to the Spell (2:11)

11. **Sergei Rachmaninoff:** Prelude in G-Sharp Minor, Op. 32, No. 12 (2:38)

Aminollah Hossein: Excerpts from *Mosaics*, Op. 19

12. Scenes from Summer (4:41)

13. Sérénade Tartare (6:32)

14. **Tara Kamangar:** Etude "East of Melancholy" (2:37)

Loris Tjeknavorian: Excerpts from *Fantastic Dances*, Op. 2

15. Festive Dance (2:05)

16. Lyrical Dance (2:29)

17. Dance of Elegy (3:55)

18. Dance of Ecstasy (2:42)

Total Time: 60:56

“Love with us is always mixed with sorrow... There is no doubt that our melancholy, plaintive song, which is the child of the North, has also an oriental strain. Just listen to the Volga boatman’s mournful song—one almost feels the Tatars’ domination.” – *Composer Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857)*

“The East was an Aladdin’s cave from which Russia drew endlessly. Love in the East was different...other melodies, other harmonies, a mixture of reserve and expansiveness. It was a land of dreams.” – *Music Producer Marina Ilanova*

“Nowhere in Europe does the Oriental element play such a prominent role as in the works of our composers.” – *Vladimir Stasov, Russia’s leading music critic of the 1800s*

East of Melancholy: Piano Music from Russia to Iran offers a pianistic guide through a fascinating region in which continuous settlement and musical activity dates back to 4000 B.C. Rarely performed pieces by Iranian, Armenian, and Tajik composers born in twentieth-century Iran are showcased, as well as works



by Russian composers influenced by folk music from the Caucasus. There has been a considerable interchange of artistic techniques and inspiration in this region – considered to be one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse regions in the world – and much of the Caucasus was under Persian rule as recently as the mid-nineteenth century, when Imperial Russia conquered the territory from the Persian Qajars.

The ancestor of the piano – the *santour*, or dulcimer – is widely believed to have

originated in the land of present-day Iran over two thousand years ago. The modern piano, however, did not appear in Iran until 1806, when Napoleon gifted this instrument to the Persian emperor. The piano does not lend itself easily to traditional Persian music, because the piano's fixed tuning is incompatible with the microtones of Persian music. In addition, the piano's ability to act simultaneously as melodist and accompanist is lost with traditional Persian music, which is mainly monophonic. However, innovative composers have managed to incorporate elements of Persian music into their piano compositions, often using the harmonic minor scale to evoke a Middle Eastern sound, and using quickly repeated pedaled notes to recreate the distinctive sound of the santour.

After the revolution of 1979, many Iranian composers' lives were turned upside down, and manuscripts were scattered and lost. As Iran's best classical teachers and performers left the country, few remained to preserve and promote the works of these composers, some of which are presented for the first time in this album.

Music in Russia has long been subject to the religious and political position of the state. As recently as 1636, as part of a fight against the pagan spirit which lingered on in legends and folklore, the Moscow Patriarch decreed that all musical pursuits in the home were illegal, ordered the confiscation of all musical instruments, burned the instruments in bonfires, and dumped them in the Moscow River. It was not until Peter the Great made himself the virtual head of the Church that secular music in Russia arose. From then on, music was subject to the political orientation of the Russian court.

Similarly, in Iran, music has been sporadically banned throughout the centuries. Most recently, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 dealt a major blow to the classical music scene in Iran. Many of the conservatory professors and highly skilled classical musicians fled the country, so there was a scarcity of capable instructors. Other casualties of the Regime included the Ministry of Arts and Culture, which had financially sponsored musicians and composers abroad – including Aminollah Hossein and Loris Tjeknavorian – and the Shiraz International Arts Festival, for

which many important works were commissioned and premiered. Music – with the exception of sacred religious chanting – was banned in Iran from 1979 until 1988, throughout the duration of the Iran-Iraq War; it was even illegal to buy pianos during this time. Though this ban has gradually been lifted, musicians performing in the Western classical style in today's Iran are subject to the demands of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

The Russians have a word called “nega,” which refers to the lush languor of the Orient as viewed through European eyes (Taruskin-*On Russian Music*). Such exoticism is not always guileless; Borodin's *Prince Igor* is a prime musical example of “nega,” and yet one can argue that its subtext was the racial justification of Russia's militaristic expansion to the East. Iranian composers writing in the classical idiom – many of whom studied Western classical music in Russia – appear to have been influenced by works like these that display musical exoticism, whether consciously or subconsciously. In the pieces I selected for the album, the most striking example is the opening of Aminollah Hossein's *Solitude*, strongly reminiscent

of the introduction to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*.

