IN PRESS. NOT FOR CIRCULATION

The Sonic Intimacies of Khosrow Sinai's *A Lost Requiem* (1983)

Chapter for *Ethnomusicology and Its Intimacies*, edited by Dafni Tragaki, Stephen Wilford and Stephen Cottrell

Laudan Nooshin, City, University of London, UK

Abstract

Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing body of scholarly work on Iranian cinema, but this literature has some significant lacunae, including relatively little consideration of music and sound more generally and few writings on documentary film. This chapter explores the sonic intimacies of Khosrow Sinai's film *A Lost Requiem* (Persian: *Marsiyeh-ye Gomshodeh*, 1970-83), a beautifully poetic and moving documentary that tells the little-known story of Polish refugees in Iran during World War 2. The chapter introduces the film and explores the ways in which Sinai uses music and sound - including diegetic and non-diegetic music, ambient sounds and the human voice – to engage the viewer in a highly emotive relationship with the film and its subject matter. In particular, the rich combination of sound, music, voices, still images and film, and the palimpsestic merging of the filmic present and the remembered and imagined sounds of the past, creates a complex multi-sensory experience in which the sonic becomes a space of intimacy within which to mediate memory and affect.

Introduction[1]

> 'Mr Richard Smallen of New Zealand asked me to place flowers on his mother's grave. This is just one of many such occasions that I have come with flowers in my hands to the Christian Cemetery in Tehran. Some years before when I first came, I saw gravestones stretching before me. Row upon row of unfamiliar names, of children between 1 and 2 years old lying side by side with those of the aged. It made me think, it caused me to ask, why this catastrophe of a nation? A lost requiem. This started me on my quest. My obsession to find the answer led me and my film crew to many places. And the moving story began to unfold before us'. (*A Lost Requiem*, 1983, Dir: Khosrow Sinai, 1:10-3:06)

These words towards the start of *A Lost Requiem* (Persian: *Marsiyeh-ye Gomshodeh*, 1970-83) by Khosrow Sinai (1941-2020) set the scene for a beautifully poetic and moving film that traces the harrowing and little-known story of Polish refugees in Iran during World War 2, mainly through the narrative of those who stayed in Iran after the war.[2] As we hear Sinai (through the voice of the narrator) reflecting on his first encounter with the cemetery a few

[1] The author would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust (UK) for this research, through a Research Fellowship (2021-22).

[2] The film is current available online https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ry5ERzEOU5c and the discussion of this chapter is best read in conjunction with a viewing of the film.

years earlier, the camera pans across the large Christian cemetery in Doulab, Tehran. In this chapter, I am interested in the ways in which sound is used in *The Lost Requiem* to draw the audience into an intensely intimate and emotive relationship with the subjects of the film and perhaps with the filmmaker himself whose words we hear throughout. I focus on a range of sounds, including diegetic and non-diegetic music, environmental sounds and the human voice. I first watched *A Lost Requiem* in 2015 at the peak of the co-called 'refugee crisis', a year when more refugees arrived in Europe (mainly from the Middle East) than at any time since World War 2, much of this displacement rooted in historic and contemporary interventions in the region by Western powers seeking to protect and extend their geo-strategic interests. I was drawn to this story and somewhat embarrassed that I hadn't known about it before. There seemed to me a deep irony in learning about destitute Europeans seeking asylum in the Middle East, the complete inverse of the situation in 2015 and since, and really not so very long ago. It caused me to reflect on the many stories that we don't get to hear, including those that are conveniently 'dropped' from the historical narrative: before 1989, it was forbidden in Poland to refer to the so-called 'Polish Exodus'; and it was also not in British and US interests to publicise what is often regarded by Poles as a betrayal of their country at the 1943 Tehran Conference at which Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt redrew the borders of Europe. What prompted Sinai to make a film on a still sensitive topic is unclear, but the result is an important historical document that has brought this story to some level of public consciousness. As cultural commentator Aga Sablinska writes,

> *The Lost Requiem* was never publicly released in Poland, largely because it addressed subjects in Polish history that the Soviet Union wanted censored, such as the repression, torture, and murder of Polish people at the hands of the Soviets in the early 1940s. It wasn't until 2007 that the Polish premiere of the film took place, 24 years after it was completed. The film first appeared on Polish public television in 2013, and was lauded by the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* for "capturing the atmosphere of those extraordinary times and its contemporary faces". Despite such praise, the film remains almost entirely unknown in Poland today, and Sinai's recent death was not covered by any major Polish newspaper, even though he authored such an important document of Polish history. (2020)

Notwithstanding, in 2008 Sinai was awarded the Knights Cross of the Order of Merit of the Polish Republic by the Polish President, Lech Kaczynski, at a ceremony in Warsaw in recognition of his services to the Polish nation. Five Iranians of Polish descent, survivors of the labour camps, were also honoured at the same ceremony.

In the summer of 2020, *The Lost Requiem* started circulating on social media, following Sinai's passing due to Covid. This coincided with the start of my work on the Sonic Tehran project and it was also around this time that I came across the writings of historian Lior Sternfeld (2015, 2018a, 2018b) which, with its references to Polish orchestras, cafés, newspapers and radio stations in Iran, sparked my interest and prompted me to think about what this story might reveal about the sounds of Tehran in the 1940s and later. Indeed, having had no prior awareness of the refugees, I soon discovered a number of long-standing friends and acquaintances of Polish heritage whose family members had lived in or travelled through Iran during World War 2 (see Nooshin 2022). I was particularly struck by the central role of sound in the film narrative, including as a window into the past, and the act of imagining and remembering sound as an important affective dimension of the film. Below, I provide historical context for the presence of Polish refugees in Iran, before introducing the film in greater detail, with a focus on its sonic intimacies.

