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## History, Politics, and Religion in the Life and Compositions of Sahba Aminikia

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HISTORY, POLITICS, AND RELIGION IN THE LIFE AND COMPOSITIONS  
OF SAHBA AMINIKIA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by  
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To my parents, who sacrificed their own dreams to make mine come true

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	v
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. HISTORY, RELIGION, AND POLITICS .....	6
CHAPTER 3. ONE DAY; TEHRAN .....	12
CHAPTER 4. NIGHT AND FOG .....	30
CHAPTER 5. INTERVIEW.....	41
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	53
APPENDIX: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FROM THE COMPOSER .....	57
VITA .....	58

## ABSTRACT

Sahba Aminikia is an Iranian-American composer who was underrepresented in his home country. He was born into a family with Baha'i faith only two years after the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. The consequences of the revolution brought several challenges for him as a musician and a religious minority. Aminikia was deprived of the right to further his education, so he first moved to Russia, and later on, immigrated to the United States where he received his master's degree in composition. The research is focused on the analysis of the two pieces titled *One Day; Tehran* (2010), and *Shab o Meh (Night and Fog)* (2013) as well as the history of Aminikia's life and compositional process in the format of an interview. My analysis of these pieces is motivic, and the tonality is discussed based on the idea of pitch centrality. In this document, I explore the compositional style of Aminikia through the lens of his past experiences within the historical and political events in Iran in order to provide performers a better understanding of his works, so that they can make informed interpretive decisions.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Sahba Aminikia is an Iranian-American composer born in 1981 in Tehran, Iran, who is currently residing in San Francisco. Aminikia studied music composition in Russia at St. Petersburg State Conservatory. He received his bachelor's and master's in music at San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Some of his most influential teachers were Boris Ivanovich Tishchentko in Russia, who was a post-graduate student of Dimitri Shostakovich, and Mehran Rouhani in Iran. Although he was born and raised in Iran, and was trained as a Western composer, all of his compositions were inspired by the unique events in his life, and they reflect back to the political, historical, and social life of Iran. Aminikia is the winner of multiple composition awards, such as American Prize - Professional Chamber Music Division - 2nd Place (2015); Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival Stone Fellow Composer (2014); and Winner of the Shanghai-San Francisco International Chamber Music Festival Composition Competition (2012).<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I am going to describe the influence of political events in the life and compositions of this composer. Iranian Islamic revolution, the Green movement, and the discrimination of Baha'i minority within Iran are among the major events that shaped the identity and style of composition of Aminikia. I will be focusing on two of his compositions: *One Day; Tehran*, and *Night and Fog*.

Sahba Aminikia is a young contemporary composer who was born shortly after the revolution in Iran and is currently residing in the United States. As a religious minority of the Baha'i faith, he was beaten and threatened. He has won multiple awards for his chamber music compositions. As an Iranian-American composer, Sahba Aminikia has been majorly influenced by both countries and their cultures. His life as a Baha'i minority provided some unique challenges for him in his hometown, and as a composer who was born in the '80s in Iran, he

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<sup>1</sup> Omid Zoufonom, "Iranian-Born Composer Sahba Aminikia Bridges Worlds in Extreme Times," KQED Arts. <https://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2017/03/07/iranian-born-composer-sahba-aminikia-bridges-worlds-in-extreme-times/>.

experienced some important political and historical events that made his life very interesting. Although he has been out of his country for several years now, most of his music is inspired by the culture, poetry, and political events of his motherland. The purpose of this study is to familiarize people with the life and works of Sahba Aminikia, a composer who has been under-represented in his own country. I will be exploring the compositional style of Aminikia through the lens of his past experiences within the historical and political events in Iran in order to provide the performers a better understanding of his works, so they can interpret the compositions at a deeper level. I am going to show the connection of history and political events in the life of this composer, which led to the creation of his compositions, and describe the similarities among his works and his compositional style.

Aminikia's music cannot be called Persian because it is based on Western forms and structures; but he cannot be called an American composer because of the various influences in his life. American composer, Henry Gilbert, argues that one does not become an American composer just by coming to the country and signing the immigration papers. He even goes further by saying that not all composers who are born in America are American composers. A country does not define a composer's compositional style, but the events that happened around him and the education that he got can be huge factors in shaping his identity as a composer.<sup>2</sup>

Gervais White also questions the importance of nationality in contemporary compositions; is it just borders that make music nationalistic, or do stylistic, psychological, and social matters have more importance? He explains that national factors have lost their meaning in this era, and that borders do not have the same definition as before. Nationality is just one of the classifications of a composer that can be related to his compositions. Political, religious, and

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert F. Henry, 1923. "What is an American composer? [The influence of a composer's training and the character of his music determines his classification as an American composer more than his birthplace or race]," (1923).

psychosocial issues surrounding the life of a composer can be more effective on his works than solely his nationality.<sup>3</sup> This explains why Aminikia's works that follow all the rules for Western Classical compositions still awaken the deepest emotions in Iranians who are listening to his music in much of the same way that a folk song might.

Robert Gluck argues that globalization plays an important role in the mixture of non-Western instruments into Western compositions. Non-Western societies have not been completely modernized yet, so this makes the music of native cultures unique and draws more attention to them. Globalization has also helped people who are especially interested in electroacoustic music to take the recordings of the traditional instruments and apply them to Western compositions. This development gives a composer the ability to create a bridge between the music of East and West. This is also significant because it can create a sense of history, culture, and belongingness in an era in which people struggle to find their true personal identities and validity within their culture.<sup>4</sup> One of the strong tools that Aminikia uses to bring that feeling into his music is by playing Persian voices, songs, or even ambient street sounds of a day in Tehran simultaneously during a live quartet or choir composition. As American-Persian composer Shahrokh Yadegari describes it very well, "Tradition is a process, not a set of objects. You have to think of ethnicity as a set of resources that people use, not as a particular content or a particular set of objects. The concept is how they think about who they are...."<sup>5</sup> The importance is in the mind of the composer, and how he defines himself.

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<sup>3</sup> Gervais Terence White, 1956. "Nationalism in contemporary music [National, international or multinational, and regional music. Does a country influence the composer or does the composer influence the music of the country? Expatriate composers]," (1956): 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Robert J., Gluck, "Free sound within culturally specific practice," *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only)*, EBSCOhost (2005): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Robert J., Gluck, "Free sound within culturally specific practice," *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only)*, EBSCOhost (2005): 2.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

Since Aminikia is a living composer, and there are not many resources available directly about him, the study will greatly benefit from interviewing the composer. I sent my prospectus to the composer to get his consent in order to move forward with the research. Sahba Aminikia currently resides in San Francisco, California. Aminikia will be interviewed based on his experiences as an Iranian-American composer after the revolution, the process of his compositions, the sources of his inspiration, and particularly his experience with the political situation in Iran, and its effect on his works.

I will present data about the political and historical situation of Iran in the critical era that Aminikia was born and raised. This data includes gathering articles and looking through the research that has already been done on the Baha'i community, their education in Iran, the nature of the Green Movement, and the role of the Islamic Revolution in the music industry over the last four decades. I also will present some data on music before the revolution, after the revolution, and during the green movement to provide the reader with an insight about the history of Persian music.

The study shows the relationship among politics, religion, history, and music. Therefore, it was important to have access to Aminikia's music scores in order to make the connections between his life and music.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data will be qualitative. As it was mentioned before, this study heavily relies on the interview. The interview has been transcribed and inserted as the last chapter to the dissertation for readers' consideration.

I will present a formal analysis of Aminikia's music. I will be showing how each piece falls into a standard Classical form. I will be analyzing the style of his instrumentation to find similarities and differences between his major influences, such as Shostakovich and Stravinsky. I also will show any rhythmic, intervallic, and motivic ideas that have been used in his music which can be traced to Persian music or culture. The analysis will be done to determine if any non-Western techniques or effects have been used in Aminikia's music, and if so, how that portrays his life story as a minority composer in Iran after the revolution.

I also will present documents about the political, historical, and religious issues of Iran, and draw upon previous analyses that have been done in order to find common themes between those issues and the stories that come up in Aminikia's music because his compositions are based on storytelling.

In order to provide the reader with a closer look at the transformation that the immigration and other factors have had on his compositional style, the above-mentioned information will be presented in the form of a lecture recital where the works will be performed, and a comprehensive lecture will be given about the findings in the music of this composer.

## CHAPTER 2. HISTORY, RELIGION, AND POLITICS

Although nationality does not necessarily dictate one's compositional style, Aminikia's compositions have been largely influenced by his birth country, Iran. There was a tendency in Iran during the mid 20th century to be Westernized due to the cultural trend that became dominant at that time called "West is the best." As a result, during that period Western instruments received more attention, and even Persian pop songs started to sound like Western music. Ayatollah Khomeini, as the leader of the revolution believed that a cultural reformation was needed for Iran, and that would become possible by moving away from Westernized traditions, so that future generations would not become colonized by foreign countries and would not encounter cultural adaptation. This led to major cuts in music programs on television and radio, which were and still are some of the most important sources of music in Iran. <sup>6</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution addressed music in one of his speeches as follows:

Music is like a drug, whoever acquires the habit can no longer devote himself to Important activities. It changes people to the point of yielding to vice or to preoccupations pertaining to the world of music alone. We must eliminate music because it means betraying our country and our youth. We must completely eliminate it. ("Radio and Television must Strengthen the Young", Keyhan, 1 mordad 1358/1979)<sup>7</sup>

According to this belief music was not legitimate and had to be banned.<sup>8</sup> The more that the government stood against musicians and music making, the more the younger generation became interested in learning music privately. More than 30 years have now passed since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, and during that period there have been different policies and

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<sup>6</sup> Ameneh Youssefzadeh, "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations," (2000): 2.

<sup>7</sup> Karin Van Nieuwkerk, *Muslim rap, halal soaps, and revolutionary theater: artistic developments in the Muslim world*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, (2012): 88.

<sup>8</sup> Ameneh Youssefzadeh, "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations," (2000): 2.

perspectives among the authorities regarding social and religious issues.<sup>9</sup> These restrictions led to many challenges for Iranian musicians attempting to continue in their jobs and education. Iran has a very ancient culture and a long history of music, but the new government stood against it, and this was very disturbing.

A brief look at the history of Persian Art Music and how it originated shows that Persia and Greece had a long political and cultural connection. From this arose the possibility of musical exchange. Also, the theories of both Persian and Arabian music, which are geographically close to each other, are Greek in origin. It is important to look back to the ancient past because Persian music has changed very little during all these years. This lack of change is due to political and religious issues. During certain periods, such as the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Shi'a (a conservative branch of Islam) prohibited music altogether. This also happened after the Islamic Revolution a few decades ago. These long periods of restrictions affected music advancement and prevented public performances, but history shows that at times when non-religious governments ruled the country, music flourished.<sup>10</sup> Although the limitations for musicians after the revolution were very frustrating, they applied to all musicians with no exceptions. However, Aminikia had more serious things to worry about, like his life survival and basic human rights.

