

Kurdish Music

songs of the stateless



The Kamkars

Eva Skalla/Global Heritage

An ethnic and historical entity since the seventh century BC, and a territory as large as France, Kurdistan was in 1923 divided up amongst its neighbours – Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Soviet Republic of Armenia. Ever since, the Kurds have become all too familiar with the techniques states can deploy to suppress language and culture to make a people disappear. Now, at least in one part of the Kurdish nation, the Kurdistan of Iraq, a new hope is emerging, with the end of the Saddam era allowing a powerful flowering of Kurdish culture. **Eva Skalla** and **Parwez Zabihi** listen to the sounds that give a voice to the Kurdish people.

Music is integral to Kurdish identity – and there are few places on earth where it has more meaning, as an assertion and expression of a culture.

Historically, too, music has a central role in Kurdish society. In this land of mountains and high plateaux, lying between the Black Sea, the Iranian Plateau and the steppes of Mesopotamia, music has for centuries been the means of oral transmission of chronicles, epics and lyrical poetry. In a non-country, whose language and literature are suppressed, everything is sung and put to music to be committed to memory, and so passed down.

The music sings of the joy and sorrow of everyday life, gives rhythm to the labour of the field, magnifies mystic and erotic rapture, and helps the listener to relive the wars and insurrections that still punctuate the life of the Kurds. The Kurdish prince Salahaddin – the Saladin of the Crusades – is one of the principal heroes whose exploits feature in **epic songs**, though other sung events date back to the time of Alexander the Great, and seem scarcely less current than those describing the Gulf War. The epic song is a constant call to battle and a glorified, nostalgic reminder of the past, arming its listeners against the harsh realities of modern life, and defending their beliefs and identity. Even today when a *peshmerga* (Kurdish freedom fighter) dies in the hills, his comrades sing and dance, long into the night, to express their grief and say their farewells.

Bards, Minstrels and Songs

Traditionally Kurdish folklore is transmitted by **dengbej** (bards), **stranbej** (minstrels) and **chirokbej** (storytellers), usually from families of musicians. The feudal structure of society, however, in which every feudal lord would have his *dengbej* and would compete with fellow lords for the best, has changed greatly in the past century. The systematic destruction of Kurdish villages by the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian governments has resulted in a considerable movement to the towns and cities where a different kind of music scene has evolved. Nonetheless, the majority of Kurds are still rural people, and some are still nomads.

In Kurdistan there is a strong tradition of singing about unhappy, unrequited love, and unusually it is the women who compose and sing these **songs of love**, at least within their own village or valley, before the wandering minstrels – men – take them up and perform them on their travels. The reper-

toire of these roaming *stranbej* also includes **erotic poetry**, which is passionate and direct despite the Islamic culture. These singers are judged by their creativity, the beauty of their poetry and their ability to stir emotions.

There is also a strong body of **work songs**, used to accompany wool spinning and rug weaving, the threshing, winnowing and herding that are part of agricultural life, or the shearing of sheep and the birth of lambs that punctuate nomadic life. In addition, music is central to **weddings, births, funerals and feasts**. At all such events, young and old dance for hours – men and women together in long lines, arms linked. There are hundreds of different **dances** and they vary from region to region. The music is provided by village musicians who sing traditional or newly created songs, accompanied on the *zurna* (wooden shawm), *dhol* (drum) and *bloor* (flute).

A celebration of great importance to the Kurds is **Nawroz**, the New Year, held on March 21. Bonfires are lit in every village, picnics are eaten and everyone dances till dawn. The lighting of fires harks back to the pre-Islamic times and the Zoroastrian religion which, together with its forerunner, the ancient Yazidi religion, still survives amongst the Kurds. Yazidis are found both in Iraqi Kurdistan – around their sacred shrine of **Shekan Baazra** – and in Armenia, where there is relative freedom for Kurds. Their religious music, mostly sacred chants, survives, although few recordings are currently available. The Zoroastrian **chatta** (religious songs) are chants that were performed in the fire-temples of the Magi in praise of Zoroaster, and come from their holy book, the Avesta – thought by some to have been written originally in Orami, a dialect of Kurdish. They can still be recognized in the Houra, ancient and sacred songs from the Oraman area of Iranian Kurdistan.