Historical Context: Polish Refugees in Tehran

Following the German invasion on 1st September 1939, the Soviet Union took control of eastern Poland and between 1939 and 1941 arrested and deported over a million Poles (estimates vary between 1.25 to 1.7 million), as well as ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians and Lithuanians living in Poland and including about 80,000 Jews, some of whom had fled the western part of the country. Those arrested were generally regarded as anti-Soviet 'class enemies' and included landowners and the intellectual elite, as well as factory owners, military personnel and teachers. Many were sent to forced labour camps in Siberia and other remote parts of the Soviet Union, where they lived in indescribably harsh conditions. In June 1941, after the Soviet Union joined the Allies, Polish prisoners were released and many of the able-bodied joined the co-called 'Anders Army', under the leadership of General Władysław Anders, recently released from the Lubyanka prison in Moscow (see Davies 2015). Those who had been in labour camps travelled thousands of miles (some entirely by foot), many dying of starvation, cold and disease along the way. Some stayed wherever they could in what is now Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan; but many continued south and eventually reached Krasnovodosk (now Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan). From here, the newly formed army and civilians were taken on crammed oil tankers and container ships across the Caspian Sea to the Iranian port of Bandar Anzali (also known as Bandar Pahlavi), arriving in two main phases

between 24th March and 5th April and 10th and 30th August 1942. A small number also travelled by land from Ashkhabad to Mashhad in north-eastern Iran.[3]

Having been occupied in August 1941, Iran was the 'closest territory outside the Soviet Union fully controlled by the Allies and with infrastructure capable of absorbing numerous refugees' (Sternfeld 2018b:106), in addition to which the Anders Army had come under British command. Most arrived in a desperate state, and many died soon after arrival, including from malnutrition, malaria and typhus, and were buried in what is now the large Polish cemetery in Anzali. Of those who survived, the men and women of the Anders Army joined Allied forces further south; the rest, mainly women and children, were taken to Tehran. From there, and with the help of aid agencies, many were sent to cities such as Esfahan and Ahvaz, and some to camps in India and Africa, and after the war to countries such as the Palestine, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, the United States and the UK. The majority were Catholic, with about 1,800 Jews arriving in Tehran by the spring of 1943, but with thousands more to follow from Nazi occupied Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (ibid.:115). There were around 13,000 children who had been orphaned or separated from their families. It is hard to obtain exact figures on the overall numbers arriving in Iran in 1942: according to Sternfeld 'Aid organizations such as the International Red Cross and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) suggest total numbers fluctuating between 200,000 and 300,000 across the war years. The number of [Allied] troops has been estimated at 500,000 by the Soviet, American, and British armies.' (Sternfeld 2018b:121).[4]

I have become increasingly intrigued by the story of Polish refugees in Iran and have spent many hours reading and listening to harrowing accounts of the journey to Siberia, the labour camps, family members lost, children forced to throw the bodies of siblings from moving trains, and other terrible happenings. I have watched footage and pored over photographs of refugees arriving and of their time in Iran. I have wondered about the frequently expressed gratitude and the humanity with which people were received, bearing in mind that Iranians were experiencing food shortages and severe inflation at this time (the British had provided

[3] Images of refugees arriving in Bandar Anzali can be seen here: https://swoopingeagle.com/home/hope/arrival-in-pahlevi/

[4] Many contemporary newsreels can be found online, for instance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpJvDQVX_Dc, as well as critiques of the ways in which such films were used for propaganda purposes (see, for instance, https://silencedrefugees.com/british-propaganda-film-polish-refugees-in-persia/).

assurances to the government that the refugees would be provided for) (Sternfeld 2018b:122). Interviewees on *The Lost Requiem* describe locals welcoming them and giving food. One of the main protagonists, Anna Borkowska, recalls: 'Every person threw something on the lorries, so that we'll get it. I got hold of a piece of sweet bread in a small towel, cheese and a few sweets' and then struggling to contain her emotions, 'It's very important, not for the cost or for the bread, but for the heart. Because we had no one here and they treated us like that' (39:53-40:18). Another woman living in the city of Ahvaz in southern Iran, recalls the kindness, contrasting it with how she had been treated in the previous years, 'in other words I was accepted as a human again, from a country that as a young child I never knew it existed … I actually owe Iran my life' (49:23-49:41). It is interesting to note that the welcome extended to refugees was quite different from the general antipathy towards the occupying Allied forces at this time (Antolak n.d.).

From the available accounts, it is clear that a thriving Polish cultural presence established itself in Iran within a short time, notwithstanding people's sense of transience, the agreement with the British having been that Iran was a temporary stop on the Poles' journey to other destinations or back home. Many expected the latter, but the political settlement at the end of the war meant that very few returned to Poland. Sternfeld suggests that even in such a short time there was good 'integration into Iran's social fabric' (2018b:118), including intermarriage. As one of the few scholars who has written in English on this topic, Sternfeld's work offers glimpses into the musical and cultural life of refugees, mainly via contemporary newspaper reports and writings by journalists or military personnel. According to Sternfeld, the refugees had a significant impact on Iran's emerging cosmopolitan middle classes and that many of the wartime Polish institutions, such as art galleries, nightclubs, churches, and synagogues remained active and prospered at least until the 1979 revolution' (2018b:114).[5] also argues that the 'the influx of highly visible and positively perceived foreigners into major urban centers increased the Iranian public's tolerance toward previously marginalized communities, which in turn led to higher integration of minorities into Iranian society, a

[5] A number of historical accounts and memoires have been published in Polish, Persian and English, including *From Warsaw to Tehran: Sad Memories of a Captive Polish Immigrant in Tehran from World War II* (2009), the story of Helen Stelmach (also interviewed by Sinai), edited by her sons Mohammad Ali and Reza Nikpour. The project 'Iran: In The Footsteps of Polish Refugees' (https://ispu.org.pl/en/home/) led by Marek and Fiedler Radoslaw, resulted in a book of the same name (2019, in Polish). See also see Mironowic 1986, Woloch 1998 and Dekel 2019, as well as the Polish-language texts listed in Sternfeld 2018b:126, footnote 78. There are also a number of documentary films such as *My Iranian Paradise* (2007) by Katia Forbert Petersen whose mother was a refugee who joined the Anders Army and later married a Danish engineer.

characteristic often attributed to the second Pahlavi era'. (2018b:104), bearing in mind that this also coincided with the more open social, cultural and political atmosphere that followed the removal of the autocratic Reza Shah by the Allies in 1941.

