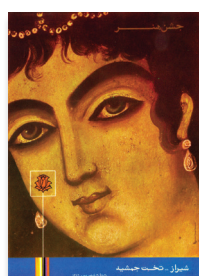


Festival of Arts Shiraz-Persepolis¹

*OR You better believe in as many as six impossible
things before breakfast*

By Mahasti Afshar

OVERVIEW²



1st Shiraz Arts
Festival poster
1967



11th Festival 1977
Poster design:
Qobad Shiva

The Shiraz-Persepolis Festival of Arts was an international festival held in Iran every summer for eleven years, 1967-1977. *Jashn-e Honar-e Shiraz* as it was popularly known in Persian was an inspired and feverish exploration, experimentation and creative conversation between Iran and the outside world that unfolded primarily through music, drama, dance and film. The programs started at 10 a.m. every day and ended at 1 or 2 a.m. the next, staggered across ancient, medieval and modern venues, some natural, some formal, others makeshift, in Shiraz, or forty miles northeast at the Achaemenid ruins of Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam. True to its mission, the festival's ecosystem cut across time and other boundaries, refreshing the traditional, celebrating the classical, nurturing the experimental, and stimulating a dialogue across generations, cultures, and languages, East and West, North and South.

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¹ The official English title in festival catalogues published annually, 1967-1977.

² The primary printed sources for content and images for this report include the Shiraz Festival catalogues, bulletins, program notes, and *Tamasha* Magazine, 1967-1977. Supplemental data were provided by individuals with firsthand knowledge of the Festival, Reza Ghotbi, Sheherazade Afshar, Bijan Saffari, and Arby Ovanessian, as well as Parviz Sayyad and Mohammad-Baqer Ghaffari. Secondary sources include, in Persian: interviews with Farrokh Gaffary (1984) and Bijan Saffari (1983), Foundation for Iranian Studies, "Program for Oral History;" "Jashn-e Honar-e Shiraz," *Kargah-e Nemayesh az Aghaz ta Payan, 1348-1357* [The Theatre Workshop from Beginning to End, 1969-1978], Setareh Khorramzadeh Esfahani, ed. Tehran: Afraz, 1387: 101-199; "Jashn-e Honar-e Shiraz-Takht-e Jamshid: 1346-1358," *Yad-ha va Boud-ha: Khaaterat-e Iraj Zohari*. Tehran: Mo'in, 1382: 171-227; and in English, "Iran," *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre: Asia/Pacific*, Don Rubin, et al., eds. London/NY: Routledge, paperback ed., 2001: 191-221. This is a fairly comprehensive but by no means exhaustive account of the Festival; it omits countless artists and other relevant information due to considerations of space. All data have been meticulously reviewed for accuracy. All omissions, editorialized commentary and concluding remarks are the personal views and the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the sources that contributed to this report. Article design and production by Helen Mauchi.

³ One of many such accolades by foreign critics over the life of the festival, excerpted from an article by Professor Enrico Fulchignoni, director of UNESCO's International Committee for Cinema and Television, first published in *Il Tempo* at the close of the 9th festival in 1975, translated in *Tamasha* No. 246 (1976): 74.

Shiraz, “without doubt the most important performing arts event in the world...,”³ was where most Iranians first encountered the traditional arts of Asia, Africa and Latin America—Indian raga music, Bharatanatyam and Kathakali, Qawwali, the music of Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Korea and Vietnam, Balinese Gamelan, Japanese Noh, the drums of Rwanda, traditional dances of Bhutan, Senegal, Uganda, and Brazil... The experience was eye opening, expansive, magical, and transformative.

Shiraz is also where Iranians came to ‘rediscover’ their own traditional music on a different platform. Presented by master musicians on an international stage before large publics for the first time, this exquisite art form acquired a fresh vitality and just recognition and gained new fans, especially among youth. Regional music from the four corners of the country was also presented at the festival, with the same result. And that is not all. It is at the Shiraz Arts Festival that Iranian audiences witnessed the revival of Persian storytelling and dramatic traditions on a large scale, *naqqali*, *ta’ziyeh/shabih-khani* and *ruhowzi*, celebrated a new generation of Iranian filmmakers along with cinema legends from East and West, and watched the spectacular birth of new Iranian theatre—playwrights, directors, set designers and actors fearlessly writing and staging innovative plays in Persian that for the first time resonated globally. Five groundbreaking works by Iranian dramatists were invited to festivals in the West, including Arby Ovanessian’s staging of Abbas Nalbandian’s equally original début work, *Pazhouheshi...* in 1968,⁴ a production that virtually transfigured and modernized Iranian theatre, and Esmā’il Khalaj’s *Shabat* in 1976.

⁴ *Pazhouheshi zharf va setorg va no dar sangvareha-ye dowre-ye bist-o-panjom-e zamin shenasi* (A Modern, Profound and Important Research into the Fossils of the 25th Geological Era.)

⁵ Co-commissioned with the French Ministry of Culture.

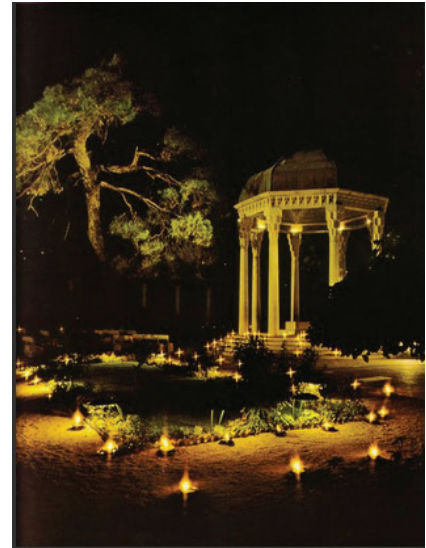
A distinguishing feature of the Shiraz Arts Festival was the variety of unique works it commissioned from pioneers of contemporary music as well as avant-garde theater and dance, works that embodied a transcendent blend of East and West and were shaped by the landscape for which they were created. These were, in music, Iannis Xenakis’s *Persephassa*⁵ and *Persepolis* (1969 and ’71, respectively), and Bruno Maderna’s *Ausstrahlung*, a spiritual journey through history that integrated recitations of Persian poetry (also in ’71); in theatre, Peter Brook’s *Orghast*, a “work in progress” (1970) that involved actors of diverse nationalities, Iranians among them, speaking an invented idiom that included Avestan, Greek and Latin; and in 1972, Bob Wilson’s *KA MOUNTAIN...* which ran non-stop for seven days and nights on a hill at Haft-tan with the participation of American and Iranian actors and nonprofessional locals; and last but not least, in dance, Maurice Béjart’s *Golestan* (1973), named after Sa’di-e Shirazi’s 13th century literary masterpiece and choreographed entirely on Iranian music.

⁶ Launched in March 1967, NITV merged with Radio Iran in 1971 and was renamed NIRT.

Tens of thousands of admiring spectators experienced the festival each year on site. Millions more had the opportunity to watch the recorded programs on national television throughout the year. The festival operated on a starting indie budget of \$100K that grew to \$700,000 in 1977. The budget was subsidized in part by the state but mostly by the National Iranian Radio and Television (NITV/NIRT),⁶ which offset its costs by airing the programs as part of its broadcast schedule. Ticket sales generated some revenue; most travel costs for foreign artists were taken up by governments that had bilateral treaties with Iran; and the artists, thrilled by the opportunity to explore and innovate in a singular environment, accepted minimum fees and no extra funds for commissioned or world premieres of their work.

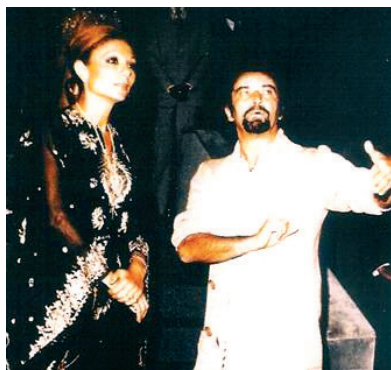


Persepolis, *Takht-e Jamshid*. Photo: Alireza Pourhassan



Hafezieh. Photo: Keyvan Khosravani

To be sure, the festival's fans, artists, and organizers represented a minority of the general population in Iran; the majority had little or no awareness of, interest in, or access to the likes of Balachander, Bėjart, and Bijan Mofid. But that was precisely the point, to bring down the wall between the culturally privileged and underprivileged, to celebrate and share humanity's artistic wealth as widely as possible for the benefit of larger publics, especially the younger generation. The vision was all the more meaningful given the state of the country as a whole. Many dream of making the world a better place; some dare act on their dreams. Others slumber in the luxury of stagnation. *Jashn-e Honar* never slept.



Shahbanou Farah with Maurice Béjart at the Shiraz Arts Festival

⁷ Excerpts from an address by Empress Farah Pahlavi at the inaugural festival. Festival catalogue 1967.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The festival's principal programs, music, theatre, dance, and film are described separately below under "Programs." The seminars and conferences, and related publications, poetry and painting, exhibitions of Persian carpets and handicrafts, children's theatre and dance workshops and other special programs organized by the festival are not covered in this report.

FORMATION, MISSION AND ORGANIZATION

The idea for organizing an international festival designed to "nurture the arts, pay tribute to the nation's traditional arts and raise cultural standards in Iran" and to furthermore "ensure wider appreciation of the work of Iranian artists, introduce foreign artists to Iran, and acquaint the Iranian public with the latest creative developments of other countries"⁷ originated in 1966 with Empress Farah Pahlavi, *Shahbanou* Farah in Persian. The responsibility for shaping and executing the concept was delegated to Reza Ghotbi, then project manager for television at the Plan Organization, later director general of NITV.