There is religious music, too, among the various **dervish and Sufi cults** that proliferate amongst the mountain valleys; hypnotic and trance-inducing, its origins are ancient and pre-date Islam. As elsewhere, the **daf** (frame drum) and **shimshal** (*ney*, a long flute) are used by Kurdish Sufis as part of their ceremonies in order to induce trance.

Instruments and Rhythm

The **voice** takes the leading role in Kurdish music, with instruments secondary. Most Kurdish instruments are also found in the neighbouring musical traditions of Turkey and Armenia to the north, and Iran and Iraq to the south. The **balaban** (known as *duduk* in Armenia) and **bloor** are more common in the north and in the mountains, as are

the **doozela** (double reed flute) and the **shimshal** – both very much folk instruments. Amongst the stringed instruments the **tanbur** (*saz*) is more common in the north, whilst the **kamancheh** (spike fiddle), which is thought to originate from Kurdistan, is more of a southern instrument. The **oud** also features in the south as do the **santur** (zither) and **tar** (lute) in more urban sophisticated contexts.

While the content of Kurdish music and songs is very varied, the words are usually set to one of five different **rhythmic patterns**. One is based on a Zoroastrian *chatta* with either eight or ten syllables in each line. The other four styles are simply three verses with lines of eight syllables, or two verses with lines of seven, ten or twelve syllables. The form consisting of two verses with lines of ten syllables is the most frequently used. Songs which are based on these five rhythmic patterns are considered to constitute the most ancient and traditional part of the repertoire. The **melodic line** is simple, its range consisting of only three or four notes, which are repeated as the different verses are sung. The form of the songs is strophic – one identical line of poem and music recurs at the end of each stanza like a refrain.

Kurdish music is **modal**, with the mode, or *maqam*, known as *kurdi* throughout the Arab world being, as you might imagine, predominant. However, all the different types of modal schemes which are found in Persian traditional, classical and folk music also exist in Kurdish music in Iran; in fact, it has been suggested that Kurdish music is one of the foundations on which Persian classical music has been built. As so much has been made of the influence of surrounding nations on the culture of the Kurds, it is important to consider how much the influence has been the other way. Kurdish musicians, especially within the diaspora, emphasize the independence of Kurdish music from Persian or Arab music, whilst national authorities prefer to marginalize Kurdish music as being a local species of another nation's music.

Partition States

Since partition in the 1920s the culture of the Kurds has been seriously disrupted. Travel between the various Kurdish regions has been – and is – severely restricted, while mass media have helped to impose dominant national languages even in the farthest-flung villages. Music has undergone different changes in the different countries, though it has remained in clandestine

circulation between them through smuggled and copied cassettes. The arrival of satellite television and the Internet has radically improved the ability of Kurds to access their own music. In the autonomous region of Kurdistan of Iraq, three television stations and the satellite station Kurdsat (which is available worldwide) have made many music programmes featuring pop, traditional and classical music. Kurdish musicians from all over the world go as often as they can to perform in Howleer or Sulemaniyah. Even **İbrahim Tatlıses** from Turkey is planning to come to Iraqi Kurdistan to give his first Kurdish language concert.

Kurdistan of Turkey

Until recently, in **Turkey**, all songs in Kurdish were banned on pain of imprisonment, torture or death, both for musicians and listeners, though Kurdish musicians can now admit to being Kurdish. Throughout the last seventy years the Turks have been the most ruthless in their attempts to destroy all Kurdish culture. Many musicians have been imprisoned or killed or have fled into exile; others – such as the popular Arabesk singer **İbrahim Tatlıses** – have taken the easier path of singing in Turkish.