Music and Sound in *A Lost Requiem*

Sinai started work on *A Lost Requiem* in 1970, but the film took many years to complete. It premiered at a private screening which Naficy describes as 'a solemn occasion in the winter of 1983 in a Catholic church in Tehran before four hundred guests'. He also notes that extracts from the film were shown by the state broadcasting organisation VVIR, but that 'like its title [the film] seems to have disappeared, as it has not been shown publicly in full again either in Iran or abroad' (Naficy 2012:34; see also Kargar 2022).[6]As well as drawing on an extensive archive of photographs and film, Sinai and his crew travelled to a number of cities in Iran – Tehran, Bandar Anzali, Esfahan and Ahvaz – as well as to New Zealand for the 30th Anniversary of the arrival of the Esfahan children (see below). The film includes interviews with former refugees, their families and others. In Iran, Sinai focuses on those Poles who remained and re-built their lives there, including Anna Borkowska, a singer, actor and piano teacher (and who also worked in a hospital and as a dental assistant), who married an Iranian, Bahram Afkhami; and Vincent Filipowicz, a doctor who had been living in the city of Qazvin (to the north-west of Tehran) for 27 years and who, along with his father, worked at a hospital treating Polish refugees in Tehran and was also a medical officer at the Battle of Montecasino in Italy in 1944. Anna Borkowska helped a great deal with the film's music, advising Sinai on the choice of Polish songs and as a source of contacts and information on Polish culture more generally. Sinai also visited Bandar Anzali and talked to Gholam Abdol-Rahimi, an Iranian-Armenian photographer who took photographs of the refugees, and through which many were able to trace lost family members; and the caretaker of the now abandoned building in Esfahan where the children lived. All of the filming took place before the 1979 revolution, with the exception of the final scene in which Anna Borkowska and her granddaughter visit the grave of Anna's son.

[6] According to Naficy, the film originally focused on a Christian family and was called *1942 … Do you Remember?* (2012:33). Like many films whose production started before 1979 and were finished after, *The Lost Requiem* didn't meet post-revolutionary requirements such as hair covering for women, and therefore never received permission for general screening, nor for export abroad. This was a source of great disappointment to Sinai who had spent many years working on the film and was so personally invested in it. As mentioned above, the film received a screening in Poland in 2007 (at the University of Social Sciences) and soon after at a festival in Los Angeles (which Sinai was unable to attend because he was denied a visa). From there it started to circulate online and gained a wider audience (personal conversation with Farah Osouli (Sinai), 11.8.22).

Sinai had initially trained in architecture in Vienna, but went on to study music composition for three years at the Vienna Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, where he later also took a degree in film and television directing and screen writing. Returning to Iran in 1967, he worked at the Ministry of Culture and Arts (until 1972), taught screenwriting and documentary filmmaking and also worked at the National Broadcasting Organisation (*Seda o Sima*) as producer, screenwriter, director and editor. Sinai made over 100 short films, documentaries and feature films, the best known being his avant-garde documentary films and docu-dramas. He also served as a juror for several national and international film festivals. It is clear that Sinai's sensibility as a filmmaker was shaped by his musical training (he was also a proficient accordion player): music and sound are integral to the film and its impact on the viewer.[7] In particular, Sinai pays precise attention to sound and regularly mentions sound in his voiceover reflections. In the discussion below, I focus on selected passages to explore three areas: (1) diegetic and non-diegetic music in the soundtrack, including by Sinai himself; (2) ambient and other environmental sounds, as well as remembered or imagined sounds from the past; and (3) the sounds of voices and their significance. In all three cases I argue that sound plays a central role in creating a sense of intimacy between viewer, filmmaker and the subjects of the film.

Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Music

The Lost Requiem features a great deal of music, both diegetic and non-diegetic. The latter includes patriotic Polish songs such as 'Zabłąkany Kujawiaczek'[8] and 'Czerwone Maki na Monte Cassino' ('The Red Poppies on Monte Cassino'), one of the best-known Polish military songs of World War 2, which plays in the background as Vincent Filipowicz describes his experiences as a medic at the battle, the images cutting between him and footage of fighting and of wounded being treated (28:07 to 30:24; this footage thus implying the sounds of fighting and aerial bombing that we don't actually hear; 28:07 to 30:24;). An interesting thread that runs through the film is the piano music of Frédéric Chopin, heard at

[7] The film credits in relation to sound are as follows:
'Sound: A.Vakili.
Music composed and arranged by Khosrow Sinai
Sound mix: Iran Centre for Film Industries, Inc. K. Khoshhabavar' (1:41 to 1:51).
[8] 78rpm record produced by Orbis Polonia in London CAT 176 OP 226. Performer: Gwido Borucki https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2MNYHTMiX0. My thanks to Barbara Cwizewicz for identifying the Polish songs in the film.

three points (starting 14:42, 34:59 and 46:28).[9] As perhaps the best-known Polish composer internationally, it is unsurprising that Sinai should have chosen to set his music, but there is another level at which the music can he heard as the 'voice' of a refugee, given that Chopin spent much of his adult life exiled from Poland following the 1830 November Uprising against the Russians. For those who recognise this reference, the music arguably becomes a shared space of exilic expression and one that connects Polish people across the span of more than a century. This use of sound to bridge the divide of time is an idea that I return to below. The second Chopin passage is almost a full 5 minutes (34:59 to 39:12), set to interviews of people talking about the generosity of ordinary Iranians as they welcomed refugees, juxtaposed with images of the graves of those who died far from their homeland, once again linking with Chopin who died in exile in Paris. As I watch and listen to these passages, I find myself drawn into the emotional intensity and intimacy of their sonic worlds.