An advisory board was formed that charted the festival's scope and principal goals. In Ghotbi's words, the festival would present all the arts "in the context of an encounter between East and West" with a focus on "the best traditional arts of the East, the finest classical traditions of the West, and the avant-garde apropos its place in the world."⁸ The festival would also undertake research and pursue activities in the creative domain.⁹

Most cultural activity being centered in Tehran, the group decided to host the festival away from the capital thinking that the effort to make the trip and the concentration of artists and festival-goers in one location would enrich the experience, "like an artistic pilgrimage." After considering Kashan and Isfahan, their choice fell on Shiraz. The city offered a variety of venues such as Hafezieh, Delgosha Garden, Saray-e Moshir, Narenjestan, the Jahan-Nama Garden... and not far off, the magnificent ruins of Persepolis. The Mehmansara provided hotel accommodation—not luxurious, but adequate and in line with the festival's identity—as did the newly built Pahlavi University student dormitories.

To govern the festival, a 31-member board of trustees was formed under the patronage of Empress Farah comprised of cabinet members, university chancellors, provincial authorities and other officials, and individual scholars, cultural figures, and custodians of properties earmarked as performance venues. The trustees, who served for two-year terms and who changed over time were responsible for approving the budget and the bylaws, nominating the board of directors, and appointing an inspector for financial oversight.

A five-member board of directors was then appointed: Dr. Mehdi Boushehri served as President, with Reza Ghotbi, (NITV and Festival Director General), and Farrokh Gaffary (NITV and Festival Deputy Director General), Dr. Qassem Reza'i, Director, Tourism Organization,

and Dr. Zaven Hakopian, Director General, Ministry of Culture and Arts.

The Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis officially opened on 11 September 1967 (20 Shahrivar 1346), less than a year after NITV televised its first program.

PROGRAMS: SELECTION AND PLANNING PROCESS

Planning and decision making was a collaborative team effort involving Ghotbi, Gaffary, the artistic director of the festival and later its de facto director, Sheherazade Afshar (music and dance), and Khojasteh Kia [until 1971] and Bijan Saffari (theatre); Gaffary was also in charge of film, and later, of theatre.

Other key members of the team included Parvin Qoraishi (executive secretary), Faramarz Shahbakhti (administrator), Vardkes Esra'ili (engineering), Mohammad Shafa'i (construction workshop), Farideh Gohari and Fereshteh Shafa'i (set design), Keyvan Khosravani (lighting design, inaugural year only),¹⁰ Manouchehr Shamsa'i (lighting), Yousef Shahab (sound), and Qobad Shiva (graphics). Publications, media and public relations posts were held by Iraj Gorgin and later, Karim Emami.

Over the years, the festival benefitted from the advice and expertise of a large number of individuals, including Dr. Dariush Safvat, Dr. Hormoz Farhat, Fowzieh Majd, and Houshang Ebtehaj (music), and Arby Ovanessian, Davoud Rashidi, Mohammad-Baqer Ghaffari and Parviz Sayyad (theatre).

A complete audio archive of daily public forums with the artists, seminars, performing arts programs, and magnetic tapes of all the productions that could be videotaped, interviews with the artists on 16mm film, and printed material—festival catalogues, bulletins, educational publications, and *Tamasha* magazine were housed at NIRT. Collectively, this archive is a time capsule of substantial historical and cultural value, both in terms of Iran and internationally, covering the period 1967-1977.



4th Shiraz Festival 'Theatre and Ritual' 1970

Poster design: Qobad Shiva

¹⁰ Khosravani was only involved with the festival in 1967 but his lighting design for Hafezieh and Persepolis endured and defined the tone, ambience, and the accents of the outdoor venues for the next ten years through 1977.



Public Forum: Karim Mojtahedi, moderator 1970

R: Public forum participants 1970



PROGRAMS

1. MUSIC

TRADITIONAL IRANIAN MUSIC

Iranian classical or traditional music, *musiqi-ye aseel*, (“authentic” or “noble” music), which is Iran’s highest and most treasured performing art—as is poetry in the literary domain and miniature painting in the visual—was the heart and core of the festival’s programming. Several concerts were offered each year in Hafezieh, an ideal setting where Hafez, a 14th century native of Shiraz who is considered Iran’s greatest lyric poet of all time lies in a white marble tomb etched with his memorable verses under the shade of a stepped, open pavilion in a jasmine-scented garden.

Beginning in 1967 and through 1977, the most distinguished masters of traditional Iranian music were selected in close collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Arts, Radio Iran, and NITV to appear at the festival. The general public knew these masters primarily through radio while a privileged few enjoyed live performances hosted by small circles of aficionados in their private homes. Meantime, the market for popular music was growing exponentially. The trend led many musicians to play the modal systems (*dastgāhs*) not in their entirety but in shortened versions more palatable for public consumption. The festival provided a platform for live concerts to be performed on a formal, international stage before large publics. The pioneering effort was transformative, such that prominent artists who as a matter of course refrained from performing publicly agreed to appear at the festival, Saeed Hormozi, Yousef Foroutan, and Dariush Safvat, among them.



L-R: Payvar, Majd, Nahid, Shahidi, Bahari, Tehrani, Jalil Shahnaz



Jalil Shahnaz

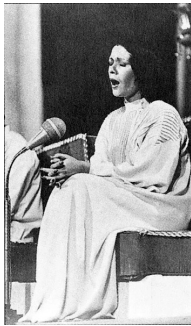
Four concerts were offered during the inaugural festival in 1967, with all seven major modes performed by the most renowned instrumentalists, among them, Ali-Akbar Shahnazi, *tar*; Ahmad Ebadi, *setar*; Jalil Shahnaz, *tar*; Hassan Kassa’i, *ney*; Lotfollah Majd, *tar*; Faramarz Payvar, *santour*; Ali-Asghar Bahari, *kamancheh*; and Hossein Tehrani, *tombak*, and vocalists, Hossein Qavami and Mahmoud Karimi accompanied by several ensembles led by *tar* player, Nasrollah Zarrinpanjeh.

News of the event spread around town by word of mouth and through public media. The concert on the second night played to a packed, standing room only audience with spectators lined up all the way back against the garden rails. From then on, on nights when the adjacent site, Hafezieh Stadium, was free, the music was amplified

over the garden walls to the delight of non-ticketed publics who gathered outside to listen.

While the above-named artists continued to perform at the festival, numerous other recognized masters also appeared in concert, including singers, Abdolvahab Shahidi, Taj Esfahani, Mahmoud Khonsari, and Khatereh Parvaneh, Gholam-Hossein Bigjekhani (*tar*) accompanied by Mahmoud Farnam (*daf*), Farhang Sharif (*tar*), and the Malek brothers (*santour*, *kamancheh*, and *tombak*).

The festival's goal—which was achieved at the outset and sustained to the end— had been to present unadulterated, authentic Iranian music with the respect due the art and its foremost exponents. As a result, not only countless more Iranians came to appreciate their own traditions, but foreign critics posted reviews of Iranian music in the international press with the same level of interest and esteem accorded classical Indian, Chinese and Japanese music.



Parisa at
Hafezieh 1977

In subsequent years, a new generation of gifted artists joined the roster of musicians that appeared at *Jashn-e Honar*, while NIRT's Center for the Preservation and Propagation of Music (*Markaz-e Hefz va Esha'eh Musiqi*), established in 1969 under the direction of Dr. Dariush Safvat, contributed new research, training, and programming.

A new standard was set with the introduction of young masters at the festival, Dariush Tala'i and Hossein Alizadeh (*tar and setar*), Mohammad-Reza Lotfi (*tar*), Jalal Zolfonoun (*setar*), Majid Kiani-Nejad (*ney*), Parviz Meshkati (*santour*), Jamshid Shemirani (*tombak*), and singers, Siavosh (Mohammad-Reza) Shajarian, Nouredin Razavi-Sarvestani, and Parisa, all of whom were enthusiastically received by audiences and critics alike.¹¹

Watching two generations of musicians bring the exquisite spirit of traditional Iranian music to life side by side was to experience the sublime; it refreshed the art, artists and audiences alike, as if in a nod to Hafez's verse, 'I may be old, but hold me tight in your arms one night and I'll wake up young by your side at dawn':

گرچه پیرم، تو شبی تنگ در آغوشم کش
تا سحرگه ز کنار تو جوان برخیزم

¹¹ The following is a partial list of other Iranian musicians, older and younger, who appeared at the festival: Houshang Zarif (*tar*); Nosratollah Ebrahimi (*setar*); Mohammad Heydari, Majid Najahi, Mas'oud Saremi, Reza Shafi'ian, Abolfazl Tavvakol, Reza Varzandeh, Abbas Zandi (*santour*); Mohammad-Ali Haddadian, Mohammad Moussavi, Hassan Nahid (*ney*); Maliheh Sa'idi (*qanoun*); Mehdi Azarsina, Davoud Ganje'i, Mohammad-Ali Moqaddasi, Mahmoud Rahmanipour, Ali-Akbar Shekarchi (*kamancheh*); Rahmatollah Badi'i (*qeychak*); Amir-Nasser Eftetah, Mohammad Esmaili, Mohammad Farahmand, Nasser Farhangfar, Hossein Hamedanian, Morteza Haj-Ali A'yan, Arjang Kamkar, Bahman Rajabi (*tombak*), and singers, Simin Ghanem, Touraj Kiarass, Parivash Sotoudeh, Sima Bina, and Sogol.