Despite the risks, Kurdish pirate radio stations have flourished, mostly run by partisans in the mountains, and a huge underground market for tapes of forbidden singers, passing from hand to hand and smuggled from one part of Kurdistan to another, has grown up. These days the music is increasingly likely to be downloaded from the Internet and listened to on an MP3 player. It is in this atmosphere of persecution that **Şivan Perwer**, the most famous and popular Kurdish singer today, came to the fore. Born in Urfa in Turkish Kurdistan, into a family of musicians, his earliest memories are of songs of loss and longing, always filled with the desire to live in a land free from persecution. From an early age his wish was to be the best *dengbej* and already as a child, composing his own songs, he was singled out for his remarkable voice.

Şivan rose to fame rapidly in 1972 at Ankara University, at the time of the Kurdish uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan. Cassette tapes made on the simplest equipment were smuggled into Iraq and Iran at great risk. Thousands were inspired by listening to his songs, thousands came to hear this charismatic and controversial figure with a breathtakingly beautiful voice sing live, always illegally and often at gatherings of *peshmerga* before they went into battle. In 1976 he had to escape Turkey and fled to Germany, where he continued recording.



Şivan Perwer

Şivan came to world notice when he took part in the Simple Truth concert at London's Wembley Stadium in 1991, an event he organized with Peter Gabriel and the Red Cross to raise funds for the Kurds in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

It is remarkable that Şivan should have such great popularity in all parts of Kurdistan and among the Kurdish diaspora as well as Azeris, Turks and Persians, given he is still banned from radio and television across the whole region, except in Iraq. Possession of one of his political cassettes can lead to a long prison sentence in Iran, and still only a few, of his cassettes (of traditional songs) are permitted for sale in Turkey.

Federal Kurdistan of Iraq

Before the emergence of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Kurdish musicians fared better than those in

Turkey or Iran. Urban Kurdish musicians were able to study music in Baghdad and perform on Baghdad or Kirkuk radio, and they were permitted to take a limited part in the cultural life of Iraq as long as there was no hint of anything political.

One of the great names of the century was the legendary **Ali Mardan** (1914–80) from Kirkuk, an urban musician, singer and composer whose music sometimes showed Arab influences (he played with Arab orchestras), but was much appreciated and played by his fellow Kurdish musicians. Other important musicians include the first two female Kurdish singers to be recorded and to work on Baghdad radio, **Ayse San** and **Miryem Xan**, and **Mohammed Arif Jesrawi**, another influential figure, whose music was taken up by Kurds not only in Iraq but also in Iran.

In time, simple recording facilities became available, although a government licence was necessary to make any recording. Getting this licence could take several months as the poetry was heavily scrutinized by the censors for any political references, and so a

highly symbolic language evolved: a flower or a beautiful girl would symbolize Kurdistan, the partridge the struggle for freedom. Many cassettes were recorded illegally on portable equipment and distributed clandestinely, with the result that numbers of musicians and poets were imprisoned or put to death for their defiance. **Karim Kaban** from Sulemaniyah was hanged, **Tasin Taha** was blown up, and **Tahir Tafiq** “vanished”.

In 1974, after a popular uprising that cost many thousands of lives, the Kurds managed to win a degree of autonomy. They were allowed to publish in their own language; the radio stations in Erbil, Sulemaniyah and Kirkuk played Kurdish music; schools, universities and music schools, teaching in Kurdish, were established; and there was a prolific output of cassettes. However, within just a few years the situation deteriorated. Kurds would not abandon the idea of independence, and when

one of the Kurdish political parties sided with the Iranians in the Iran–Iraq War, wooed by hopes of independence, the Kurds experienced the horror of chemical bombing. Thousands of villages were destroyed and their menfolk were “disappeared” by Saddam’s secret police.