One of the main reasons that Aminikia had to leave his home country was because of his religion. As a practicing Baha'i, Aminikia faced much discrimination. Baha'i community is the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran. Since the revolution, more than 200 Baha'i have been killed without any charges being brought against their persecutors. More than 80 Baha'is are in prison today because of their faith. The Islamic government has taken away many human

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<sup>9</sup> Ameneh Youssefzadeh, "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations," (2000): 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ella Zonis, 1965. "Contemporary Art Music in Persia." *The Musical Quarterly* no. 4: 636, *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost (1965): 636-7.

rights from Baha'is; they have been denied for official employment all over the country, and they do not even have the right to go to any of Iran's universities for secondary education. Baha'is are continually being imprisoned and threatened because the government accuses them of being a threat to Islam and the country's national security purposes. Aminikia was therefore forced to leave the country to pursue his secondary education in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

There were five major political and historical events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Iran that had a great impact on the people: Iran's constitutional revolution (1905), the Mossadeq project (1882-1967), the demonstrations of the fifth of June 1963, the Islamic Revolution of 1979; and recently the post-election challenges of June, 2009. The constitutional revolution refers to the movement in which Western intellectuals largely influenced Iranians. Although Aminikia was born a long time after this revolution, the influences of this revolution continued on to his generation. The constitutional revolution encouraged foreign ideas and disregarded indigenous ideas. This made Iran a receiver of ideas instead of a giver, and the reflection of it can be seen in music. Because of this revolution Iran became a consumer of Western products.<sup>12</sup> Aminikia was largely influenced and inspired by the music of Pink Floyd, Queen, Shostakovich, and Stravinsky.<sup>13</sup>

The Green Movement refers to the time period surrounding June of 2009, immediately after the presidential election. Millions of Iranians in and outside of Iran were angry and heartbroken after they heard the results of the election. On June 12<sup>th</sup> of 2009 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared as the president, and this raised so many questions about the validity of the results. The campaign of Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, who were reformist

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<sup>11</sup> Shahin Milani, "Situation of the Bahá'í Minority in Iran and the Existing Legal Framework," (2016): 137-8, 141-2.

<sup>12</sup> Arya Bastaninezhad, "A Historical Overview of Iranian Music Pedagogy (1905-2014)," *Australian Journal Of Music Education* no. 2 (January 1, 2014): 6.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Gilbert, "PressReader," PressReader.com - Connecting People Through News, February 01, 2017, accessed November 24, 2017, <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/san-francisco-chronicle/20170201/282260960190973>.

candidates that were expected to win, openly questioned the results. After that millions of people collectively worked together to show their disagreement. People took to the streets and participated in democratic riots. They wore the color green in support of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's campaign. Many people were killed and imprisoned as a result of these riots.<sup>14</sup> Aminikia was himself involved in the Green Movement and has tried to portray some of his feelings of those days in his music.

Aminikia has been influenced by both Western and Eastern music and culture. These influences can be seen in his compositions, each of which have a particular story to tell. Three of his compositions—*One Day; Tehran*, *The Tragedy of Sohrab*, and *Night and Fog* have common themes, all inspired by historical, and/or political events in ways that influenced him. Aminikia tells stories of his life and his home country's history through these pieces.

*One Day; Tehran* is a string quartet written in 2010. The work was inspired by the post-presidential election in Iran in 2009. As the name of the piece implies, it tells a story about one day in Aminikia's hometown. The piece has three distinct parts: "Dawn," "Noon," and "Sunset." The piece starts peacefully in the morning with the tension increasing by noon. This tension describes the political events that did not have a break at that time and were on-going. After this tension there is sunset—a time for families to gather around to comfort one another as the day draws to the end; and lastly the piece ends with a lullaby. This lullaby is soothing, warm, and calm to present the end of the day with a promise that tomorrow is going to be a new day.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dabashi, Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran*, [Electronic Resource], New Brunswick, N.J. : Transaction Publishers, (2011): 23.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat00252a&AN=lalu.3757924&site=eds-live&scope=site&profile=eds-main>

<sup>15</sup> Sahba Aminikia, "One Day Tehran (2009)," Sahba Aminikia. Accessed November 24, 2017, <http://www.sahbakia.com/works07>.

*Sooge Sohrab (The Tragedy of Sohrab)* is a piece written by Aminikia for electric guitar, percussion, and narrator in 2013. *The Tragedy of Sohrab* is based on one of the stories of Shahnameh by Abolghasem Ferdowsi, and it is the longest poem ever written. Rostam is a hero who spends a night at the palace of the king of Samangan. Sometime after he leaves the palace, he hears that his son was born- the result of his intimacy with the king's daughter. Years later the father and son meet for the first time. They are in a battle without recognizing each other. Rostam is fighting for Iran, and Sohrab, his son, is fighting for Turan (a region in central Asia). Rostam kills Sohrab at the end of the battle.<sup>16</sup>

Humanity's struggle with fate and life is a form of tragedy in which the hero, who is in this case Sohrab, laughs with sadness at his fate, but he is not able to control what is awaiting him. This is what heroes in tragedies do; they sacrifice themselves in order to provide truth and eternity for other people. Ferdowsi has created a strong climax with this tragedy, and the most important part is that Sohrab was killed by his own father, Rostam. This is a disaster because the father kills his innocent son.<sup>17</sup> This story is very similar to the Green Movement in Iran, in which the Iranian government persecuted innocent Iranians because of their political views.

Aminikia used pre-recorded audio files collected from Tasul and Ishurl, which is a Muslim ritual that is dedicated to grieving to the third Imam of Shias, Husayn ibn Ali, a historical and religious figure who was also killed innocently in 680 AD. The ritual includes chanting, weeping, and in some extreme cases, self-flagellation, and the music portrays these

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce Bahmani, Karl Altstaetter, José Campos, Jason Levine, Robert Napton, Kit Loose, Jamie Douraghy, Cameron Douraghy, and Firdawsī. *Rostam and Sohrab*, CA: Kings Letters, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Mokhtar Ebrahimi, and Abdollah Taheri. "The Tragedy in the Story of Rostam and Sohrab in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh." *Tarih Kültür ve Sanat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol 6, Iss 1, Pp 96-105 (2017), no. 1 (2017): 96. doi:10.7596/taksad.v6i1.707.

strong emotions.<sup>18</sup> Aminikia goes further in connecting the meaning of this tragedy to several years of Iran's history, and he draws connections between this ancient epic literature, the history of Iran, and the political events of the day by saying:

Throughout the ancient history of my homeland, Iran, millions of Sohrabs have been murdered and oppressed by their own fathers who have never realized whom they are wounding are in fact their own off springs and compatriots. Sohrabs of my homeland have constantly been accused of treason, of being rioters and of being heretics.<sup>19</sup>

*Shab o Meh (Night and Fog)* is a piano trio that was commissioned by Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, and it was written for the Delphi Trio in 2013. This piece was inspired by the "night" that Aminikia was left in a cold desert in Tehran. Since the government has been persecuting Baha'i faith for a long time, on one of Aminikia's trips back to Iran in 2011, the guards beat him and dared him to say, "I'm a Baha'i" three times.<sup>20</sup> He explains that this piece is not about who took him there that night, or what was the reason behind it, but it is about the profundity of the impact that this experience had on his life. He describes that a gun was put in his mouth and the trigger was pulled a few times although there were no bullets in the gun. Regardless, he could smell and taste smoke. Aminikia recalls that in those difficult moments in the desert, he was thinking about his favorite piece of music, Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8, to calm himself down. This piece describes his emotion as he was looking at Tehran at that night in the desert. Tehran was a city that he loved, his hometown, but he felt incredibly far away from the place where he was born, raised, and was supposed to feel safe in it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sahba Aminikia, "Sooge Sohrab (The Tragedy of Sohrab) ~ Sahba Aminikia," Iroon.com: Welcome, February 17, 2017, accessed November 24, 2017, <http://www.iroon.com/irtn/vlog/26512/>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Gilbert, "PressReader," PressReader.com - Connecting People Through News, February 01, 2017, accessed November 24, 2017, <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/san-francisco-chronicle/20170201/282260960190973>.

<sup>21</sup> Sahba Aminikia, "Shab o Meh (Night and Fog) (2013) for Piano Trio," Sahba Aminikia, accessed November 24, 2017, <http://www.sahbakia.com/product-page/shab-o-meh-night-and-fog-20>

### CHAPTER 3. ONE DAY; TEHRAN

*One Day; Tehran*, String Quartet No. 2, is a short quartet in 3 continuous movements portraying life in Tehran on a single day in summer of 2009 during the post presidential elections protests. . The movements are named “Dawn” (sahargah), “Noon” (nimrooz), and “Sunset” (Shamgah).

In order to better understand this piece, I will look at it through the lens of motivic analysis to discover the important motives and how true musical ideas are connected. *Motiv* is a German word that in English is defined as “figure,” and Parry provides us with the following definition of it:<sup>22</sup>

It is in fact the shortest complete idea in music, and in subdividing works into their constituent portions, as separate movements, sections, periods, phrases, the units are the figures, and any subdivision below them will leave only expressionless single notes, as unmeaning as the separate letters of a word.<sup>23</sup> (Parry, Figure)

Aminikia argues that his music is not programmatic, but he believes in the power of storytelling, and all of his compositions are based on a story. Personal storytelling is about expressing and describing events in life based on one’s experience. In storytelling, the story often is told in a form of a metaphor from an opposing angle or from an underrepresented viewpoint.<sup>24</sup> This piece is inspired by Aminikia’s personal experience in Iran, and he is telling the story from an underrepresented point of view, which in this case is the perspective of the people of Iran. Aminikia believes storytelling is a powerful tool in the arts. African-American storyteller Lorraine Coleman acknowledged that she relies on stories because “Minority communities only

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Dunsby, “Thematic and Motivic Analysis,” *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 907.

<sup>23</sup> Parry, “Figure,” p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Cohen-Cruz, “Storytelling,” In *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, Rutgers University Press (2005): 129, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1b4cwtm>.

trust what comes from the heart.”<sup>25</sup><sup>26</sup> Alongside the motivic analysis, I will be showing examples of how these motives unfold while telling a story in an attempt to bring the performers a step closer to understanding how a day in history is being portrayed through music, so the performers can make more informed decisions in the interpretation of this piece.

