



Her Majesty Shahbanou Farah Pahlavi's address at the Symposium for the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis held at the Asia Society-New York on October 5, 2013

Thank you Ms. Melissa Chiu and Ms. Rachel Cooper for your kind and warm words of introduction.

It is a great pleasure for me to be at the Asia Society in a symposium on The Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis, a subject that is very close to my heart and full of memory and meaning for me.

I have always held the Asia Society in great esteem for promoting understanding and cooperation among nations and cultures. I would like to thank the organizers of "Iran Modern" and the symposium, Melissa Chiu, Senior Vice President, Global Arts and Cultural Programs and Rachel Cooper, Director of Global Performing Arts and Special Cultural Initiatives, for inviting me to be here with you. I am also very pleased to see in the audience old friends and acquaintances from Iran and across the world, some of them for the first time in many years, like Professor Peter Chelkowski.

Let me begin with a short prelude before I get to the Shiraz Arts Festival. I was born at the outset of the Second World War to a family worried about Iran's future, including its independence and territorial integrity, sentiments that most Iranians shared. As I grew up, I learned that much had been done for Iran in the twenty years before the war, but a great deal more needed to be done.

As all teenagers do, my friends and I talked about the fields we might choose and the life we might lead. We all assumed that whatever we did, serving Iran would be high on our agenda, a sentiment that also had become widespread over the years since the Constitutional Revolution. I decided to study architecture and set out for Paris in 1957, full of enthusiasm and excitement, intent on becoming an architect and returning to work in Iran, and totally oblivious to the ironies of fortune. Two years later, I was the Queen of Iran.

When His Majesty Mohammad Reza Shah proposed to me, he made sure that I understood the travails and responsibilities of being the Queen of Iran.

Suddenly, obligations to the country, always present but tangential to life's endeavor, became axial to my every option.

It took some time for me to learn where exactly we stood in culture and art as a nation, and what our artists were producing, and just as important, what they wanted to be done.

The fact is that our country was on the move. By the middle of the 1960s much would change in our social and economic life: the White Revolution would open new vistas for our future, our economy would be on the verge of takeoff, our women would gain the right to vote and would be elected to the parliament, our farm workers would become land owners, our factory workers would be on the road to become part owners of the factories.

A feeling was in the air, affecting a wide range of people, including our artists who had achieved much and wanted more.

I began with this brief prelude to point out that the Shiraz Arts Festival was the child of its time. It could not have existed had our nation not made the progress it had or generated the desire and the know-how that made it possible. It was part of a mosaic, a testimony that our nation had achieved, or was on the verge of achieving, a critical mass in various fields of cultural creativity.

In some fields like poetry, new thinking and experiments had begun in the '20s and '30s; in others like painting, architecture and the performing arts – music, theatre, and film – the tempo of creativity was clearly accelerating about the time of the Shiraz festival.

All this pointed to a synergy created by the coming together of the demand for and the production of art forms.

The synergy was reflected also in the evolving philosophical thinking about art and culture, in museums such as Negarestan, Abgineh, Reza Abbassi and Bronzes of Luristan that were being created.

It was also present in the architectural rethinking about structure and environment demonstrated in the design of the buildings and cultural centers like the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Carpet Museum, the Niyavaran Farhangsara, and especially the City Theatre of Tehran.

This effervescence of energy was a natural outgrowth of our history. As Iranians, we were heirs to an ancient civilization with a glorious past, and a culture with a vast reach that had greatly influenced its geographic environment both before and after the advent of Islam.

We were also a young people with a not-so-glorious near past in need of designing a present that could become a bridge to connect our past history and culture, of which we were very proud, with a future that our people desired and deserved.

The connecting mechanism, generally referred to as modernization, was a confusing term, as it was, and still is, often misconstrued as westernization.

We, of course, admired all that the West had achieved in science, technology, and the arts. We tried to learn and absorb as much of it as we could. But our idea of the future was not to be Western or to become westernized, just as it was not to be Eastern or easternized.

I can best explain this by recalling conversations my husband and I had with an old and dear friend the poet-statesman Léopold Sédar Senghor about the meaning of being Iranian in historical terms – “iranité” he termed it, a bridge connecting not only Iran’s past and future, but also the East and the West. To us, this meant a cultural synthesis, a striving to bring together the best that humanity had offered in the past and would offer in the future with our own past and future. We thought of it as a worthy dream, a good signpost toward a future of cooperative, peaceful, just, humane, and creative prosperity.

Lest this be thought pollyannic, let me emphasize that we were very much aware of being a developing country, and that in many fields we lacked in basic necessities. But this did not mean we should accept the proposition that because we needed the wherewithal for growth and development we should not aim for the best.

I had the patronage and the privilege of helping the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, launched in 1966, headed by Mrs. Lili Amirarjomand. The Institute was meant to and soon did spread across the country. In some far off villages, mules had to be used to carry educational material to the village children. But no matter where in the country, method and material was the same for every child and young adult. Our best talents in literature, music, plastic and performing arts helped with the production of books, videos, films, paintings, posters and everything else that was needed for the success of the project.

Thus, we approached Iranian art as a living, growing, and expanding exercise in creativity, rooted in the magnificence of our ancient and Islamic past, but free to look to the future and to breathe and to develop openly in contact with the best that the world offered.

The Shiraz Art Festival became the most famous example of this approach. Its formal purpose, as stated in my 1967 message, the first year of the festival, was to pay tribute to the nation’s traditional arts, raise cultural standards in Iran, ensure wider appreciation of the work of Iranian artists, introduce foreign artists to Iran, and to acquaint the Iranian public with the traditional and the latest artistic developments of other countries.