With the establishment of the so-called ‘safe haven’ after the First Gulf War, the Kurds had more freedom, but in a climate of full economic sanctions and constant internal struggle and turmoil there were few funds for developing an infrastructure for recording. Since the overthrow of Saddam much has changed. The regional government has a confident new policy for the arts. The Ministry of Culture is building music institutes in Howleer and Sulemaniyah, and music festivals (including an international one) are being planned to take place as soon as things are calmer. In Sulemaniyah, there is a subsidized national orchestra and choir, led by conductor and composer **Karadahari**. The orchestra combines Western classical and Kurdish folk instruments.

Several music schools are flourishing, such as the Arts and Music college in Sulemaniyah, and at least two good-sized record companies are busy recording new work, attracting Kurdish artists from the diaspora such as **Naser Razazi** and even **The Kamkars** from Iran (see box).

Kurdistan of Iran

In Iran successive regimes have dealt harshly with any Kurdish attempts at politics, whilst allowing Kurdish-language newspapers and radio stations. Musicians have at times been imprisoned, as elsewhere, but there is a rich tradition in this region and some of the most sophisticated musicians have come from this part of Kurdistan.

A leading figure of recent decades has been **Hasan Kamkar**, who collected and arranged over four hundred songs from the villages, founded a school of Kurdish music in Sanandaj and trained many of the musicians, including his eight children, who have been in the forefront of the urban musical tradition. The Kamkars are unique. Keeping well clear of any political involvement, they have made a considerable name for themselves in the mainstream of Iranian music, playing and composing within both Iranian and Kurdish traditions. As a result of their influence it has become fashionable amongst Iranian musicians to discover long-lost Kurdish ancestors and to play Kurdish music as part of Persian music concerts.

The exceptional singer of Iranian classical music **Sharam Nazeri** is also Kurdish and frequently includes Kurdish material in his performances.

Other important figures include the singer-composer **Said Asghar Kurdistani**, who contributed much to Iranian classical music; the singer and poet **Abbas Kamandi**; and **Hassan Zirak**, an illiterate genius who composed over a thousand songs. Famous for his often erotic and sensual lyrics, straight out of the village tradition, Zirak travelled all over Kurdistan in the 1960s and 70s, and rare recordings of his, from various radio stations, have survived. **Hama Mamlê** and **Aziz Shahrokh** are also renowned for their remarkable voices. Mamlê died in 2004, but Aziz Shahrokh is still singing and is considered a living legend, performing his own music and also some of the songs of an earlier generation, in particular the music of Jesrawi. Other instrumentalists that are making a name for themselves are **Ali Akbar Moradi**, a virtuoso *tanbur* player, and **Kayhan Kalhor**, equally brilliant on the *kamancheh* (see Iran chapter).

Syrian and Armenian Kurdistan

Only in **Armenia** have the Kurds been free of the fear and restriction that pervades elsewhere, although their numbers are small. In Yerevan, there is a Kurdish faculty at the university where research has been done into Kurdish music, and there is a flourishing Kurdish radio station with a rich archive of recordings.

In **Syria**, the Kurds are an isolated and suppressed minority. However, musicians can now travel to Iraqi Kurdistan, where they find eager audiences.

The Diaspora

Faced with repression, war and destruction, over half a million Kurds were forced to flee their homelands in 1974 and 1991, and on a continuing basis. With the overthrow of Saddam, some Kurds from all regions are returning to a newly confident Kurdistan (of Iraq), from where the diaspora is now drawing new inspiration.

Large concentrations of course still remain in Germany, followed by Sweden, Britain, France, the US and Australia. Among the exiles there is a considerable musical community. At every major gathering of Kurds, whether for Nawroz, weddings or political events, musicians play and people dance their traditional dances. Audiences are eager to hear singers from all regions of Kurdistan.

In Paris, the **Kurdish Institute**, set up with the help of the Mitterands, does much to promote Kurdish culture. It has an archive of old record-

The Kamkars

The Kamkars are a family of seven brothers, a sister and now several sons and daughters, born in Sanandaj in Iranian Kurdistan and now living in Tehran. They are a formidable influence not only on Kurdish music but also on the music of Iran and the wider Kurdish community in Turkey and the Kurdistan of Iraq.