In order to determine whether this piece is tonal or not, I first would like to clarify the definition of tonality for the purpose of this paper. Tonality has several definitions; Brian Hyer defines tonality as “systematic arrangements of pitch phenomena and relations between them.”<sup>27</sup> This is the most traditional definition of tonality that refers to the idea of a tonic, and other harmonies such as dominant and subdominant functioning in relation to the pitch that we know as tonic. However, Schenker has a very different take on tonality. One of the main concerns of Schenker in regard to tonality is about the repetition. Repetition makes it possible for the listener to recognize and remember the motif; therefore, motif and repetition are tied together. Schenker believes that if one changes the function of a motif, they are opening more possibilities for the tonal system.<sup>28</sup> He says: “Music became art in the real sense of this word only with the discovery of the motif and its use.”<sup>29</sup> Although *One Day; Tehran* was not written based on the traditional harmonies, some musical factors provide us with a sense of tonality that is closer to Schenker’s definition. Elements such as clear motives, their repetitions, and certain pitches that give us a sense of cadence and moments of arrival in this piece, are all reasons to view this piece as tonal.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>27</sup> Brian Hyer, "Tonality," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000028102>.

<sup>28</sup> Kip Montgomery, "Schenker and Schoenberg on Harmonic Tonality," *Indiana Theory Review* 15, no. 1 (1994): 54-56, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24045934>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 54-56.

Since there is no evidence of traditional harmonies in this piece, I will be discussing it based on the idea of pitch centrality. “Pitch centrality is the projection of one pitch class into perceptual prominence to a significantly greater extent than other pitch classes.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, pitch centrality could refer to a pitch or series of pitches that receive more emphasis in the music in comparison to the other pitches used. That emphasis could be given to those notes by repetition, accents, strong dynamic markings, long note values, placing the notes in a very high or a very low register, and/or a combination of all of these.

### I. Dawn

The first movement, *Andante*, has two major sections that although are distinct characteristically, they are tied together by a motive hidden in the first section, but boldly emphasized in the second section. The movement is in binary form; the A section mm. 1-21, a short bridge connecting sections A and B, and the B section starting in m. 29. Initially, all instruments are marked *sul ponticello*, which creates an unclear, distant. The second violin tries to establish a steady pattern, but it is quickly interrupted by the viola by a pitch that is only at a minor second.

Example 1. I. Dawn, m. 1

The image shows a musical score for Violin II and Viola in 4/4 time. The Violin II part is marked "sul pont." and plays a series of quarter notes on a single pitch. The Viola part is marked "ppp" and "sul pont.", playing a series of quarter notes on a single pitch, with a slur over the first two notes.

While dawn is known as a time of stillness, this interruption and rhythmic syncopation shows that it is not a regular day in Tehran. The *tenuto* articulation markings in the second violin

<sup>30</sup> Stanley V. Kleppinger, "Reconsidering Pitch Centrality," *Theory and Practice* 36 (2011): 67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41784509>.

and viola change every measure, making it more difficult to anticipate what is coming next. The pitches D, Eb, F# (a half step followed by an augmented whole step), outline the intervals that we associate with Middle-Eastern music. The violins and viola create harmonic tension that is also accompanied by rhythmic instability and ambiguity. The composer indicates a degree of rhythmic freedom in the first violin part. These pitches might seem unimportant in the beginning, but they ultimately create the main motive for the second section of the first movement. Taking a closer look at these small ideas, so later on we can see how they change or develop and get a deeper understanding of how the entire piece gets tied together through the connection of these small ideas. Adorno see the importance of “telling the history of a theme”:

This does not mean, as prejudice would have it, that *less* analysis is needed, but rather *more*, a second reflection. It is not enough to establish analytically the constituent elements, nor even the most concrete primary cells, the so-called “inspired ideas.” Above all it is necessary to reconstruct what happens to those ideas, or to use Schoenberg’s phrase, to write the “history of a theme.”<sup>31</sup>

Aminikia gradually leads us to the last remaining note of the motive by writing a fermata at letter A. This short pause is a break from the uncertainty and the ambiguity that was described earlier. The pause is followed by a rhythmically unison figure that gradually slows down with a crescendo to finally get to the G in the first violin. This short section is supposed to stand out even more by the sudden color change in the instruments because it is the first time that everyone is playing in a natural way to create a clear and focused sound. The first 7 measures of letter A are a bridge connecting the two sections (sections A and B) together, the same way twilight connects dawn to sunrise. These measures take the listener away from the shimmery and dreamy feeling towards reality.

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<sup>31</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey, *Master of the Smallest Link* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37.

Example 2. I. Dawn, mm. 22-25

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

nat. rit.

mp

mf

Adagio ♩=60

The 4 pitches that were previously presented to us each by a different instrument in a stretched-out shape are now put together to create the most important motive of the B section of the movement. Aminikia unfolds the pitches separately, but then brings them next to each other to tell a story. Schoenberg is a great example of creating works that tell a story through the themes, and he expanded the form of his music by writing variations on the main theme just like all great composers before him, such as Haydn, Mozart, and later Brahms.<sup>32</sup> In this case, Aminikia periodically presents the notes at the time of dawn when things are still uncertain and perhaps foggy, but as we move forward later in the morning, we receive the same notes in a precise rhythmic figure. This motive very clearly sounds like Persian music, so we see the light and awakening that are expected in the morning. The authenticity of Persian music is strongly dependent on its relation to the text. The music needs to “speak”, and in most cases the melody needs to have the capacity to be sung, because if music purely focuses on the instrumental aspect it will fall out of what is expected from the Persian traditional music.<sup>33</sup> Some of the main

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Dunsby, “Thematic and Motivic Analysis,” *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 912.

<sup>33</sup> During, Jean and Rudy Steibel, “Third Millenium Tehran: Music!” *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005): 387, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311740>.

characteristics of Persian music are that melodies often have a narrow register and ornamentations are extremely important so the melody is improvisatory, or it sounds improvisatory due to the rapid embellishments.<sup>34</sup> A reason for this improvisatory feeling in Persian instrumental art music is that it generally is written in a way that suits vocal music very well because it is meant to rhyme with the poetry.<sup>35</sup> This motive has all these characteristics; the rapid 32<sup>nd</sup> notes are very emphasized, and have much more than an ornamentation function. The loud dynamic, the accentuation on the first note of the motive, and the instruction to play it fiercely are all indications of the importance of this motive. Also, the descending nature of the motive gives it the sense of falling and melancholy that is very common in the Middle- Eastern music.

The pitches in section A derive from the original motive that is first heard in its complete version in m. 29 in the first violin. The entire first movement is cleverly based on this motive. Aminikia uses this motive to unify the movement, and he uses the motive melodically, harmonically, and even intervallic. Melodically, the motive is transposed chromatically in its complete form in different voices as seen in m. 29. The motive also has some prominent intervals that have been used repeatedly. The motive consists of a major second, a major third, a perfect fourth, and multiple examples of semitone intervals, and the intervals can be seen in the cadences.

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<sup>34</sup> A. Klimke and E. Klieser, "The Treatment of Positive and Negative Schizophrenic Symptoms with Dopamine Agonists," *Negative Versus Positive Schizophrenia* (1991): 57, doi:10.1007/978-3-642-76841-5\_23.

<sup>35</sup> Ella Zonis, "Contemporary Art Music in Persia," *The Musical Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (1965): 645, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741053>.

Example 3. 1. Dawn, m. 29

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The music is in 4/4 time and marked *feroce* and *f* (forte). The Violin I part starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a half note D5. The Violin II part starts with a quarter note Bb3, followed by quarter notes C4, Bb3, and A3, then a half note G3. The Viola part starts with a quarter note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, Bb3, and C4, then a half note D4. The Violoncello part starts with a quarter note G2, followed by a half note G2. The score includes dynamic markings (*f*), articulation (*pizz*), and phrasing slurs.

Although the movement does not gravitate towards a single central tonality, m. 24 is the first point of arrival in this movement. Mm. 22-23 function as an antecedent to m. 24, and the intervallic relationship of the motive could be seen in the vertical movement of chords in m. 23 moving to m. 24. Each instrument plays the motive at a different beat, and on each occasion the motive is transposed so that it would be more noticeable. Voice leading is significant in creating a resolution and a stronger sense of tonal center. However, the structure of pitches alone is not enough to do this. The meter and rhythm are equally important in the creation of a resolution for the unresolved dissonance.<sup>36</sup> This is what we see at the Adagio where all the voices play whole notes after a long, and syncopated section. The extended note length plays a significant role in creating this sense of rest in the music.

In addition to the transpositions and metric placement of the motive, it is also interesting to see how the voicing is unconventional. The lower voices often play the motive in a higher

<sup>36</sup> Simon Phillippo, "Symphonic Momentum and Post-Tonal Dramas: Simpson's First Symphony," *Tempo*, no. 209 (1999): 6, <https://www-jstor-org.libezp.lib.lsu.edu/stable/946667>

register than what otherwise would be expected from them. For example, the second violin plays the motive higher than the first violin, and the viola plays it higher than both the violins. The voice crossings position the instruments against each other especially with the respect to tonality. The tonal restlessness increases more due to the viola and cello resting on dissonant double-stops of a tritone or minor 9<sup>th</sup>, while the violins are only semitones apart. In addition to the voice crossings, Aminikia finishes the melody that was started in the second violin, in the first violin, creating a dialogue effect between them. In m. 47, the second violin plays a motive built on half steps and ornamentations with the *fff* dynamic marking. The motive ends on an F# in the second violin, but it gets resolved on a G in the first violin in the following measure, so it is important that the performers hand their melody to the other without an interruption.

Example 4. I. Dawn, mm. 56-57 (last 2 measures of the first movement)

The musical score for measures 56-57 of the first movement of 'I. Dawn' features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The time signature is 4/4 for the first measure and 2/4 for the second. All instruments play a melody with a dynamic marking of *fff*. The melody consists of quarter notes and half notes, with a tritone double-stop in the second measure. The first violin and second violin play the same melody, while the viola and cello play the same melody an octave lower.

At the end of the first movement, Aminikia doubles the first violin and viola playing the exact same motive one octave apart, and he does the same thing with the second violin and cello

playing the same motive, but a half step lower than the first group. This is the climax of the first movement with the loudest possible dynamic markings. The movement starts and ends with the exact same pitches (D and Eb) as shown in examples 1, 3, and 4.

These two pitches are taken from the last two notes of the main motive. Aminikia takes us from dawn to noon, from quiet and uncertainty to decisiveness and persistence. Setting the two groups of instruments against each other at the conclusion could be interpreted as the government and people working against each other. The emphasis on the minor seconds creates the utmost level of tension throughout the piece that never gets resolved. People of Iran and the government are from the same land and share the same blood; they share so much and are so close, yet so far apart!

## II. Noon

The second movement, “Noon” (*Nimrooz*) is very rhythmic. The tempo marking is considerably fast. This movement has aspects of both symmetry and asymmetry. The 5/8 time signature is the first sign of asymmetric rhythmic patterns. However, there is always a subdivision pattern of [2+3] that is consistent at all 5/8 time signatures occurrences throughout the movement. Inertia is the tendency of an object to resist a change in its velocity.<sup>37</sup> “Musical inertia (the tendency of a pattern to continue in the same fashion) is central to musical rhythm.”<sup>38</sup>

If we hear a pattern of notes with the same duration, an expectation in the listener arises that this pattern is going to continue over and over again. Aminikia uses musical inertia in the second movement. There is an ostinato pattern that is established from the beginning in the cello

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<sup>37</sup> Jack Lasky, “Moment of Inertia,” *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Science*, (2017), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=89406149&site=eds-live&scope=site&profile=eds-main>.

