

Farokhzad Layegh

COMPOSER / FULL BIOGRAPHY / 629 WORDS

Farokhzad Layegh (b. 1963, Shiraz) is an Iranian composer and senior interventional cardiologist. His musical and medical careers have developed alongside one another, though by very different paths. His music brings Persian musical heritage into dialogue with contemporary Western composition, literature and interdisciplinary performance.

Layegh began studying violin at the age of seven. Following the 1979 Revolution, when public musical life in Iran was severely restricted, he set music aside to pursue medicine, returning to musical study years later in Paris, where he studied setar with Reza Ghassemi. He subsequently continued his study of Persian music with Massoud Shaari and drew on the teaching and musical perspectives of Hossein Alizadeh and Dariush Talai.

His first major composition, *The Book of Austerity* (2007), brought contemporary Persian poetry into dialogue with a modern re-interpretation of classical Persian musical traditions. The work was recorded with Maestro Shahram Nazeri, one of the most revered voices in Persian classical singing, bringing Layegh's contemporary approach into direct dialogue with the tradition from which it emerged.

With *Sus-Septed Tempus* (Seven Pending Times, 2012), Layegh extended this exploration into Western chamber music, developing a post-modern engagement with Persian musical ideas through a seven-movement cycle for string quartet. The work was performed at London's Cadogan Hall in 2020 as part of *Music Without Borders*, a programme of INTERNAVA - an international initiative Layegh co-founded with British conductor Mark Stephenson to support Iranian musicians and composers and bring contemporary Persian music to wider audiences. Movements from the cycle were later arranged for string orchestra and received their Dutch premiere with Amsterdam Sinfonietta at Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, in a programme featuring Kayhan Kalhor and Kian Soltani. Amsterdam Sinfonietta subsequently produced *Sus-Septed Tempus V* as a music film directed by Hans Pannecoucke, and in 2020 the work also appeared in *Walldance*, a collaboration between Amsterdam Sinfonietta and Bencha Theater performed as part of a ceremony attended by Queen Máxima of the Netherlands.

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FULL BIOGRAPHY / CONTINUED

Completed in 2021 and released by Hermes Records, *Lexolalia Descenticum* (Wordful Stutter of the Fall) marks a further development in Layegh's compositional work. The piece grew from a dream in which Layegh heard T. S. Eliot reciting *The Waste Land* alongside the voice of Iranian poet Ahmad Shamlou: two voices, separated by language, geography and history, confronting a shared experience of cultural and existential disintegration. From this imagined encounter emerged an eight-part composition exploring language, fragmentation, disconnection and renewal. The setar parts in *The Book of Austerity* and cello parts in *Sus-Septed Tempus* and *Lexolalia Descenticum* are performed by Layegh himself. His highly personal self-taught approach to cello brings a distinctive sonority to these works.

Lexolalia Descenticum subsequently became the musical point of departure for *The Waste Land / Het barre land* (2022-2025), a large-scale interdisciplinary production by Amsterdam Sinfonietta and ISH Dance Collective. The idea of developing the work as an interdisciplinary performance bringing together music and choreography was originally proposed by Layegh to Amsterdam Sinfonietta. The project was subsequently developed in collaboration with the artistic team; Candida Thompson and Marco Gerris shaped its choreographic, theatrical and visual dimensions. The resulting production brought together string orchestra, contemporary and hip-hop dance, aerial acrobatics and theatrical imagery, with movements from *Lexolalia Descenticum* running through the performance as a recurring musical thread. Premiered in the Netherlands in 2022, it returned for a national tour in 2025 and received its Asian premiere at the 53rd Hong Kong Arts Festival on 15-16 March 2025.

His musical work has developed alongside a long engagement with literature, philosophy, science and the visual and performing arts. His two professional lives have developed independently, yet both place him in sustained contact with different modes of inquiry: interventional cardiology with the immediate and concrete world of the human body, uncertainty and intervention; composition with language, memory, abstraction and meaning.