

## Classical Guitar Music in Iran from early 1980s to present:

### Text, Analysis and Musical Engraving by Babak Falsafi

In this article I would like to introduce three compositions for solo guitar by three composers from three generation of composers/guitarists from Iran:

#### *I- Talash by Bagher Moazen*

A composition from 1980s and 1990s

The first composition is “Talash” by Bagher Moazen. In the booklet of his CD I found a text about this piece: “Talash was composed in 1982. The title has a dual meaning: the expression of a social phenomenon at the time and the challenge the piece poses to the guitarist performing it. Its social meaning is derived from its narrative quality. It attempts to capture a historical period in Iran when there seemed to be an almost instinctive collective struggle of a people faced with the perilous danger of war, political persecution and mass exodus. The piece also requires significant effort on the part of the guitarist, as the technique is demanding and rhythm complex. In 1995, Bagher revised the piece and dedicated it to the writer and poet Simin Behbahani.”

The piece begins with an introductory passage presenting a modal system alike to D major which assures the audience of Mahoor mode or a subdivision of this system. The pizzicato in the end of this phrased passage makes a nice contrast to the opening passage of the piece and represents the wide spectrum of guitaristic ideas of the composer.

Example I ( Introductory passage)



Example II ( Introductory passage)



The 2 beat rhythmic section opens with a descending melody from A to F#. while the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> strings form a very guitaristic accompaniment pattern. This pattern will remain one of the main objective elements throughout the piece. There is no time signature in the hand written manuscript but the following examples suggest two optional time signatures:

Example III ( Opening measure of the rhythmic section)



Example IV ( Opening measure of the rhythmic section)



The first 4 measures of this section form an identical theme to represent an Oriental piece of music. This is basically a descending motion from the 5<sup>th</sup> to tonic with a pause on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. The original theme is broken down onto 1<sup>st</sup> string and 4<sup>th</sup> string which is again a very guitaristic compositional idea to simply orchestrate the melody.

Example V ( The original theme in the 1<sup>st</sup> phrase)

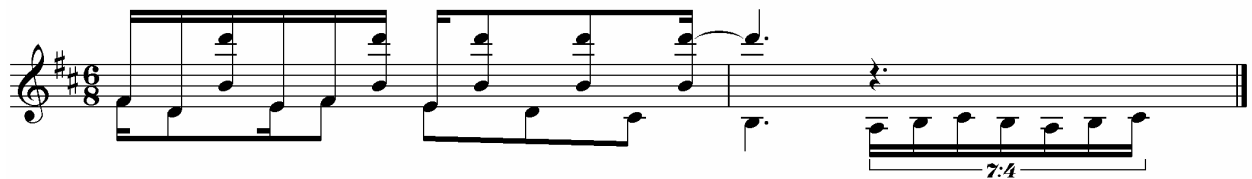


Example VI ( The original theme broken onto 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> strings)  
( The dotted quarters are shown as quarter notes)



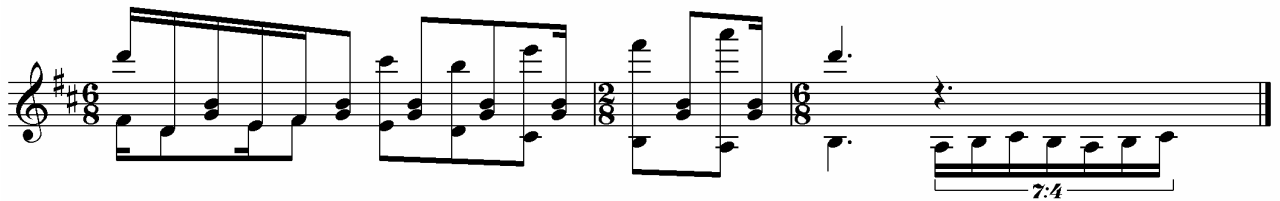
The piece continues with 2 different and simple ornamented variations of the theme for 13 measures when there is a modulated alike part for 2 measures:

Example VII ( double notes consisting B and D as an indication of alternation to the 6<sup>th</sup>)



The above pattern appears toward the end of the piece. The double notes switch to G and B as an indication of alternation to the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Example VIII ( double notes consisting G and B. The prolonged idea of the theme in example VII makes a short measure of 2/8 .)