<sup>38</sup> Steve Larson and Robert S. Hatten, “Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Forces,” In *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music*, 143, Indiana University Press, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gz6hj.11>.

voice. John Rawbotham describes quintuple meters as “wonderful engines of effect,” and Stevan Hatherly believes they are very favorable while used in Middle Eastern themes.<sup>39</sup>

Example 5. II. Noon, mm. 58-61

A certain pattern is anticipated in the quintuple sections, but at the end of each section he breaks this anticipation by going into a straight duple meter of 2/4. The viola helps accentuate the pattern on each beat. In terms of tonality, the second movement starts similarly to the end of the first movement because the voices outline two different semitonal intervals. As shown in example 5, the first violin and viola are paired together for an A-Ab semitone that is displaced by an octave, and second violin and cello play a D-Eb that is the exact same semitone on which the first movement ends with an octave displacement.

The compositional style of the second movement is reminiscent of Stravinsky, especially the use of *ostinati* because in Stravinsky’s music *ostinati* are not simply drones or

<sup>39</sup> Andrew James Gustar, "The Closest Thing to Crazy: The Shocking Scarcity of Septuple Time in Western Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 137, no. 2 (2012): 361, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23321889>.

accompanimental patterns, but they often support chants and other melodies.<sup>40</sup> The ostinato in this movement also functions as the main melody.

A composer is free to use pre-existing forms, invent new forms, or use a combination of both. It is important that the musical ideas get written in the most expressive ways without necessarily fitting into one box or the other. “We speak of a standard form when both design and tonal structure conform in their general outlines to a pattern that occurs often enough in the musical literature to receive recognition as established.”<sup>41</sup> However, many composers in recent decades, such as Ravel, Hindemith, Berg, Bartok, and Prokofiev, have used forms for their compositions that are unique.<sup>42</sup> Aminikia has altered the pre-existing form of a rondo in this movement.

The second movement consists of 5 sections. This brings us very close to what could possibly be expected from five parts of traditional rondos with the form of ABACA. In that case, we would expect to see three completely different parts, and one of those would get repeated in the form of a refrain. Aminikia writes three different parts, but he does not give us the traditional repetition of the A section. Therefore, he is creating a unique form by changing the pre-existing form in a way that fits his needs to express the “noon.” From Beethoven onwards most composers wrote sonata rondos instead of rondos.<sup>43</sup> The difference between these

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<sup>40</sup> "Stravinsky's Version of Pastoral." In *Hearing and Knowing Music: The Unpublished Essays of Edward T. Cone*, edited by Morgan Robert P. PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press, (2009): 181-89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7s9b8.21>.

<sup>41</sup> Douglass Marshall Green, *Form in Tonal Music: An Introduction to Analysis* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 1993) 291.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>43</sup> Joan Huguet, “Schenkerian Interruption and Beethoven’s Sonata-Rondo Form,” *Theory & Practice* 40 (January 2015): 124. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=120131795&site=eds-live&scope=site&profile=eds-main>.

two lies mainly in the function, length, and proportion of each section; in sonata rondos these criteria receive more careful attention.<sup>44</sup> The A section starts with the ostinato rhythm and continues until m. 84. This is followed by a short bridge that gives us a break from the ostinato and intensifies the direction towards the next section by changing meters. The motive in the quintuple section could be seen as musical alliteration, which refers to a number of repeated notes that are written over changing harmonies.<sup>45</sup> Although that statement applies to the repeated D notes in the A section while the harmony changes for a brief moment on C#, the C# could also be seen as a lowered neighbor tone to emphasize the pitch centricity on the note D.

The B section starts in m. 90, and the rhythmic and melodic ideas in this section are heavily based on section A (see example 6). But the main difference between the two sections is the orchestration. In the A section, motives are placed in one or two voices at a time in a lower register, so they do not seem strong and decisive. The C section starts in m. 98 and functions as a combination of the first and second movements' materials; the semitone motives presented in the first movement appear in the violins, and the stubborn rhythmic ostinato pattern of the second movement appears in the lower 2 voices. In letter K, we see a retransition to the 4<sup>th</sup> section of the movement, section B in m. 116. The overall form of the movement could be seen as ABCBB'.

The most important section of this piece is the B section due to its recurrence throughout the movement. The B section was last heard starting in m. 136. However, this time it sounds more conclusive and final for several reasons. The first reason is that the entire quartet is expected to stamp on the accented beats. The dynamics are *ff*, and it is the last return of this section, but this time it is even more bold and agitated due to the stomping. A voice crossing occurs starting in m. 138 that puts the second violin in a higher register than the first violin. The

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>45</sup> Sherman Storr, "Poetry and Music: The Artful Twins," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 43, no. 4 (1986): 339, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42579281>.

top register certainly emphasizes the already established motive. Also, loud tremolos in the cello section creates more excitement and the feeling of restlessness increases especially since they alternate between playing a double-stop with a 9<sup>th</sup> interval and double-stop with an augmented 7<sup>th</sup> interval.

Example 6. II. Noon, mm. 90-93

Musical score for Example 6, measures 90-93. The score is in 5/8 time and features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The Violin I and Violin II parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and dynamic markings of *ff*. The Viola part plays a similar pattern with accents and dynamic markings of *ff* and *f* to *fff*. The Violoncello part plays a pattern of eighth notes with accents and dynamic markings of *ff*.

Example 7. II. Noon, mm. 138-139

Musical score for Example 7, measures 138-139. The score is in 5/8 time and features two staves: Violin I and Violin II. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The Violin I part plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents and dynamic markings of *fff*. The Violin II part plays a pattern of eighth notes with accents and dynamic markings of *fff*.

In m. 86, Aminikia presents a figure that is different rhythmically, motivically, and in its articulation. However, the most interesting aspect is the intervallic relationship of the 4 notes in the harmony. Starting from the cello and moving up in order, each instrument plays a note that is a major second higher than the previous one. The interval between the cello and first violin is an augmented second, and all the semitones are covered (F-G-F#-G#). This is important because as it appeared in the first movement, the semitones are the main germ idea, both melodically and harmonically. The semitones are still there, so this is a motivic variation. However, this is the first time that Aminika expands the interval to an augmented second. This could be interpreted that since the day is progressing a larger gap is seen between different political groups (people vs. government). The accented articulation on each entrance emphasizes the differences.

Example 8. II. Noon, m. 86

The musical score for Example 8. II. Noon, m. 86, features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The Violoncello part begins with a half note F (F2) marked *mf*. The Viola part begins with a half note G (G2) marked *mf*. The Violin II part begins with a half note F# (F#2) marked *mf*. The Violin I part begins with a half note G# (G#2) marked *mf*. The notes are connected by a slur, and each note has an accent (>) above it. The interval between the cello and first violin is an augmented second.

Aminikia was impressed by the numerous protests by the Iranian people after the presidential elections' results were announced. Huge turnouts attended the protests, and Aminikia was struck by how well organized these protests were, in spite of the government's

predictable response, beating and imprisoning many.<sup>46</sup> This idea of organization can be seen in the musical notation and voicing of the second movement, even in the asymmetric sections. Even though the five sections have different lengths and are not meant to present a layout of a traditional form, they are very clearly organized and connected. While in the first movement the instruments were often divided in groups of two, in the second movement there is an asymmetric division of one instrument against the other three. In several sections there is one instrument that is in opposition to the other three, and those entrances can be found in mm. 81, 90, 116, and 136. In these examples, the different line is often given to a middle voice. However, the viola often plays in a higher register than all or most of the instruments, which creates a strained sound and serves as the heartbeat of the section. Metaphorically, that line can be seen as the voice of people, that although suppressed by the government, can still be heard. Although the dynamic markings of all 4 voices are the same in the previously mentioned entrances. In this case, those repeated notes are not merely providing an accompaniment for the other voices, but they are the ones insisting on the truth, and therefore need to be heard.

As shown in example 9, the very last note of the movement has an interval of a major second between the lowest note of cello and the highest note of the first violin, which in my opinion needs more emphasis. It is not an accident that the first movement ends on a semitone and the second movement ends on a major second interval.

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<sup>46</sup> Hotel Elephant, "Sahba Aminikia "One Day; Tehran,"" YouTube video, 4:20, September 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvVVo-d7Tl>

Example 9. II. Noon, m. 148

III. Sunset  
Adagio

The musical score consists of four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The Violin I and II parts play a melodic line with accents. The Viola part plays a similar melodic line. The Violoncello part plays a sustained pedal point on C, marked with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The score is in 6/8 time and features a key signature change from one sharp (F#) to one flat (Bb).

**III. Sunset**

The third movement, “Sunset” (*Shamgah*) begins as a shock after the unresolved energetic section of the second movement. All the voices suddenly drop out, while the cello continuing the pedal C until the end of the piece (see example 8). This unchanging pedal note shows that nothing gets changed after all, such as the riots, murders, and imprisonments that Iranians experienced after the elections’ result. As the title of the movement, *Sunset*, suggests, night symbolizes silence and darkness. For the first time in this piece, there are no more voice crossings, and all the instruments play in their expected range in relation to one another.

The most interesting part occurs when we finally reach a consonant harmony in m. 158, where Aminikia writes a complete C major chord in root position (see example 10). However, the use of artificial harmonics and the under-committal dynamic markings do not show signs of a strong arrival point. The artificial harmonies in the violins sound like a distance sigh. This sigh effect is also heard in m. 190 while the cello breaks the continuation of pedal tone and plays the

melody in its high register. The artificial harmonics in the violins, and the shout coming from the cello seem to be portraying similar emotions. The melody lines are very poetic, and they are telling the story for the last time, so the performers should take initiative to make each entrance of the melody sound particularly pathetic, as Storr explains:

The element of chance plays the leading role here. That is, no two performances of the same work ever sound quite alike since the performance is left up to discretion or indiscretion of the performer so far as note values, interpretation of expressive qualities and the duration of the work go, and could scarcely find a counterpart in poetry where the judicious author scrupulously weans and gleans rhythms, rhymes (if any) and rhetoric, condenses meanings, weighs the effect of metrical structures and chooses every word and syllable with utmost care.<sup>47</sup>

Example 10. III. Sunset, mm. 155-157

The musical score for Example 10, III. Sunset, mm. 155-157, is presented in four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The time signature is 6/8. The Violin I and Violin II parts feature long, expressive lines with dynamic markings of *ppp* and *pp*. The Viola and Violoncello parts have shorter, more rhythmic lines with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The score is in C major and features a C major triad in the entrances of the melody.

