My personal approach of using the Iranian santour

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Playing in octaves on the santour

The structure of the Iranian santour is particularly suited to playing in octaves. On the Iranian santour, the octaves are positioned side by side, with the exception of those on the octave of the notes on the right side of the yellow bridges, requiring a little mental exercise to spot them.

To illustrate the different possibilities of playing in octaves, we will refer to Figure 1 below.

- Measure 1 shows a simple succession with the notes A-B-C-D.
- Measure 2 repeats the same notes **played in octave.** In my transcription for santour of To yelasto pedi by Mikis Theodorakis I use this approach in the introduction, measures 1 to 12 included.
- Measure 3 takes up these notes **played in octave with tremolos,** presented in abbreviated notation. In practice, they can be played, among other possibilities, in sixteenth notes (measure 4), in sextuplet (measure 5), in thirty-second notes (measure 6) or in different variants of "tak reez" (typical *Radif* tremolos). In my transcription of To yelasto pedi I use this approach in the sung part and in the transition passages, starting at measure 13.
  You can listen to this transcription with the above approaches with the following link:
  To yelasto pedi audio
- Measure 7 shows **a distribution of melody notes over two octaves.** The resonances of the santour's open strings and the fusion of the harmonics generated by them make the sound rendering of this alternation surprisingly natural, completely preserving the integrity of the melody.

  One of the interests of the distributional approach of a melody over two (or three) octaves is to exploit the accidentals in octave. Measure 8 presents this possibility. Here, the B of the yellow bridge is flat and the B of white bridge is natural. In the given example, we go up with a B natural and we go down with a B flat. See more also my text Managing accidentals on the double bridges santour "Accidental positioned on the octave" page 2 Figure 2 for more precisions on this type of alteration.

  The approach of "alternating in octaves" is in practice combined with that of "playing in octaves with tremolos". Thus, the short-lived notes are played with the first approach (alternating in octaves) while the longer notes are played with the second (tremolos in octaves). Figure 2 shows an excerpt from my composition "Doush" in one octave, where I have set to music a poem by the Persian poet Hafez, and the same excerpt played on two octaves using both alternance and tremolos approaches. Note the following points in Figure 2:
    - The variable cutting of tremolos with eight notes and sixteenth notes in both versions,
    - The reconstruction of the E minor chord on three octaves (measure 11),

    - The "on paper" rewriting of the melody on two octaves is rather illegible, it is better to read the melody in its original version and to alternate the notes over the two (or even three) octaves mentally.
- Each one of the techniques of playing in octaves presented above, could be applied, separately or in a combined manner (as in the example of figure 2), to an entire melody or to certain passages of a piece.