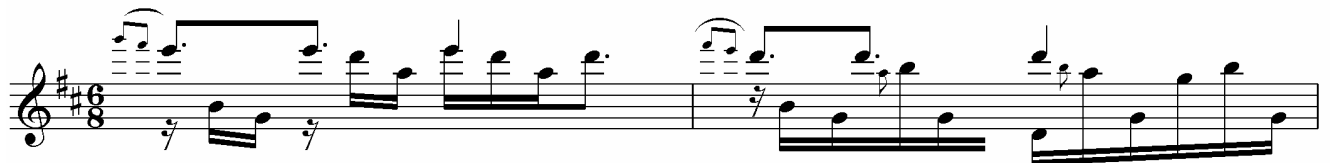


As one reads through the piece finds an interesting repetition of the opening theme in an octave higher:

Example IX ( An ornamented variation of the opening theme of examples III through VI)

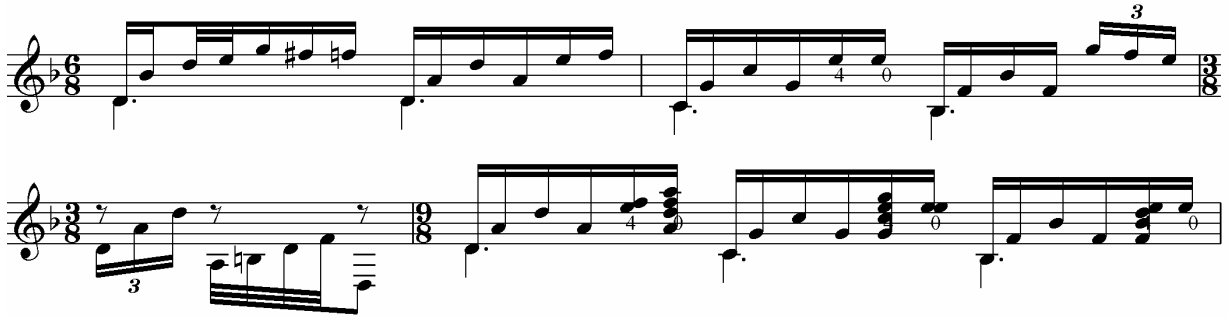


Example X ( An ornamented variation of the opening theme repeated in the middle of the piece an octave higher.)



The measures of the last example are followed by a change in key signature for about 16 measures ( In the original manuscript there is no barline or time signature while the nature of the piece is very rhythmic. The present barlines and time signatures are all suggestion of the author of this article.)

Example XI ( The first measure of the modulated section to a relative modal system)



The step wise motion of the bass in the first two measures of the above example is borrowed from flamenco and this influence throughout the piece is very obvious.

This piece should be considered a revolutionary piece of music in Iranian classical guitar repertoire, As it opens up the doors to other guitarists/ composers to use some elements of Persian traditional( classical) music on the classical guitar such as: modal systems and tar/setar techniques.

## ***II- Khorasan by Mehrdad Pakbaz***

A composition from 1990s and 2000s

“Khorasan” is the title for the second piece chosen for this article:

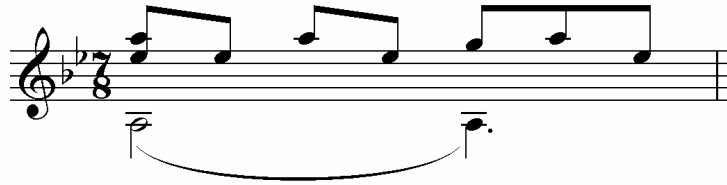
This piece was composed by Mehrdad Pakbaz after Bagher Moazen had written Talash. Later on in recent years this piece was released in an album in Iran performed by the composer and became more well known to Iranian guitarists. From the very opening section the composite rhythm of the piece is very attractive:

Example I ( The opening bar of the piece which keeps its rhythmic identity throughout measure 24)



This opening is ornamented in the next measures and repeats in octave and 5<sup>th</sup> in the bass throughout measure 24. All three ideas are great and demonstrate the deep composition and arrangement knowledge of the composer. From measure 25 a new rhythmic pattern is presented which covers the melodic material of the dance section:

Example II ( Slightly different rhythmic pattern presented few measures before the dance section)



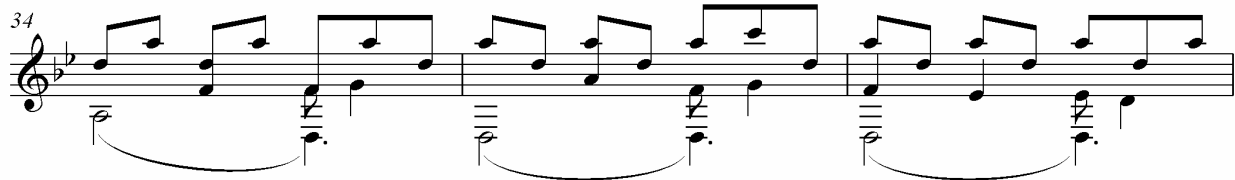
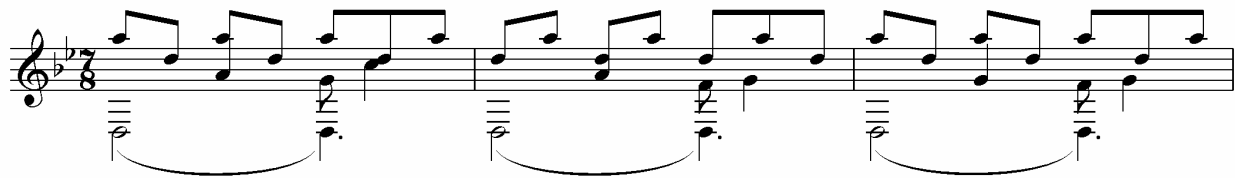
The Folk tune which is used to open the dance section is already introduced in different rhythmic or melodic varied forms here or there before the beginning of the dance section. This is a common composition practice and is done very nicely in this piece.

Example III ( the main theme to open the dance section)



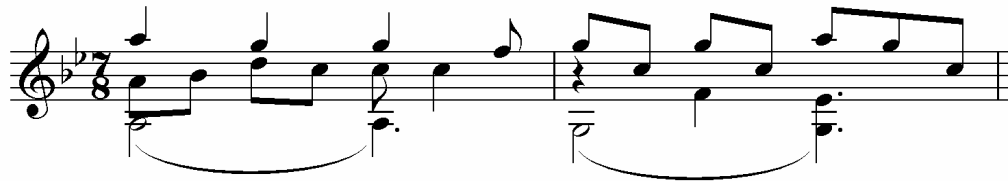
The composer very successfully uses this theme in the middle voice and adds a high A on the first string and D on the second string as a pedal note accompaniment throughout the 6 measure extended opening section of the dance.

Example IV ( A guitar arrangement of the folk tune by the composer which is developed throughout the whole dance section)

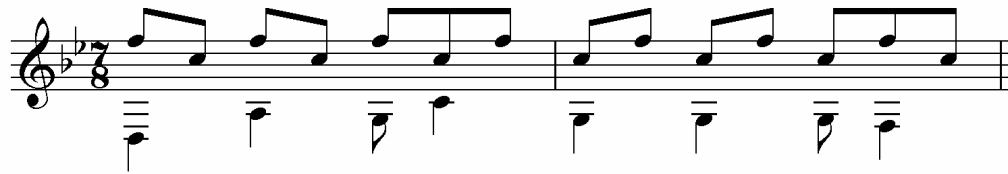


The dance section duration is about 50 measures. In this section many grouped measures such as groups of 2 or 4 are the brief varied forms of the main theme as in Example IV.