But it is the diegesis that offers a constant reminder of music as an intimate space of memory, belonging and loss. The film is framed by Anna Borkowska and her music. We first meet Anna early in the film (from 3:47) in her Tehran home: it is 1975 and she is accompanying herself to a Polish song ('Wiem, że nic nie zdoła') and we see the piano stacked with Polish sheet music. In fact, we hear Anna sing in Polish before we hear her speak. The first shocking testimony we hear is from her, as we move from music-making to a close-up of Anna, head in hand, as she recalls being taken with her family from Poland to the labour camps, their subsequent ordeal in the camps and eventual release and journey to Iran, where– unlike many who left after the war – Anna lived for the rest of her life. Relating her escape from Warsaw with her mother, Anna describes how, having walked all night, they located a village to hide in by following the sounds of roosters and dogs (6:05). Anna's was a musical family, and she talks about her brother Wiktor, a violinist who had studied at the conservatory in Wałcz and who we see a photograph of. Wiktor died tragically, aged 27, soon before the labour camps were opened up. Given that those sent to the camps were primarily from affluent classes with access to a cultured education, it is likely that there were both amateur and professional musicians among the refugees in Iran, but we know very little about who they were and what kinds of music-making they were involved in. *A Lost Requiem* mentions fund-raising concerts and plays, and we even see a concert programme; indeed, Anna herself took part in

[9] These pieces are as follows: Nocturne in F minor, op.55 no.1; Nocturne in B flat minor, op.9 no.1; and Nocturne in C Sharp minor, posthumous. My thanks to Michelle Assay for help in identifying these.

theatre productions that were held both to entertain the refugees and to raise funds.[10] Whilst none of the other interviewees in the film make music on screen, pianos feature regularly in the background. Towards the end of the film, Sinai returns to Anna's living room. Her son, Gholam Reza sits to the side, listening to her play and sing a Polish song but with the words sung in Persian (1:21:24 to 1:22:38), a symbolic and poignant melding of Anna's two countries of belonging. Although Anna speaks Persian in interview, she always sings in Polish, with this one exception. As she sings, we see people visiting the graves of their loved ones in Tehran:

> 'Now that you aren't there anymore/There'd be sorry for me.
> Nothing can separate us from each other/Your heart doesn't belong to anyone else.
> But if it's so, that we must stay apart/I don't want this. I can't live without you.
> Because there's no more tears/The world is full of misery.
> Happiness is only in dreams.'[11]

The main melody of this song becomes something of a leitmotif for the film, heard in fragments on violin at 9:35 – perhaps in reference to Anna's lost brother – and on 'cello at 20:27, and used extensively in Sinai's soundtrack for the Esfahan section (see below). In a later passage, Anna sings the Polish birthday/anniversary song 'Sto lat' while accompanied by her son (1:24:18 to 1:25:15).

It is clear that Anna's music-making keeps Poland alive for her on a very personal level. Other than this, all of the diegetic music in the film takes place in communal settings, mainly in New Zealand where there was at the time of filming a strong community of now adult 'Esfahan children'. These were unaccompanied children who were sent to the city of Esfahan, where the climate and general atmosphere was considered good for their health and where there was an established Armenian Christian community.[12] As Sternfeld writes, Esfahan eventually developed 'a community with more than 20 Polish establishments, including schools, scouts, choirs, and churches' (2018b:110). In the autumn of 1944, 733 of

[10] Anna played cameo roles in a number of films, including *Delshodegaan* (Ali Hatami, 1992 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0125718/) and Jafar Panai's internationally acclaimed and award-winning *The White Balloon* (1995, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112445/). She also appears in another film that Sinai made about Poles in Iran, *Yaar da Khaaneh* (1987, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0123331/).
[11] I have been unable to identify this song, which seems likely to be a composition by Anna herself. My thanks to Hossein Sattari for this suggestion.
[12] There was also a group known as the 'Tehran Children' who came to Iran via a different route, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/tehran-children.

these children and 100 teachers and workers sailed on a British ship from the south of Iran to Bombay, and from there on a US ship to Wellington in New Zealand, a journey that took one month. Thirty years later, Sinai and his crew travelled to New Zealand to film and take part in a reunion. On the film, we first encounter the 'Esfahan children' on a bus taking them to the reunion; everyone is participating in lively communal singing (52:19 to 54:46).[13] Through clever editing of scenes from the (1974) present and historical footage of the children disembarking from the boat in New Zealand carrying bundles of belongings, travelling by bus and arriving at their destination at the town of Pahiatua in 1944, Sinai effectively uses music as a connector between past and present and as a way of, in his own words, 'overcome[ing] the rules of time and nature' (11:47).