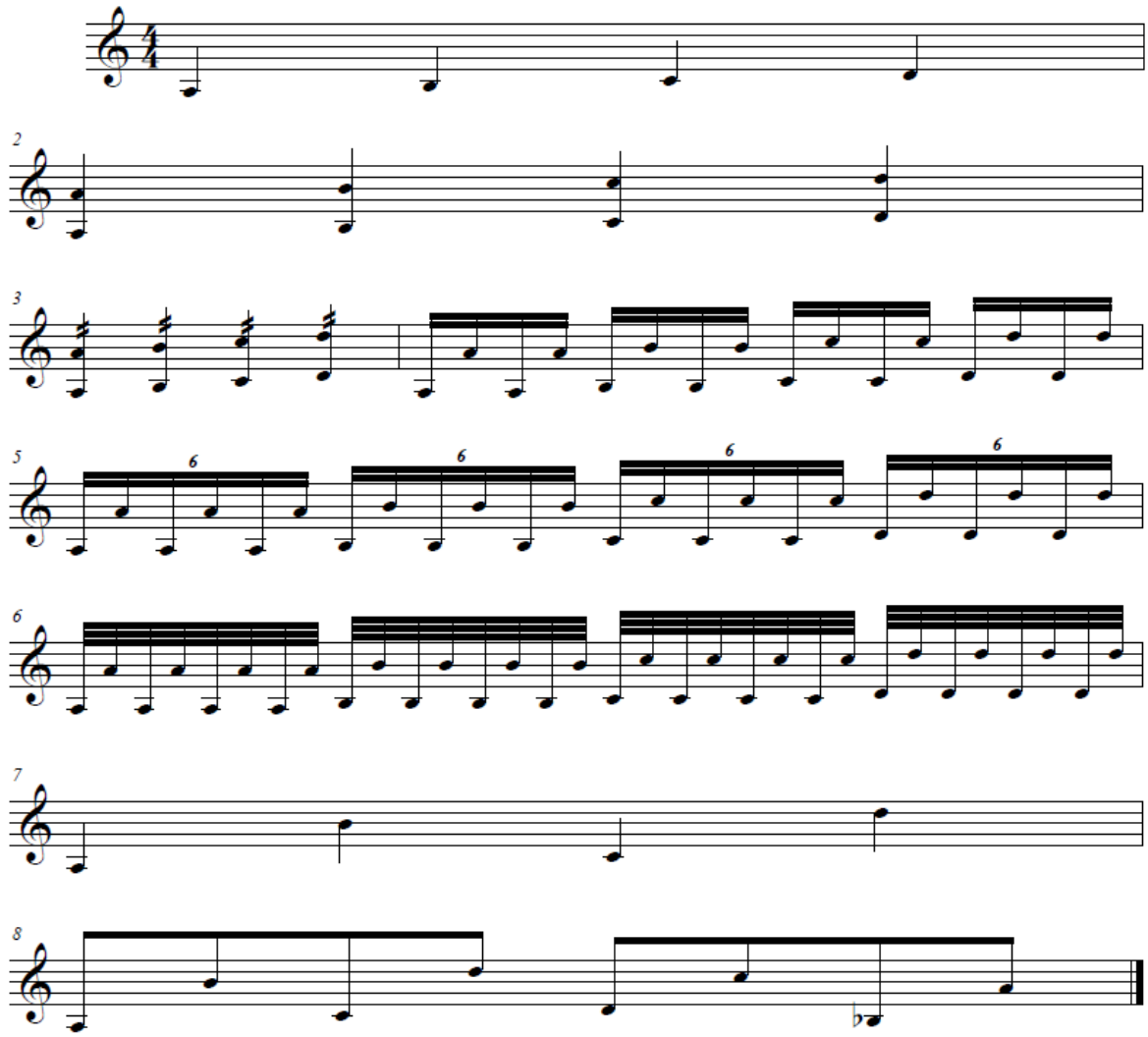

Figure 1

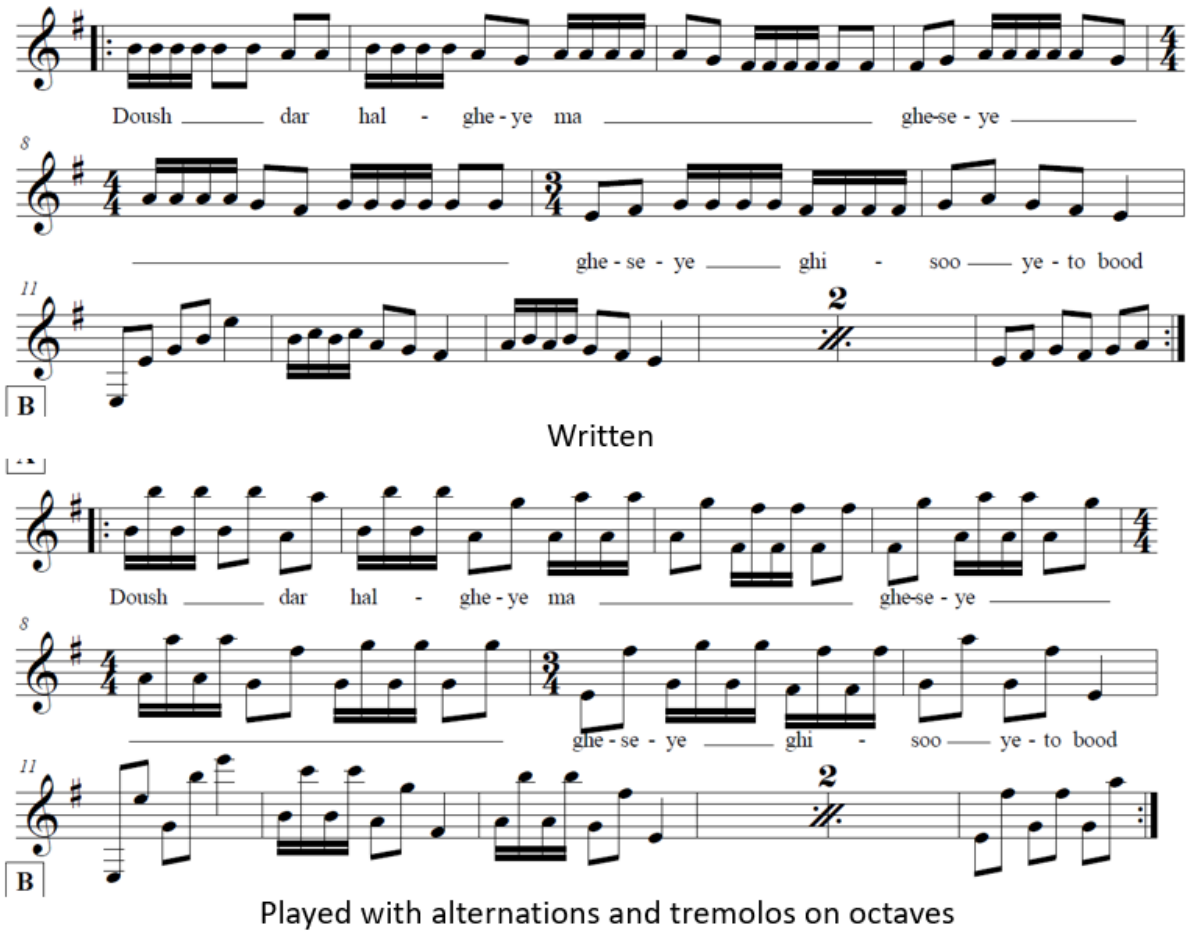

Figure 2

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