In 2004, they were the first group to be allowed to perform Kurdish music in full Kurdish costume in Istanbul and then in the city of Dyarbakar, where they played to rapturous audiences of many thousands, despite the ominous presence of tanks and Turkish soldiers in the background. Several of the brothers are talented composers. Hooshang, the eldest, is well known for his orchestral compositions, always drawing on Kurdish themes. Arsalan has written for film, for orchestra and for The Kamkars themselves, as have Ardeshir, Bijan and Pashang. Ardavan is probably the best *santur* player in Iran today, and is also a composer. His powerful, lyrical music breaks new ground technically and his *santur* can sound like a piano one moment, a percussion instrument the next. The Kamkars run a music school in Tehran which has 500 students.

In a recent interview, Hooshang was asked:

What is the situation of Kurdish music today and what has The Kamkars' influence been?

Before The Kamkars came onto the scene, Kurdish music was hardly known, even to the Kurdish people. There were no special groups and everything was very local, regional and amateur or semi-professional. There was the simple rural music and there was urban music, but little went outside of its community. Although very important to the Kurdish people, inseparable from their blood, it was undocumented, being passed on orally and so very susceptible to being marginalized or forgotten.

What The Kamkars have done is little by little make Kurdish music familiar to musicians, Kurds, even Iranians and foreigners. We have written it down and continue to do so. The Kamkars' music has developed in style and in influence to the point where now our style is dominant even in Persian music, and many classical Persian groups play Kurdish music as part of their repertoire and use the *daf*, which Bijan was responsible for introducing to Persian music.

Even in Iraqi Kurdistan several groups follow our style. An important feature we have introduced is teaching people to sit and listen to a concert. Before us, music was only played as a background to partying, eating, drinking and most importantly dancing. Now, even on TV programmes people are seen sitting on chairs and listening to music; music is taken seriously.

At last, the synthesizer, which has often been used to accompany a singer when musicians are not affordable, is being replaced by people learning to use original instruments again.

In Kurdistan [Iraq] institutes are being created, a new generation is beginning to be trained, music books are being translated into Kurdish and the situation is getting better all the time. We have been invited to found an institute in Howleer or Sulemaniyah, and when it is safe we hope to do that, as it will be well funded. There is a lot to do.

In Kurdistan [Iraq] we are attempting to influence musicians not to use Arabic melodies and not to be so influenced by Arabic music. Even in pop music I tell them to use Kurdish rhythms and atmospheres and melodies. Why use Spanish music or Madonna? Find Kurdish words and draw on your huge heritage.

Where are The Kamkars going now with their own music?

We continue to compose. Arsalan has two CDs out using Western techniques of composition with Kurdish rhythms and tunes played by an orchestra. Ardavan has a new CD, not yet released, based again on Kurdish themes.

Myself, I want to introduce some new techniques, developing Kurdish music into new realms. For instance, playing with words, rather like in Renaissance madrigals, dividing phrases up between different voices. Each voice singing in very different combinations. No longer just playing a song in the traditional way, repeating verses to one melody. The music is now getting complex. The techniques do not damage the underlying quality of the music, but they are new, they have not been heard in Iran either. The percussion instruments are used melodically. On our new CD *Hawra* (Chanting), initially released [by] Charchera, in Howleer, there is a piece "Halale Taniar" based on five different repeating phrases coming through, one by one. At one point, all five play with each other but do not disturb one another. Even the drum and all the voices originate from these five phrases. This is very new.

ings and has reissued many of these, as well as some new recordings. In **Sweden**, where several musicians have settled, there is a thriving musical community. It is here that young musicians have started to experiment, adding elements from Western pop, Western classical, jazz and Indian music to traditional Kurdish music.

Şivan's later records reflect these influences, as does the music of **Naser Razazi** and his wife **Marzia**, exiles from Iran who had a big following at Nawroz parties and gatherings. They recently returned to Iraqi Kurdistan, where Nazir is able to perform and to record with more musicians at his disposal than was ever possible in Sweden (Marzia died in 2005). **Najmeddin Ghulami** is another urban singer who has settled in Scandinavia. He has produced several recordings using traditional instruments, but also experiments with other formations and has recently introduced a synthesizer to his line-up.

