**Q: Hi everyone, and welcome to another episode of WHY THIS?, a Nexus Arts podcast. I’m Aaron Schuppan. I’m the media manager here at Nexus Arts, and in WHY THIS? I talk to artists from all walks of life, all mediums and all levels of career. Today’s episode I’m speaking with Hamed Sadeghi, an Iranian tar player, from Iran originally, from Sydney now, and as a learner to this discussion, he’s lived all over the place. We had a really interesting chat about music, storytelling, inspiration, passion. I think you’ll get a lot out of it. Enjoy.**

**All right. Welcome back everyone. It’s a freezing cold Monday morning, but we’re in the warm confines of the Nexus Arts Venue. I’m here with my new friend Hamed, who I literally met five minutes ago, so this is going to be a really interesting chat. Do you want to introduce yourself to everybody and tell us a bit about what brings you here today?**

P1: Sure. Well, thanks for having me. I’m Hamed Sadeghi. I’m a Persian classical tar player, like the guitar with no gui, just t-a-r. It’s a very traditional ancient instrument that is common in Iran, and some other central Asian and Middle Eastern countries. I’ve been to this country for a few years, and now I’m in Adelaide to perform.

**Q: Fantastic. So you’re performing tomorrow night, right?**

P1: Saturday.

**Q: Saturday.**

P1: Yes.

**Q: It is Thursday today.**

P1: Is it? Yes.

**Q: Yes, it is.**

P1: Yeah. Sorry, I’m – early morning.

**Q: Early morning. We’ve both had our first coffee, we’re a little confused.**

P1: Yes.

**Q: Interesting. So, obviously, you’re from Iran?**

P1: Mmhm.

**Q: And you learnt the instrument there. How did you first pick up the tar?**

P1: On a radio station, when I was 13 or 14, I heard this instrument on a radio program, and I asked my mum if I can start playing this instrument. She was a bit surprised, you know, for a 14-year-old kid to be more into contemporary, rock back then, or pop music. And I said, “Well, I like this one.” She got me an instrument, and I started taking lessons, and never stopped.

**Q: Wow. So it just grabbed you. What was it about the sound that you connected with?**

P1: I think the warmth of the – maybe not, maybe because it has a very – it sounded like someone was telling a story. And I like – and I have been listening to radio a lot, even when I was very young, and I loved reading books, I love the a stories, and I thought this instrument is kind of telling a story for me, and I liked it.

**Q: That’s fascinating. Maryam, who you’re playing with, said something sort of similar, that music is kind of a form of storytelling in an abstract sort of a way, but it’s still taking people on an emotional journey, sort of guiding them through a set of feelings and then to a conclusion. That’s interesting that you both said the same thing. Talk to me about, I guess, your practice now in Australia and what your current relationship is with playing music?**

P1: I guess, well, I – when I moved to Australia eight – nine years ago, I changed, and also lots of new influences living in this country. I wasn’t sure in the beginning, I wasn’t sure if I want to stay here, because it was too quiet for me. Coming from Tehran we have like 25 million people in only one city. It’s hectic, yeah. And imagine me, I was born and raised there, and just hang in the city, and I came to Australia. I moved to a suburb in Sydney called Castle Hill, and it had a very friendly village vibe, beautiful, but it was too quiet for me. And I thought, nope, I’m going to go back. I did. But then after a couple of weeks thought, oh, I’m missing Australia, and I came back. And then I moved to city in Sydney, Surrey Hills, and Inner West.

**Q: That’s a little busier.**

P1: Yeah. And then I was like, oh, hang on, I love Australia. You know, since then lots of things changed. I fell in love with jazz. I liked jazz before I came to Australia. I had a couple of fusion bands in Asia, in Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia, but I guess I was more mature when I moved here. And I tried to explore this new path.

**Q: You said two things there that I want to ask you separate questions about. Falling in love with jazz; I want to know how that happened. But then maybe before we get to that, you say you had fusion bands, and you said Malaysia and Singapore?**

P1: Yes.

**Q: Tell me about that. That sounds really interesting. So you were in there and you travelled through those places, or did you live in those parts of Asia?**

P1: I moved to Malaysia before I come here. I did a degree, a Master of Sound Engineering in Malaysia. So I wanted to try living in Asia, just because I liked it. And I formed a band in there and we started touring and doing gigs in Asia, mostly in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Taiwan a little bit.