MIKHAIL GLINKA (1804-1857), known as the “father of Russian classical music,” was the first composer to integrate Russian folk idioms into well-crafted classical compositions. Glinka's protégé was the pianist and composer Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) – the self-appointed leader of the Mighty Five, a group of Russian nationalist composers from the second half of the nineteenth century, whose members included César Cui, Mussorgsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov.

The Lark was originally written for voice and piano by Glinka, and later arranged for piano by Balakirev. The original song is set to Russian verses by Nestor Kukolnik, about a lark singing into the wind for his lost beloved.

AMINOLLAH HOSSEIN (1905-1983) was born in Ashkhabad to Iranian parents. Hossein learned to play the tar (Persian lute) as a child from his mother, and recordings of his tar performances are still venerated in Iran today. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Hossein

moved to Stuttgart, Germany to study medicine at the insistence of his father, and simultaneously studied the piano with Artur Schnabel. In 1927, he moved to Paris, and studied composition and orchestration privately under Paul Vidal at the Paris Conservatory. Hossein's first work, the ballet *Toward the Light*, was performed in 1938 at the Paris Opera House, and his later ballets, *Persian Miniatures* and *Scheherazade*, were choreographed by George Skibine, one of Diaghilev's dancers. His other orchestrated works include *Symphony of the Sands* (1946), *Persepolis Symphony* (1947), *Arya Symphony* (1976), and three piano concertos. He also composed twenty film scores – many for films directed by his son, the famed French actor and director Robert Hossein – under the pseudonyms Andre Hossein and Andre Gosselain. Hossein's works have seen a revival in recent years: his *Persepolis Symphony* was performed and recorded by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and his *Symphony of the Sands* was performed and recorded by the Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra with tenor Roberto Alagna.

The Prelude No. 1 is inspired by the poet Omar Khayyam, whose complete verses Hossein could recite by heart. *Persian Miniatures* have been excerpted from Hossein's eponymous ballet, and I have arranged them for solo piano. *Scenes from Summer* and *Sérénade Tartare* are excerpts from the *Mosaics Suite*, a set of six pieces dedicated to Hossein's wife, Anna, a Jewish-Ukrainian actress. For *Scenes from Summer*, Hossein writes the following notes: "(*Scenes from Summer*) depicts the light atmosphere of a sunny day, clear and sonorous. To be played with an airy execution." For *Sérénade Tartare*, he writes: "A gloomy sketch – feeling very sad for no reason." *Caravan* was originally written for tenor and orchestra, and has been arranged for solo piano by Delbar Hakimova (b. 1958), a Tehran-based professor and pianist of Tajik origin.

ARAM KHACHATURIAN (1903-1978) was one of the leading composers of the Soviet Union, and the most celebrated composer of his native state of Armenia. When he arrived in Moscow in 1921 from his hometown of Tbilisi, he had virtually no formal training in music, but was ad-

mitted on the strength of his talent to the Gnessin Academy. His international reputation was established with the success of the Piano Concerto in 1936, composed at the same time that he became active in the newly founded Union of Soviet Composers. In 1939, Khachaturian lived for six months in Armenia, immersing himself in Armenian folk music. Khachaturian remained a proud Armenian throughout his life, serving in 1958 as the state's delegate to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. As he once proclaimed, "My whole life, everything that I have created, belongs to the Armenian people."