Ciwan Haco, originally from Turkish Kurdistan, is now living in Norway, and playing with Norwegian musicians. He sings in Kurdish and, with some reference to Western rock music (such as Bruce Springsteen), draws his inspiration from the traditional music of northern Kurdistan (part of Turkey).

The relaxation of strictures in exile has led to the emergence of a generation of female singers, who in traditional Kurdish society would have been unable to make music a profession. **Gulestan**, Şivan's ex-wife, recorded and performed with him but is now making her own records of traditional and new songs accompanied on the *saz*. **Nilüfar Akbal**'s operatic training has influenced the way she performs, while Denmark-based **Nazé** mixes traditional instruments with synthesizer and guitar more successfully than most. **Aynur**, despite making it onto the cover of *fRoots* magazine, still suffers from a preoccupation with heavy reverb, any acoustic instruments on her recordings being lost in waves of processed percussion.

Other groups playing more traditional music include **The Razbar Ensemble** who play the trance music of the Ahl-e Haqq, and the **Living Fire Ensemble**, made up of musicians from all parts of the Kurdish diaspora. They play folk tunes and melodies from the different areas, in whose arrangements can be seen the influence of The Kamkars.

Many thanks to Hooshang Kamkar, Arsalan Kamkar, Parwez Zabihî, Şivan Perwer, Kendal Nizam, Ahmed Nejad, Newroz and Sheri Laiser for their help in preparing this piece.

DISCOGRAPHY Kurdish Music

A few recordings of Kurdish music (Şivan, The Kamkars, Moradi and the French anthologies) are now available from the megastores, but the majority can be found only at specialist outlets and from Kurdish organizations. Bahar Video in London (343 Green Lanes, N4 1BZ) is useful, while in Turkey SES Plak (WMC Blok No. 6410, Unkapani, Istanbul, Turkey; tel (90) 212 527 5261, fax (90) 212 513 5087) has an extensive selection of Kurdish pop music.

Kurdish music websites have proliferated in recent years and are an easy source of recordings as well as being an increasingly important access point for many Kurds. Most useful are www.kurdonline.com/music, which has links to many other Kurdish music sites offering downloads; www.kurdland.com/main/music, which allows you to listen to tracks by fifty popular artists; and www.beznez.com/kurdishmusic, which has links to many Kurdish artists' own websites.

☉ **De Soran a Hawraman: Songs from Kurdistan**

Al-Sur, France

Mostly traditional and folk music recorded in France by musicians from both Iran and Iraq, featuring the *kamancheh*, *tanbur*, *daf*, *ney* and *duduk*. Good notes in French and English.

☉ **Kurdish Music**

Auvidis/UNESCO, France

Field recordings made in Kurdish villages in Syria with instruments that include the *tanbur (saz)*, *zorna (shawm)*, *zil* (copper cymbals used by Kurdish nomads) and *tabalak* (clay kettledrums). Interesting notes in English.

☉ **Muzika Gelêri ya Hekariyê/Traditional Music of Hakkari**

Kalan, Turkey

This astonishing and emotionally powerful collection of music from Kurdish highlanders is a milestone in ethnographic recording in the region. It focuses on the indigenous vocal music of Hakkari, relatively untouched by urban instrumental styles. Sung by well-known local *dengbej* as well as anonymous tribesmen and women, this is the music of Kurdish everyday and social life, including weddings and religious celebrations. Accompanied by book-length liner notes in Turkish, Kurdish and English.

Nizamettin Ariç

Filmmaker, composer, painter and singer Ariç is an accomplished *saz* player, now resident in Germany. He has made several solo CDs, singing both traditional and original songs in the style of the *dengbej*, the storytelling bard.