One of the main arguments of this chapter is that this kind of visual suturing of past and present, which we experience throughout the film, allows the audience to enter a highly intimate and affective engagement with the past. Another example: the passage from the Battle of Montecasino cuts back and forth in time, juxtaposing historical footage of the battle with contemporary shots of Vincent Filipowicz treating his patients in Qazvin; and music creates an intimate mediating link between both (28:07 to 30:24). Similarly, a short passage from 40:23 (to 41:57) shows one of the best-known Polish social venues that was established at this time: the Polonia bar and restaurant located in a basement on Lalehzar Avenue, the heart of Tehran's entertainment district. We see (what appears to be) footage of the bar, with people drinking, dancing and socialising, including the Polish women who had little choice but to keep company with the many foreign military and other war-related personnel – British, US and Indian – posted to occupied Iran.[14] There were already a few European-style cafés in Tehran by the 1930s, but the Polonia no doubt offered what felt like a more authentic European ambience for troops and refugees who shared the war-time city. The dance band music continues over images of the same space in 1975, now a chocolate factory (and at the time of writing a publisher's office). Once again, the visual montage of images of the same physical space across different times is bound together through music. This blurring of diegetic and non-diegetic, and between the music on screen and that in people's memories and imaginations, introduces a palimpsestic quality: as the sounds of the earlier period

[13] The songs are: 'Hej tam pod lasem' (https://youtu.be/n93wA59Nf7I) and 'Felek Stankiewicz' (https://youtu.be/_Gb6aCiIFM0).
[14] The song is 'Jeśli kochasz mnie' https://youtu.be/e-9e9pMbbJs.

continue in the soundtrack – in this case the dance music of Polonia – we are invited to imagine the traces or resonances of those sounds in the same space 30 years on.

Other examples of live diegetic music-making include a passage towards the end of the film, a Polish celebration in New Zealand with a performance of folk music and dancing in traditional costume (1:23:26 to 1:24:18).[15] There is also a passage of congregational hymn singing (1:30:00 to 1:31:43; the hymn is 'My chcemy Boga'), which begins with Sinai's reflection: 'Life goes on and people sing its praises'. The camera pans over the congregation, many of whose members still have memories of the war and their time in Iran; it lingers over the face of one man who is not singing and who is clearly pained by those memories, the sonic act of congregational worship no doubt intensifying such feelings. This passage leads into the final scene of the film, with cross-editing of images between the congregational singing and Anna Borkowska visiting her son's grave, the diegetic/non-diegetic music binding these together.[16] The latter scene ends with a melody heard earlier (at 9:35 and 20:27), on solo violin and then 'cello, as the visuals once again shift between the filmic present in the cemetery and photographs of Gholam Reza.[17] And with the image of flowers on his grave and the sounds of bird song, the film ends. The final credits role to silence, and a simple white text on black background.

As well as pre-existing non-diegetic music, Sinai composed a soundtrack which accompanies the Esfahan section of the film (58:21 to 1:19:26). The music is played by a small ensemble, including *santur* (hammered dulcimer), 'cello, violin, keyboard and cymbal. The music has a strong Iranian quality, but also cleverly references Polish music heard elsewhere in the film (for instance at 1:01:09 and 1:02:26). The music has an elegiac quality, which later becomes more sinister as Sinai delves into more painful memories. Once again, the music – this time a blending of Iranian and Polish themes – provides the 'glue' that binds together the old photographs and the filmic present of Esfahan, including the now abandoned spaces visited by Sinai and his crew.

[15] The music is 'Krakowiaczek jeden' (https://youtu.be/OeQ6jYzt6cM).
[16] It is interesting that Anna carries some white balloons in this passage, given that she was later to act in the 1995 film of the same name (see footnote 10).
[17] This was the only scene of the film that was shot after the revolution. Anna passed away in 2007 and is buried alongside her compatriots in Tehran's Doulab cemetery where *The Lost Requiem* begins.

Sounds Imagined and Remembered

As should already be clear, one of the fascinating aspects of *The Lost Requiem* is the centrality of sound to the narrative, particularly in creating a sense of intimacy between past and present. Sinai regularly invokes remembered and imagined sounds as an entry point to the past, sounds that he suggests still resonate in spaces today and certainly in the memories of survivors. Sinai's attention to the sound worlds of the refugees is quite striking, and there is a great deal of ambient sound and memories of ambient sound, not all of which there is space to discuss here. In particular, as noted, there is a strong palimpsestic intimacy whereby the same space is shown across time, often sharing the same soundtrack. Sinai shows what can be done with sound when all that is left of the past is photographs and silent footage. In *The Lost Requiem*, he breathes new sensory life into these media. From the very start of the film, Sinai positions himself as a witness to the story and central to this is the performative act of listening, whether to the memories of survivors or to the imagined sounds of the past. A striking instance of this is where Sinai invokes the marching of soldiers on the streets of Bandar Anzali. His narration is accompanied by a collage of photographs of young Polish men and women, many in military uniform. The film cuts between these old photographs and the rainy and deserted streets and parks of Anzali at the time of filming. We 'walk' with Sinai and share his emotional journey as he seeks to enter the sound worlds of those young people: we hear marching, the singing of a military anthem,[18] and bugle calls. Obviously, these sounds only exist in his imagination, and we can't be sure that they were the sounds heard at the time, but they nevertheless draw the viewer-listener into an intensely haptic and intimate relationship with the silent photographs of these young people whose fates are unknown. The passage is worth quoting in full:

> 'The dust that had covered the faded photographs concealed beneath the memories. [pause] I tried for some moments to overcome the rules of time and nature [pause; background sounds of marching, military anthem and bugle calls]. As I walked in the wet and deserted parks of Anzali, the *sound of marching feet came to my ears*, of the young soldiers who were forced out of their homeland and were being sent out to different battlefronts around the world [music continues; photographs of young Poles in Anzali, mixed with present day images of its parks and public spaces]. And *the sound of their young voices full of hope filled my mind* [background sounds of marching and music continues], their *chorus pleading* with their wish to return to their own land. And the *sound of the orphans' happy play*, able to forget through their innocent youth their miseries for a while [image of lion statue and marching

