



KĀNUN-E PARVAREŠ-E FEKRI-E KUDAKĀN VA NOWJAVĀNĀN VII. VISUAL ARTS TRAINING CENTER

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vii. Visual Arts Training Center

In the beginning, each artistic training program was independent, and the subjects were not coordinated under an overall artistic training management. The Visual Arts Training Center became a real entity long after each artistic training program was created and was in operation with Sheida Gharachedaghi (music), Don Roger Laffoon and Ardavan Mofid (theater), Monfaredzādeh (filmmaking), and Parviz Kalāntari (painting), most of whom were among the pioneers of Kanun (see below, viii).

When the Visual Arts Training Center was assigned to cover all artistic training, Parviz Kalāntari was appointed to direct the center with Reżā Gowharzād as his administrative assistant. Kalāntari organized annual seminars for trainers in each discipline, discussing the problems and experiences they faced. The Center also had an internal newsletter, *Kaṭṭ o rabṭ*, in which trainers could write about their own experiences, problems, and



ideas.

Training film directors. The impact of the Visual Arts Training Center on the preparation of youngsters who were interested in artistic domains should not be underestimated. Through this initiative, after the Revolution, an array of young artists were introduced to the Iranian public, and the work of many of them has been praised worldwide. Former trainees of the center include Behruz Afkami, film director; Homāyun As'adiān, film director; Moḥammad-'Ali Ṭālebi, film director; Ḥamid Jebelli, film director and actor; Iraj Tahmāseb, film director and actor; Ḥasan Ḥasandust, film editor; Moḥammad-Reżā 'Aliqoli, film composer; Faribā Šāhin Moqaddam, film dubbing director; Ḥamid Ḥamzeh, playwright, theater director, and make-up specialist; Majid Ḥamzeh, radio actor and speaker; Mas'ud Maymi, film planner and assistant director; Nāṣer Naẓar, composer; Fāṭemeh Mo'tamed Āriā, actress; and Akbar 'Abbāsi, actor.

Music workshop. Sheida Gharachedaghi formed the Music Training Center of Kanun in 1971 and directed the center for about six years. While teaching and developing the future music trainers of Kanun to apply Carl Orff's music teaching methods, she established music workshops in 52 cultural centers across the country. Many cultural centers soon established their own children's singing groups and orchestras with Carl Orff musical instruments and easy learning methods. A number of musicians and musicologists were entrusted to teach various classes for different age groups.

Theater Center. This department was founded in 1971 by Don Laffoon, who went on to serve as its director for the next five years (see below, viii). He was assisted by Ardavān Mofid (1947-), who succeeded him as director in 1976. Laffoon created four programs at the Theater Center: (1) a company of professional actors that toured throughout Iran, as well as internationally (Australia, Germany, and Wales), performing plays commissioned by the Theater Center; (2) a puppet program established by Ardešir Kešāvarzi (1945-2009), who was assisted by Kāmbiz Šamimi Mofaḵkam; (3) a team of trained teachers who were sent out to conduct classes of creative dramatics in cities throughout the country; (4) a company of adolescent actors (directed by Mofid) that emerged from the library/cultural center's theater classes, which also performed. Mofid was dispatched by the Institute to study for his M.A. in theater, which he received from Florida State University in 1976. Laffoon was keen to take plays and puppet shows to even the smallest towns in the country, so he designed a large mobile theater equipped with its own generator to



power the theater's lights and sound. Built in Hamburg, Germany, the mobile theater was the first of its kind in the world (interviews with Laffoon, 24-26 July 2010).

Don Laffoon, assisted by Mofid and Kešāvarzi, staged many popular plays for children, such as "The butterfly" (*Šāhparak k̄ānum*), "The turnip" (*Torob*), "Rise and shine Miss Sun" (*Ḳorsid k̄ānom āftāb kon*), "An event in the puppet town" (*Hādeṭe'i dar šahr-e 'arusakhā*; tr. Kešāvarzi), "The cloak of a thousand tales" (*Šenel-e hezār qeṣṣeh*), "The robots," "Traditional elementary school" (*Maktab k̄āneh*), "Aria De Capo," "The Eagle and the fox" (*Oqāb o rubāh*), "Dormant luck" (*Baḳt-e ḳofteh*), and *Rostam o Sohrāb*. Kanun's Children's Theater Company also took plays such as "Madame Butterfly," "The cloak of a thousand tales," *Kuti o Muti*, and "An event in the puppet town," to international festivals in Germany and Wales and also toured Australia for a full month, playing and teaching workshops for children in the four major cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth.

Also performed was "Obsolete vocabulary" (*Vāžehā-ye matruk*), written both in English (to be performed at the Iran-America Cultural Center) and in Persian for Kanun by Homayoun Moezzi Moqaddam (1938-), composer, vocalist, and music teacher, directed by Aravān Mofid. It was performed in 1974 before Shahbanou Farah and Princess Leila in Library Number 21 at Nārmak Children's Cultural Center; it was also performed frequently in other cultural centers (interview with Homāyun Moezi Moghadam). Terry Graham wrote at length about the play and its writer and director (*The Teheran Journal*, 19 February 1974).

