



## DJANBAZIAN, SARKIS

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**DJANBAZIAN (Jānbāziān), Sarkis** (b. Armaveer, Armenia, 15 January 1913; d. Tehran, 11 December 1963), the first male ballet master, and a dancer, choreographer, and producer, as well as the founder of a ballet academy in Iran ([FIGURE 1](#)). He was also among the pioneer male ballet dancers who performed on stage in different cities in Iran. Djanbazian is widely regarded as the father of ballet in Iran, as he played a significant role in introducing the art of ballet by establishing a school with a rigorous curriculum for training students and staging professional performances. Over the course of 27 years, he staged more than 100 pieces and significantly influenced the way dance was viewed in Iranian society. In Djanbazian's time, dance in Iran, with the exception of *samā'* rituals among the Sufis, was traditionally viewed merely as entertainment performed at certain events such as weddings and looked down upon as a profession. Djanbazian's efforts and his teaching style and dedication brought recognition and respect for dance as an art form and encouraged people to seek dance education and training and to pursue a career as a professional dancer, a choreographer, or an educator in Iran. Many of his students pursued successful careers in dance inside and outside Iran. Among them, one may mention professional dancers such as Edick Djanbazian, who joined Vienna Opera Ballet Theater; Yerjanik Djanbazian, Frida Minassian, and Goli Mirjahāngiri, who took up dancing careers in Rudaki Hall in Tehran; Yagāna Šāygān, who continued her career in dance in England and Spain; Soniā Rafat, who pursued a dancing career in England; and Vera Tamelina and Shoushik and Magda Sahakian who continued their dance careers in the United States.



From early childhood, Djanbazian took an avid interest in the arts, especially in dance. After graduating from high school, he went to Leningrad (St. Petersburg at the time) to study dance. He graduated from Vaganova Dance Academy of Leningrad on 14 January 1936 and from Lesgaf University with a Masters of Arts degree on 15 November 1936. After graduation, he worked as a principal dancer, choreographer, and artistic director in Kirov Theatre in Leningrad until July of 1938.

Owing to the heavy political pressure of the Russian Communist government on Armenians, Djanbazian left Russia with his family in 1938, migrated to Iran and settled in Qazvin. He decided to establish a dance school, form a dance group, and stage performances in Qazvin. When he met with the city council of Qazvin to discuss his plan and obtain permission to establish a dance school, he was treated with disrespect and expelled from the office. The Armenian Church in Qazvin did not have enough authority to allow Djanbazian to have a dance school at the church environment. The priest, however, was very kind and showed respect toward Djanbazian's interest in dance and his pursuit of establishing a dance school. Therefore, without consulting with the Church's advisory board, the priest allowed Djanbazian to hold his dance classes on the rooftop of the Church. For weeks, Djanbazian had to carry the smaller students up a ladder to the rooftop to ensure their safe attendance in the classes. He finally managed to stage a few dance performances that were received well. This encouraged Djanbazian to take the next step in pursuing his dream of a professional dance school.

Djanbazian left Qazvin in 1942 for Tehran in hope of establishing a dance academy (communication with A. Djanbazian). He held dancing classes in the Armenian Kušēš high school after the hours; everyday, students had to remove all chairs and desks to make room for rehearsals and the put them back. Djanbazian pursued his dream with tireless effort, energy, and optimism until he managed to establish Tehran Ballet School in 1942 in Tehran. The progress was initially very slow; his efforts were not appreciated, and he did not receive much respect for what he was doing. Gradually, enrollment in the school increased, reaching 150 students in 1955, and he started to plan stage performances. In his instructions, he used Vaganova dance technique (a technique perfected by the great Russian dance instructor Agripinna Vaganova) with a passionate, direct approach. As an instructor, he was known for his vigilance, tireless perseverance, and discipline. His energy, passion, dedication, and vitality made his teaching very effective. Some of his relatives,



including his own daughter, were amongst his students, but they were subjected to his highly stringent and disciplined approach as any other student. He staged many full length ballets such as Alexander Pushkin's "Fountain of Baghchehsarai" and "Dreams of Hafez," and Reinhold Glière's "Chinese Flower Girl," and choreographed shorter ballets such as "Jealousy" (Ĥesādat), "Persian Miniature" (Miniātorhā-ye Irāni), "Anuš," as well as several classical and traditional Persian dance pieces including "Gol-e gandom," "Woodchopper" (Tabar-zan), "Sailors" (Malavānān), "Life and Death" (Zendegi va marg, widely known as "Snake Dance" or Raqṣ- mār), "Prayers in the mountains" (Raqṣ-e namāz), "Qāli-e Kermān," and "Šālikāri" (communication with A. Djanbazian). Djanbazian took a great deal of interest in Iranian culture, and tried tirelessly to incorporate Iranian themes and stories in his artistic work. Despite his lack of fluency in Persian, his interest in Persian literature led him, with the collaboration of Ehsan Yarshater, to the production and staging of "Rostam and Tahmina" ballet, based on a love story in the Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*. Over the course of his career, he collaborated with many artists and intellectuals of the time. He also served, in 1948, as the head of the faculty at the National Guard and Armed Forces Academy (Laškar-e gard-e šāhanšāhi), where he trained high-ranking officials of the country (communication with A. Djanbazian; "Djanbazian Dance Academy," ref. no. 5).

In 1950, Djanbazian married Fleur Djanbazian; they had two children, Anna and Albert. Anna received her education in dance first under her father's direction and then continued her training in Russia after her father passed away.

Djanbazian founded the Folk Dance and Song Ensemble (Goruh-e raqṣ o āvāz-e maḥalli) conducted by maestro Edik Hovespian in 1959. Later on, this ensemble continued their performances under the direction of maestro Hovik Gasparian at the second national dance festival in Iran in 1962. Sarkis Djanbazian died of heart attack at the age of fifty on 11 December 1963 in Tehran. His greatest concern was that his school might not continue after his death. The school remained open and instructors such as Yagāna Šāygān, 'Abd-Allāh Nāžemi, Yerjanik Djanbazian, and Zohra Amjadi taught there until Djanbazian's daughter, Anna, returned home after the completion of her dance education in Russia. She took over the academy in 1972 and managed it until 1984, when she left Iran and continued her dance activities in the United States.



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