3rd Shiraz Festival 1969

Poster design: Qobad Shiva

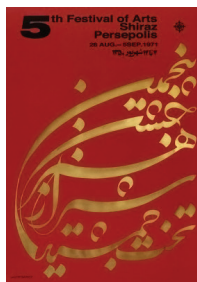
¹² *Gorouh-e Jam'avari va Pazhouhesh-e Musiqi-e Navahi*

The festival also presented regional Iranian music, which although prized locally was not considered a fine art nationally. A shift in perception of this genre of music started with the appearance of Asheqs from Azarbaijan and musicians from Kurdistan in the early years of the festival, while a dramatic rise in its stature became palpable beginning in 1973 as the “Group for the Collection and Research of Regional Music”¹² founded at NIRT under the direction of Fowzieh Majd contributed more varieties of programs to the festival. Master ‘singers of tales’ from Baluchestan, Khorassan and the Persian Gulf, none of whom had performed outside their region, found an audience mesmerized by a repertoire that ranged from meditative and mystical poetry to epic and romance. Collectively, they broadened the horizon of Iranian music and its audience in ways unimaginable before.

Highlights of the regional music, instruments and artists from Khorassan included *dotar* players Nazar-Mohammad Soleymani and Morad-Ali Ahmadi; *dotar* players and singers, Mohammad-Hossein Yeganeh who performed the tale of the Sufi king, *Ebrahim Adham*, and Olia Qoli Yeganeh who was invited back by popular demand the following year and performed *Gharib* and *Shah Sanam*, the romance of *Zohreh o Taher* and songs from the *Kour Oqli* cycle. Baluchi epic tales formed part of a program titled “Bards and their Music” with La’l Baksh Peyk (vocals and *tanbireh*), accompanied by Qolam-Heydar Baluch on the *sorud* (a 3-stringed lute). Also from Baluchestan, the festival hosted “Guati Rituals & Music” led by Karimbaksh Ostadi, principal singer and *tanbireh* player; as well as a *Noban and Zar* healing ritual from the Persian Gulf island of Qeshm, with Baba Darvish and Mama Hanifa, *Zar* leaders.

The events were a sensation from start to finish.

TRADITIONAL EASTERN MUSIC



5th Shiraz Festival 1971

Poster design: Qobad Shiva

Iran and India share ancient cultural roots that are expressed in their respective sacred literatures, the Avesta and the Vedas. In more recent times, Iranians were exposed to Hindu literary traditions when the Mughal Empire produced Persian translations of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and other Sanskrit literature starting in the 16th century. Farther east, Iranians learned of the arts and crafts of China and other lands that traded along the Silk Road and connected Asia to Arabia and Europe. Literary and visual arts aside, however, Iranians had no firsthand experience of the performing arts of Asia. The Shiraz festival introduced audiences to a vast array of traditional music—as well as dance and dance-drama—from Indonesia to the Philippines, Japan, China, the Middle East and North Africa.

The master instrumentalists who brought the gift of Bhairavi, Darbari, and other grand ragas of classical Indian music to an increasingly appreciative audience at the festival included Balachander, *veena*, the unsurpassed Bismillah Khan, *shehnai*, Amjad Ali Khan and Sharan Rani, *sarod*, Ram Narayan, *sarangi*, Ravi Shankar, *sitar*, Shiv Kumar Sharma, *santoor*, Vilayat Khan, *sitar*, and Debabrata Chaudhuri, *sitar*, accompanied by Faiyaz Khan on the *tabla*. The sound of Hariprasad Chaurasia's *bansuri*, the storied bamboo flute known as Lord Krishna's divine instrument, left the audience spellbound. Classical Indian singing was performed, among others, by Nasir Aminuddin Dagar, the pre-eminent exponent of the *dhruwad*; and by Pran Nath, a master of *Kirana Gharana* whose austere singing style attracted minimalist composers in the U.S. in the 1970s. "*Pabuji Ki Phad*," a traditional folk art form from Rajasthan was also part of the repertoire of Indian music presented at the festival.

A short list of traditional music from other parts of the world includes three types of gamelan from Bali and Java, Indonesia; "*Lhamo*," a 400-year-old folk opera by exiled Tibetans from Dharmasala; Sufi devotional music by Aziz Miyan, a master of Qawwali from Pakistan; Arabic music by the Iraqi master of the Oud, Munir Bashir; Tunisian liturgical music, Berber Songs of Kabylie; Algerian music by Marie-Louise Taos Amrouche; and *saidi*, a form of folk music from Upper Egypt performed by the Musicians of the Nile Delta led by Metqal Qenawi Metqal. From Japan came Kinshi Tsuruta (*biwa* and vocals), Tadao Sawai, *koto*, and Katsuya Yokoyama, *shakuhachi*, and from Vietnam, the great musician and teacher, Trần Văn Khê.



Trần Văn Khê at Hafezieh



Ravi Shankar at Persepolis 1970

WESTERN MUSIC

Classical Western music had almost a century-old history in Iran and a serious, if relatively small group of adepts mostly concentrated in the capital. The festival's mission in this category was to offer the finest of the classical repertoire and also make known the best in the contemporary and the avant-garde.

The quality of sound production was exceptional. As reported by Financial Times lead music critic Andrew Porter, "Indeed here at Persepolis and in Hafezieh the "assisted" open-air sound had a naturalness and trueness surpassing anything I have ever heard in the West"—a feat all the more remarkable in view of the range and variety of programs and instruments, both Western and Eastern, from solo recitals to orchestral and choral, including electroacoustic music and *musique concrète*.



Yehudi Menuhin with the NITV Chamber Orchestra 1967

¹³ Renamed NIRT Chamber Orchestra (National Iranian Radio & Television) in 1971.

The inaugural year in 1967 opened with a concert by the National Iranian Television Chamber Orchestra¹³ (est. 1967) conducted by Vahe Khochayan in a performance of Pergolesi's 'Salve Regina' with Iranian soprano, Nasrin Azarmi, and ended with the World Premiere of 'Kakuti, a dance for her' by Iranian composer Morteza Hannaneh. Yehudi Menuhin was the soloist for the orchestra's second concert at Persepolis; pianists Elzbieta Glabowna and Iranian artist Novin Afrouz also performed in the same year. The final event was a concert by the L'Orchestre du Domaine Musical led by Gilbert Amy in a program of *Varèse*, *Messiaen*, and *Mozart*, and the World Premiere of Amy's 'Relais'.

A selective list of notable artists in the following years includes, in 1968, Arthur Rubinstein, Christian Ferras with Pierre Barbizet; and Cathy Berberian who gave the first staged performance of her *Stripsody*. In 1969, Martha Argerich was featured in recital as was Yvonne Loriod who also performed in a concert with the Orchestre National de l'ORTF led by Jean Martinon. The third festival also featured the World Premiere of Xenakis's *Persephassa* with Les Percussions de Strasbourg, a work that spoke to that year's central theme, 'percussion'; the ensemble also offered a concert that included the World Premiere of Betsy Jolas's *États: pour violon et six percussions*; the latter two compositions were co-commissioned with the French Ministry of Culture. The ORTF orchestra performed other notable concerts in 1969 as well; the programs included Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* and Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, led by Martinon, and Messiaen's *Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*, conducted by Bruno Maderna in the presence of the composer. The Juilliard Quartet was featured in the 4th festival in 1970.



Maderna (center) and Messiaen at Persepolis 1969



Cracow Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir 1971

The World Premieres of Xenakis's *Persepolis* and Bruno Maderna's *Ausstrahlung*—both festival commissions—were presented in 1971. The latter was performed by The Hague Residence Orchestra led by Maderna himself with soloists Berberian, Verheul and Faber, a concert that the great Dutch flautist Verheul considered 'one of the highlights of his career.'¹⁴ Iranian conductor Farhad Mechkat also led the same orchestra in a program that ranged from Baroque to contemporary music. The Moscow Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Barshai also appeared in 1971 as did the Cracow Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir in concerts led by Katlewicz. John Cage, David Tudor and Gordon Mumma appeared in concert at the 6th festival in 1972 and collaborated with Merce Cunningham on a separate program in the same year.

¹⁴ www.mauriceheugen.com/koosverheul.php

A week-long Stockhausen retrospective was also held in 1972. Students turned out in droves at Saray-e Moshir, squatting on the floor in shirt sleeves and jeans to hear him. At the Delgosha Garden where he performed his 'Sternklang' the crowd almost got out of hand as they rushed the stage and climbed telegraph poles to get a better look, an image emblematic of the festival whose audience grew increasingly young and engaged, presumably because they heard the music in an environment that encouraged openness, curiosity, exploration, and participation with the rest of the world through the arts. To say that foreign artists and visitors were just as excited by their experience in Shiraz is an understatement. Mumma described the 1972 festival as "one of the most extraordinary cultural experiences of my life."¹⁵

¹⁵ Robert J. Gluck, "The Shiraz Festival: avant-garde arts performance in 1970s Iran." Department of Music, University at Albany: 217.