The C major triad is also laid out in the entrances of the melody. In m. 158, the viola enters with an E, in m. 167 the second violin enters with a G, and the first violin completes the chord in the second beat of m. 178. Although there are several dissonances in this movement, it is the most tonal movement of the work. While several dissonances and tonal effects occur in the

<sup>47</sup> Sherman Storr, "Poetry and Music: The Artful Twins," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 43, no. 4 (1986): 342, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42579281>.

melody, it would not be incorrect to say that the entire movement could be analyzed as an outline of a C major chord. The movement ends on C and all tension comes to an end (see example 11). This could be the voice of people who remain united.

Example 11. III. Sunset, mm. 204-206

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is in 6/8 time and consists of three measures. The Violin I and Violin II parts are in treble clef and play a sustained, very soft (*ppp*) note. The Viola part is in alto clef and plays a descending melodic line. The Violoncello part is in bass clef and plays a descending melodic line. The score is written for measures 204, 205, and 206.

There are several examples that show the motivic consistency and pitch centrality throughout the piece. The first movement starts on a D and Eb, and the last few notes in the viola reflect to the beginning with the same notes. The main motive of the second movement in m. 55 occurs in m. 186 with an augmented rhythm, and a few changes in pitch, but the character of the motive (that is descending and consists of semitones and whole tones) still remains.

## CHAPTER 4. NIGHT AND FOG

*Shab o Meh (Night and Fog)* is a piano trio composed in 2013 and was premiered by the Delphi Trio. The trio was written a couple of years after *One Day; Tehran*, but both pieces are inspired by the political events in 2009. The trio is in one movement and has two labeled sections that are performed in a continuously. Aminikia explains the story behind this piece:

"Shab o Meh" is about that "night" when I woke up in the cold of a desert night in the outskirts of Tehran with my clothes torn off, my wallet and my cellphone taken for further examination, my face swollen up while being unable to open my eyes for the pepper sprayed in my nose and in my mouth. A handheld gun was held and shot inside my mouth; once, twice...It was not loaded. "Remember the taste of the gun barrel!". Next I was on my own, left in the middle of the desert and I have to find my way towards the city I was born at, Tehran.

The piece is about that life-changing experience itself and not about where and by whom and even why it did happen. I stood in the middle of a fully dark desert looking at Tehran lights which were more of a glare in my eyes and I realized that this city has changed me but I still love my hometown. In Soviet Union, citizens used to disappear in night and fog. Later, they would have been found somewhere far far away from where they were taken. I was lost in night and fog and I found myself somewhere far away from where I was born, raised and felt safe at.<sup>48</sup>

Similarly to *One Day; Tehran*, I will do a motivic analysis of this piece, *Night and fog*, and will show its compositional process. I will present the reader with some interpretive suggestions based on the story behind this piece. The tonal language of this trio is very chromatic; therefore, I will be talking about harmony with regards to pitch centrality.

### I. Night

The first section; *Shab (Night)*, starts with the violin and cello alone playing in *sul ponticello* at the interval of a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. As shown in example 1, the violin secures a pedal note of C, while the cello alternates between F to Gb in a veiled, and almost imperceptible manner

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<sup>48</sup> Sahba Aminikia, "Shab o Meh (Night and Fog) (2013) for Piano Trio," Sahba Aminikia, accessed November 24, 2017, <http://www.sahbakia.com/product-page/shab-o-meh-night-and-fog-2013>.

hidden in the dissonance of the piano chord. The interval between the string instruments changes from perfect fifth to an augmented fourth. These intervals show their importance when they get repeated in the entrance of piano in m. 4. The piano plays a chord that consists of a perfect fourth and an augmented fourth. The chord soon is transposed both down a minor third, and up a major second. This two-measure long motive is repeated four times. In the third and fourth repetitions, the piano and violin play the dotted rhythm in unison. The first 14 measures are an introduction. The introduction is extremely bleak and desolate as described earlier. The introduction is perhaps meant to show the stillness of the night, and the melody also plays an essential role in this matter.

Melody is defined in various ways: “Melody has been defined as an auditory object that emerges from a series of transformations along the six dimensions: pitch, tempo, timbre, loudness, spatial location, and reverberant environment.”<sup>49</sup> Although this definition is not very specific, it shows the importance of pitch and duration in determining a melody. Also, other factors, such as key, melodic profile, melodic density (the degree of melodic activity), and internal distribution of tessitura (pitch range) are all important in the analysis of a melody as well.<sup>50</sup> In the introduction, the melody is initially in the cello line, and the violin, beginning in m. 9 doubles the lowest voice of the piano’s chordal sonority. As shown in example 2, The range of the melody in the strings is narrow, a minor third (F-Ab). The violin and cello are both written in the same register, which puts the cello in its upper register. The number of pitches assigned to this melody is 5. Four of these pitches come from the first chord in piano (F, Gb, Bb, C) in m. 4, where the Bb changes to an Ab. This is not merely a coincidence since later in the piece we see the Bb eventually returns as a pitch center and a point of arrival. It is fair to regard the style of

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<sup>49</sup> Y Kim et al., “*Analysis of a contour-based representation for melody*,” In Proc. International Symposium on Music Information Retrieval (2000).

<sup>50</sup> Emilia Gómez, Anssi Klapuri, and Benoît Meudic, *Melody Description and Extraction in the Context of Music Content Processing* (2002), PDF.

writing far as minimalistic. The cello only plays the two notes of F and Gb for the first 14 bars of the introduction; however, the frequency of change is augmented, and the slower change in harmonic rhythm leads us toward a cadence in m. 14 where the strings all arrive to a unison F. The degree of repetition is typical of minimalistic writing.

Example 1. Shab, mm. 1-4

Violin

*pp*  
Sul pont.

Violoncello

*pp*

Piano

*poco rubato*  
*pp*

Example 2. Shab, mm. 9-10

Violin 1

sul pont.  
*p*

Violoncello

*p*

Piano

“Minimalism is an extreme case of structure and prolongation; whether the pitch content is severely reduced, or the rhythmic drive and harmony remain the same for extended periods, the effect of minimalism is to call attention simultaneously to a structure and its prolongation.”<sup>51</sup> In addition to repetition, simplicity of concept is an essential characteristic of minimalistic music. Terry Riley as one of the fathers of minimalism argues that this style opened up a big gate for composers in a quasi-improvisatory manner. If the music does not expect change on every beat, it gives the listener more time to think about the material presented.<sup>52</sup> The *rubato* marking helps to set a meditative mood for the listener to sense the subtle changes in the repetition.

The *Agitato* section begins with a “scream” that is written as a glissando for violin (example 3). The piano introduces a new motive based on perpetual motion. There is a local repetition of this motive that continues for several measures. This motive is the driving force of this section and should be played aggressively and in a restless manner. The motive is built on a series of ascending and descending semitones and whole tones. The pitches of this melody are not significant in the melodic direction of this movement, but they create a seemingly improvisatory figure that accompanies the strings. The accents on the lowest notes need to be emphasized to bring out the irregularity of 7/8 meter.

Looking at the score in the *Agitato* section, the violin and piano appear more important because of their melodic activity and high range, but by taking a closer look, the cello is the voice that establishes the global repetition. This is more of a hidden repetition, and it is more difficult to identify. The repetition is taken from the first two measures of the cello in the introduction (F-Gb), and it has been augmented in mm. 15-23 (F#-G#) in a lower octave

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<sup>51</sup> Frederick J. Geiersbach, "Making the Most of Minimalism in Music," *Music Educators Journal* 85, no. 3 (1998): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3399142>.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Carl, "The Politics of Definition in New Music," *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989): 109, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40373952>.

(example 4). Although the motive is greatly transformed, the upper neighbor relationship is preserved. The motive repeats multiple times from m.15 to m. 46. In the violin part, the “scream” on the note C# in m. 25 goes a semitone higher (D) in m. 33, and reaches its climax in m. 42 on the note E. Each time that the scream effect is being played, the unresolved note value is lengthened, and it creates more tension. Although the note E in the violin part in m. 42 seems to be the climax because of its high register, its long rhythm value, and loud dynamic marking, in fact the true arrival is on F in m. 47. There is a change in the perpetual motive of the piano in mm. 43-46 because instead of the ascending and descending pattern, this time the motion is mostly ascending in a higher octave. The F in m. 47 is displaced one octave lower than expected, but the cello is also doubling that note in the same register. Considering the large amount of repetition in this piece, we are inclined to think of this as a minimalist style of writing.

Example 3. Shab, mm. 15-16

The musical score for Example 3, Shab, mm. 15-16, is presented in 7/8 time. It features three staves: Violin, Violoncello, and Piano. The Violin part begins with a glissando marked "gliss#" and a dynamic marking "f". The Violoncello part also has a dynamic marking "f". The Piano part consists of two staves with complex rhythmic patterns, including a prominent bass line with a descending sequence of notes.

Example 4. Shab, mm. 23-39

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Violoncello (Cello) and Vc. (Violin). The Violoncello part is in the upper staff, and the Vc. part is in the lower staff. Both parts are in 7/8 time and use a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Violoncello part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a descending melodic line. It then transitions to a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic and an ascending melodic line. The Vc. part begins with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic and a descending melodic line. It then transitions to a forte (*f*) dynamic and an ascending melodic line. The two parts overlap in measures 27-29, creating a smooth transition.

Dovetailing is a technique used in minimalist music that allows a smooth transition between two different sections. These transitions begin with the addition of a new motive to the pre-existing texture. Gradually, the number of notes or instruments playing the pattern gets lessened.<sup>53</sup> The first example of dovetailing occurs in m. 47 while we see the same motive in the piano. According to Sanchez-Behr, there are several different manners of dovetailing, such as adding a note, internal expansion, free variation, transposition and inversion, and beat transposition.<sup>54</sup> In m. 47, the motive has been transposed, and the shape of the melody has also been inverted (the primary motive descends with a stepwise motion, but the modified motive is ascending). The free variation modification is also found here; although the motive is easily identifiable, Aminikia uses false notes in dovetailing instead of writing out exact notes. “A false note is a muted or dampened note that has rhythm but often no discernible pitch.”<sup>55</sup> Since the piano is only providing transitional material in this dovetailing, the new material is given to strings. As shown in example 5, the new materials presented in mm. 47-67 are a variation on the

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Sanchez-Behar, "Dovetailing in John Adams's "Chain to the Rhythm"," *Indiana Theory Review* 31, no. 1-2 (2013): 88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/inditheorevi.31.1-2.0088>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> "False Note," *OnMusic Dictionary* - Term. Accessed January 08, 2019, [http://dictionary.onmusic.org/terms/1377-false\\_note](http://dictionary.onmusic.org/terms/1377-false_note).

melody that was heard in the introduction. F is the prominent note in this section because not only it is being held continuously as a pedal note in the cello, it is serving as an arrival pitch in the short motivic variations played in the violin. A clear example for that occurs in mm. 61-62 where an embellishment proceeds the note F. In addition, the pitch centricity over the note F is seen in the last beat of m. 65 in the violin. Aminikia uses the dovetailing technique for the second time in mm. 66-68 in order to write a smooth transition. In this transition, the rhythmic activity is significantly decreased, and there is also a reduction in dynamic. Ending the phrases on a sonority of a semitone is a technique commonly used by Aminikia that is seen in this transition between violin and cello. While at first, this transition appears at the end of a section, it is functioning as the beginning of the next section.

