



**The Persian Student Association at
Stanford University**

Presents

Axiom of Choice

**October 11, 2002
Dinkelspiel Auditorium
Stanford University**

Featuring

**Loga Ramin Torkian: guitar, quarter-tone
guitar, *saz*, *diwan***

Mamak Khadem: vocals, *daf*

Ruben Haratounian: *duduk*, clarinet, *zurna*

Dimitris Mahlis: guitar, *bouzouki*

Doug Lunn: bass, percussion

André Harutyunyan: percussion

The Persian Student Association is a non-political volunteer student organization whose objective is to sponsor Iranian social and cultural activities and events, to promote an understanding of Iranian culture, to help foster friendship among different cultural groups, and to provide a source of union and support for the Iranian community at Stanford. Membership is open to all Stanford students, faculty, staff, and visiting scholars. More information is available at <http://psa.stanford.edu>.

Poignant, innovative, epic, and soulful—these are but a few of the adjectives used to describe the music of Axiom of Choice. Formed in 1992 by guitarist, composer and Artistic Director Loga Ramin Torkian and co-producer and percussionist Mammad Mohsenzadeh, the ensemble's goal is to define a new sound within the context of Iranian music. They were soon joined by vocalist Mamak Khadem whose vocal talent complemented the original compositions of Torkian.

The name of the ensemble is a mathematical term, which clearly defines their intentional freedom of choice within the parameters of their compositions and music. As artists who immigrated to the United States, Axiom of Choice incorporates the sounds of other cultures – both East and West - broadening the scope and appeal of their music while remaining loyal to their Iranian roots and retaining the originality, distinctiveness and integrity of their sound. Their original compositions are mostly based on Iranian melodies and modes and have universal appeal because of their cohesive, seamless and natural fusion with other styles of music. The musicians work within a unique compositional structure in which both improvisation and personal expression can freely take place. One important goal is to make Iranian music more accessible to the broader audience. The other is to communicate through a progressive and new global sound, unique to world music. Based on the guitar, *saz*, *diwan* (Middle Eastern lutes), Persian vocals, the Armenian *duduk* (oboe), clarinet, and global percussion instruments, their sound is at the same time traditional and modern, Iranian and yet global. The group's music is self-expressive and powerful, adventurous and mysterious, contemplative and mournful, yet uplifting and cathartic. They were nominated Best Recombinant World Music Ensemble in 2001 and 2002 by the LA Weekly Music Awards. Their recordings feature “*Beyond Denial*” (X-Dot 25), and “*Niya Yesh*” (Narada World). Their third album “*Unfolding*” (also on Narada World) is inspired by the Iranian poet, mathematician, and astronomer Omar Khayyam and embraces his mystical poetry and vision.

Loga Ramin Torkian is a guitarist, Middle Eastern lutist, and the composer and Artistic Director of Axiom of Choice. Born in Iran, he moved to the United States after the revolution. When asked to speak about his musical

background, he says: “The path to defining one's music is never straight. I reflect upon the day I left my flamenco guitar teacher - disheartened by his truthful comment that after practicing for years, the only way to bring myself to professional standard would be to move to Spain, otherwise my playing would always have an accent. I knew I could not leave the United States for years to come and I felt I had reached an end. I did not realize then that I was about to discover something very unique within myself.” Loga spent the next three years studying the *tar*, an Iranian lute and joined for a short period a traditional ensemble by the name of *Nava*. But he quickly learned that he could not satisfy his creativity within the framework of traditional music. It was then that he decided to create the quarter-tone guitar to which he adapted many of the *tar* techniques and formed Axiom of Choice, which served as a common ground for other expatriates to work with him. “As an émigré artist, I have chosen to express myself in music that is not bound by the confines of traditional Iranian music. Yet, my music in its very depth comes from that tradition,” says Loga who continues to use the *radif* (Iranian repertoire) and Iranian melodies as the source of his compositions. Many master musicians have welcomed his approach. His innovative quarter-tone guitar retooled with movable frets also sets him apart as a guitarist allowing him to play Middle Eastern scales and create new ornamentations on the guitar. He also performs on other Middle Eastern string instruments such as the Turkish *saz* and the Kurdish *diwan*. His extensive travels around the world have been instrumental in developing his great sensitivity towards other cultures. He believes that any music that crosses over to other cultures should not only be appealing, but also fundamentally sound for the cultures involved. Loga has also been involved in composing music for films.