Stockhausen at the sound desk 1972

Stockhausen concert at Saray-e Moshir

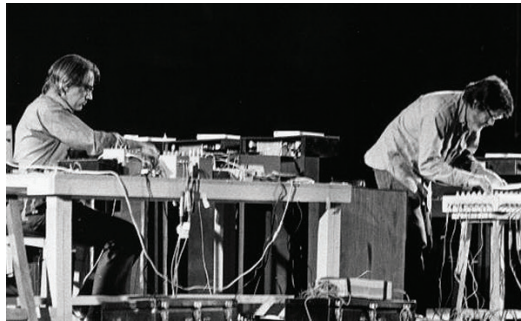


Tamasha bulletin,
6th Shiraz Festival
1972

The 1974 festival featured the London Sinfonietta, David Atherton and Mary Thomas, and in 1975, the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, Penderecki conducting his own compositions, and also led by Maksymiuk in a program of *Ravel* and *Mussorgsky*. In 1976, the American Brass Quintet offered a rich program of music from the 17th c. to Elliot Carter as well as the World Premiere of 'Contradictions' by Iranian composer Alireza Mashayekhi. Another World Premier that year was '*Iranian Set*' by Bogulaw Schäffer, a work based on Persian poetry, with Adam Kaczynski leading Ensemble MW2. The 11th festival in 1977 featured the composer Morton Feldman and the Creative Associates.

¹⁶ All works commissioned by the NITV/
NIRT Music Department.

The works of several other Iranian composers were premiered throughout the festival,¹⁶ including Dariush Dowlathahi, Hormoz Farhat, Fowzieh Majd, Alireza Mashayekhi, Mohammad-Taghi Masoudieh, Houshang Ostovar, Massoud Pourfarrokh, and Manouchehr Sahba'i.



L-R: David Tudor and John Cage 1971



Abbey Lincoln 1969



Max Roach Quintet 1969

American blues and jazz was presented in 1969 featuring the great percussionist, drummer and composer Max Roach leading his Max Roach Quintet, and vocalist and songwriter Abbey Lincoln; and in 1970, the gospel, soul, and R&B group, the Staple Singers.

2. DANCE AND MUSIC THEATRE

Iran has no indigenous tradition of formal dance, only folkloric, and never developed this art form even in the pre-Islamic period. Discovering the breathtaking variety of traditional and modern dance from around the world at the festival was therefore a unique and exquisitely novel adventure for the audience.



Uma Sharma 1969

Classical Indian dance was presented in all its varieties, beginning with a *Kathakali* performance of stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata in 1968. Among the foremost exponents of diverse genres and styles were Uma Sharma, *Kathak* (1969); Yamini Krishnamurti and Sonal Mansingh, *Kuchipudi* and *Odissi* (1970); and Shanta Rao, who performed *Bharatanatyam*, *Mohiniyatam*, *Bhama Nrityam* and *Kathakali* dance.

The opening program of the 1972 festival was a *Kathakali* presentation of *Rostam and Sohrab*, a fabled tragedy where the greatest hero in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the 10th century Persian national epic, fatally wounds his son in battle, neither being aware of the other's identity until it is too late. Sanjukta Panigrahi performed *Odissi*, her signature dance form, and *Nritta* in 1975. The 11th festival in 1977 featured *Purulia Chhau*, a tribal martial dance that is performed at regional festivals in India and is particularly popular in Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

A dazzling array of Indonesian dance and music drama also radiated throughout the festival. One particularly memorable Balinese dance was the opening event of the 1969 festival, the story of Rama's struggle to rescue his wife Sita from the clutches of the demon Ravana. The dancers' jingling steps and exacting facial gestures moving to the strange and hypnotic beat of the gamelan and



Kathakali 1968



Balinese Gamelan and Legong Dance 1969

framed by lush colors and elaborate costumes conjured an unreal, timeless and dreamlike dimension at Persepolis. In 1971, the festival hosted *Ballet Sunda*, the first performance by the artists outside Sunda, their birthplace in a region in West Java. Another stunning event aside from exquisite performances of *Legong* and the *Barong* was *Kechak*, presented by Sardono W. Kusomo at Naqsh-e Rostam in 1976 with a percussive a cappella chorus of men and boys from Bali hunched down around tight circles wearing nothing but checked cloths around their waists chanting “chak-chak” and throwing up their arms as they voiced a battle from the Ramayana.



National Ballet of Senegal 1970

The festival's complement of dance and music theatre also included sacred and ancient Buddhist dances from Bhutan (*Cham*), Brazilian *Capoeira*, a ritualistic fusion of martial arts, dance, and music, both in 1974, and along with the Senegalese National Ballet in 1970, a number of African productions derived from indigenous traditions including Duro Lapido's *Oba Koso* from Nigeria (1973) and Robert Serugama's dance-drama, *Renga Moi* from Uganda in 1975.



Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Persepolis 1972

¹⁷ Terry Graham, *Tamasha Magazine*, No 8, September 1972.

¹⁸ Gluck, *Ibid.*

Western modern dance was represented by several choreographers and dancers at the forefront of the avant-garde. In 1972, Merce Cunningham Dance Company performed his "Open Air Theatre Event," described by a critic as "an incredible soaring of pure spirit,"¹⁷ followed by the World Premiere of his "Persepolis Event." Carolyn Brown, one of the dancers remembers the experience as "marvelous" and "unforgettable."¹⁸ The opening program of the 7th festival in 1973 was the World Premiere of Maurice Béjart's *Golestan* at Persepolis, a work named after a Persian literary masterpiece by the 13th c poet Sa'di, who says of his own work, "A rose only lives for five or six days/The joy from my rose garden always stays," and performed by his Ballet du XXe Siècle. The ballet was set to Iranian music and performed by members of the NIRT Center for the Preservation and Propagation of Iranian Music. After returning to Belgium, Béjart created *Farah*, a work inspired by Rumi and other Persian mystical poetry. He invited the Iranian musicians who had accompanied his *Golestan* in Shiraz to premiere the work in Brussels, and in 1976 presented it at the 10th festival. Other works by Béjart at the festival included two World Premieres, *Heliogabale*, and *Improvisation sur Mallarmé III*, a work based on music by Boulez.

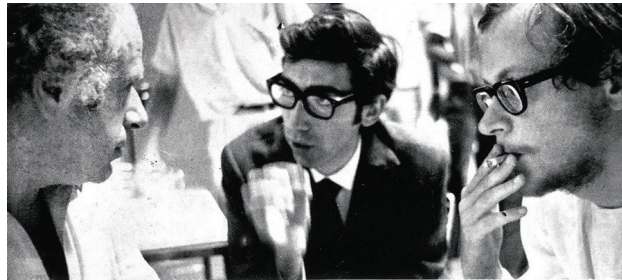
The Nikolais Dance Company, led by founder and renowned American choreographer, Alwin Nikolais, gave the opening night performance of the 9th festival in 1975 with a program that included *Temple*, *Tribe- Dance I & II*, *Suite from Sanctum* and *Crossfade*. The same year saw a performance of Andy Degroat's *Rope Dance Translations*, which was developed in Tehran with the participation of several actors and a musician from the Theatre Workshop in Tehran (*Kargah-e Nemayesh*).¹⁹ In 1977, the festival hosted the World Premiere of Carolyn Carlson's *Human called Being* at Naqsh-e Rostam; Carolyn Carlson also performed *Recital* and arranged a special program for children at the Jahan-Nama Garden.

¹⁹ On NIRT's *Kargah-e Nemayesh* (est. 1969) see further below under "Contemporary Iranian Theatre."

3. THEATRE

²⁰ In 1973, Iran was host to the 2nd Third World Theatre, a festival and conference that was held in Shiraz and supported by the 7th festival on the organizational, though not on the programmatic level.

From 1967-77, the Shiraz Arts Festival presented more than fifty traditional as well as contemporary and experimental plays from Iran, India, Japan, Eastern and Western Europe, Africa, U.S., and Latin America, and accommodated a number of independent “ancillary” productions.²⁰



L-R Peter Brook, Arby Ovanessian, Jerzy Grotowski 1970

TRADITIONAL IRANIAN THEATRE

In terms of Iran, the festival had a twofold goal. One was to revitalize the indigenous Iranian dramatic arts, and the other, to stimulate the growth of theatre in Iran and propel it to international standards.

The indigenous Iranian dramatic arts constitute *naqqali*, a storytelling tradition involving dramatic recitations of Persian epic poetry and other narrative literature; *ta'ziyeh* (also known as *shabih-khani*), a Shi'ite mourning ritual commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hossein at the battle of Karbala in 680 C.E.; and *ruhowzi*, popular performances imbued with social satire.