[18] The song is 'Zakazane Piosenki - Rozszumiały się wierzby płaczące' (10:49 to 13:52): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq5GpIWofB0

> feet]. The long-suffering visitors to our shores had departed from Anzali many years ago. It was only in my mind, on these desolate park steps, that their pale photographs flashed before my eyes. I saw them. *I heard them*. In these silent, empty parks. I retraced their footsteps [marching sounds].' (11:29 to 14:19, italics added)

In this and many other passages, Sinai establishes a dialogue between the past of 1942-44 and the filmic present. Nowhere is this dialogue more direct than in his visit to the Jolfa district of Esfahan, including the school and houses where the child refugees studied and lived. This passage is of particular interest for the ways in which sound – actual and invoked – plays a mediating role in this dialogue, including crucially through the voice and subjectivity of Sinai himself. This is the point at which Sinai's composed soundtrack starts (from 58:21) and continues for the whole of the Esfahan section, interspersed with snippets of interviews. Sinai creates an evocative collage of closely matched old photographs, the filmic present of the city and the stories of the now adult Esfahan children. All of these are set to his voiceover reflections, including the imagined sonics of the past: 'those very same Polish children who 30 years ago had filled the ancient narrow streets of Esfahan with their songs' (55:27), and later: 'On the ageing terraces, no child was running and the sound resounding in my ears was not that of the happy carefree laughter of the children, but that of the men and women in New Zealand as they related their past memories to me'. Sound, and its absence, are invoked as Sinai visits the Armenian church in Jolfa: 'Again a blanket of dust. Again the quiet silence' (1:03:41). At this point, we hear Sinai's instrumental arrangement of a Polish song heard earlier, starting with a plucked riff on 'cello, but with the harmonies changed, as he narrates: 'The sounds in my mind came not from here but from far away across the ocean [i.e. from New Zealand]' (1:03:41 to 1:04:22). Soon after, the original Polish song returns, as an interviewee recalls staying in a convent in Esfahan, and we see images of the church. Sinai's music (*santur* and 'cello) returns at 1:05:09 as he locates an old building in Esfahan and matches it to photographs of the same building with refugee children on the balcony. From 1:05:52, the music becomes 'darker' as the camera wanders through the abandoned building. Moving into a church courtyard, and to the continued soundtrack, we see present day children with the implied sounds of them playing in the same spaces where Polish children had played decades before:

> 'I was sure that the children playing here were unaware of those who had long ago stood by this very same pool and taken pictures under the arches [cue: old group photograph of the Esfahan children] …. Taking photographs was always an exciting occasion …' (1:07:22 to 1:07:46)

The camera then ‘becomes’ a child running and laughing to join the photography session: we hear running feet, laughter, and a woman calling to the children in Polish (‘Why don't you go with them? Run, run faster to catch up with them’); we then see an old group photograph and the exact same space now empty of children and sound. Sinai reflects, ‘In the old deserted garden I was alone. I looked about me and printed in my mind were the stories related to me in New Zealand by those who had been here as children those many years ago’ (1:09:33 to 1:09:47). The voiceover then becomes a first person narrative (the only point in the film where this happens), and once again fragments of the Polish tune are woven into the soundtrack:

> ‘We had a happy time in the camps of Esfahan. We played, we learnt, we swam. The girls learnt carpet weaving. Our governors tried to amuse us with theatres, parties. We all believed that we would celebrate our next Christmas in Poland. We all believed that Iran was our last stop before our return to Poland’. (1:09:51 to 1:10:14)

Once again, Sinai creates a palimpsest by which the present-day silent and abandoned buildings resonate with historical sounds, imagined and remembered: the singing, laughter and playing of children. Indeed, in the following passage, set to his own music, Sinai talks directly to those who previously inhabited these spaces, creating an intense intimacy between past and present:

> ‘Sometimes I believe that it would be possible for me to break through barriers of time and space. I saw their faces. I waited, expecting to see the children running along the terraces, or someone calling to me from the windows … ‘Hey, is anyone there?’ [two dogs playing and barking] Sometimes I believe that in a corner somewhere I would hear an answer in Polish ... ‘Hey, children, come and play in the garden. Do you understand Farsi? Do you understand what I say? Do you hear me?’ (1:11:24 to 1:13:01)

The camera ‘walk through’ of the now-abandoned buildings is interspersed with the memories of interviewees in New Zealand. For instance, Sinai says, ‘Come, children. Let us sing together. Polish, Iranian, anything you like’ and this cuts directly to a woman recalling the sounds of Iranian music and making a pretty good attempt to sing a *tahrir* (vocal ornament) before dissolving into laughter (1:13:31 to 1:13:44).

This long section set in Esfahan (and New Zealand; from 58:21 to 1:19:26) ends with the sounds of the city’s famous Zayandehrood river: we hear women talking in Polish and laughing, we hear the water flowing and then the voiceover, which ends: ‘Let us believe that

one day human beings may be allowed to forget their requiems. Let us believe. Let us believe' (1:19:12 to 1:19:22). This is also the point at which Sinai's original music soundtrack ends, with fragments of Polish songs.

'The Voice of the Few Remaining'

> 'Those who went have gone. Those who died are silent. And for me, the voice of the few remaining that I found echo the voice of the many who came to Iran.' (35:06, set to Chopin Nocturne in B flat minor, op.9 no.1)

As well as considering diegetic and non-diegetic music and other sounds, the discussion above has also frequently mentioned the voices that are an important part of *The Lost Requiem*'s affective power and the intimacy generated between filmmaker and viewer and between historical narrative and filmic present. There are in fact two versions of the film, one with the narrative in Persian and the other in English. Sinai himself reads the narration for the former (which I have been unable to access); the version readily available online is the one in English, read not by Sinai but by his cousin, M. Bayandor. Throughout the film, one is aware of a 'double voice': the physical voice of Bayandor and the metaphorical voice of Sinai. Sinai was fairly fluent in English, but according to his widow, Farah Osouli, he decided to ask his cousin, who had lived and studied in the UK, to read the English text. I have elsewhere written about the meanings imbued in the sounds of the voice – the vocal 'grain' as it were (drawing on Barthes; see Nooshin 2021): what does the sound of the voice itself say and how does this contribute to the affective intimacy of the film? It's hard to know how directorial Sinai was in relation to the 'tone' of Bayandor's voice, but the softly spoken, emotive and empathetic vocal sound, as well as the slow rhythm and pacing of the poetic text, arguably all contribute to the film's sonic intimacy.

