

Dear Professor Tavakoli-Targhi,

It is with much enthusiasm that I submit my application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship. My dissertation, titled *The (Mis)Fitting Virtuosa: Women, Bodies, and Instrumental Excellence in Iranian Classical Music*, explores the social and professional lives of female musicians in Tehran. I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork during the fall of 2018 and the winter of 2019, and later in response to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I continued the research through platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. Having worked as a professional musician in Tehran for 10 years, I bring to this project an intimate knowledge of Tehran's Iranian music scene as well as extensive long-term personal connections which significantly add to the depth of my inquiry.

Combining traditional and virtual ethnography with musical analysis, my work demonstrates how gender constructs are ingrained into notions of musical excellence and virtuosity, which often pose as neutral and free of such constraints. It shows that in Iranian music an *Ostad* is always assumed to be a man, even when she happens to be a woman. In so doing, it narrates the story of women who are shifting the landscape and soundscape of Iranian music while breaking into this traditionally male-dominated space and creating women-only spaces of their own. My dissertation will be the first extended English-language study of female instrumentalists in contemporary Iran.

I aim to defend the dissertation in the summer of 2023. Two of the dissertation's four body chapters are complete and have been approved by my dissertation committee. I am currently writing the third chapter on gender and musical excellence, which I will submit to my committee in the early fall. I have also drafted the fourth chapter on women-only concerts and have presented some of its arguments and cases in previous conferences. Given the current state of the chapters that I have written and the ones that I am working on, I plan to submit a complete draft of my dissertation—including the Introduction and Conclusion—to my advising committee in April 2023, and anticipate defending in July of the same year.

I believe my dissertation contributes to the flourishing field of Iranian Studies by investigating new angles of women's ongoing efforts to enter and create new spaces in Iran. The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship would be a significant help in propelling me over the finish line in this process.

Sincerely,

Hadi Milanloo