**Q: Cool.**

P1: It was mostly – but it was mostly Middle Eastern/new ideas, world music things. It had nothing to do with jazz, yeah. And then I – when I moved to here I realised that how much I loved jazz. Because I think the reason is that I realised that there’s similarities, the hidden similarities between jazz, improvised music and Persian classical music, where we learn how to improvise. Like two different genres that have kind of a similar language.

**Q: Interesting. I’m not a musician at all, and so I love this part of when I get to talk to musicians, it’s can you break that down for me into sort of like, I guess, the most basic way of explaining what you mean.**

P1: Yeah. You know, it might happen to non musicians, asking musicians, how do you come up with melody, how do you write music, for example? And it’s hard to explain, because you don’t know how. It is like when you know your mother tongue, you don’t know how to structure sentences in your brain, you just say it. For a musician it’s like learning the language, like keep repeating what exists in music, and then you come up with your own phrases. So jazz has the same approach for learning music as Persian classical music has. Where in Western music things are more segmented and more structured, because the path is very like, you have to do this. But like in jazz you don’t know where to start, basically.

**Q: Sure. Yeah.**

P1: You know what I mean?

**Q: Mmhm.**

P1: Because you have to learn the language. You just have to keep repeating until your body learns it.

**Q: Right.**

P1: Yeah. It’s fascinating.

**Q: Yeah.**

P1: It’s simple but complicated.

**Q: Sure. Simple but complicated. Yeah. I love watching a good jazz band when they’re all in – I can just see that they’re all in a zone. They’re all sort of looking to each other or looking back and forward at each other, and they just seem to know exactly when to handover, or they’ll see – bass player will see the piano player start doing a thing, and somehow they click and they sort of – yeah, it is like watching people suddenly understand what the other person is saying in a language that only they seem to speak, or that I don’t speak, but I’m watching something happen right in front of me. Do you play a lot at the moment? How is your live performance career going?**

P1: Well, after the pandemic it’s crazy. Yeah. We’re touring at the moment with my band, and this show is part of our national tour. I’ve been overseas recently. I’ve been to Europe and Iran for a few weeks, but it was mostly solo shows, and a festival in Germany as well. Once we finish this tour we will go to Europe with my band, to Spain, Portugal and South of France.

**Q: Talk to me about – tell me about your band, and tell us about the tour in Europe, what’s that like?**

P1: Well, the band is a five piece – I call it ensemble, and it’s myself on the tar, Pedram Layegh on the guitar, Adem Yilmaz on the percussion, Max Alduca on double bass, and Michael Avgenicos on the saxophone. But Michael can’t come because he’s got COVID.

**Q: Oh, no.**

P1: It’s going to be a four-piece ensemble.

**Q: It’s a four-piece this week.**

P1: Yes. Which is fine, because we’ve been doing as a four-piece many times these last two years. It’s happened before. And, yeah, we will be going to Europe. We had this tour locked in last year, two years ago, didn’t happen, obviously, and it’s happening now. We’re going to Portugal, starting from Porto to the South of Lisbon, and then all over to Cadiz, South of Spain, [00:11:32] Madrid, Barcelona, and a couple of more gigs.

**Q: Fantastic. What a great way to see the world. Are these festivals that you’re playing, or are they sort of one-off shows?**

P1: There are three festivals, and the rest are gigs at music venues, basically, like jazz venues.

**Q: Wow. That’s cool. It sounds like things are going really well for you at the moment. Like it’s a steady thing that you’re getting to do with your music. What do you do when times are tough, or when all of this music thing is a real struggle, how do you cope with that?**

P1: I was, well, look, in the last two years I was lucky, because I work in the theatre and dancing industry as well. I make a lot of music for Elva, in Sydney. And also some independent dances. I recently finished a work at the Sydney Dance Company. When times are tough I work on creative projects that I need to immerse myself in my room and make music for a story. Also a lot of teaching.

**Q: Where do you teach?**

P1: I’ve got a little studio in Sydney in my place, just in my studio. Also got a few international students over Zoom, from Middle East, mostly. Yeah. Which I kept them. I mean, it was a regular income way before for me, but now it’s a bit different. Hopefully I can keep teaching.

**Q: Sure. Yeah. Let’s go back to performing. Something – I’m always kind of envious of the work I do; I’m behind a camera, and then the work I make goes through months and months and months of work, and then you sort of show it to people on the screen, or maybe they’ll watch it on their computer or something. I’m not even present when people consume my work. But musicians and performers, you get up on that stage in front of people. That feedback is immediate, and I imagine when it’s good, it must be incredible, and when it’s bad, it must be really, really bad.**

P1: Yes.