The note F, which is almost held for 4 measures establishes the global repetition in m. 67. This is a variation on the motive in mm. 9-10. The reason that I label it as the “global repetition” is that Aminikia introduces the motive in the introduction, he abandons it, and later on in the piece, he returns to the motive and expands it through different variations. The variation is achieved through rhythmic augmentation, and also the addition of double-stops in the strings. Each time that the motive is played, it needs to be played louder with a brighter tone. The motive is in a lower register marked with a soft dynamic marking, but it gets repeated in a higher register and longer rhythmic values. The motive is telling Aminikia’s story that in the beginning; he could not see clearly when he woke up in the middle of the night in the desert, but gradually found himself, and in this sense the motives become more and more clear in the same way.

Example 5. Shab, mm. 47-48

Musical score for Violin, Violoncello, and Piano, measures 47-48. The score is in 7/8 time. The Violin part starts with a half note G4 (marked *ff*) and a half note B4 (marked *b*). The Violoncello part starts with a half note G3 (marked *f*) and a half note B3. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with chords and arpeggios, starting with a half note G2 (marked *sfz p*) and ending with a half note B2 (marked *mf*). A dynamic hairpin connects the *sfz p* and *mf* markings.

Musical score for Violin, Violoncello, and Piano, measures 47-48. The score is in 7/8 time. The Violin part starts with a half note G4 (marked *2*) and a half note B4 (marked *b*). The Violoncello part starts with a half note G3 and a half note B3. The Piano part features a complex accompaniment with chords and arpeggios, starting with a half note G2 (marked *sfz p*) and ending with a half note B2 (marked *mf*). A dynamic hairpin connects the *sfz p* and *mf* markings.

There is an important arrival on the note Bb in m. 84. The importance of it is not simply due to it being placed after a long fermata, but because this is the note that was once introduced in m. 4 in the piano part and was abandoned for a while in the melodic progression. It is almost as the composer was reaching for this arrival point the entire time. The other factor that establishes the significant arrival is the Bb is doubled in the piano and written against an A in the cello. As shown in previous examples of *Night and Fog* and *One Day; Tehran*, Aminikia frequently uses semitones in the beginning, and ending of the phrases the same way that Classical period composers show these moments of arrivals by leading the phrase from tonic to dominant and vice versa. The semitone with the low Bb in the violin and the *mp* dynamic marking is the quietest voice used by Aminikia so far in this piece. This suppression representing his own weak voice that is suddenly interrupted by the loud *sfz* chords in the violin that are describing gunshots. The long notes in both violin and cello in mm. 85-130 should be sustained and played very legato, hiding the bow changes to paint a picture of perseverance despite the interruption by the external interruptions.

Another dovetailing begins in m. 117; the cello provides the transitioning material while the piano and violin are still continuing with the previous materials. In this dovetailing, Aminikia uses the beat transposition technique in which he delays the motive by an eighth note, and it creates syncopation. This transition takes us to the last return of the melody shown in example 2 with the difference that this time the melody is played as double-stops in the strings with the addition of A and D as pedal tones. The “Night” ends with major seventh and diminished 5<sup>th</sup> intervals.

## II. Meh (Fog)

The second part of the trio is quite chromatic and is based on different motives than the ones discussed in the first part, however, the pitch centricity on Bb actively continues throughout

the piece. On top of the cluster chords in the piano, there are two sets of ideas; the recitation on the Bb that is dynamically soft and monotonous like a prayer, and the melody that is based on semitones, which is more present. Aminikia is telling his story of that night in the fog by the use of cluster chords in the beginning and shows that everything is muffled, and unclear. But moving forward through the piece, there is more clarity in both harmonic and melodic language in his composition.

As shown in example 6, the “scream” in the first section come back with a shorter rhythmic value on the accented note and semitone intervals. A story is being told through the transformation of this motive, the screams in the first sections are for survival at the moment, and the screams in the second section are reminiscing on what has happened.

Example 6. Meh, mm. 205-206

The musical score for Example 6, Meh, mm. 205-206, is presented in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves: Violin, Violoncello, and Piano. The Violin and Violoncello parts begin with a triplet of eighth notes (Bb, Bb, Bb) marked *f*<sup>3</sup>, followed by a long note. The Piano part features a melody of eighth notes marked *mf* and a large cluster chord at the bottom marked *fff*.

Aminikia describes the theme in the “Fog” section of “Night and Fog” as follows:

The theme (typical of my work) represent the idea of hope (light) coming out of darkness so starting with the pedal repetitive figure coming out of darkness and lack of hope and

gradually (almost stepwise) moving towards brightness and light. This represent of the fact that in the heart of any darkness, there's a lesson to be learnt and to be perceived. And that is exactly what happened to me. At the end of the day, I realized my homeland might not be the country that I want to return to, but the fire of hope can be lit anywhere in the world and not necessary where I grew up.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "Shab O Meh," e-mail to Sahba Aminikia, January 18, 2019.

## CHAPTER 5. INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Sahba Aminikia

Interviewer: Sinella Aghasi Moshabad

Date: 10/08/2017 at 2:00 PM

The interview was recorded over Skype with Mr. Aminikia's permission. Both interviewer and interviewee were at their residence.<sup>57</sup>

Q: Please tell me about yourself, Sahba.

A: My name is Sahba Aminikia. I am an Iranian-American composer, 36 years old and currently living in San Francisco. I came to the States as a refugee and finished my studies at the Conservatory of Music and have been working and living here for the last 11 years. Before that, I studied for a year and a half at St. Petersburg Russia, I moved to Turkey, and then immigrated to the United States.

Q: When did you leave Iran?

A: In 2005, I went to Turkey to file my immigration case to come to the states. I introduced myself to the UN as a refugee and had to stay there for a while until my case was processed.

Q: What is the main reason that made you immigrate?

A: My parents are followers of Baha'i faith, and I am also registered as a Baha'i myself. The main concern of my generation in Iran was the fact that we grew up in a very globalized world in the '80s and '90s. We were not carrying our religious beliefs necessarily, but since we were warning to those families affiliated to our parents, we were automatically deprived of certain rights including the right to education. Although the Baha'i community did not encourage immigration, I came here, and finished my higher studies because it was essential to gain a wider perspective of the world.

Q: What was the highest degree that you completed in Iran 2005?

A: I finished my high school and then went to the Baha'i university (BIHE) for two years. There was a music program back then similar to an associate's degree, so I finished that, and at the time I was also studying with Dr. Mehran Rohani who had a significant impact on my life, and he was like a sanctuary I found in Tehran. He introduced me to literature and music, and he gave me a lot of composition lessons, which was even new to him. He is a fantastic teacher and a composer and also a Baha'i himself. He was fired from the university because of his beliefs and suffered so much in Iran back then. He moved to Iran when the revolution happened, so he was the first generation who was banned from the universities. Dr. Rohani was the teacher of many current musicians in

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<sup>57</sup> Please see the Appendix for the permission letter.

Iran even the ones who are very well known. He used to teach harmony, counterpoint, and analysis classes at his home, and that is how he earned his living. He is still living in Iran, going back and forth between Iran and UK. I moved here because of my higher studies and education. My family is still back in Iran.

Q: Can you tell me about BIHE?

A: They have a website, and they have a campaign behind them called " Education is not a Crime." It is about Baha'i students in Iran who are deprived of studying; there are also many non-Baha'i students who are being deprived of studies as well. This is basically how the Iranian government tries to suppress any freethinking, and free speech; this does not certainly limit to Baha'is, the scope is much broader than that. Sometimes excellent, and hardworking students get deprived or fired from the university for loose reasons. This is a tool for the government to spread some fear, it is really hard to describe it and put it in words, but it somehow pertains to the political system of Soviet Union and those dictatorships, so it is sometimes irrelevant even in today's Iran that something like that is happening.

Q: Who is your favorite Iranian composer?

A: I can name two that I was highly inspired by Mr. Hossein Alizadeh who is an icon of setar and a great composer. I was very much inspired by Reza Vali when I heard his music, especially his folk music back in Iran. Also, one of my favorite Russian composers, Shostakovich, now there are three. The reason I moved to Russia was that there were six of his students who were still teaching at the conservatory at that time, and I wanted to study with one of them. I ended up studying with Mr. Boris Ivanovich for a year.

Q: What is your favorite piece? And Why is that?

A: I grew up in a situation... let me give you an intro about it. I grew up in Iran, and in Iran, any product, any cultural product coming from the Western world was hard to find, like a gem, so most of these products were smuggled in the country. People that we used to buy from were these really sketchy people on the street who would whisper into your ear that they are selling, for example, Michael Jackson, ACDC, Queen, or something like that. They would also sell the posters and playing cards because it was considered part of the gambling culture that was banned in Iran. Later on, certain shops in Tehran sold music, and I had to find music from a large pool of CDs put in front of me like rock, classical, and jazz music. At that time, I did not understand the exact meaning of genre in the real sense. I was continually consuming cultural products, which were very diverse coming from Queen, Pink Floyd, and Stravinsky. I always consumed in the same manner, and I still think of them as a phenomenon. Any kind of music can be excellent or terrible. But I think my favorite composition that inspired me to go to Russia is Shostakovich 8<sup>th</sup> quartet. I was amazed just by the fact that how classical music specifically modern music can be expressive, and that was the best part that I enjoyed. Because nowadays in some parts of Europe, you will feel that music is divided into two ways; one is classical literature like Mozart, Beethoven, 16<sup>th</sup> century music, and the other one is the music which is not really accessible or digestible by all, but by a few who are from the

academic world. I was confused that why that kind of music is coming from the literature usually pertains to the public and everyone can hear and enjoy it, but at the same time, we have academic music that is being written right now that does not reflect the emotions or feelings of the people who are writing it. It is always about finding somewhere in the middle that is digestible and creating a form of music or art that is digestible by the public and anyone from a five years old child can understand it, and at the same time, it has its artistic values, and artistic integrity. That is why I was so amazed by this quartet because it is so beautifully written; so organized, symmetrical, and in many ways so simple, but it is incredibly expressive. It talks about the emotions of a 20<sup>th</sup>-century person, so it was really interesting.

Q: What is your favorite composition?

