Globalisation, ease of travel, and 24-hour media showing the Earth’s remotest corners have proved that the world is indeed small. In some way they have also made us protective of our local heritage, drawing the culture of one’s home country into sharper focus. This world music series shows the musical side of the phenomenon. The exciting set of discs, featuring some of the best musicians in the world, contains carefully chosen music in compilations possessing a natural musical flow. None of the musicians play electric instruments, giving the music a fabulous authentic feel, and many performances are recorded live, allowing the atmosphere to come sparkling through.

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This recording is compiled from the Nimbus world catalogue from recordings first released on Nimbus Records NI 7060, 5397 and 7061

Re-mastering: Floating Earth
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TRACK LIST

DASTGĀH-E CHĀHĀRGĀH
1 Pishdarâmād 4.40
2 Darâmād 0.51
3 Kharâmān 2.04
4 Zābōl 0.39
5 Zârbi 4.09
6 Muyeh, Hesār, mokhâlef 5.41
7 Zârbi-e mokhâlef & mansuri 5.09
8 Zanguleh 1.12
9 Tasnif-e sârebān 4.19
10 Se-Pā 11.39

Total playing time 60.25

DASTGĀH MĀHŪR
11 Sâghi-Nāmeh & Soufî-Nâmeh (Radif) 4.47
11 Darâmād (improvised) 2.08
12 Châhârmezrâb inspired by a piece by Master Sabâ (Hossein Omoumi) 2.17
14 Neyriz (improvised) 0.55
15 Pish Zanguleh based on the Radif (Hossein Omoumi) & Neyriz text Mirza Nassir Esfahani (Radif) 4.15
16 Zanguleh (Radif) & Tasnif Mâhûr (Sheydâ) 3.11
17 Delkash & Châhârmezrâb (improvised) 2.22

Total playing time 60.25
This disc contains music from the rich and ancient culture of Persia. The differing traditions of classical and folk music are represented, played on the ney and the somā, as well as sung. The ney is often described as the world’s oldest instrument, whilst documents exist showing that in the 6th-4th centuries BC the somā was accompanying dancing in the southwest Iranian region of Lorestān.

As is so often the case, Persian traditional music is the product of many related world strands. The melodies and modes of the dastgāh system, for example, are related to the maqām system found in 7th century Turkish, Byzantine and Arabic music, owing to the cross-fertilisation caused by the Arab invasion of the Persian Empire (633-656). Nevertheless, Persian classical music maintains its own unique characteristics. One of them is the use of rhythmic percussion to accompany instrumental melodies. The highest esteem, however, is reserved for the art of improvisation and free-time singing based on the sung recitation of poetry.

The music has a well-defined structure. There are 12 dastgāhs which make up the radifs (melodic figures passed down through time by oral tradition). The word dastgāh relates to the ḡāh, the position of the hand (dast) on the instrument, since different hand positions create different modes. In the system of dastgāhs there are seven main modes - Shur, Māhur, Segāh, Chāhārgāh, Homāyun, Navā and Rāstpanjgāh - and five off-shoots - Bayāt-e Tork, Abu’ Atā, Afshārī, Dashti and Esfahān. Each of these dastgāhs are themselves made up of smaller melodic forms called gushehs (short melody ‘corners’). A performance is made up of sections, with a typical formulaic performance consisting of a pishdarāmad (pre-introduction), darāmad (introduction), tasnif (song), chāhār mezrāb (rhythmic section) and a number of gushehs.

Persian classical music performance overcomes the apparent dichotomy of being strictly formulaic yet free. Soloists (taknavāz) traditionally spend years as pupils at the feet of a Master (Ostad) learning by rote and memorising upwards of 200 radifs. With such deference to these Masters it could be supposed that this style of teaching wouldn’t allow for natural musical development or individual artistry from the pupils. In fact the diversity which can be achieved through improvisation is so huge that even though newly composed gushehs are permitted within the radifs they are rarely heard. Today universities offer courses teaching the radifs and as a result the numbers of classical musicians, once the preserve of the upper classes, is rising. Conversely the private Master/pupil style of teaching is declining.

Ensemble playing can be heard on tracks 4-5, whose traditional forces are quite small. A typical group (as evidenced from ancient pictures)
consists of a couple of melody players, a couple of rhythm instruments and perhaps a singer. Nowadays though, contact with western musicians has led to larger ensembles which will typically also include western instruments. If a singer is included his or her role is very important in creating the music’s atmosphere through the choice and delivery of poetry. Improvisation shows the art of the soloist further and the skill in developing both melody and rhythm. In Iran, poetry and music are closely linked: the word *khandan* means both reading and singing, and many pieces follow a speech pattern. Favourite poems used include those from the Sufi mystic Mowlânâ Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), who has been described as America’s favourite poet!