The ballet *Spartacus* is one of Khachaturian's most well-known works. The scenario follows the exploits of Spartacus, the leader of the slave uprising against the Romans known as the Third Servile War, although it takes liberties with the historical record. The *Adagio* (often referred to as the "Love Theme from Spartacus"), accompanies the reunion of the hero and his wife. Its melodic style is said to be reminiscent of Armenian laments. It was arranged for solo piano by Brooklyn-based composer and concert pianist, Matthew Cameron.

LORIS TJEKNAVORIAN (b. 1937) was born in Borujerd, Iran. He studied violin and piano at the Tehran Conservatory of Music, and composition at the Vienna Music Academy. As Director of the National Music Archives in Tehran, he was placed in charge of collecting and researching traditional Persian folk music and national instruments. In the course of his career, Tjeknavorian has made nearly one hundred recordings and written more than seventy-five compositions, including symphonies, operas, a requiem, chamber music, ballet music, choral works, an oratorio, and over forty-five film scores. His compositions have been performed by numerous major orchestras, including the American Symphony Orchestra, the London Philharmonic, the London Symphony Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Haifa, Johannesburg, and Tehran. From 1989 to 1999, he was the principal conductor of the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra in Yerevan.

The *Fantastic Dances* were composed during Tjeknavorian's final years at the Vienna Academy (1959–1960). He later orchestrated the work for three pianos, celesta, and percussion. Haunting, Arme-

nian-sounding melodies weave through the dances, which range in character from meditative to rapturous. Regarding this composition, *New York Times* music critic Bernard Holland writes: “Mr. Tjeknavorian puts Armenian and Iranian tradition in our hand as if they were passports.”

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943) was born into an aristocratic family of Moldovan descent in northwestern Russia. After his father, a retired army officer, lost the family fortune and deserted the family, Sergei’s cousin, the concert pianist and conductor Aleksandr Siloti, sent him to study piano with the noted teacher Nikolay Zverev in Moscow. Rachmaninoff graduated from the Moscow Conservatory at the age of nineteen, winning a gold medal for his one-act opera *Aleko*. By 1905, Rachmaninoff had established an international reputation as a pianist and composer and held an appointment as a conductor at the Bolshoi ballet. After the October Revolution of 1917, Rachmaninoff left Russia and lived mainly in the United States and Switzerland for the rest of his life. His works enjoy great popularity to this day, and he is considered to be one of the finest pianists

of all time. As the Polish pianist Josef Hoffman said, “Rachmaninoff was made of steel and gold: steel in his arms, gold in his heart.”

The Prelude in G-Sharp Minor, Op. 32, No. 12 was composed in 1910 and contains references to *Dies Irae*, the theme of a thirteenth-century Latin hymn describing the Day of Judgment.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975), born in St. Petersburg, Russia, was one of the most popular composers of the twentieth century, with a compositional output including fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets. An obsessive character working under the Stalinist regime, he used irony and sarcasm as tools of expression.

Shostakovich began composing his cycle of twenty-four preludes in late 1934 – one prelude for each of the major and minor keys, as Chopin’s preludes were arranged. The preludes are unpredictable and full of contrasts. The C-sharp minor prelude is melancholy and haunting, while the D-minor prelude excites with its erratic yet determined quality.

My parents emigrated from Iran to the United States three months before the 1979 Revolution, and I was born in California. Growing up in a small town in Central California in which we were the only Iranian family, I was fascinated by all things Persian, and eager to learn more about this part of the world. In the process of learning and recording the pieces on this album, I have researched the lives of several Iranian-born composers and have developed friendships with some of them. I greatly admire how they are able to apply the best of Western music structures and theory to their native traditions, and in doing so, make them accessible to broader audiences.