A: I like a lot of my compositions (laughs) because they pertain to a certain point in my life, my own story in life that is not necessarily linked to myself, and it is somehow connected historically to people that I respect. For example, the carpet piece back in 2014 called *Tar o Pood* (Warp and Weft) was inspired by the time I traveled through Iran to different cities and encountered these amazing artists in Esfahan, Yazd, and Tehran who were dedicated to the art of carpeting, so I have a large pool of memories that came with that story. Another one of my pieces that I like, and I am proud of it is *Sooge Sohrab* (Tragedy of Soharb). This is a piece I wrote for the Living Earth show, which is a San Francisco based Duo. It portrays the story of Rostam and Sohrab in Shahnameh, but at the same time it relates to the recent political events, especially after 2009 in Iran where there were post-presidential events, the riots, and how so many people were killed, injured, and tortured. I was in Iran at the time, and I wrote the piece after my own arrest, so it was an actual exorcism. I wanted to write this piece, and my friends were very generous and willing to play it.

Q: Were you involved in the green movement?

A: I was in Iran; when I was studying here, I almost used to go back to Iran twice a year, and I was there in the summer of 2009 right before the election. I did this entire process for three months, and I went to the streets, I participated in a couple of gatherings, and witnessed one of the most massive protests in Iran that happened back then in June. I think it happened when 2-3 million people marched from the Imam Hossein Square to the Azadi Square (Freedom Square). It was a silent protest; 3 million people walking on the street like a gigantic portion of people and not talking a word, so it was a very striking move. And then, when I went back again in 2011 after an interview I did with the Voice of America, I was arrested by the security forces and was taken to the desert and intimidated, and they asked me not to come back to Iran. I was told to leave within 48 hours and do not come back. So that is what I did, and I have been here ever since.

Q: Can you tell me about the process of your composition?

A: The process of my composition is very intuition-based and melody based. I feel that I improvise a line when I play the piano. Since I was nine, I have been playing the piano; I improvise. I firmly believe in my belief system that music somehow should reflect some melodic notion and melody is the source of music. I think if music is disconnected from

that source everything else is just technique and does not have that kind of an effect on the audience. I come from a culture that is all about melodies, stories, improvisation for several hours, and creating all sort of variations of the same melody, so I see music that way. I usually come up with melodies and improvise, and that is how it begins. My music is very visual because the film score composers Bernard Hermann, and Alfred Hitchcock have influenced me. I love the idea of portraying an inner layer of psychic in the music, creating meaning, creating a narration, and a story out of that.

Q: Do you describe your music as programmatic?

A: Programmatic, no, I do not actually. I describe it as melody-based music; I think my music is precisely the opposite of programmatic. I mean the programmatic music I used to hear, or what is defined as programmatic music in literature is usually portraying the exact literal definition of what is being told in the story. Great examples of that in literature is music by Korsakov; it is similar to the film scoring as you see in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century how everything is scored wall to wall and is overwhelming and is meant to amplify the emotions. But I believe in storytelling, I see that very different. I see that storytelling should be the basis of any piece of music no matter if it is programmatic or not. I believe in exploring a wide array of emotions in one piece, and that creates a sense of catharsis or completion like when people are guided through a maze and go through different feelings, and then settle, that is when people come out of it happy and satisfied.

Q: What makes your music distinctive?

A: That is a tough question for me to answer. I feel any piece of music is distinctive because it has the concept of personality, and individualism in music. I think there is something wrong with the system of music we serve to the audience today. Music should be individualistic and should be reflective of one's emotions, feelings, stories, and also the time they are living. You can see that in every piece of music that has remained from 500 years ago, you know that it certainly pertains and is linked to something more significant than the human being. I believe that is the dilemma of all artists to create something permanent and immortal. When you take a look at what is being immortal from the last 500- 600 years, it is always linked to a greater truth, and that can be very much found in the literature, mythology, and religion. Anything that has survived for so many years, and the music that is inspired by it creates a sense of nothingness like being out of your own body, that is what speaks to people and makes your music popular after 600 years.

Q: Have you tried to simulate a sound of a Persian instrument in any of your compositions?

A: That is something I have never tried. Even when I am arranging a piece, I believe I am portraying an image or an impression of some feeling that can be translatable to any culture. If I try to emulate the sound of setar, I try to imitate the instrument. Then, I try to change the tuning, that is specific. Anything that is specific is entering the area of danger where it might not be digestible by everyone. So I feel that human emotions are more than that. They can travel through culture, religion, and the essence of humanity. I think when that gets portrayed out of the culture is more permanent. For example, we can

spend the time to introduce Persian culture to the West the same way that it is being done recently. However, the product that I have seen as a result of that type of thinking often creates a sense of isolation, and a sense of admiration for another culture, instead of providing a space for being part of the global perception that exists in the world today. A Persian instrument should be introduced to the world. Persian instruments are folk instruments because they are geographically limited to that area. But Persian music has a different concept in a way that it is less about the details of the culture, and more about human truth, human decency, and human values. For example, the energy that exists in Torkaman music can be conveyed, but the actual sound cannot because each person hears it very differently. So, the question arises, which Persian music are you talking about? (laughs) That is always my question because everyone digests music differently. The way I hear it is a mixture of the energy of Miles Davis's performance, or Queen singing. So if I can create something out of that which makes sense to me, then that is Persian, because I am Persian.

Q: You identify as an Iranian-American composer, what are the main aspects that shaped your identity?

A: I was born and raised in Iran, so that has a huge impact on my life. I moved here when I was 25 years old relatively late as people think of it. Also, at the same time, I was born in a minority in Iran, a minority that has specific views for their own reasons. I would feel that the Baha'i community is more of a globalist religion. I was born and raised in that culture, and that had a massive effect on my mind; not defining and identifying everyone by their religion. Although it does not have that effect on the majority of that community in Iran because they are so isolated. When I moved here, I was introduced to the humanities, art, and literature. I took a lot of humanities courses back in the conservatory. My mentor was Dr. Holman who had a significant impact on my life, so I went through a lot of mythology and Shakespearean poetry. He tried to teach me about the details that exist in every culture. These details can create a sense of nationalism in specific areas of the world, but once they get extreme, it leads to racism. In my opinion, also emphasizing the real essence of Persian music or calling it Persian or non-Persian because it sounds in a specific way can eventually lead to a system in which no one will be able to create anything new because they are always afraid of falling into these labels, I think this is the case in Iran itself. I believe living in the States, and being exposed to the American higher education system, which I truly value because it is very humanistic has opened a new horizon for me to look at this differently. I feel that a sense of globalism mixed with my immigration to the US and being part of the culture that already exists in the States, which is very diverse have affected my mind, and the way I view my own culture. I try to translate that feeling, be able to send a good message, and show it to the world. It is just the fact that all these 30 years of isolation especially for people who were born after the revolution has created a sense of isolation from the world, and has made people protective of their own culture almost in the sense of inferiority as if they feel that they have to constantly prove themselves as a cultured nation and prove what they have contributed to the world. But everyone has added something to the world, and we can all be part of it if we want to have a fair share.

Q: You mentioned already a few names that you inspired you; Pink Floyd, Miles Davis, and Shostakovich. What are you other source of inspiration in your compositions?

A: Stravinsky! I loved the storytelling in Pink Floyd. I played the Beatles while growing up; I almost played all of their songs on the piano because we used to have a band in Iran. Miles Davis was another inspiration. Hossein Alizadeh, and Mohammadreza Shajaryian were great influences. I am also very much inspired by cinema; movies and my favorite has always been Hitchcock. From Iran, Mr. Bahram Beizaie is an incredible dramatist. I do not feel that my entire inspiration comes from music, but it comes from different sources, such as films.

Q: You are not registered as a Baha'i yourself, is there anything from your religion that has led you to your compositions?

A: Of course, it had. At first, you heard my personal story being raised as a minority that is persecuted in Iran, which created certain types of people like my parents who I grew up with them. Every child I was growing up with lost their dad through execution or at the beginning of the revolution, so I would say there was a huge sense of dramaticism, romanticism, and massive, gigantic cultural martyrdom in the Baha'i community. Back then, most of these people were executed because of their faith and were called martyrs. The Baha'i community has a very pacifist type of culture, but at the same time, they are "lamb of God" kind of culture that see themselves being sacrificed for the fruits of their faith to blossom. That had a significant impact on my life. I practiced being a Baha'i up to a certain age, and then I stopped communicating with them because I felt that like any other religion or any ideology, the good work starts first, and when it is institutionalized in a certain culture of administration that essence is gone. I think that is true about anything you can imagine in the world when you look at everything that started; Islam, Christianity always make sense in the historical context of the time, but when you see that as an enterprise everything changes. The Baha'i community that is a huge advocate of globalism has always fought for globalism, and humanitarian causes, but you do not see them involved in any humanitarian causes nowadays. So, if you get a survey of all their activities, they are based on their own existence, and their own administrative service, which is fantastic, but it excludes other religion which is not going to be very effective I think. So that is why I feel that I am fortunate that I was born in that situation because I did not grow any specific feeling towards other people of other religions. I studied them all, but in my worldview arts and music are far further from religion; more valuable, more precious, and more innocent. For example, I get approached by the Baha'i community all the time to do all sort of work for them. I do work for many other communities, but I do not feel that music in a context of religion in this day and age has any effect because the world is so polarized right now that anything can trigger a sense of sensitivity, so we have to just look for similarities and for what affects all of us without making someone misunderstood that this is another battle between them and all the other people, and it is part of the political culture. In short, the answer is yes and no!

Q: How did the revolution affect you and if it did not happen where would you see yourself?

A: If it did not happen wow! It is really hard to say because it did happen, and that society was ready for it to happen. I do not see it as a good or a bad thing; it is the outcome of several hundred years of tyranny humiliation, and colonialism that led into the existence of such a government. I do not feel that people go for any extreme move against their own government unless their emotions are being dismissed and ignored in

their country, or society. So even about what is happening between Iran and the US right now, I think both sides should hear each other more often. I feel I am lucky that I lived in that situation, I am the oldest of the millennials because I was born in 1981, and when I look at the people who were born after me, I notice they did not experience a certain drama and history, they heard about it, but sometimes it is hard to feel it inside of yourself and create a complete story out of it. I think my generation in Iran got what they deserved; in a way, that story was completed. We were born after the Islamic Revolution, and we were promised to be the children of the revolution and be faithful to it. That plan entirely failed; the way they responded to us was through the 2009 elections in Iran; when people were tortured, killed, and arrested. I know a more comfortable life would be more appealing, but at the same time, I am very grateful to be part of that kind of a story of a nation because that will affect me for the rest of my life.

Q: You use pre-recorded files in your compositions, can you tell me more about that and also about your collaboration with artists in Iran and Afghanistan?