⊙ Zine

SES Plak, Turkey

Ariç's powerful and emotional voice is a perfect match for the longing expressed in these haunting, beautiful songs, mostly accompanied on the *saz*. Includes music from the film *A Song for Beko*.

Ciwan Haco

A refugee from Turkey, Ciwan has settled in Norway and is one of the bright stars of contemporary Kurdish pop.

⊙ Dûrî-Carcira

SES Plak, Turkey

Ciwan's debut, featuring Kurdish and Norwegian musicians, was a big hit with the younger Kurdish audience.

⊙ Gula Sor

SES Plak, Turkey

A more recent recording – Ciwan plays *saz* with a return to roots music.

Kayhan Kalhor

Kurdish Iranian Kayhan Kalhor is the undisputed star of the *kamancheh*, an ancient Middle Eastern bowed lute, sometimes called the spike fiddle.

WITH ALI AKBAR MORADI

⊙ In the Mirror of the Sky

World Village, France

Beautifully balancing discipline and energy, love and anguish, this CD is a tasteful fusion of *kamancheh* and *tanbur*. Kalhor and Moradi tap into the pulse of their people, who long for a homeland to unify their many diverse cultural threads. At times, both players fire up, and a mesmerizing improvisation follows, intermingling spontaneity with the heavier messages of the *djamm* gatherings, devotional Kurdish Sufi ceremonies.

The Kamkars

The Kamkar family are certainly the most polished of Kurdish musicians. They are considered to be amongst the very best musicians in Iran today for both their classical Persian and Kurdish repertoires. Many of the group members play several instruments, as well as being gifted soloists and prolific composers. They are responsible for bringing Kurdish music into the mainstream in Iran.

★ Living Fire

Long Distance, France

This live recording, recorded in Paris, has a darker feel and perhaps more atmosphere and intensity than the well-known *Nightingale with a Broken Wing* (see Iran chapter).

Ardavan Kamkar

The youngest of the Kamkar brothers, Ardavan is considered the best *santur* player in Iran today. A prolific composer, he has taken the *santur* into new realms of expression and technical skill.

★ Over the Wind

Traditional Crossroads, US

All original compositions influenced by his Kurdish roots, this powerfully charged, lyrical and expressive CD released in 2001 is a fine example of his innovative playing and consummate talent.

Adnan Karim

Karim is one of a generation of musicians who developed their style in Iraqi Kurdistan but fled the oppression of the Iraqi government. He has settled in Sweden, but now returns to play and record in Iraqi Kurdistan.

⊙ The Longest Night

Stran Music, Sweden

Adnan is the singer and composer of most of the songs on this recording in the traditional style. It was made in Sulemaniyah (Iraqi Kurdistan) by the music group of the Kurdish Fine Arts Society and remixed in Sweden.

Hama Mamlê

From a traditional family of musicians in Iranian Kurdistan, Mamlê was renowned for his beautiful voice. He was deported by the Shah's regime and lived in Sweden until his death in 2004.

⊙ Zemane

Stran Music, Sweden

A collection of classic recordings on which he is accompanied by violin, flute, *santur*, tar, *oud* and *zarb* (*tombak* drum).

Ali Akbar Moradi

Steeped in the history, culture and religion of his native Kermanshah region, Moradi is a virtuoso of the *tanbur* (a long-necked, two-stringed plucked lute). A member of the Sufi Ahl-e Haqq (People of Truth), he plays at their *djamm*, ceremonies at which Sufis dance to music played on the *tanbur* (which they consider sacred) in order to enter a *trance*, a state of ecstasy, and achieve mystical revelation.

★ Iranian Kurdistan: The Ritual Maqam of the Yarsan

Näive, France

Moradi is probably the only person alive who knows and has mastered all 72 *maqams* (modal patterns) of the Kurdish *tanbur*. Although austere and unrelenting, this remarkable and beautiful 4-CD box set is full of musical depth and intensity, and provides a rare insight into the real music of Sufi mystics, rather than the various concert adaptations.