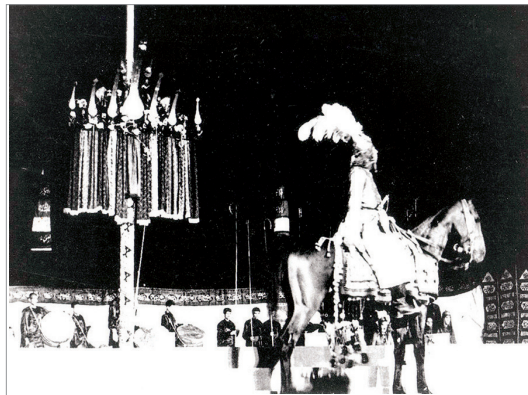


Ta'ziyeh at the 10th Festival 1976

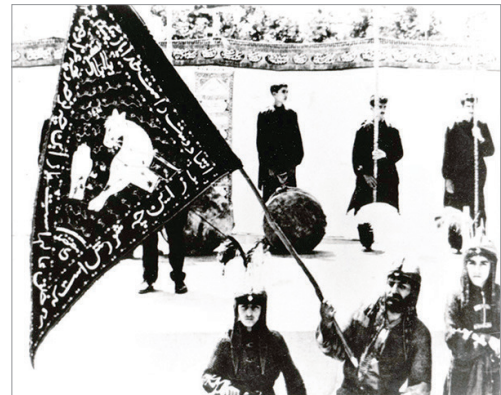
Poster design:
Leyly Matin-Daftari

With eyes on its first goal, the inaugural festival presented a series of performances featuring some of the most notable *naqqals* in the country; in the same year Parviz Sayyad presented *Ta'ziyeh Horr*, the first public enactment of *ta'ziyeh* outside rural areas since performances were banned in 1933. Following the warm public reception of *Horr* in 1967, Sayyad produced *Ta'ziyeh Moslem* in 1970, and in 1971, *Khorouj-e Mokhtar*, a tale centered on revenge—with comic overtones and no martyrs—that is traditionally performed on the 13th of Muharram to provide relief after ten days of mourning. In 1976, Mohammad-Baqer Ghaffari who had traveled for a year and a half in search of *ta'ziyeh* performers and musicians produced seven *ta'ziyehs* in different venues, Hosseinieh Moshir in Shiraz, and the village of Kaftarak nearby where about 10,000 spectators attended free of charge. In the same year, the festival hosted an international seminar on *ta'ziyeh* chaired by Peter Chelkowski, where approaching

ta'ziyeh as pure drama and presenting it outside a religious/ritualistic context was a subject of lively and as yet unsettled discussion and debate.



Ta'ziyeh Horr 1967



Ta'ziyeh had an important impact on some foreign directors, notably Peter Brook who in spring 1970 had watched an unadulterated, excerpt presentation of *Ta'ziyeh Moslem* in a village close to Neishabour in Khorassan.

The festival's interest in exploring and presenting traditional Iranian theatre included a *ruhowzi* festival and seminar at the 11th festival in 1977.



2nd Shiraz Festival
1968

Poster design:
Houshang Kazemi

CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN THEATRE²¹

To address its second goal, namely, to cultivate and advance the dramatic arts in Iran, the Shiraz Arts Festival launched a playwriting competition in 1967 that in 1969 led to the founding of NIRT's Theatre Workshop, *Kargah-e Nemayesh*, Bijan Saffari, Artistic Director, to 'help writers, actors, directors and designers exercise and experiment independent of commonly accepted professional restrictions,' which operated in close association with the festival.

The first hidden talents to emerge from the competition were one, Abbas Nalbandian, a 21-year-old newspaper seller whose *Pazhouheshi*,... written two years earlier, had been rejected by a number of production companies as "un-stageable." Staged by Arby Ovanessian at the 1968 festival, the play depicts eight already dead characters who "search, get acquainted, travel, exchange ideas, make a show of their lives, die, get resurrected, and keep going without getting anywhere"²² confronted by a "director" and his twelve "assistants" who threaten to install central heating if they don't act well. With every threat the "assistants" take a step forward with raised arms shouting "Heil!," which sends the terrorized actors trembling into a huddle. In staging *Pazhouheshi* Ovanessian who also

²¹ For more information about Iranian plays mentioned in this paper see *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre: Asia Pacific*, Don Rubin, et al., eds. London & New York: Routledge, 2001: 201-218.

²² Ibid: 208



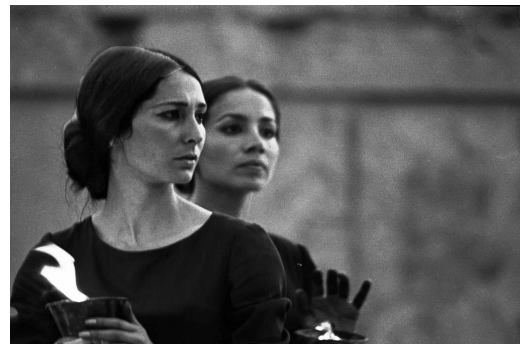
Pazhouheshi... 1968

designed the set, the costumes and lighting acted not as a mere stage-master but as a master artist recreating another artist's work as his own, a radical notion that opened the gates to the true art of directing in Iran.



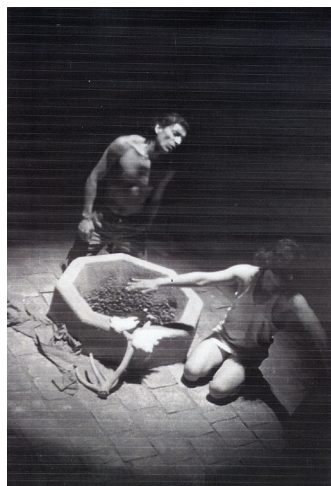
Vis o Ramin 1970

Photos: Mehdi Khansari



Farkhondeh Baver & Shamsi Fazlollahi in
Vis o Ramin 1970

The second gifted playwright that emerged through the competition in 1968 was Mahin Jahanbegloo (Tajadod). A doctoral candidate in Persian literature, her *Vis o Ramin*, based on an 11th century romance by Fakhruddin Gorgani, echoed universal human conditions anchored in Iranian identities and underlined the wealth of Persian narrative poems that have rarely been exploited for their dramatic value. Ovanessian staged *Vis o Ramin* in 1970 as the opening program of the 4th festival whose theme was 'Theatre and Ritual.' He timed the play to unfold with the movement of the setting sun then lit a fire, a natural artifice with deep, spiritual undertones that was later echoed in the works of Peter Brook and other dramatists.



L-R: Bijan Mofid & Fereydoun Yousefi in *Nagahan...* 1972

²³ The title derives from *Tazkarat al-Awlia* by Fariduddin 'Attar (d.1221), a work in Persian prose on the life of Sufis.

²⁴ It is a paradoxical and wretched irony that in 1989, having suffered imprisonment in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Nalbandian committed suicide. On October 5, 2013, speaking about the essence and the trajectory of the Shiraz Arts Festival at the Asia Society Symposium in New York, Ovanessian closed his remarks with a reference to *Nagahan...*, the implication being that the festival was a voice of exploration, creativity and knowledge that was silenced not only by the 1979 Islamic Revolution but by the community of critics that have declined to write about it since. [Ovanessian remarks <http://bit.ly/1aMqDus>]



Bozak Namir Bahar Miyad 1973

In 1972, Ovanessian directed another play by Nalbandian titled *Nagahan 'Haza Habibullah, Maat fi Hubbullah, Qatilullah, Maat Beseifullah'* (All at Once 'Friend of God, Died in the Love of God, Slain by God, Died by the Sword of God')²³ with an outstanding performance by Bijan Mofid in the lead role of a teacher who is murdered by his neighbors at high noon on *'Ashura*, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein, for a hidden treasure that turns out to be merely a chest full of books. The play is a commentary on the plight of societies that characterized by poverty, ignorance and superstition commit a tragic mistake and kill the source of knowledge, a universal path to salvation.²⁴



Shahr-e Qesseh 1968

Another outstanding production in 1968 was *Shahr-e Qesseh*, a play in the vernacular genre written and staged by Bijan Mofid. A social commentary with animals representing familiar character types in Iranian society, the memorable production was accompanied by moving songs composed and performed by Mofid himself that were soon memorized by one and all and are cherished today as a living legacy of this multi-talented and widely popular artist.

In 1969, Mofid directed his *Mah o Palang*, a political allegory in which he played the leopard ('palang'). He returned to the festival in 1973 with a new play, *Bozak Namir Bahar Miyad*, a coproduction directed by Maria Krishna with her Théâtre Athanor from France that included French and Iranian actors and had both children and adults for an audience. Another of his plays, *Oqab o Rubah*, was staged by his younger brother Ardavan Mofid in 1977 with actors from the *Kanoun-e Parvaresh-e Fekri-ye Koudakan* (Center for the Intellectual Development of Children.)



Halet Chetoreh Mash Rahim? 1972



Jom'e Koshi 1973

Other Iranian plays rich with local flavor, social commentary, poetic realism and currency were developed at the Theatre Workshop for the festival during 1972-1977. Among them were four plays by talented writer-director Esma'il Khalaj who staged his *Halet Chetoreh Mash Rahim?*, *Goldouneh Khanoum*, and *Jom'e-Koshi* in a tea house in Shiraz, and *Shabat*, which later traveled to Warsaw. Gifted writer, director, actor, and artist Ashurbanipal Babella presented two of his works, *Emshab Shab-e Mahtabe*, which he staged in the Shiraz TV Studio, and *Hora Sexta*, at Persepolis.

A number of veteran Iranian theatre directors appeared at the festival. The well-known and popular stage and TV director, writer and actor, Parviz Sayyad, staged a play in a tea house based on the merry "eavesdropping" seasonal rite, *Falgoush*, written by poet-artist Manouchehr Yekta'i that enjoyed a very warm reception. Another renowned actor and director, Abbas Javanmard, produced Bahram Beyzai's *Ghoroub dar Diyari Gharib* and *Qesse-ye Mah-e Penhan*, two one-act puppet plays sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Arts and performed by actors from the *Gorouh-e Honar-e Melli* (National Arts Group). A final example among veterans is the pioneering writer-director Ali Nassirian who staged his *ruhowzi*-inspired *Bongah-Teatral* in Saray-e Moshir, also sponsored by the Ministry.