Space precludes detailed analysis of the multiple registers of meaning in the vocal sounds of the many interviews in the film. Of direct relevance to the current discussion, however, is how the sounds of these testimonies (as with music and ambient sound) generate a sense of intimacy. This is particularly apparent in former refugees' memories of being welcomed by local people. It is impossible to convey in words the sonic emotion of one woman's voice as she recalls: 'We found out that really good people still exist in the world. We came full of lice, full of disease, full of epidemics and nobody asked us for a certificate of health, nobody asked us if we are capable to do a good day's work. They took us as we are. Poor, homeless,

disease-ridden people. Unfortunately, after 3 weeks my mother died in Tehran. Thousands of Polish people died there. I can still remember Persian hospitality, Persian kindness to us' (1:15:22-1:16:20). At times the emotion makes her pause before she is able to continue. She then asks the film crew if she can record a message to her friend Ada Sikorska, whom she recognised in one of the old photographs that the film crew had brought to New Zealand. Holding up a photograph of Ada and her sister, and switching from English to Polish, her voice wavering with emotion, she addresses Ada directly, asking her to get in touch wherever she is, 'Here, there are a few other girls who were with us in our class. We all would be very happy if we could talk with you again, even by correspondence' (1:17:46 to 1:18:00).[19] Similarly, as noted earlier, when Anna Borkowska recalls local people throwing food to the refugees, she stops speaking briefly as she struggles to contain her emotions, before continuing: 'It's very important, not for the cost or for the bread, but for the heart. Because we had no one here and they treated us like that' (39:53-40:18). As she pauses between the words, we see a blurred carousel of images as if she is searching her memory. In this and similar passages, such as when she describes her brother's death (18:22), the extreme close up images of Anna's face adds an intense visual intimacy to the sonic.

These passages are immensely moving, as the particular quality of voice draws the viewer into an intimate relationship with the on-screen character and their emotional journey. Perhaps one of the most moving scenes in the film is the weekly Polish Mass filmed in a Tehran church in 1975, at which time around 100 Polish people remained in Tehran (from 30:25). From the cross above the altar the camera pans down to the priest, whose voice resonates in the echoey church. The camera pans out and we see the congregation from behind and hear them: praying, coughing, shifting in their seats. The camera then focuses on individual faces, most lost in thought and memory. Then, as if entering those memories, Sinai weaves in historical footage: of refugees walking and carrying their bundles, to the sounds of the Polish song heard at the start of the film ('Zabłąkany Kujawiaczek'). The latter fades out and we hear Sinai translate the priest's words: 'Let us pray. Let us pray that no nation may ever again be sent forth from its homeland' (31:32 to 31:42). There follows a montage of images from past and present, all set to the near silence of the church as people pray. At

[19] This passage of the film does not have subtitles, but the viewer gets a sense of the meaning partly through the tone of voice. My thanks to Barbara Cwizewicz for translating this passage. Who knows whether these friends, and many others, were ever reunited. Forty years on, and with the digital revolution, I was able to locate Ada at the click of a mouse: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ada_Fighiera_Sikorska

32:13, the congregation joins the priest in reciting The Penitential Act. The music returns at 32:16 with historical footage of families reuniting and this continues as the image shifts back to the church and people's responses to the painful memories; we see Anna with her head in her hands, crying. After Mass, people congregate outside, talking and embracing, and the footage is cleverly edited to juxtapose the embraces in 1975 with those of reuniting people in 1942 (the passage ends at 33:35).

But there are also sounds of happiness in the film: at 56:15, the crowd in New Zealand cheers as the photograph album that Sinai has brought from Iran is passed around and we hear an excited polyphony of voices as people try to identify themselves or the places they remember, exchange memories, and so on. Once again, the close-up of faces and their reactions combines with the sound to create a strong sense of intimacy and affective engagement with the story.

Another notable aspect of voice in *The Lost Requiem* are the different languages and accents heard: Polish spoken within and outside the church, in the cemetery, Anna's singing, and the congregational hymns towards the end; the accented Persian and English of the Polish people interviewed in Iran; the accents of the Armenian photographer in Bandar Anzali (14:36) and of the caretaker in Esfahan; and the former refugees in New Zealand whose 'new life' accents belie their painful childhood stories. The film is saturated with sonic linguistic diversity, which arguably serves to complicate simplistic narratives of language and belonging.

