

## ornamental descend

The main idea of *ornamental descend* was to respond to Ata Ebtekar's practice. Ata's work has provided a predominantly ambient scene with an important nuance and, as such, encouraging the development of new styles. Having uniquely, and rather confidently, engaged with elements of Iranian classical and folk music, his repertoire of practice provides a significant contrast to that developed by his former colleagues in SET (especially in early years). His work somehow bridges elements of 'sophisticated' club music—closer to forms such as idm and breakcore—and electroacoustic music. In an environment in which many forms of music typically played in clubs are not allowed to be represented in public in any shape or form—the kinds one may generally call, regardless of their different generic characteristics, 'groovy' or danceable—Ata's practice fills an important gap. It is partly thanks to Ata's music, optimism, enthusiastic conduct, connections, and PR abilities that SET has grown to such an extent, becoming the number one platform for experimental electronic music in Iran with a reputation that goes beyond the country's geopolitical borders.

As a prolific producer and performer, Ata is undoubtedly EEMSI's most internationally (perhaps also domestically) known figure. He has released work through prominent electronic music record labels such as Warp and performed in internationally famous electronic music festivals such as MUTEK, CTM, and Ars electronica. He is a cofounder of SET and has been a member for almost four years (until April 2019). He also teaches electronic music in Tehran as a freelance tutor and owns Zabte Sote, the first (and perhaps only) active electronic music record label in Iran. As tutor he has, for instance, taught Behrang Najafi (aka Bescolour) and Shahin Entezami (aka Tegh), who also produce and perform together as Temp-Illusion<sup>1</sup>—Ata's influence is particularly evident on Temp-Illusion's work. Due to his high-profile two-decades-old professional career, he interacts with the scene from a somewhat 'safe distance'; one that allows him to work relatively peacefully (as a 'father figure' from Eugenio Caria's point of view<sup>2</sup>) without steering up too much controversy.<sup>3</sup> With a significant status as such, his practice is, therefore, uniquely positioned to influence the scene, providing it with an inspiring model. Interviewing Ata in earliest stages of my research effectively paved the way for further interviews and facilitated my access to the scene.

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<sup>1</sup> I have previously explored Ata's role in more depth within SET through 3.2 and 3.5.

<sup>2</sup> See Eugenio Caria's comment in page 65, which offers a similar observation with regards to Sote's status within the scene.

<sup>3</sup> See 4.9 for a discussion regarding competition within the scene.

*Ornamental descend* is 04:03 long and, as such, is my shortest composition within the portfolio. It is composed based on a ‘musical’ phrase that appears at 02:31 and gradually develops through different variations and ornamental passages until the end of the piece. It explores microtonal structures, particularly quarter-tones, in a ‘pop’ music context—due to its length and riff-oriented character—similar to the majority of Ata’s works. All sounds are formed through performing with Eurorack modules—a wavetable synthesizer, oscillators, filters, lfos, sequencers, and envelope generators. To achieve the kind of microtonal intervals and ornamental passages that the work involves, different couplings of control signals and audio sources were explored. The piece’s main sonic cell—the phrase that appears at 02:31—is developed throughout the piece in the form of call and response, which is a common compositional technique in *dastgāh* music (a modal system used in Iranian classical music). Developed ornamental passages have been considered as virtue of a skilful performer within Iranian folk and classical music for centuries. Performers of Iranian ‘traditional’ instruments have been recognised and praised within Iranian classical music literature for their authentic and elaborate use of ornamental passages.<sup>4</sup> Quarter-tones are also contained in many Persian *dastgāhs*, and, as such, are known as one of the characteristic sounds of Iranian folk and classical repertoire.