The programs provided a unique opportunity for Iranians to see the art forms of countries that until then they had only heard about: from Japanese Noh and Indian Kathakali to the Renga Moi of Uganda and the Capoeira from Brazil; from Balinese Gamelan to drummers of Rwanda and to Max Roach.

Western classical music was presented by some of its best representatives such as Yehudi Menuhin (1967), Arthur Rubinstein (1968), both at the Apadana Palace in Persepolis.

In theatre, Jerzy Grotowski presented “The Constant Prince” at Bagh-e Delgosha in 1970. In 1971, Peter Brook created “Orghast I & II” in Persepolis and Naqsh-e-Rostam. In 1972, Robert Wilson put on “KA Mountain”, a production that extended along the slope of a hill and lasted some 168 hours without interruption. Andre Gregory presented “Alice in Wonderland” and Andrei Serban “Fragments of a Greek Trilogy” at Persepolis. In 1973 in Takht-e-Jamshid, Maurice Béjart created and directed a ballet named Golestan, after the poet Saadi’s masterpiece, embellished with traditional Iranian music and Rumi’s poetry.

The romance of places like Hafezieh, the tomb of Hafez the most venerated Iranian poet, and the power and glory of Takht-e-Jamshid and Naqsh-e-Rustam, reminders of the most glorious eras of Iranian history, offered inspiring sites for presenting art forms.

More important was the opportunity for Iranian artists to present their work next to the work of the best in the world, exciting interest and admiration for their creativity.

In Iranian classical music, recognized master instrumentalists like Ali-Akbar Shahnazi, Ahmad Ebadi, Jalil Shahnaz, Hassan Kassai, Ali-Asqar Bahari, Faramarz Payvar, Hossein Tehrani, Hossein Qavami, Abdolvahab Shahidi and Mahmoud Karimi, and young masters like Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, Parisa, Nourreddin Razavi, Hossein Alizadeh, Mohammad-Reza Lotfi and Dariush Tala’ie brought awe and respect for their noble art.

And from the Ashegh music of Azerbaijan to the Persian Gulf music of Qeshm Island, from Kurdistan to Khorasan and Baluchistan, the festival presented the best of our regional music.

Bijan Mofid’s Shahr-e Qesseh, one of the most successful Iranian theatrical productions ever, was first shown at the Shiraz Festival. Other writers and directors — among them Arby Ovanessian, Abbas N`albandian, Parviz Sayyad, Manouchehr Yektaii, Abbas Javanmard, Ali Nassirian, and Esmā`il Khaladj — presented significant works.

Especially interesting and innovative was the introduction of Iranian religious theatre, ta`zieh, during the first Shiraz Art Festival in 1967. In 1976, a group of scholars from Turkey, France, Italy, Germany, and the United States joined Iranian scholars in Shiraz in an international symposium presided over by Professor Peter Chelkowski to discuss ta`zieh as ritual and art form. The same year seven ta`zieh assembled by Mohammad Baqer Ghaffari were presented in Kaftarak, a village near Shiraz, where some 70,000 viewers attended free of charge.

Beginning in 1967 with “Siyavash in Persepolis” directed by Fereydoun Rahnema, the festival screened more than 100 Iranian and international films, most notably films by younger Iranian directors such as Dariush Mehrjoui, Sohrab Shahid-Sales, Khosrow Sinaii, Nosrat Karimi, and Nasser Taqvaii. Present were also international masterpieces, most of them shown for

the first time in Iran, including among others films by Ozu, Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray ... to Pasolini, Bergman, Losey, Duras and Parajanov.

The Shiraz Festival became a hub generating other thoughts and activities, including, the Epic Festival of Tus in Mashhad in 1974 and the Festival of Popular Traditions in Esfahan in 1977.

“Dialogue among Civilizations”, which I sponsored, was conceived in discussions with the late Professor Hossein Ziai and Dariush Shayegan during the 1975 Festival. The Center established to promote dialogue among civilizations organized its first international symposium titled “Given the Global Impact of Occidental Thought, Is Real Dialogue among Civilizations Possible?” in 1977. It was followed in the same year by the first exhibition of Sub-Saharan Art in Bagh-e Ferdows in Tehran.

I regret that there is no way I can name and thank all the Iranians and non-Iranians whose participation and dedication made the Shiraz Arts Festival and its achievements possible. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the dedicated young men and women who worked very hard to help organize the festival.

In particular, special recognition is due to the National Iranian Radio and Television, which contributed to artistic decisions and also managed and staffed the Festival throughout its life. Aside from that, its Chamber Orchestra, Center for the Preservation & Propagation of Iranian Music, and Theatre Workshop were major contributors to the Festival.

I cannot conclude this talk without remembering the Festival’s artistic director, the late Farrokh Gaffari, to whom much of the festival’s success is owed. I would like to celebrate his life by recalling here what he said of the Festival, years after it had ended:

“No festival has done what the Shiraz Art Festival did during its lifetime. The 10 to 12 days of the Festival created an exceptional cultural and human environment for the artists to learn of each other’s accomplishments, to establish contact and friendship with each other and with their public. The Festival brought together the performing arts of nations possessing ancient cultures with those of Europe and North America. Sometimes the two were combined as in the works of Peter Brook and Maurice Béjart. The Shiraz Art Festival was the only one of its kind that offered these two opportunities. A third contribution of the Festival was that it helped the third world artists overcome their shyness vis-à-vis western art. Conversely, it brought the western artists face to face with the extraordinary works created by non-western traditional as well as modern artists.”

Again I would like to thank the Asia Society and take this opportunity to wish the organizers of this weighty and timely event great success.