



Music

Women, life, freedom! Iranian electronic musicians reflect on a year of protest

A new compilation of work by female producers honours the women fighting for their rights in Iran in the wake of Mahsa Zhina Amini's death in police custody

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In September 2022, Mahsa Zhina Amini died after being arrested by Iran's "morality police", for allegedly wearing her hijab improperly. Authorities claimed she had a heart attack and brain seizure, but witnesses to her arrest said she was a victim of police brutality. The uprising sparked by her death was the largest Iranian civil rights movement since the revolution in 1979, as thousands took the streets and were often met with violent subjugation from the country's authorities.

More than a year has now passed, and the ubiquitous chants of "*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*" (meaning "woman, life, freedom" in Persian) have seeped from the streets of Iran into the works of female Iranian electronic artists - literally so in the case of *Azadi.MP3*, whose track Empty Platform is filled with chants of those protests alongside heavily percussive beats.

Her track is included on a new compilation of music and sound by Iranian women, curated by Aida and fellow producer Nesa Azadikhah: a cacophonous sonic adventure titled *Intended Consequence* released in August via their label *Apranik Records*, and a sequel to January's *Woman Life Freedom*. "We want to use our voice and platform to raise awareness about these issues in the otherwise silent electronic music industry," Aida says.

Azadikhah adds - like Aida, speaking before the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war - that they also intend to "honour the bravery of people whose fight has taken on a new form. Currently, the people of Iran are continuing the fight in their day-to-day lives, protesting through wearing the clothes they want

and not covering their hair. These acts are deliberate and have consequences that people are aware of, yet they choose to fight in this way regardless.”

The women are part of an Iranian electronic music scene whose history stretches back to the 1970s, but was held back by the revolution of 1979 and its focus on tradition, before gradually developing again this century via artists (some of them across the diaspora) such as Sote, Kasra V and 9T Antiope and DJs including Paramida. “We witnessed classical and traditional music seamlessly fold into electronic music, and create a new version of itself,” says Azadikhah.



Intended Consequence

PREVIEW Various Artists

Save on Spotify

1	Empty Platform AZADI.mp3	02:31
2	dbkkk Rojin Sharafi	04:30
	Resist The God Trick	00:00

Those developments have stepped up another gear since the Amini protests. Back in September 2022, Azadikhah was on a tour outside Iran - visiting her home town Tehran seven months later, she entered a changing city. “There were women and girls who were not wearing the hijab, and there were men who were protecting the women. People are still protesting. This revolution really affected people and made them united, to the extent of affecting social behaviours.” Aida, who is based between Vancouver and San Francisco, confirms: “I hear that women all over the city are dressing in bright colourful clothes while leaving their hair to flow freely.”

The longstanding relationship that Iranians have with poetry meant that chants on the streets - what Aida calls “condensed expressions of generational trauma” - became a rhythmic and poetic reflection of a culture in flux, and fed into visual art and music, notably in the work of Iranian collective [Only Voice Remains](#), who created a one-hour sound piece consisting of voice notes, poetry, music, readings, reflections, protest sounds and speeches broadcast on London’s NTS Radio.

But plenty of the tracks on Intended Consequences are nonverbal. Aida says that instrumental electronic music, being highly flexible and plastic, helped “make sense of our surroundings beyond just logic; manifestations of emotion represented through sound”. Music, Aida says, “allows others to grasp and understand how it could have felt to live in that time.” This artistry, Azadikhah adds, especially helped “artists who are outside the country and couldn’t be on the streets” to process their feelings.

The two curators also included their own work on the compilation. Azadikhah’s mournful breakbeat track Perpetual, just like her work on her latest EP Exhaustion, “allows me to express all the emotions and sadness that I experienced throughout what was happening this year”. Aida’s track Ode to Expectations meditates on the expectations placed on women, which can become a battleground “between choosing yourself or something that isn’t truly your struggle, goal or need. In this way we have to set boundaries, and this can come at a great cost.” It is atmospheric and dark - and listening anew this week, matches a new mood in the country amid the uncertain situation in the Middle East. Yet the techno beats, rolling ever forward, still feel hopeful.

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