**Q: Do you have any stories? I’m curious to hear, like, what’s the best show or what’s the best performance experience you’ve got, and do you have any bad ones?**

P1: This is something that I’ve been thinking about a lot, because before I answer your question, a difference between films and theatre and live music performances, is that in film there’s an interface between audience and the artwork.

**Q: Absolutely.**

P1: But live music performance or theatre, physical performances, there is no interface with the audience. So their energy really impacts on you and your performance. Where I realise when I was making music for short movies, I was in the audience, and I was watching – I watched the film on different occasions, and I was feeling different.

**Q: That’s something I find fascinating about a film, it’s ‑ ‑ ‑**

P1: It’s so, yeah.

**Q: - - - the same thing every time.**

P1: Same thing.

**Q: But the people you’re with, all the context you’re watching it with, can change the experience of it.**

P1: Exactly. So we rehearse a set list, perform for the audience, and then depending what kind of audience you get, that changes it still. So still that’s the interesting part for me, how to control, how to, you know, if there’s a bit of an unexpected energy in the room, how do you – how you can handle that?

**Q: Sure, sure. So you’ll adjust the set list, depending on the response that you’re getting from audiences and stuff?**

P1: Yeah. And I’ve checked this a lot with my musicians after some certain gigs. I was like, did you guys feel the same? It wasn’t like – it was like that, or like this, and they go, oh, yeah, yeah, it was, it was. Everybody can feel it. So it’s an instinct, yeah.

**Q: What’s – tell me about one of the best times you’ve ever had, so one of the best shows you’ve ever played?**

P1: I think, if I’m going to be honest, the best shows I’ve ever had were regional Australia.

**Q: Regional Australia?**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Great.**

P1: You can feel how honest, how natural, how lovely people are.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: It’s just so beautiful.

**Q: Yeah. They’ll let you know in the country, if they like it or if they don’t.**

P1: Yeah. Yep.

**Q: They’ll let you know, yeah.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Amazing. Where have you played in the regions? How regional are we talking?**

P1: Like recently we’ve been to Bellingen, Armidale, to Berry.

**Q: Berri, in South Australia?**

P1: Oh, no, in New South Wales.

**Q: Oh, sure. There’s a – yeah.**

P1: Yeah. And a few little villages near Byron Bay, yeah. We’ve been to Orange – I don’t know if it’s a regional, it’s very fancy. Bermagui, near Victoria, yeah, lovely, like people are – I mean, Australians are a lovely people. They’re so friendly.

**Q: That‘s good to hear.**

P1: Yeah. It’s true. I love this country. Yeah.

**Q: So what made your decision to move to Australia? How did that come about? The choice to come here in particular?**

P1: I have no idea how it happened, to be honest. I was ‑ ‑ ‑

**Q: Bought the wrong plane ticket?**

P1: - - - I was in Malaysia, and a friend of mine went to Australia, and he wanted to go and see a lawyer, and he couldn’t speak English, and he asked me to go with him to translate. And then when he was talking to the lawyer he told my friend that you’re not eligible to apply for the permanent residency, you know, to get these points you need to do another few months.

**Q: Sure.**

P1: And then he asked me what is your condition? “Oh, I’m a musician. I don’t want to go to Australia. I’m going back to Iran, maybe to Europe. I don’t know.” He said, “Well, tell me how is” – and then once I told him he said, “Oh, maybe you’re eligible, you can go if you want. I can apply for you.” Sure. All right. Let‘s give it a go.

**Q: I respect the spontaneity of that. That’s great. I was eligible, so I did.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Good one. Yeah. Cool. Music is just if – from everything you’ve told me, music is the driving force of your life. It’s the thing that you do. So what’s your day-to-day like, in terms of maintaining that and working at it and progressing?**

P1: Look, I think it doesn’t matter what you do, in what industry or what – how big or how small it is, I think as long as you’re doing it with passion and love, it’s going to be something. Like no matter what it is. Like the most insignificant thing of what you can think of, as long as you do them with – if you give hundred per cent of yourself to it, and with love and passion, you’ll be fine.

**Q: What do you do when the passion isn’t there?**

P1: I simply take a day off. I just take a day off to go swimming, just go jogging, reading. But, yeah, my partner always, she always – she thinks that I’m working all the time. I don’t agree, but she thinks I’m working all the time. But I think I do take some time off once a month.