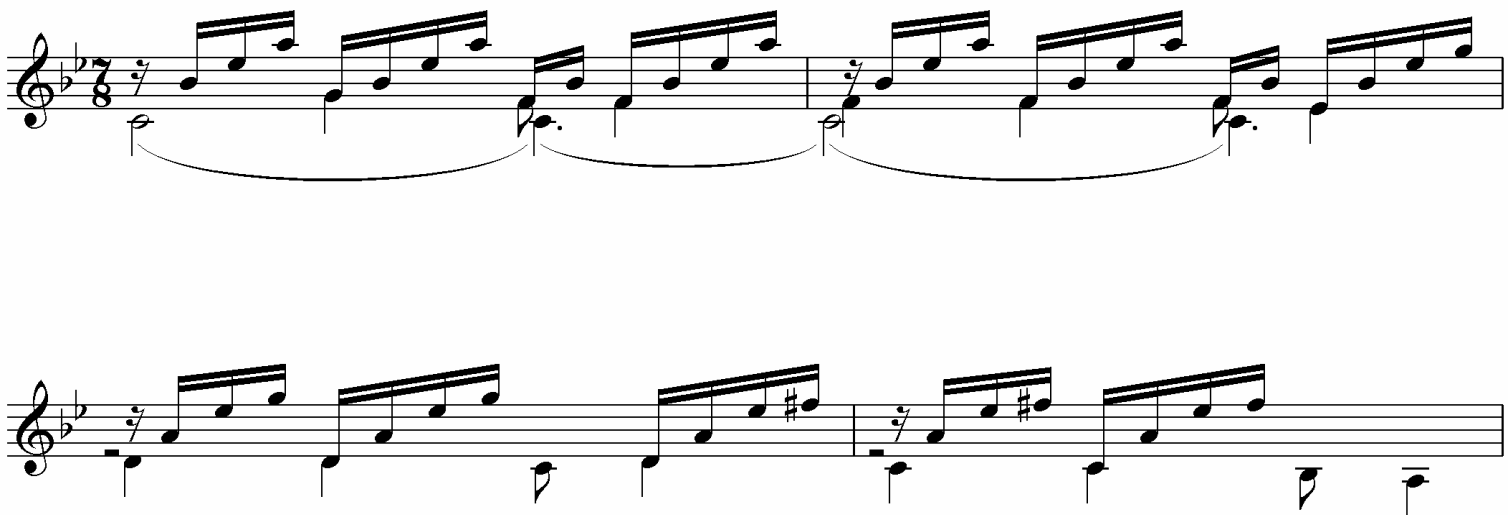
Example V ( a two measure varied form of the main theme)



Example VI ( a two measure varied form of the main theme appearing in bass and accompaniment in arpeggios pedal on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> strings)