Towards the end of the film, Sinai returns to Anzali and talks to the photographer about his memories of the refugees. After a minute or so, the latter's words are creatively manipulated into a repetitive loop (1:27:33 to 1:30:01) which gradually fades back in the mix, transformed from foreground narrative into a quasi-musical background for the voiceover (with the added sonic dimension of pattering rain):

> 'I searched for years among the ruins of gravestones in the cemeteries for the lost requiem. I cried along with the rain for the requiem. But with the passing of time, I too forgot.' (1:29:06 to 1:29:27)

Conclusion: The Intimacy of Sonic Footprints

> 'I have to accept. I have to accept the limitations of time and space. The children have gone long ago. They have carried with them the memory of the hospitality of a nation and the pictures of an ancient land.' (1:14:08 to 1:14:24)

The Lost Requiem is a filmic elegy that documents a little-known chapter of the Second World War. Whilst it has been impossible in the space of this article to do full justice to the range of ambient and remembered sounds in the film, I have explored how the rich combination of sound, music, voices, still images and film generates a complex multi-sensory experience and how the sonic becomes a space of intimacy within which to mediate memory and affect. Further, Sinai he uses various techniques to create palimpsestic blurring between past and present, and sound is an important part of this. I have elsewhere explored the idea of historic sonic footprints that continue to resonate across the decades, sounds that may no longer be heard but that have shaped and changed the spaces we inhabit. A central conceit of the film are the sonic footprints of the Polish people who spent part of their lives in Iran and then, mostly, moved on. One might ask: where do such sounds go and what are their traces in the public spaces of Tehran today? The clamour of political events in the 1950s, followed by revolution and war in the 1970s and 80s have drowned out many of the earlier voices and sounds. And there are other resonances that this story activates: the sonic experiences and sounds brought by others who have sought refuge in Tehran since World War 2: Afghan refugees (another Soviet-related exodus) and internally displaced people from the south of Iran during the 1980s Iran-Iraq War (see Fakhraeirad, Nooshin and Rezaie forthcoming).

The Lost Requiem overflows with Sinai's passion for and self-acknowledged obsession with this story. The dedication at the beginning reads: 'This film has been produced from 1971 to 1983 in memory of those refugee children, women, and men, who were brought to Iran during World War II and their names on countless gravestones remains as the only sign of a historical catastrophe'. Like the graves with which the film begins, the closing credits are accompanied by silence, as the final word of a story that few will remember. Or perhaps it is the absence of sound at this final point in the film that provides a space in which the film-maker generates the strongest sense of intimacy with his audience.

References

Antolak, Ryszard. no date. 'Iran and the Polish Exodus from Russia 1942', *Pars Times*, http://www.parstimes.com/history/polish_refugees/exodus_russia.html

Baqerzadeh, Mohsen. 1987/1366. 'Goftogu ba Gizella Varga Sinai, Naqqash; Khosrow Sinai, Filmsaz; Gholamhosain Nami, Naqqash va Ostad-e Honarhaye Tajassomi' ['In conversation with Gizella Varga Sinai, artist; Khosrow Sinai, filmmaker; Gholamhosain Nami, artist and sculptor'], *Ketab-e Tus* (summer), 335-84.

Davies, Norman. 2015. *Trail of Hope: The Anders Army, An Odyssey Across Three Continents*. Oxford: Osprey publishing.

Dekel, Mikhal. 2019. *Tehran Children: A Holocaust Refugee Odyssey*. New York: W.W.Norton.

Fakhraeirad, Armaghan, Laudan Nooshin and Anna Rezaie. Forthcoming. 'A Sonic Tale of Two Cities: Memory, Trauma and Auditory Scars in Tehran and Abadan-Khorramshahr', in *Music and Society in Iran*, ed. Houchang Chehabi and Nahid Siamdoust. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Kargar, Parvin. 2022. '*Mohajeran-e Lahestani az Negah-e Doorbin-e Iranian*' ['Polish Migrants Through the Camera of Iranians'], Special issue of *Baraaye Fardaa* magazine, Khordad 1401, pages 60-63.

Mironowic, Anna. 1986. *Od Hajnowki do Pahlewi* [*From Hajnówka to Pahlevi*]. Editions Spotkania.

Naficy, Hamid. 2012. *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Volume 4, The Globalizing Era, 1984-2010.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Nooshin, Laudan. 2021. 'Affective Listening, Sonic Intimacy, and the Power of Quiet Voices in Rakhshan Banietemad's *The May Lady*: Towards a Cinema of Empathy', in Maryam Ghorbankarimi (ed.), *Refocus: The Films of Rakhshan Banietemad*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp.115-39.

_____ 2022. 'The Sounds of Polish Tehran', Sonic Tehran blog post, https://www.sonictehran.com/post/the-sounds-of-polish-tehran (9.2.22).

Sablinska, Aga. 2020. 'How filmmaker Khosrow Sinai uncovered the hidden history of Polish refugees in Iran', 7th October 2020 https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/12207/khosrow-sinai-polish-refugees-iran-documentary-now-available-youtube

Stelmach, Helen. 2009. *From Warsaw to Tehran: Sad Memories of a Captive Polish Immigrant in Tehran from World War II* (edited by Mohammad Ali and Reza Nikpour).

Sternfeld, Lior. 2015. Podcast: 'Lior Sternfeld on Polish Refugees in Mid-Century Tehran, War and Migration in the Cosmopolitan City'. January 22nd 2015. https://ajammc.com/2015/01/22/lior-sternfeld-polish-refugees-iran/

_____ 2018a. *Between Iran and Zion: Jewish Histories of Twentieth-Century Iran*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

_____ 2018b. '"Poland Is Not Lost While We Still Live": The Making of Polish Iran, 1941-45', *Jewish Social Studies, 23*(3), 101-27. https://doi.org/10.2979/jewisocistud.23.3.04

Woloch, Helena (1998) *Moje Wspomnienia* (*My Memories*). Sovest: Kotlas.

Biography Laudan Nooshin is Professor of Music at City, University London, UK. Her research interests include urban sound studies, music and sound in Iranian cinema, sound in heritage and museum spaces, music and gender, music and youth culture in Iran and creative processes in Iranian music. She has published widely and is currently writing a book on the sounds of Tehran (for a project supported by The Leverhulme Trust, https://www.sonictehran.com/). Laudan is co-Editor of the Cambridge University Press

series Elements in Music and the City, is a Vice-President of the Royal Musical Association and co-founder of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies Network.