



The Art of Avaz and Mohammad Reza Shajarian: Foundations and Contexts

Rob Simms, Amir Koushkani

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The Art of Avaz and Mohammad Reza Shajarian: Foundations and Contexts, by Rob Simms and Amir Koushkani, examines the traditional art of singing classical Persian poetry, as represented by its greatest living exponent. This in-depth study surveys the social and historical context of the twentieth-century tradition of avaz while placing Shajarian's early career within this complex culture, from being a child prodigy of Qur'an recitation in Mashhad to his rise to national prominence in the 1970s.

As a globetrotting celebrity who is renowned for singing medieval poetry with impeccable technique and radiant inspiration, Shajarian's life and work provide a compelling case study for larger issues of reconciling tradition and modernity, and the crucial role of the individual in maintaining and renovating traditional art forms. Avaz is discussed in the broader context of Iranian narrative performance traditions, where the performer retells well-known scripts in a way that is appropriate to the audience and the present occasion, spinning the tale to convey a personal message. Shajarian's career also exemplifies the huge changes that Iranian musical culture underwent in the 1960s and 70s. Finally, the study includes a detailed examination of the materials and creative processes of Shajarian's artistic craft, including his acquisition process and training, vocal technique, selection and treatment of poetry, use of traditional musical materials, and his balance of engaging preset materials with improvisation.

The Art of Avaz and Mohammad Reza Shajarian is an impressively detailed study of the music, life, and environment of the most influential musician in Iranian classical music of the past three decades.

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