Ghoroub dar Diyari Qarib 1973



Qalandar-Khouneh 1975

The festival also presented a new generation of Iranian directors that included Iraj Saghiri, a native of Bushehr in southern Iran who staged his *Qalandar-Khouneh* and *Mahpalang*, both richly inspired by local traditions and colors, Aziz Chitta'i who presented his *Omar Khayyam dar New York* with the Tokme Repertory Company that he had created in New York, and Mohammad Saleh-Ala who wrote and directed *Zir-e Chador-e Oxygen*, and *Eski ru-ye Atash*. Two other productions were supported by the Ministry of Culture and Arts: Former member of the Theatre Workshop Shahrul Kheradmand

staged *Rostam o Esfandiar*, a tragedy of epic proportions that pits two iconic *Shahnameh* heroes against one another, and writer-director Mehdi Faqih presented his *Bastur* with a puppet theatre company from his native Fars Province.

The collective result was a paradigm shift that propelled Iranian theatre from a domestic stage to an international one.²⁵ Iranian plays were for the first time reviewed in foreign media—and favorably so—while *Pazhouheshi...* which became the subject of a doctoral dissertation²⁶ also made history by being the first Iranian play to be invited to international festivals. Another significant milestone was Ovanessian's production of Albert Camus' *Caligula* in 1974 where he cast the protagonist as a split personality played simultaneously by two actors. Hailed for its striking originality, the play was invited to tour Poland and was performed in Latin America, making Ovanessian the first Iranian to be invited to direct a foreign play in the West.

²⁵ For the history and development of theatre in Iran, and a discussion of the numerous plays performed at the Shiraz Arts Festival not mentioned here, see *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, Asia Pacific*: 204 ff.

²⁶ Gisèle Kapuschinski, Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 1982.

Sussan Taslimi (*Caesonia*) flanked by a split personality in *Caligula* 1974

Photo: Mehdi Khansari

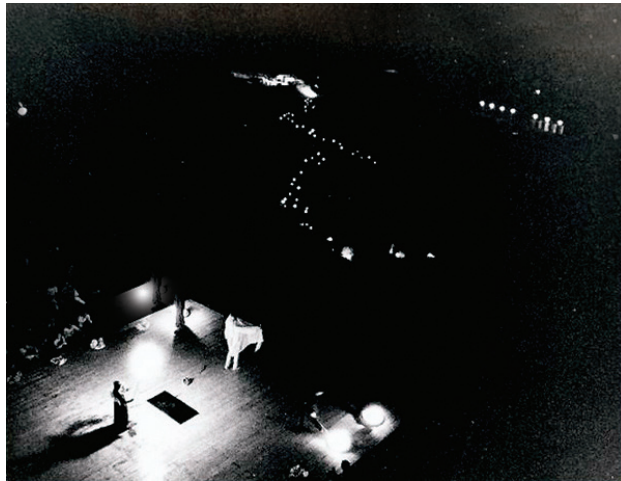


On the 10th anniversary of the festival in 1976, a number of artists were invited to come back to Shiraz with new creations. One notable outcome was *Savari dar-amad ruyash sorkh, mouyash sorkh...* (There Appeared a Knight with a Red Face, Red Hair...) ²⁷ a production that exemplified the festival's parallel goals for Iranian theatre, namely, to cultivate indigenous traditions, foster innovation, and elevate local productions to global standards.

Developed collectively by Mahin Jahanbegloo (Tajadod) (text), Fowzieh Majd (music), Arby Ovanessian (director), and Ferdows Kaviani, Sussan Taslimi, Sadreddin Zahed, and a child, Nima Mofid (actors), *Savari dar-amad...* was staged at night in front of the tomb of Artaxerxes above the mountain overlooking Persepolis and the nearby village below.

²⁷ There Appeared a Knight with a Red Face, Red Hair, Red Lips, Red Teeth, a Red Gown, a Red Horse, a Red Spear...

Savari dar-amad... at the
Tomb of Artaxerxes,
Persepolis 1976



In terms of innovation, this was the first time a play had been created collectively in Iran—a new paradigm in the creative domain and an indicator of societal change and progress. In terms of global standards, the play was invited to represent Iran at the Theatre of Nations, held in Caracas, Venezuela in 1978, and at LaMaMa in NY in the same year, a development that followed the trajectory of *Pazouheshi...*, *Shahr-e Quesseh*, and *Shabat*. As for the goal of cultivating indigenous traditions and making them current, *Savari dar-amad...* is, indeed, that: Incorporating the Younger Avesta, Manichean writings, classical Persian literature, Islamic mysticism, and Iranian Illuminationist philosophy as a composite expression of 'Persian poetic wisdom,' it depicts the end of obscurity at the moment when, driven by greed, darkness swallows the light.



4th Shiraz Festival
1970

Poster design:
Qobad Shiva

TRADITIONAL EASTERN THEATRE

In addition to previously noted Indian *Kathakali*, *Purulia Chhau*, an Indian masked dance-drama, and Indonesian dance-drama, the festival hosted *Wayang Kulit*, shadow theatre from Malaysia (1973), Japanese *Noh*, and *Bhavai*, folk theatre from Gujarat (1977), in all, over a dozen excellent examples of non-Iranian traditional theatre.

CONTEMPORARY AND EXPERIMENTAL INTERNATIONAL THEATRE

The most memorable foreign productions at the festival were presented starting in 1970 and numbered [then] Eastern Bloc (8); Western Europe (5); U.S. (10); Latin America (1), and Asia (2). Only Japan and Brazil presented both experimental and traditional theatre at the festival. On the 10th anniversary of the festival in 1976, a number of directors were invited to return with new productions.

Eastern and Central Europe



Ryszard Cieslak in *Constant Prince* 1970

Poland set the tone of contemporary theatre at the festival in 1970 with one of the greatest theatrical works of the 20th century, Jerzy Grotowski's *Constant Prince*, a product of the director's radical concepts, the 'theatre laboratory' and 'poor theatre.' Groups of forty spectators seated inside the Delgosha Garden pavilion watched in awe and dread as Ryszard Cieslak enacted the anatomy of resistance, anguish and pain with perfect control over every muscle, sinews and vein in his body. The astounding quality of Grotowski's work and his personal gravitas, palpable during the morning seminars and debates imbued the festival with a heightened sense of intensity and drive. In 1973, another Polish director, Kristof Jasinski staged *Polish Dreambook* and *Fall* with Teatr Stu from Cracow, and Atelier 212 from Yugoslavia performed Slobodanka Alexic's *Hamlet in the Cellar* (1974) and *Miracle in Sargan* by Ljubowirz Simovic, directed by Mira Trailović (1976).

Two more works from Poland deserve special mention. In 1974 *Lovelies and Dowdies*, written by Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz "Witkacy" in 1938, was stripped down and staged by another pioneering theatre director and theorist, Tadeusz Kantor, as Impossible Theatre, a happening where the actors took shape on the spot and the spectators were dragged into the action. Kantor came back to the festival in 1977 to stage his most famous work, *Dead Class*; he played himself as a director in a classroom where the children are lonely marionettes and robotic adults cannot relate to their childhood, ambiguous characters that endlessly morph, disintegrate, and finally harden in a dead class. Both plays were produced by Cricot 2.



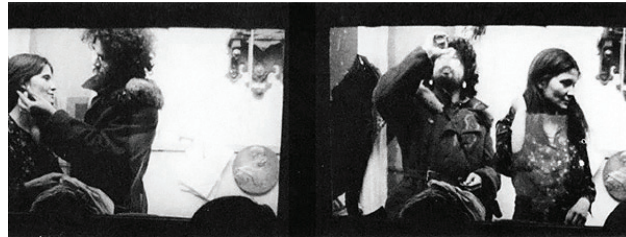
Anna Koos & Galus Hasz (child),
Pig, Child, Fire!, Shiraz 1977

²⁸ A photograph of the scene appeared the next day in the festival Bulletin No. 4, Aug. 20, 1977, p. 3, in a review by Alireza Rezaei titled "In Search of a Historical Battle," with the two slaughtered babies on the floor, the woman in the long flowery skirt, and next to her, her boy standing on a table wearing a long dress. The image is archived on the Squat Theatre website <http://squattheatre.com/shiraz.html> along with an image of the uniformed soldier from an earlier, 1975 production of the same scene, "Assassin of Children in Bethlehem." In his *Yad-ha va Boud-ha: Khaterat-e Iraj Zohari. Mo'in: Tehran 1382*, p. 211, Iraj Zohari, drama critic and writer, describes the scene in some detail and scoffs at the Shirazi religious leaders for their uproar over what was a 'symbolic gest in a play.'

²⁹ صحیفه امام، مرکز نشر آثار حضرت امام خمینی (ره)، جلد سوم، ص ۲۲۹-۲۳۱.

[Center for Publishing Imam Khomeini's Works, Vol. 3: 229-231] (<http://bit.ly/1gMmw1z>) which cites Khomeini's edict along with a Persian translation of a passage in *The Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974-1979*, London: Jonathan Cape (1984) by Anthony Parsons who repeats the incendiary fiction with great outrage but no interest in fact-checking.