**Q: I mean, that’s really true, when you say I take a day off, that really struck a chord with me. It’s very difficult, and I think a lot of artists struggle with that thing of like, you know, if it’s not happening that day, or we’re not feeling it, you feel this need to sort of – a lot of us – people I’ve talked to on this very podcast feel the need to sort of knuckle down and really try to figure that out in the moment and sort of kind of force it, but sometimes it’s, yeah, stepping away, and sometimes I think it’s our mind and body’s way of saying just need to recuperate a little bit, we need to rest, we need to sort ourselves out and come back tomorrow, or come back in an hour. You’ve just got to ease off the gas a little bit sometimes.**

P1: Yeah. And also I think the older I get, the more I realise when not to play, and when not to practise. Because you’re not going to lose it. It’s not going to go anywhere. It’s going to be there. But it’s really important to let your body breathe.

**Q: Yeah. Definitely. That’s definitely something that comes with a little bit of age, I think. That fear of I’ll lose it, if I don’t do this right now I’ll lose it. I used to keep a notebook on me, and I wrote down every idea I ever had, because I just thought if I don’t write it down, this could be the genius idea. And it took me a really long time to just stop doing that. Because I realise if the idea is good, I’ll remember it. Because if it’s not good, I’m not going to bother remembering it. And that sort of turned out to be true. Yeah. Cool. I think my final question I like to ask everyone is about – we’ve talked about how you started and we’ve talked about what you do now. But what is ahead for you and what do you hope is in your future when it comes to music?**

P1: Well, I started a very particular journey in my life, because I play a very – an instrument, which is not very common. I think my goal – I wish to get to somewhere that this instrument has the some stage as a lot of popular instruments have. I'm working hard on it. And I think to come up with a more understandable musical language for everyone involved, that they can – that when they listen to it they understand it, they enjoy it, regardless of what the instrument is in the band. Like not instantly thinking of world music, jazz or classical, western, eastern; it’s just music and enjoy it.

**Q: Do you find that that’s sometimes a barrier for people, that they’ve already decided, I don’t like jazz, or I don’t understand Middle Eastern music, or whatever? Do you find that that’s a barrier?**

P1: It is. You also feel that if they are in the audience, you feel the energy. Which is, you know, something, but it’s also a lot of combinations don’t sound pleasant to a lot of people. Fair enough. They’re just too different, and if you put them next to each other and expect the result to be nice and pleasant, it won’t be.

**Q: Like flavours in a dish, sometimes if you’re not used to certain flavours going together it can be a challenge at first. I suppose it takes a little time to get used to.**

P1: Yes. Exactly. Yeah.

**Q: This is what I like to ask people at the end. My hope is that a lot of people might be listening to this interview. May not be a practising artist yet, but maybe they’ve always thought about it. They’ve always thought, you know what, I’d love to paint something, I’ve always had an idea for a story. What would you say to someone who has that inkling of, I would like to do something, but maybe they haven’t done it yet?**

P1: Okay. Let me tell you something. When I moved to Australia nine years ago, it was very hard for me to establish myself as a full-time musician, because I didn’t know anyone. It was very new for me. Expensive. I had to make money. And I found a job in a company. I started working in an office for a few months, money was great, easy job, just go to the office, come back home, happy. If I continued over about two houses by now, like I would have been in Hawaii now, for example, I don’t know, but just after a few months I thought it’s not me. I don’t want to – I’m not living for money, I’m living for my passion. I want to enjoy every single moment of my life, and I just quit it. And they said do you want a new position, do you want more money, do you want – no, I just want to be free. Don’t – give me your love.

**Q: Don’t give me your money.**

P1: Yeah. I’m not saying this is right. But if you want to do something, this is the right time. There is no other time. There is no tomorrow. Do it now.

**Q: Yep. Yes. You also don’t have to quit your job to do the things ‑ ‑ ‑**

P1: Oh, no, no. No, no.

**Q: I’ve done the same thing and regretted it. I was like, why did I quit that job. I could have done both.**

P1: No, it’s very true. It’s very true.

**Q: But I get it, yeah, if you want to do it, now is the right time.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Yep. Now is always the right time. I absolutely agree with you. I agree with you there.**

P1: Yeah.

**Q: Beautiful. Well, thank you so much for coming in and having a chat. I hope everybody listening has enjoyed it.**

**Thanks again for listening, everybody. I hope you enjoyed my chat with Hamed. If you’re listening to this in time, perhaps come see him play at Nexus Arts on Saturday night. If you’re listening to this at any other time, however, check at nexusarts.org.au to see what we’ve got going on all year round in our gallery space and in our main menu. And check out the back catalogue of episodes of WHY THIS? We’ve got everyone from artists to painters to tattooists to professional wrestlers. There’s something in there for everybody. Thanks again. Bye.**

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