Despite having common roots, Iranian folk music, which is different from the court-based classical music, has certain unique regional qualities. The folk melodies spread across the country are numerous and beautiful. Away from the old royal courts and cities, Lorestān, in the southwest of Iran, has been fought over throughout history for its strategic position. Consequently, accounts of battles have taken root in the musical culture of the Lor people. Part of one of the most famous song tunes, *Dāye, Dāye!* (Mother, Mother!) is included in *Se-Pā* (track 10). It tells the story of the Lor people’s battles, to which new verses have been added at every major event right up until the recent Iran/Iraq war. But it is not all war in Lorestān: there is love too. Weddings and other social gatherings provide the occasion for the sornā to play at dances. The tune *Se-pā* literally means ‘three steps’, and is danced by advancing three steps and taking one back.

The Revolution of 1979 and the following 30 years have not provided a stable environment for music-making in Iran. Nevertheless there are musicians living and working both in Iran and abroad. With a kind of government support today and the rise of commercially available CDs the music of this country continues to spread and be appreciated.
Hossein Omoumi was born in Isfahân, the home of the Persian classical ney playing style. He studied both the vocal and instrumental radifs, first with his Father, and then under the pupillage of the Masters Hasan Kasâ’î and Mahmud Karimi. Having played and taught in Iran (as well as studying architecture) Hossein left for Europe in 1984. His performances have taken him to many major festivals and concert halls in Europe and the United States. He is a scholar of some repute, having worked in Tehran, the Sorbonne, UCLA, and currently at the University of California, Irvine as Professor in Persian Performing Arts.

Simâ Binâ was born in Khorasan, the heartland of Iran’s popular tradition. Her early learning came from her father, the Master Ahmad Binâ, before she moved on to study the radifs and singing technique with the Masters Ma’aroufi and Zarpanjeh. After graduating from Tehran University she continued her studies with Master Davami. Since 1979, as well as teaching singing she has explored Persian folk song, collecting, recording, writing and re-interpreting popular regional music. She presents the fruits of this work in concerts throughout Europe and North America, having been the first Iranian woman singer to tour the west after the Revolution.

Shahmirza Morâdi first played the sornâ in Europe in the early 1990s where his incredible breath control thrust him into the limelight. Born in Lorestân in 1924, he learnt his music from family members, most especially his father who played the sornâ at local gatherings. Through the 1970s he played on Iranian radio before being silenced by the Revolution. However, during the 1980s he enjoyed national success with CD recordings. He is accompanied on this disc by his son Rezâ Morâdi on the dohol.

Madjid Khaladj has played the tombak since he was a child in Iran, and learned from the Masters Badjalan and Maleki. He plays most Iranian percussion instruments and studied the ney with Hossein Omoumi in order to broaden his understanding of Persian classical music. He teaches in Basel, and at the Sorbonne in Paris where he also founded the École de Tombak. He has produced various recordings and movie soundtracks and tours both as a soloist and as part of an ensemble.

Madjid Derakhshâni (târ) was born in Semnan, and studied in Tehran. His teacher was the Master Mohamad Reza Lotfi. An established Master himself, he now teaches, has recorded with the singer Mohammadreza Shajarian, and is a well-known ensemble player.
The **ney** is a simply designed instrument which is difficult to play well. As a result there are few accomplished Masters. It is made from reeds cut from the hot, dry desert and pierced with six holes, giving it a range of two and a half octaves. It is reckoned that it is possible to play every Persian melody on the **ney**, which is most frequently heard as a solo instrument accompanied during rhythmical pieces by the goblet shaped drum called a **tombak**. On this recording the **ney** solos are also accompanied by the **daf**, a large-sized frame drum. Performance with a singer is both traditional and widespread, and on this disc a kind of plucked lute, the **târ**, accompanies Simâ Binâ.

The Persian **ney** playing technique is very distinctive, and centered in the town of Isfahân, from where it takes its name. Instead of playing the **ney** with the head resting on the lips, Persian classical players take the instrument into their mouths and bite the end with their teeth. This produces sound inside the mouth which the player is then able to colour by altering the shape of the inside of the mouth.

The **sornâ** is a double reed instrument, made from wood and often covered in ebony or even silver. Its dimensions can vary but the average length is 40cm with eight finger holes, giving it the range of an octave and a note. By using the embouchure of their lips, experienced players can stretch to another note. The **sornâ** has a metal mouthpiece with a flat plate to support the player’s lip. By using the remarkable technique of circular breathing the sound of the **sornâ** does not stop. Simultaneously pushing air stored in his cheeks into the instrument the player takes in more through his nose. The **sornâ** is accompanied by the **dohol**, a double-headed cylindrical drum.