Since 1971, the Kanun Theater Center has had two main objectives: the promotional and the pedagogic. Kešāvarzi, who directed Kanun's puppet theater training workshop from 1974 to 1980, trained many children's puppet animators and filmmakers. Thus many of today's great writers, film, theater, and television directors and actors solidified their careers by joining the Kanun Theater Company, including Marziyeh Borumand (1951-), a dramatic arts graduate, actress, director, and puppet master; Bahrām Šāh-Moḥammadlu (1950-), a film and television actor and director; Režā Bābak (1955-), an actor in over 15 feature films, starting with Bahrām Bayzā'i's "Ballad of Tara" (*Čarike-ye Tārā*, 1979) television serials; and Susan Farroḳniā (1951). Hengāmeḥ Mofid (1956-), a professor of dramatic arts, writer of scripts, songs, and plays, director, voice actress, and music composer, played a hand in the realization of children's puppet shows on television (interview with Ardavān Mofid, July



2010).

Finally, the late Bižan Mofid (1935-84), who was already well known as a playwright and director, also agreed to work as writer for Kanun Theater Company. Kanun also recorded plays and tales for children (see above, vi; interviews with Don Laffoon and Ardavān Mofid, July and September 2010).

Painting workshop. Parviz Kalāntari (see below, viii) joined Kanun in 1967 to organize and manage the children's drawing and painting training activities for Kanun's cultural centers (libraries). Following his own proposal, he and his assistant, 'Abbās Mehdi-Kāši, were sent to Los Angeles Junior Arts Center for three months in 1968 to study its training methods and techniques and to make note of the adaptable courses. Upon their return the idea of a children's visual arts training program became a reality, covering programs on ceramics, handstamps, painting and sculpture, photography and visual arts. These activities became an indispensable aspect of the architectural plans of cultural centers, which were being increasingly constructed in poor neighborhoods in cities across the country.

Parviz Kalāntari, an original painter and writer, and other art promoters were keen to approach the training program subjects in a manner so as to teach the techniques and awaken the curiosity of interested children, while avoiding the trainers' personal preferences in method or style. Their main objective was to show and teach the basic tools and to provide every opportunity for the children's own imagination and creativity to flourish.

Children's Film Training Center. Esfandiār Monfaredzādeh (see below, viii), a well-known Iranian film music composer and songwriter (over 20 film scores and innumerable songs), was initially invited in 1970 to compose scores for Kanun's film productions. He was, like his childhood friend Mas'ud Kimiā'i, a self-taught filmmaker, but he also had a taste for music, though he never finished his academic musical studies, either at the Tehran Music School (Honarestān-e Melli-e Musiqi) or in Vienna; however, from his teenage years he was able to play and improvise with a number of traditional and classical instruments ('ud, accordion, *zārb* drum, flute, piano, and other keyboard instruments). While composing films for Kanun, Monfaredzādeh learned of the children's film training program from a translation of a book about filmmaking for young people. This book was translated by a young filmmaker and music lover, Arsalān Sāsāni, and was to be published by Kanun. Ebrāhim Foružeš, then responsible for the Film Production Department, supported



Monfaredzādeh in founding the Center. In the autumn of 1970, the Children's Film Training Center started its 8mm courses (four hours per week) for interested children at two libraries in Tehran. Soon the filmmaking courses extended to other children's cultural centers, not only in the capital but also the provinces, and within six years the children and young adults had produced over 460 films (of 1 to 10 minutes in duration). The entire teaching team, in addition to Monfaredzādeh, was made up of Arsalān Sāsāsni and Farhād Šaybāni, poet, songwriter, and filmmaker; he also made an animated film based on children's drawings, "Another town" (*Šahri digar*), for Kanun in 1973. Nāšer Zerā'ati, writer and filmmaker, continued the Center's program after the departure of Monfaredzādeh.

In 1972 the first children's film productions were ready to be screened (eight films), and among them "Fear in the alley" (*Tars dar kučeh*) and "Don't stare" (*Did nazan*), were praised at the Children's Film Festival of Milan, Italy, in the summer of 1972. Each year the Children's Film Training Center became better equipped, and more trainers were employed. In 1973, the number of films made by children increased to 38 (a total of 4 hr 30 min in duration), and three films received prizes in Helsinki. In 1974, training was extended to the provinces, and courses were organized and followed in Ahvaz, Rasht, Fuman, and Mashad. In this year, the Center was training 300 trainees with 12 trainers, and 89 films were approved as finished products (5 hr 40 min). In 1975, 13 films from a total of 83 by teenage filmmakers among 460 trainees were selected for participation at 4 international festivals, and four of the films garnered awards in Tel Aviv and Hiroshima (author's personal observation).

Interested and disciplined trainees, after one or two years of practical and theoretical follow-up, could enjoy better and more important opportunities (after realizing well-constructed fiction films) and could be accepted for a third and last phase, where the teenage filmmakers could work with professional equipment (e.g., 16mm camera, professional editing and recording machines and facilities). Many of Kanun's future trainers have followed this path while finishing their high school education. A number followed dramatic arts and film and television schools in Iran or abroad with success and are now among the best filmmakers, master technicians, and university level arts school instructors both within and outside the country.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

See at end of part IX.

Figure 14. A scene of a play on a mobile theater. From left: ‘Ali Purtāš, Afsāneh Tavakkoli, Kāmbiz Šamimi Mofaqqam, Hengāmeḥ Mofid, Moslem Qāsemi.

Figure 15. A scene of the puppet show, “Red Riding Hood” (*Šenel qermezi*). From left: Soheylā Taslimi, Kāmbiz Šamimi Mofaqqam, Ardavān Mofid, Mortezā Ṭāheri (Ṭezi). Performed by the mobile theater group.