

Hormoz Farhat (1928-2021): A Personal Remembrance

by Harry White



Professor Hormoz Farhat, who has died at the great age of 93, was a well-beloved and distinguished member of the Irish community of musicians, composers and scholars. He was also an erstwhile member of the SMI, and an exceptionally benign, considerate and thoughtful presence at recitals, concerts, scholarly meetings and book launches from his appointment to the Chair of Music at Trinity College Dublin from 1982 until late in 2019, when serious illness forced him to withdraw from the musical environment he had graced for almost forty years. Indeed, prior to his arrival in Dublin, he had occupied a senior research fellowship at Queen's University Belfast, where he came in 1979 at the invitation of the late Professor John Blacking, following the turbulence and mortal danger in which he found himself during the Iranian Revolution. He had occupied the Chair of Music at the University of Tehran from 1970-78, and was Vice-Chancellor of Farabi University from 1975-77. As a composer, university professor and administrator, Farhat spent his formative years in the United States, where he received his BA in Music from the

University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), his MA in Composition from Mills College, and his PhD in Ethnomusicology, also from UCLA. His teachers in composition included Darius Milhaud, Lukas Foss and Roy Harris. Farhat spent almost ten years as a university teacher in the US, including five years (1964-69) as an Associate Professor of Music at UCLA, after which he returned to his native country.

His remarkable career thus spanned three continents and over seventy years as a student, professor and professor emeritus of music. This astonishing achievement was perhaps belied by Farhat's innate modesty (not to say reticence): he was the least self-advertising of men. But those of us fortunate enough to enjoy his friendship gradually became aware of an immense trove of experience, intellectual acumen and sheer depth of musical thought which lay beneath the smooth and urbane surface of his outward demeanour. Although many will recall his exceptional courtesy and considerateness – these qualities were, in his case, a genial force of nature – such features of his personality should not be allowed to eclipse the passionate and supremely intelligent condition of his lifelong engagement with music, both as an artist and as a scholar. And even if some of his later recollections seemed rueful and tinged with a degree of melancholy (given that he was abruptly forced into exile in his mid-fifties), his animated and deeply informed opinions concerning Europe, Persia (his preferred name for the country of his birth) and the history of the Middle East left one in no doubt as to where his convictions lay.

I first met Hormoz Farhat in 1984, when I became his doctoral student at TCD. While a graduate student at the University of Toronto a little over two years earlier, I had been told that an 'Iranian ethnomusicologist' had been appointed to the Chair at Trinity. For a number of reasons I found this somewhat surprising, but in any case my initial encounter with Hormoz immediately dispelled the images summoned by that description. This strikingly handsome and elegantly groomed man seemed to me more like an old-world (and thoroughly westernised) Persian diplomat than an Iranian musicologist, an impression gently underlined by his formal demeanour in conversation. But I also remember that after we shook hands and he asked me to sit down, he filled a pipe with tobacco from a leather-bound jar, and having lit it, sent large, blue clouds of smoke into the air as we talked. I was also an ardent pipe-smoker, and thus encouraged, placed my own pipe on the desk between us. 'You too?' he said, his wonderful eyebrows lifting in mild surprise (a characteristic gesture which I came to love), as he pushed the tobacco jar gently towards me. I filled my pipe in turn, and we both sat there, puffing away in perfect contentment as the interview proceeded. This was to be the

characteristic mode in which our subsequent meetings began. (Bear in mind that this was almost forty years ago.)

Hormoz was the mildest, most unruffled and most persuasively attentive supervisor I could have wished for. After the frenetic pace of my Toronto years, the deliberated, leisurely tempo of our meetings (*andante tranquillo*) was a balm. And despite our formal beginnings ('Professor Farhat' and 'Mr White' were the order of the day), we very rapidly became friends. Not long after I became his student, I met his wife Maria Baghramian (she was then a PhD candidate in Trinity, and for many years since has been a distinguished Professor of Philosophy at UCD), and this, too, deepened our friendship.

Following the completion of my studies in 1986, Hormoz not only remained a dear friend, but also a cherished mentor. He encouraged me at every turn in the enterprise of consolidating musicology as an academic discipline in Ireland, and with characteristic generosity contributed a chapter to the first volume of *Irish Musical Studies* (1990). When Patrick Devine and I organized the first international musicological conference in Ireland (1995), with Joseph Kerman as keynote speaker, Hormoz was there to greet Kerman as an old friend and former colleague. And when the SMI itself came into being (2003), it was not without my having consulted Hormoz on the ambitious prospect of forming a learned society devoted to the discipline of musicology across the island. On all such occasions, his counsel was as valuable as it was modestly and perceptively formulated. I can also clearly recall his sudden smile and the lustrous merriment in his pool-dark eyes as he steered me past difficulties I would otherwise have foundered upon. Had he not been a composer and university professor, he would indeed have made a wonderful career as a diplomat.

I have already alluded to a certain, solitary *tristesse* in Hormoz, despite the serene happiness of his family life in Ireland. He was deeply grieved by John Blacking's untimely death, and I always felt that despite the kindness with which he was received in this country, the impact of so many upheavals in his professional and personal life weighed more heavily upon him as the years advanced. Nevertheless, my abiding memory of this wonderfully wise and compassionate man shall always be of his gentle composure, ineffable kindness and wistfully shrewd sense of humour. May he rest in peace.