*Ornamental descend* was released in August 2018 as part of a diverse and expansive compilation of experimental electronic music by Iranian producers. The album, titled *Girib*, was curated by Ata Ebtekar himself and was the first album released through his own, recently-founded (2018), record label Zabte Sote in collaboration with Opal Tapes; a record label based in Newcastle (UK) that is known to electronic music enthusiasts. This compilation is the most comprehensive and arguably the most significant collection of ‘Iranian’ electronic music ever produced due to its unprecedented size and diversity. As such, *Girib* marked an apex in the activities of experimental electronic music scene in Iran. It also helped me find several new acts that I was otherwise unaware of such as Rojin Sharifi<sup>5</sup>, Parsa Jamshidi (aka PARSA)<sup>6</sup>, and Pantea Aramfar (aka pan-tea),<sup>7</sup> whose valuable inputs in later interviews further informed and influenced the development of my research and practice.

Due to the return of the US sanctions on Iran following the new US administration withdrawal from the JCPOA (aka Iran’s nuclear deal) on May 2018, President Trump’s obsession

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<sup>4</sup> In 2.1 I have provided a brief historical account addressing the status of ornament within Iranian-Islamic arts. For more discussions see Nettle (1972 and 2001), Van Khê (1980), Tsuge (1980), Reckord (1986), Bastaninezhad (2014), Azadehfar (2014), Heydarian (2016), Bahadoran (2016), and Akrami and Moghimi (2017).

<sup>5</sup> [zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/pulp](https://zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/pulp)

<sup>6</sup> [zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/expopp-1](https://zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/expopp-1)

<sup>7</sup> [zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/a-c-a-t-in-a-basket](https://zabtesote.bandcamp.com/track/a-c-a-t-in-a-basket)

with ‘changing Iran’s behaviour’, a new threat of war for which the Iranian state is also responsible, a new power struggle in Iran’s neighbourhood between Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran, and the resultant (re-)radicalisation of the political theatre inside the country, the future of experimental electronic music scene seems unclear. In this situation, *Girih*’s most significant achievement may be the fact that it managed to gather a wide variety of otherwise scattered practices, introduced them to wider international audiences via a reputable platform in the field of electronic music, and, as such, archived a body of practice, a ‘scene’, that may start to degenerate due to the impacts of a new period of radical political and economic instability.



Figure 6-4. Screenshot captured from Zabte Sote’s page on Bandcamp<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Extracted from Zabte Sote’s official page on Bandcamp, accessible via the following link (last access 4 Feb. 2019): [zabtesote.bandcamp.com](http://zabtesote.bandcamp.com) *Girih*’s artwork is designed by Amir B. Ashrafzad



**Donald J. Trump** ✓

@realDonaldTrump

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The Iran sanctions have officially been cast. These are the most biting sanctions ever imposed, and in November they ratchet up to yet another level. Anyone doing business with Iran will NOT be doing business with the United States. I am asking for **WORLD PEACE**, nothing less!

2:31 am - 7 Aug 2018

Figure 6-5. Screenshot from Donald Trump's Tweet (7 Aug. 2018) on the return of US sanctions on Iran<sup>9</sup>



**Donald J. Trump** ✓

@realDonaldTrump

Follow



....Iran's very ignorant and insulting statement, put out today, only shows that they do not understand reality. Any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force. In some areas, overwhelming will mean obliteration. No more John Kerry & Obama!

7:42 am - 25 Jun 2019

Figure 6-6. Screenshot from Donald Trump's Tweet (25 Jun. 2019) in response to President Rouhani's speech<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Extracted from Donald Trump's official twitter account, accessible via the following link (last accessed 29 May 2019): [twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1026762818773757955?lang=en-gb](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1026762818773757955?lang=en-gb)

<sup>10</sup> In response to a cyber-attack launched by the US military on Iranian computer-controlled weapons on 20 June 2019, which followed four days later by more sanction on Iranian officials including the Supreme leader, Irani's President Rouhani had said that the White House was 'suffering from intellectual disability'. Trump's tweet is extracted from his official twitter account, accessible via the following link (last accessed 6 Jul.2019): [twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1143529907403788288](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1143529907403788288)