Simon Broughton



Kayhan Kalhor and Ali Akbar Moradi (right, with *tanbur*)

Nazé and Newroz

Young musicians Nazé and her husband Newroz are refugees living in Denmark. She has a rich, dramatic voice and their music is a good example of the new Kurdish music with Western influences that is popular at parties.

WITH ORIENTAL MOOD

⊕ Ax Kurdistan

Own label, Denmark

Nazé and Newroz head up Oriental Mood, the group of Kurdish and Danish musicians featured on this recording playing a collection of traditional music and new songs composed by the couple.

Şivan Perwer

The inspiration of a whole generation of young musicians, Şivan was exiled by the Turkish government as the voice of a people demanding their independence. At least half of his Turkish CDs on SES Plak, the label with the best collection of Kurdish pop, are banned in Turkey. While most of Şivan's discs are traditional in style, on some he experiments with synthesizers and electric guitars.

⊕ Chants du Kurdistan

Auvidis/Ethnic, France

This collection of mostly traditional songs is a good introduction to Şivan's earlier music, in which he accompanies himself on *saz*.

★ Kirive Vols 1 and 2

SES Plak, Turkey

Şivan has eighteen CDs on SES Plak; these volumes are "best of" collections and a good place to start. They include many of his most famous political songs and some folksongs. Şivan accompanies himself on the *saz*, and other instruments featured include *duduk*, *bloor*, *oud* and *qanun*.

⊕ Şivan Perwer

Caprice, Sweden

A welcome change from his many commercial releases. Largely traditional love songs, with nothing overtly political, although in his own song "Tembura Min" (My Tembur), Şivan speaks of a country longing for freedom, and urges his instrument to spread love and understanding. This album is stronger for not being a manifesto, but a collection of fine and stirring music by a great performer.

The Razbar Ensemble

Based in Germany, the Razbar Ensemble are members of the Ahl-e Haqq who have dedicated themselves to upholding the spiritual music of their order.

⊕ A Feast of the Divine

⊕ Leyli

Arion, France

On these excellent recordings *tanbur*, *kamancheh* and *daf* accompany voices that slowly build with increasing tempo and gripping intensity into the ecstatic dance of the mystic.

Temo

Temo is a Syrian Kurd, resident in France since 1975.

⊕ Derew

Playasound, France

Derew (Falsehood) is an intimate recording of Kurdish bard repertoire, on which Temo accompanies himself on the *tanbur*. Some of the instrumental playing is exceptional.



PLAYLIST

Kurdish Music

1 DANCE OF WIND Ardavan Kamkar from *Over the Wind*

Exquisite improvisation that reveals all of Ardavan's skill and power.

2 KHOSHA HAWRAMAN The Kamkars from *Nightingale with a Broken Wing*

A powerful, lively dance tune that demonstrates the verve and skill that The Kamkars bring to traditional songs.

3 OURAD KHANI The Kamkars from *Live in Concert*

This exciting piece, composed by Hooshang Kamkar, is based on traditional chanting. (Currently download only.)

4 MAQAM-E GOL WA KHUK Ali Akbar Moradi and Kayhan Kalhor from *In the Mirror of the Sky*

Moradi is at his soulful best in this "Flower and Earth" *maqam*; perhaps this will tempt you to get his 4-CD box set.

5 HELABÇE Şivan Perwer from *Kirive Vol 1*

The story of the chemical bombings at Halabja – one of the songs that made Şivan a legend amongst the Kurds.

6 SEBRA MALA Şivan Perwer from *Şivan Perwer*

With a faster tempo, this is a favourite dance number which questions the lack of freedom for Kurdish women.

7 ZINE Nizamettin Aric from *Zine*

Haunting and powerful, Aric's voice soars through this song of longing.

8 GULA SOR Ciwan Haco from *Gula Sor*

A good example of Ciwan's pop appeal.

9 HEY VAYYAR Razbar Ensemble from *A Feast of the Divine*

Highly charged sacred music of the Ahl-e Haqq, featuring men's and women's voices with *daf* accompaniment.