Mamak Khadem is the vocalist of the ensemble. Trained in the classical Iranian style, by nature poignant, she weaves emotive textures ranging from bliss to pain, which give a mystical and nostalgic bent to the music. “When I think of my childhood, my memories are inseparable from the melodies that touched my soul when I was growing up. It was through

establishing this personal relationship with music as well as my training at the Children Choir for National Radio and Television of Iran that my musical education began. But it was not until the late seventies and after the revolution that I truly became inspired to learn Iranian traditional vocals.” Thus Mamak Khadem sums up her musical background. Like many other immigrants, Mamak discovered her cultural heritage after years of living abroad. The revolution in Iran and subsequently the immense amount of work produced in the early eighties by master musicians of that time became her source of inspiration. Since then, she has seized every opportunity to further her vocal art, regularly traveling back to Iran to study with some of the finest Iranian vocalists and masters. In 1992, Mamak joined Axiom of Choice, which allowed her to experiment and define her own style. She has expanded her vocal art also by learning other methods of singing (such as classical Indian, and Bulgarian). Mamak believes that the path of learning is endless. However, one thing clear to her is that Persian vocal art can be successfully used outside of its traditional context. She has worked and recorded, among others, with Hans Zimmer (on the score of “Peace Maker”), Jamshied Sharifi, Tulku, Omar Faruk Tekbilek, Joel Mc Neally (on the soundtrack of the movie “Buffalo Soldier” and “Dark Angels” TV series), Jeff Rona, composer of the “Chicago Blues” TV series score, and Chris Beck, the composer of “Buffy, the Vampire Slayer” TV score.

Ruben Haratoonian from Armenia is a foremost *duduk*, *zurna* and clarinet player. A prominent student of the legendary world-renowned Armenian *duduk* player, Djivan Gasparyan, Ruben is a graduate of the prestigious Aram Khatchaturian College of Music and the Komitas Conservatory and has established himself as a virtuoso performer and the finest *duduk* player to live in the United States and the West. Prior to relocating to the United States, he was the Director and soloist for T. Altounyan Armenian State Ensemble of Folk Singing and Dancing. He is currently the most active *duduk* player living in the United States and a recording artist who has performed at numerous prestigious venues. Dedicated to preserving the music of Armenia and the *duduk* tradition, he is the first *duduk* player of the Armenian ensemble Winds of Passion.

Ruben is esteemed not only for the exquisite tonality of his *duduk* playing but also for his vast knowledge of the melodies and *maqams* (traditional motifs and modes) of not only Armenia but also of the surrounding region, including Iran, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. In this capacity, he is unique. He joined Axiom of Choice in 2000.

André Harutyunyan from Armenia is a multi-percussionist who is highly sought after by world music, Armenian and Iranian ensembles. He has recorded and performed with Djivan Gasparyan, Armen Chakmakian and Vas, among others. He has been a member of Axiom of Choice since 2000.

Dimitris Mahlis is a Greek-American guitarist, bouzouki player, and multi-instrumentalist who has performed professionally since age 16. He has collaborated with artists such as Freddie Hubbard, Ian Neville, Hassan Hakmoun, and Grigoris Bithikotsis. He currently performs with Axiom of Choice and his own ensemble Baba Ghanoush.

Doug Lunn, is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, and producer who has appeared on over 100 recordings in addition to numerous film and TV soundtracks. He was the Music Director and a featured performer in "SPIRIT: A Journey in Dance, Drum, and Song" on both the PBS special and the national touring company. In his primary instrument, the bass, he also performs on drums, percussion, and keyboards. He has also worked with artists as varied as Mark Isham, Bruce Springsteen, Don Cherry, Vida Vierra, David Torn, and L. Shankar. He is currently the music director for Swing Brazil Dance Company.

TONIGHT’S PROGRAM AND LYRICS EXCERPTS

Mystics and Fools (*Unfolding*)

If drunk on this precious wine, so I am
 If a worshipper in this shrine, so I am
 Each clan makes my image in its own light
 Maker, priest, and convert of my faith, so I am!

Turquoise land (*Unfolding, instrumental*)

Parting Ways with the Soul (*Unfolding*)

Behold! You will part ways with the soul
 Shrouded, vanishing in secrets of the void
 Regale for you know not where you began
 Delight! The destination is unknown

The caravan of life, how in haste it passes
 Behold the moments of joy it carries away
 O mistress, why be burdened with what tomorrow
 holds?

Bring forth the cup, for the night passes

Rythm Riddle (*Beyond Denial, instrumental*)

Saroumad Zemestan (Not recorded)

Calling (*Niya Yesh*)

-----INTERMISSION-----

Guitar and voice improvization

Valeh (*Beyond Denial, Rumi Poetry*)

Chahargah (Not Recorded, instrumental)

Elixir (*Unfolding*)

To live without this exquisite wine, I can’t
 The burden of being is heavy without its promise
 How I am slave to that moment when the mistress
 Offers another cup, and I, replete, just can’t!

How long should I lament whether I have or have
 not?

And whether this life passes in joy or not?
 Fill up the cup for who knows
 Whether this breath I take will be the last or not?

Messenger of time (*Unfolding*)

Relish this moment, here and now
 The star of youth revolves in its orbit
 Dance with delight in this circle of bliss
 Eternal is this moment, here and now

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