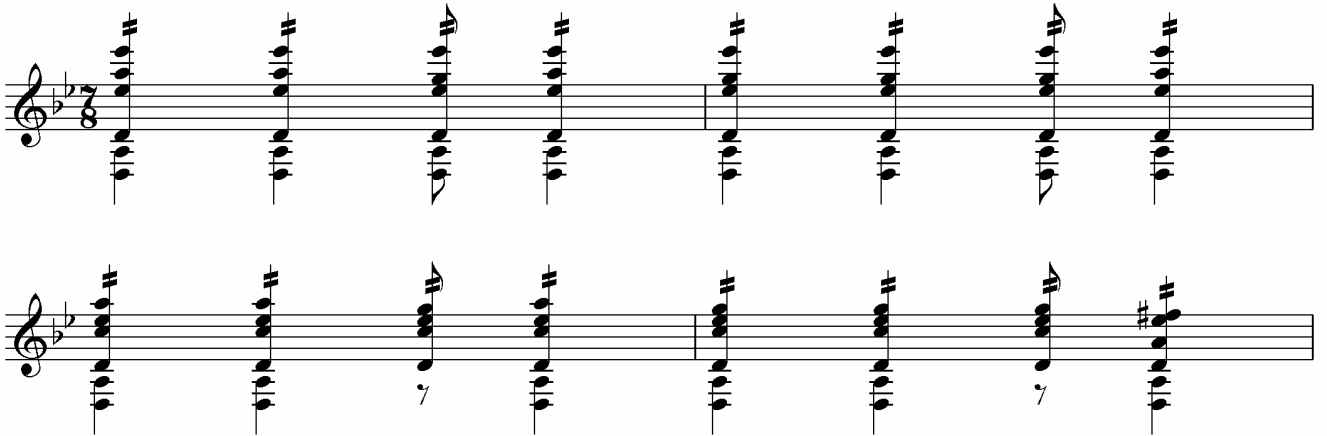


Example VII ( four measure varied form of the main theme, arpeggiation and theme appearing on the 4<sup>th</sup> string slightly modulated.)



In not too long from the final coda there is a moment of great excitement for the performer and the audience and that's when the composer has successfully established this piece as very very Middle Eastern composition on the guitar while there are still elements of sophistication. This idea is done by rasguado, drone bass and the "folk tune" on 2<sup>nd</sup> and later 1<sup>st</sup> strings:

Example VIII ( Capturing moment or the composer's signature!)



### *III- Masjed by Mansour Habibdoost*

A composition from 2000s

The last composition in this article is “Masjed” which was composed not long ago. This composition has been once selected to be a set piece for the Tehran Guitar Competition following Mansour Habibdoost winning in composition competition section of Tehran Guitar Competition. As the three compositions in this article are tentatively introduced based on their composition date Masjed was composed long time after the other two and is fairly new composition. This piece is in three movements:

I – Adagio, II – Andante, III- Allegro con Agitato + Andante Cantabile

From the very first sight the title which is in Farsi a kind of temple reminds of a guitarist famous piece La Cathedral! As one reads through the piece and finds out about the 3 movements finds more similarities between the two pieces!- La Cathedral has 3 (and a 4th added later by the composer) movements titled very much alike the titles of Masjed’s movements!-. The opening measure of first movement introduces a simple rhythmic pattern and it continues for 42 measures with no major change.

Example I ( Opening measure of the first movement)



The rest throughout this movement for 42 measures is somehow harmonic progression on this rhythmic pattern.

Now since there are already enough similarities between the titles of famous La Cathedral and Masjed one can guess the rhythmic pattern and overall form of the second movement!

Example II ( Opening bars of the second movement)

The dotted quarter notes followed by eighth notes remind the audience of La Cathedral again.

6th:D I II III -----  
 f  
 etc.

A very similar rhythmic pattern goes on for 19 measures until the first movement appears again and ends the second movement.

The third movement of the piece begins like a right hand warm up exercise and never develops into any other rhythmic or motivic form.

Example III ( The beginning measures of the fast movement)

6th:D I  
 f

If the latter piece is beyond a composition course assignment, the author of this article should practice more the compositional analysis to discover more about sophisticated elegance and complications of this piece. Anyhow this piece composed in 2008 was announced a set piece for Tehran Guitar Competition and was published in Iran. When the author decided to choose three different pieces from three decades of classical guitar composition in Iran there was not a wide range of selections. “Masjed” was one of the only options to present the current decade!

About the author:

***Babak Falsafi*** graduated from San Francisco Conservatory of Music in 2006 and from Prague Conservatory of Music in 1998. Babak began studying the guitar at the age of nine and since then has devoted his time to music. He has arranged and composed several pieces for classical guitar. His deep interest in Oriental music for guitar led him in recent years to design a new instrument similar to guitar and capable of producing a mystic sound. This resulted in the invention and construction of his 18 string guitar called dastansora in 2008.

For more info on Babak Falsafi's works and projects or his invented instrument please visit his website at [www.babakfalsafi.com](http://www.babakfalsafi.com)