In 1977, Squat Theatre, a group of young actors who had been exiled from their native Hungary in 1973, performed *Pig, Child, Fire!*, an experimental play that condemned brutality and violence. To erase the space between audience and action, the performance was situated in the window of an empty store on a busy street and could



Anna Koos & Peter Breznayik (soldier), the original production of
Pig, Child, Fire!, Budapest 1975

be seen by passersby. One vignette, performed on the sidewalk, depicted the "slaughter of the innocents," the biblical account of the massacre of male infants in Bethlehem by soldiers sent to kill the newborn "King of the Jews" whose birth had been announced to Herod by the Magi. In the scene, a uniformed soldier wearing a high-collared ankle-length military overcoat, pants and high boots snatches two babies (plastic dolls) from their mothers' arms, snaps off their heads and throws them to the ground. A third woman, pregnant and wearing a long, flowery skirt, hurriedly pulls a long dress over the body of her young boy and puts lipstick on him to make him look like a girl, and then seduces the soldier in order to save her child. The ploy works; the soldier grabs the woman from behind and the two bend back and forth as a gesture of lovemaking.²⁸

The scene was meant to induce repulsion against the tyranny of power; instead, it generated an urban legend, source unknown that was reported in the press the following day according to which a naked actor had raped a naked actress on the street before hundreds of onlookers. The tall tale quickly went viral among misinformed, gullible, and irresponsible people that had not even been there, with unfortunate consequences. Among these was an edict issued by Ayatollah Khomeini on September 28, 1977 then in exile in Najaf, which declared that "Indecent acts have taken place in Shiraz" and urged the [religious] "gentlemen" to "speak out and protest." Anthony Parsons, then British Ambassador to Iran also recorded his outrage for history, writing in *The Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974-1979*, that he was told by an "eyewitness" that a "rape... was performed in full (no pretense) by a man (either naked or without trousers, I forget which."²⁹ The wretched fiction continues to circulate even today even among those who were not born in 1977. Slaughter of innocence.

Western Europe and Latin America

Victor Garcia, the Argentine-born director, produced two plays at the festival with Teatro Núria Espert in Spain, Jean Genet's *The Maids* (1970) and *Divinas Palabras* (1976). In 1974, working with the Ruth Escobar company in Sao Paulo Brazil, he directed *Autosacramentales*, allegories illustrating the mystery of the Eucharist by Calderon de la Barca, playwright, poet, later Franciscan priest and the foremost dramatist of the Spanish Golden Age in the 17th century.

Núria Espert in
The Maids
1970



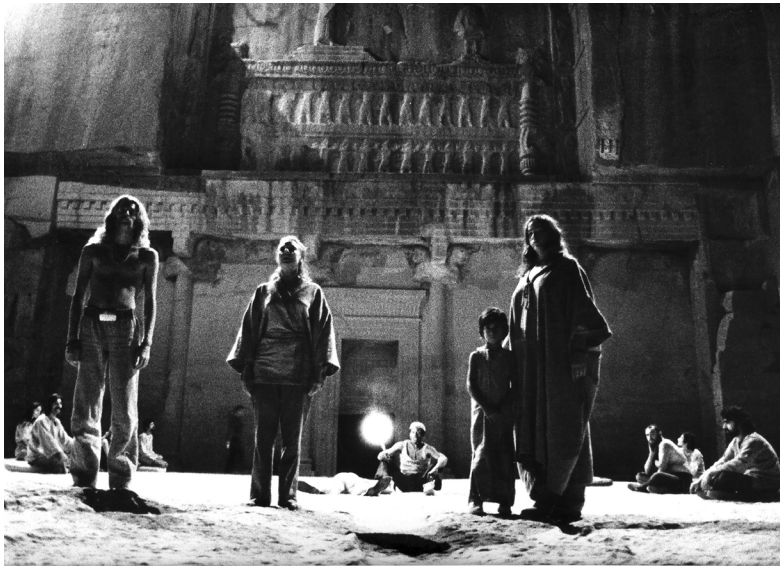
Group TSE, from France, directed by Argentinian Alfredo Arias, staged the World Premiere of Honoré de Balzac's *Heartaches of an English Cat* (1977), a satirical animal story involving Beauty, a magnificent English cat, Puff, an older Persian cat, and Brisquet, a chatty little French cat discussing proper, Victorian behavior, society, politics, and other topics of interest in mid-19th century Europe.

The International Centre for Theatre Research (French acronym, CIRT) founded in 1970 by Peter Brook and Micheline Rozan in Paris was a research center, built to explore the cultural, geographic, spatial and linguistic boundaries of theatre.³⁰ Brook's visit to Iran in spring 1970 and the screening of his films at the 4th festival in the autumn, led to the presentation of CIRT's first major research project, *Orghast I & II*, as a "work in progress" at the 1971 festival.³¹ Centered on Prometheus, the Greek culture hero who defies the gods and brings fire to man, with added elements from Zoroastrian and Armenian mythology, the work was an experiment led by Brook in Paris and Iran in collaboration with drama directors Arby Ovanessian, Geoffrey Reeves, and Andrei Serban and a cast of twenty-five actors, that aimed at discovering the essential sounds and vibrations common to all languages. The British poet Ted Hughes participated in the process and created a non-verbal "language" that became the title of the ongoing work.

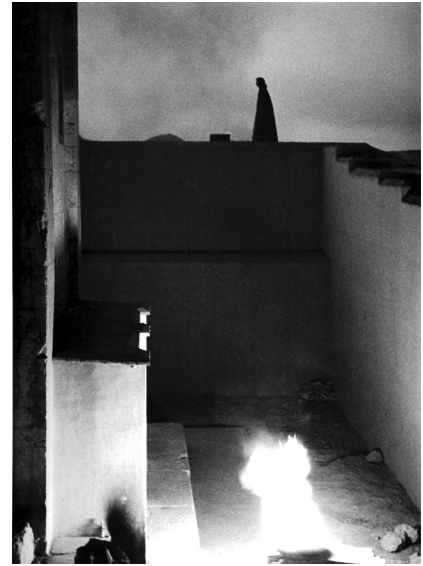
³⁰ In 1974, CIRT was renamed Centre International de Créations Théâtrales (CICT) to include theatre production.

³¹ For a detailed discussion of *Orghast* see Negin Djavaherian, *Not Nothingness: Peter Brook's Empty Space and Its Architecture*, Ph.D. dissertation. School of Architecture, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, August 2010 (<http://bit.ly/16jmzq6>).

Orghast I was staged before the tomb of Artaxerxes in Persepolis, and *Orghast* II, about seven miles further northwest at Naqsh-e Rostam. For Brook, the opportunity to explore new intuitive possibilities and processes in space, time, language and performance in an ancient landscape and culture was a profound experience that also marked his later work, *Conference of the Birds* and *Mahabharata*, among them.



Orghast I, Persepolis 1971



Orghast II, Naqsh-e Rostam 1971



Origin of Blood 1973

Japan

Two extraordinary works were presented from Japan, both by Shūji Terayama, an iconoclastic, provocative, prolific and extremely inventive avant-garde artist who worked in different mediums—poetry, film, photography, and ‘meta-theatre.’ Terayama staged his *Origin of Blood* in Delgosha Garden (1973), and *Ship of Folly* at Saray-e Moshir (1976). The performances combined qualities of shamanic dreams and nightmares, magic, madness and lucidity, and the occasional suspension of belief as when an actor descended from a rooftop down to the garden, walking vertically, face down, seemingly without any device saving him from the pull of gravity, only his will. The effect of the illusion was shocking and beautiful.

U.S.

The festival presented a variety of U.S. off-Broadway productions both by recognized practitioners of experimental theatre and others that were on the fringe and grew to become iconic in the 1970s following their performances at the festival. One great source of attraction for all dramatists at the festival was that they were free to choose their preferred venue, as available and feasible.



Bread & Puppet, *Fire* 1970



Bread & Puppet, free public performance 1970

In 1970, Peter Schumann, founder and director of Bread & Puppet Theatre, was the first to introduce the festival audiences to experimental American theatre with *Fire* and *King's Story*. Before each performance an actor read a statement of protest against political oppression then another actor distributed freshly baked bread among the audience, which fit well with 'theatre and ritual,' the main theme of the 4th festival, and the play was performed with the company's trademark giant puppets. Schumann also decided to perform in a park and outside a prison, free of charge.

Three more plays in the experimental category were performed in 1971. Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre performed two groundbreaking collective "works in progress," *Terminal* and *Mutations*, both in the university gymnasium. Andre Gregory chose a fruit warehouse for his production of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, a program of the Manhattan Project. While meticulously designed, the performance was in the style of an on-the-spot improvisation and found a receptive audience some of them children perched on a treetop, which seen from "Alice's" perspective—American actor Angela Pietropinto—looked like "a tree that was growing children!"



Alice's Audience 1971
Photos: Courtesy Angela Pietropinto



Alice in Wonderland 1971



Angela Pietropinto (Alice) among
her young fans

The most singular experimental work in the 6th festival in 1972 was *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE*, staged by Bob Wilson—who was little known at the time—and the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, with a mixed American-Iranian cast of live and cardboard cut-out characters totaling nearly 550 listed in the festival program catalogue. Staged like a simple children's play with no sophisticated lighting or technical support, the play was preceded by an "Overture" staged at Qavam House, an elegant 19th c residence in Narenjestan garden where the audience happened across various members of a "family" posing scenes of daily life in extreme slow motion. There was no apparent storyline and the scenes, set in separate quarters, seemed unconnected. *KA MOUNTAIN* began the next day on a platform set up as a stage at the bottom of Haft-tan, a hill named after seven Sufis who are buried in a nearby garden. The audience was free to follow the family here and there up the hill nonstop for 168 hours for an entire week and follow disparate scenes, also in extreme slow motion, dotted with fish, animals, birds—some real, others not, as if retreating to an earlier geological era—as *Moby Dick* was being read out on the platform below. On day seven, the play ended on top of the hill next to a giant cardboard dinosaur with people chanting the "Dying Dinosaur Soars."



*KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia
TERRACE* 1972



Juxtaposing real and surreal visual elements and slowing down time to the extreme led to a heightened awareness and meditative experience that, without a connecting narrative, was by definition different for each spectator. And yet there was a unifying undercurrent, a quest and a progression toward an end, as if to evoke Attar's *Conference of the Birds* where seekers travel across seven valleys to reach the final station atop *Qaf Mountain*.

KA MOUNTAIN happened because of the trust that the festival put into Bob Wilson's creative impulses on the one hand and his willingness to believe in seven impossible things on the other.³² The American actors and the Iranian participants—not everyone an actor—had in Wilson's absence rehearsed fragmented scenes in Shiraz and built some props expecting the parts to come together as a whole later. Wilson arrived in town at the 11th hour and framed the elements on the spot and situated them on the hill. The entire process was a daily improvisation and discovery for the creator himself, the actors, and the spectators. Nothing like it had ever been conceived in the history of theatre, or attempted before. The mythic theatre that was born in Shiraz lives on and takes different shapes in the imagination even today.³³

Bob Wilson's third work at the festival was performed in 1974, *A Mad Man A Mad Giant A Mad Dog A Mad Urge A Mad Face*, in the Delgosha pavilion.

³² For Wilson's perspective on this subject see the Asia Society Museum exhibition catalogue, "Iran Modern." New Haven & London: Yale UP 2013: 93.

³³ A variation on the theme of KA MOUNTAIN appears in a video by Bob Wilson produced in 2012 (in which *Overture* is mistakenly situated at the shrines of Haft-tan) that outlines the seven-day progression of the play and ends with him chanting the dinosaur song (<https://vimeo.com/46089267>).



Medea

Photos of *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy* 1975:
Courtesy of Andrei Serban



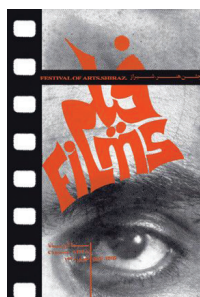
Electra



Trojan Women

Andrei Serban produced *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy*, *Medea*, *Electra*, *Trojan Women*, with New York's LaMaMa at Persepolis in 1975, a production that was rooted in his experience as a collaborator on *Orghast*. In 1977, he returned with a LaMaMa production of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy, *As you Like It*, which turned out to be the last U.S. experimental theatre at the festival. The audience merrily followed the actors across Delgosha Garden to hear the melancholy Jacques pronounce "All the world's a stage," the famous quote that gave birth to the phrase "too much of a good thing."

4. FILM



2nd Shiraz Festival
1969

Poster design:
Qobad Shiva

Starting in the inaugural year in 1967, the festival screened films on a daily basis to packed audiences, most of them youth, initially at Capri and Paramount cinemas, and from the third year, at Aryana, a newly-built and well-equipped theatre owned and operated by the filmmaker and Shiraz native, Shahrokh Golestan. The programs covered international masterpieces on the one hand—including retrospectives of Bergman and Satyajit Ray (1971) and Bunuel (1974)—and contemporary films by the likes of Joseph Losey, Tony Richardson, Ken Russell, Istvan Szabo and movies by the new generation of Iranian filmmakers.

The first movie screened at the inaugural festival in 1967 was writer-director Fereydoun Rahnema's *Siyavash in Persepolis*, a cinematic experiment with mythic characters from the *Shahnameh* wandering about the ruins of Persepolis and reflecting on the past and the present; the film had won the Jean Epstein Prize at the 1966 Locarno Festival for its innovative exploration of film language.

The festival organized an unusual and important program in 1970 when the theme was 'theatre and ritual,' during which Jean Rouch, the French filmmaker considered a pioneer of visual anthropology, screened uncut footage of African rituals, among them, Dogon tribal ceremonies in Mali.

The programs that were organized around themes included, in 1975, Musicals from the Golden Age of Hollywood and beyond, and in 1977, "Japan: History through Cinema," which screened the masterpieces of Ichikawa, Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Oshima, Ozu and Terayama.

On the 10th anniversary of the festival in 1976, the theme of the film program was the East as seen by filmmakers, ranging from silent movies to sound. The program included *Grass* by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack (1925), a silent documentary—one of the earliest of its kind—that follows the seasonal migration of a Bakhtiari tribe and their livestock across the Karoun River and snow-capped Zard Kuh, and Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (1928), *The Yellow Cruise* (1935), a documentary on China co-directed by Léon Poirier and Andre Sauvage, and *Azalea Mountain*, a Chinese model opera made into film (1974). Films on India included Satyajit Ray's, *Devi* (1960), Jean Renoir's, *River* (1951), Roberto Rossellini's documentary drama, *India: Matri Bhumi* (1959), and *India Song* by Margueritte Duras (1975). The "East" theme also included Sergei Parajanov's masterpiece, *The Color of Pomegranates* (1968) ("Sayat Nova" original title) that had been removed from circulation in the Soviet Union and was first shown at the festival in Shiraz; Giorgi

Shengelaye's, *Pirosmani* (1969), Pier Paolo Pasolini's, *1001 Nights* (1974), Chadi Abdel Salam's, *The Mummy* (1969), and *Pharaoh* by Jerzy Kawalerowicz (1966). Iranian filmmakers in this category included Arby Ovanessian, *Cheshmeh* (Spring) (1971), Fereydoun Rahnema (*Pesar-e Iran az Maadarash Bikhavar Ast* [The Son of Iran is Unaware of his Mother] (1973), and Parviz Kimiavi, *Bagh-e Sangi* (The Stone Garden '76).

A number of Iranian movies that were banned or had lost their license after an initial release were screened at the festival: two groundbreaking works by Dariush Mehrjoui, *Gaav* (Cow, made in '69) and *Dayere-ye Mina* (The Cycle, '75); and Nasser Taqva'i's *Aaramesh dar Hozoure Digaran* (Tranquility in the Presence of Others, '70).



7th Shiraz Festival
1973

Poster design:
Fereydoun Ave

The new generation of Iranian filmmakers whose films— feature-length, documentary or short— were screened at the festival included, to name a few, Parviz Kimiavi, *Mogholha* (Mongols, '73), who also made several documentaries, including *Ya Zamen-e Ahou* (Oh, Protector of Gazelles, '70) and *P Like Pelikan* ('73), Sohrab Shahid-Saless, *Tabi'at-e Bijaan* (Still Life, '74), and *Dar Qorbat* (In Exile, '75). Among documentary filmmakers who participated in the festival were Ahmad Faroughi, *Telegraph* ('66), and *Parseeyan-e Hend* (The Parsees of India, '70); Jalal Moghaddam, *Mashhad* ('67); Nasser Taqva'i, *Baad-e Jenn* ('69) and *Zohr-e Ashura* ('71). Iranian shorts included Khosrow Sina'i, *Aan Su-ye Hayahou* (Beyond Pandemonium, '68); and Shokoufeh Shakeri, *Saraab* (Mirage, '71); Nasib Nassibi, *Che Haraasi Daarad Zolmat-e Rouh* (The Fearful Darkness of the Soul, '72) and an animation by Nosrat Karimi, *Zendegi* (Life, '69).

The festival itself was the subject of several documentaries: Jalal Moghaddam, *Shiraz va Jashn-e Honar* ('67), Mahmoud Khosrowshahi, *Sound the Trumpets Beat the Drums* ('68) François Reichenbach, *Images, Rhythms, and Percussion* (Festival dans le desert) ('69), Kimiavi, *Jashn-e Honar-e Haftad* ('70), and Taqva'i, *The Fifth Festival of Arts* ('71).

THE 12TH FESTIVAL

The 12th Festival of Arts was scheduled to open on September 3, 1978 at the end of Ramadan. By then the country, suffering from a severe economic malaise that was induced and increasingly fueled by the politics of oil, was in the grip of a popular uprising that was to culminate in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In the summer of 1978 people were on the streets, tensions were high, government workers were on strike, massive demonstrations were organized by a coalition of activists from the left, right and center marching under the banner of religion, which engineered and unified the otherwise pluralistic and initially secular protest movement by billing itself as a democratic liberating force. On August 19, religious zealots set Cinema Rex in the southern city of Abadan on fire burning more than four hundred innocent moviegoers to death. The momentum was unstoppable. Given the turbulent and threatening conditions, the festival organizers decided to cancel the 12th *Jashn-e Honar*.

The performing arts were not new to Iran and had been cultivated, practiced and promoted by public and private institutions in the country for more than a century. Native and foreign forms of music, theatre, dance, and film were part and parcel of public life in Iran and were tolerated even by religious doctrinaires that considered most artistic activity sacrilegious profanity, especially where women were involved. The difference during 1967-1977 was that ten out of 356 days a year the Shiraz Festival of Arts distilled and unleashed the full power of creativity free of any political agendas or directives and not from a third world perspective but as an equal partner with the rest of humanity in the 20th century. As such, it stood out, eliciting admiration and accolades, but also a level of criticism and hostility beyond the standard share accorded all groundbreaking, high visibility cultural events around the world.

Interrupting the flow of the festival was “like tearing a page out of an unread book.” But memories linger, experiences are handed down, and historic paradigms are recalled and activated. The knowledge that it was possible to build and exercise a free, tolerant, creative, and diverse society in Iran—which is what the festival was all about—and the footprint of the cultural awakening that it elicited cannot be erased. The last chapter of *Jashn-e Honar* is yet to be written.