The title of this album, *East of Melancholy*, is the English translation of a famous collection of poems by the Iranian contemporary poet Sohrab Sepehri (*Shargh e Andouh*.) I chose this title because it speaks to the melancholic and nostalgic mood of the music in the album. I also feel that the reference to a book of poems is apt because poetry is seen as the highest expression of culture in Iran; much of Persian music throughout the centuries has been inspired by poetry. In this al-

bum, Aminollah Hossein's Prelude No. 1 is subtitled *Homage to Omar Khayyam* in honor of the beloved poet, whose *Rubaiyat* Hossein could recite by heart. *Caravan* is a piano arrangement by Delbar Hakimova of a song that Hossein set to two stanzas by the poet Sa'adi (*Oh! Caravan, do not make haste. You are taking my sweetheart away. She is carrying the only heart I have...*) Though they are not included in this album, Loris Tjeknavorian has written several works inspired by Ferdowsi's thirteenth-century epic poem *Shahnameh* or *Book of Kings*. Russia also has an incredibly rich tradition of poetry, and Balakirev's *The Lark*, included in this album, is the arrangement of a song that Glinka set to the Russian poem of the same name by Nestor Kukolnik.

Since performing and uploading these pieces onto YouTube in the past decade, I have had several requests for their scores, mainly from musicians living in Iran. Sadly, some of Aminollah Hossein's original manuscripts burned in a fire at his house, and there is no record of them in SACEM, the French national library, or through their original French publisher, Costallat. I arranged Hossein's *Persian Miniatures* for

piano from orchestral LP recordings from the seventies, since Hossein's own piano arrangement of his orchestral suite has been lost. Loris Tjeknavorian's complete scores are now readily available through his website, and Delbar Hakimova was so kind as to send me her yet-unpublished score. I feel that this music is a valuable addition to the piano repertoire.

—**Tara Kamangar**

Pianist **Tara Kamangar** has been described as a “world-class musician who excels at blending the best of Western and Middle-Eastern compositions” (Gulf News). Praised for her “nimble technique and lustrous phrasing” (San Francisco Chronicle,) Tara has premiered works by Iranian composers of the past century to standing ovations in venues such as London's Cadogan Hall, the Whitehall Palace, New York City's Skirball Auditorium, San Francisco's Masonic Auditorium, Oakland's Paramount Theatre, and LA's Disney Hall. A versatile artist, Tara has collaborated with musicians across several genres, from Spanish classical guitarist Angel Romero to multi-platinum R&B producer James Poyser. She is

the pianist and violinist for the classical crossover trio “Triptyq,” whose first single recently debuted at #2 on the classical iTunes chart. An avid composer with a background in ethnomusicology, Tara wrote the original score for the prize-winning documentary “Fifi Howls from Happiness” (France/Iran), named one of the best films of 2013 by “Le Monde,” and has incorporated Kurdish folk music into her classical compositions.

Born in California to a musical Iranian family, Tara has studied the piano and violin from the age of three. She is an honors graduate of both Harvard University and London's Royal Academy of Music, where she completed postgraduate studies in piano performance as a recipient of the Kathleen Bayfield scholarship.



Tara Kamangar and Producer/Engineer
Leslie Ann Jones

Dedicated to the memory of Aminollah Hossein

Producer: Leslie Ann Jones

Engineer: Leslie Ann Jones

Assistant Engineer: Dann Thompson, Robert Gatley

Editors: Mark Willsher, Robert Gatley, Dann Thompson

Mastered by Mark Willsher

Recorded at Skywalker, a Lucasfilm, Ltd. Company, Marin County, CA

Piano: Yamaha CFIIIS 9' Concert Grand

Piano Technician: Mark Schecter

Photo/Special Art Credits:

Page 3: Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

Covers/page 10: Golnaz Shahmirzadi

Special thanks to my parents and brothers for their love and support, to Leslie Ann Jones and her incredible team at Skywalker Sound, to Robert and Candice Hossein for their kind permission for the Persian Miniatures arrangement, to Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian, Roxane Zand, John Hillebrandt, Elizabeth Kidwell, and my colleagues in Kiosk and Triptyq for their mentorship and friendship, to the Iran Heritage Foundation, Magic of Persia, PAAIA, and Oakland East Bay Symphony for helping to promote this music, and to my musical friends in Iran for their inspiring messages. And endless gratitude to my mother, Farvardin.

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(707) 996-3844 • Fax (707) 320-0600 • (800) 364-0645

contactus@delosmusic.com

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