A: I started using pre-recorded media with my first commission with the Quartet that was premiered in 2010. I was in Iran, in the summer before 2009, and I was recording a lot of sounds while being in these protests and many other rituals. The sounds were very interesting to me because the type of sound that you hear in San Francisco, whether it is coming from a bus, people talking, or just a sonic atmosphere is very different from what you hear in Iran; the way you wake up and respond to that very distinctively is as if it stimulates the nostalgic part of your brain. As a sign of protest, people would go on the rooftops, and they would shout Allah o Akbar. I was hearing all these people from different sides chanting on the rooftops, so I brought four different mics to capture that. I came back to the States right after my father passed away in Iran. I had all these sounds, and I showed them to David, and he also was very interested in doing something. So I portrayed this entire trip of mine when I traveled from the States to Iran; and because of my father's funeral I was hearing all these sounds again all around me that people were chanting and the protest was going on, so it was a surreal experience like you are apocalyptic. So I started doing that, and then the projects with women came up, and we started collaborating with many women in Iran. The first project was in 2014, Only Sound Remains, and used a lot of voice clips from these women singers in Iran who are still deprived of singing, since it is not allowed for women to sing as a solo singer in front of the public, or a male audience. So these women were all recording these sounds inside of their homes, on their cell phones and would send it to us at a certain metronome. It was all about the sonic experience; capturing the moment that someone is just singing to a cell phone in a tiny room in Iran and then people will hear it like a national song in a warehouse. It is effective that people share that kind of experience with you from across the ocean. So I think that technology has dramatically improved our lives in that sense aside from cons that people are concerned about, and it has also made us connected to people who are outside, I mean in the '80s or '90s, we were not able to communicate with the people outside this easily. So now I can just install the telegram app and start chatting with my singer in Iran who is at my age and is deprived of all the rights that I have here. It is very easy and appealing for us and them to share that experience, so why not continue that into a method of working because I think some people who are deprived or generally marginalized have a very interesting voice, whether it is in their instruments,

voice, or their poetry. I believe that their voice carries a sense of struggle, which is the essence of love in a sense, and that is what makes it very special; in my opinion, music combined with love creates a masterpiece.

Q: What are the techniques that you use to create the Middle Eastern feeling, do you think about that?

A: Just the fact that my music is melody based, anything that comes out of me is somehow melodic. I think my main struggle is actually to be less melodic because melody by itself is free, and improvisatory and cannot be boring, so I guess because of the fact that I am constantly trying to create melodies anything that comes out of that even if it is four quarter notes represents my culture to a scale because I was born and raised there, and growing up, and simply waking up every morning to the call of prayer, hearing the music on the radio, the language, and the poetry all inspired me. The words and music are inseparable; I think their sources come from one another, so they are like a cycle. I feel I do not try to be anything in that sense, I have seen the history of that culture in Iran, and how a Persian melody is perfectly harmonized in a Mozartian harmony and it is great. It is an experience, but I sometimes feel it is as if you are patching something and you are creating a Frankenstein with every limb coming out of a different human being because at the same time it reminds you of Stravinsky and then there is a part that is definitely from Shostakovich, another part is from Persian melody coming from Shoor, or a Dastgah! I feel that this type of combination and trying to create a structure does not work unless it is coming genuinely from the composer's voice and what he hears; I think we should be more honest to ourselves.

Q: You have won numerous awards and critics love your music. How do you feel about non-Iranians' perception of your music?

A: I am very humbled to understand that my music has been called accessible, I love that expression. The people who commissioned me to write music wanted the music for the audience. When they ask me to make music, they are thinking of an enjoyable experience for the audience, and I here I am just repeating David Haifetz words but I think they are very wise: "I think music is a perfect combination, very equal combination between composer, performer, and the audience, and none of them matters more than the other." So I do not understand when people or composers think of music as something that needs to be fed to the audience and need to be educated; I feel that even in good education there is a sense of storytelling.

Q: How do you see classical music in Iran?

A: Classical music is the same in Iran; It has changed a lot, and I have not been there for the last few years. At the beginning of the revolution, when I was growing up, the only source of Classical music were revolutionary chants and songs which were performed by the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, and that was the only way that the performance was justified. So there were all these revolutionary songs, full of emotion. I did not care about the text because the effect of the orchestra was so crazy and unimaginable with the full choir. I was one of the luckiest that when I was growing up and graduated from the high school, the internet was there, and we were introduced to the idea of creating our own

home studios. I had a home studio in Iran, and I produced three albums for the Baha'i community out of my own home. Sometimes we were being budged and monitored because a cultural thing is always a sensitive thing, any kind of cultural product that you try to create in any totalitarian society is considered the main danger for them. So, we did a lot of experimentations like that at home; recording track on track, and then got introduced to all this pool of performers in Iran, for example, one oboe player would come to my place and record, and that is how I got to know the instruments. I have never been a classical geek, to be honest with you. I just do not understand when people say we only listen to anything besides classical music. I enjoy every kind of music. I see music as an experience, and I think that is the way that it should be looked at, then, it would have some sort of storytelling.

Q: What are the names of your three albums?

A: The first one is "Tabare Asheghan" which I collaborated with Mr. William Nayeri who is a musician in Iran. We both had home studios, so we both produced this album. The other one was called "Narbone," which I did with Sahba Motallebi, and Arman Habibi. The main producer was actually in Dubai, but the album was available everywhere. However, no one knows that I worked on that album. I wrote a lot of songs, and I had my own band. There was another song called "yadete gofti goftam," which is based on some poetry about jail and prisoners back in those days when Baha'is were being jailed in Iran. I worked on a lot of musical projects, and I served in the administration of the organization.

Q: What are your future plans?

A: Whenever I try to plan to do something, it gets demolished by some unexpected projects, but we are always two years ahead of creating different projects. We have gradually built a community of artists and musicians here, which consist of chorus quartet, San Francisco Girls Chorus, and Living Earth Show. All these ensembles are somehow connected and a part of the family here. We are constantly developing plans and programs for the next years. San Francisco's culture is very entrepreneurship that is very appealing and is a way of life here that also pertains to music. We have a small community here, but we are able to find our music, and we are able to have first grade performers. Having performed at many venues, I do not think anything else I want in my life at this point besides just creating. My primary goal is to create a lot of stories and musical experiences out of Persian stories, specifically coming from Iranian culture. My main motivation has been mostly the second-generation Iranians who are born and raised here. I feel their culture gives them a sense of value in today's world, and I think most of fanaticism today comes from the second generation. This generation of the Middle Eastern people actually come to the fact that they cannot find their own identity and values in the new culture and are not able to combine that because the parents were so different. I feel that they are a part of the globalized culture, so my goal is to create as many stories as I can for them, and for the people of the world.

Q: Where do you consider home?

A: Honestly anywhere I can serve humanity, and I can be useful. If I am in Iran, I am the closest to the most nostalgic things in my life, but if I am not able to work as a composer, and as a musician then that is not a satisfying life. Right now, San Francisco is my home, I find meaning in the liberalism of America and being able to create what I consider my own idea, and that is part of the American culture; the idealism and the liberalism that I greatly enjoy and I am affected by it.

Interviewer: You brought out some excellent points. Thank you for your time, I truly appreciate it.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Sahba Aminikia is an Iranian-American composer who overcame unique struggles in his home country. Being born and raised in a family with Baha'i faith, Aminikia was deprived of furthering his college studies. He was born after the Islamic Revolution in 1979; therefore, he grew up at a time in which the government was suppressing the music industry, and many limitations were prohibiting musicians from furthering their career and studies. All these challenges led to Aminikia's immigration, first to Russia, and finally to the United States. In his last visit to Iran, during the Green Movement, he was arrested, threatened, and beaten, left in a desert, and was told to leave Iran and never go back. History, politics, and religion played a significant role in shaping Aminikia's identity and his musical output.

The Green Movement, and Aminikia's arrest led to the creation of two independent works; *One Day; Tehran*, and *Night and Fog*. Aminikia attempts to tell stories through his music. In my research, I did a motivic analysis for both of the pieces to show how the motives unfold and develop throughout the pieces underlying a storyline.

Aminikia's compositions do not follow traditional harmonies. Instead, he uses pitch centricity, and that puts his compositions in the post-tonal realm. He uses extended techniques like artificial harmonies in the strings and false notes in the piano. The two prominent common features in his compositions are cadences on a minor second, and unconventional voice leading. At times, Aminikia puts the lower sounding instrument, such as viola and a cello in a higher register than the violin to create specific effects. The other common characteristic of these two compositions is that he positions hopeful melodies at the end of these dark narrative works to leave the listeners with some hope. While the structure of these works holds many contrasts, the melodies at the end of both works are meant to describe the idea of hope and light in Aminikia's compositions.

The purpose of my research is to familiarize the reader with the unique life, and personal experiences of Aminikia that were the sources of inspiration for the two mentioned pieces. While the compositions fall into the Western Classical music genres, they have been greatly inspired by the Persian culture and music. In my research, I showed how Aminikia faced his challenges, and ultimately created these masterpieces. He has broadened the synthesis of Iranian and American art music and has created a bridge between the East and West through these compositions. I hope that these notes may lend a degree of information to future interpreters of Aminikia's music and his music will be recognized and appreciated by more and more audiences. It is truly a strong contribution to the genre of chamber music from Iran, and is a direct reflection of the culture, and this man's relationship to his country.

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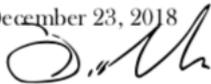
## APPENDIX: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION FROM THE COMPOSER

Sahba Aminikia  
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1250 20<sup>th</sup> Ave Apt.5  
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To whom it may concern,

Hereby I grant Sinella Aghasi Moshabad the permission to use or incorporate snippets of the scores for my works, "One Day; Tehran" and "Night and Fog" into her doctoral dissertation. For any questions please contact me at [sahba@sahbakia.com](mailto:sahba@sahbakia.com).

Thanks,  
Sahba Aminikia  
December 23, 2018



I also grant Sinella Aghasi Moshabad the permission to use any part of an interview given to her by me on 10/08/2017.

Sahba Aminikia  


## VITA

Sinella Aghasi Moshabad was born and raised in Tehran, Iran where she attended the Music School. In 2010, Sinella immigrated to the United States, Sinella graduated with the honor of Magna Cum Laude from California State University with her bachelor's degree in Music Education and Violin Performance, and her master's degree in Violin Performance from San Francisco State University. Sinella is a Doctor of Musical Arts Candidate at Louisiana State University with an emphasis on Violin Performance and Arts Administration.

As an Active performer, Sinella plays with the Baton Rouge Symphony, Acadiana Symphony, Rapides Symphony, and Townsend Opera Orchestra. As a Music Educator, she has worked as a Teaching Artist at San Francisco Symphony Orchestra's Education Department and served as the Assistant Conductor of the Modesto Youth Symphony Orchestra. Sinella is currently teaching an undergraduate course at LSU as well as Teaching at Kid's Orchestra.

Sinella plans to pursue teaching opportunities at the collegiate level as well as working with non-profit organizations as an Arts Administrator to make the arts accessible for all in her community.