

The concept of improvisation in Iranian traditional music : the performer's mental state and memory when confronting the improvisational model

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The aim of this paper is to clarify Iranian aesthetic feelings towards improvisation when the same performance from an objective perspective is identified as being different and different performances identified as being the same. In the Dastgāh system, which is the model for improvisation, there are mainly two elements. One is a group of traditional melody types that are accumulated in a musician's body like stock phrases. The other is the rule about the relationship between each melody type in terms of how those stock phrases should be arranged as a whole. In this paper, I focus on the performer's mental state and memory when confronted with the Dastgāh model, rather than an analysis of the reality of the model itself.

While researchers regard these stock phrases as substance first and tend, unconsciously, to seek out a fixed nature, whether stock phrases are used as they are or not in improvisation (text-centered mentality), for the Iranian musician, these melodies exist only in the moment when they are resounded, and furthermore, exist firstly in order to embody the relationship between melodies. A verbatim-like memory of the melody itself is primarily thin. There is only a memory like "recall" until an actual form is given in performance (orality-centered mentality).

While the fixed nature, which is inherent in a textual-based mind, leads to the feeling that "since someone already owns the melody and I have to perform something different in improvisation", a stock phrase-like fixity, which is inherent in the orality-centered mind, is a common object that no one owns, and everyone can use for the moment of performance as one's phrase without the feeling of having borrowed it. Namely, "the procedure" that the player draws music each time from Dastgāh is improvisation for them, rather than the textual viewpoint over the actual performance produced.