



## SHIRAZ ARTS FESTIVAL

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**SHIRAZ ARTS FESTIVAL.** For eleven consecutive years, beginning in 1967, a festival of arts, known in Persian as *Jašn-e honar*, took place in [Shiraz](#) and the nearby remains of the ancient imperial city of [Persepolis](#). The Festival owed its conception to the ideas put forth by the queen of Iran, Šahbānu Farah. Its over-riding purpose was to be a meeting place of the performing arts of the Eastern world with those of the West. One of the primary objectives of the Festival was the promotion of Persian traditional music, and another was the provision of a platform for the presentation of new musical and theatrical creations by native artists. In addition, the Festival sought to familiarize the native audience with music, dance, and the theatrical arts of other cultures, particularly those of Asia and Africa. Also, Western music and theater, both the classical and the avant-garde, figured prominently among the major events. Lasting some ten to fourteen days, the Festival was timed to coincide with school summer holidays, at the closing days of August and early September, late enough so that the mid-summer heat had eased.

From its inception the Shiraz Arts Festival stood out among the many existing international music festivals due to the originality of its mission and the diversity of its programming. Its emphasis on the traditional, as concerns the arts of the East, and the inclusion of the avant-garde trends in Western musical composition and in theater, made the Festival a unique experience. While musical performances formed the mainstay of its programs, theater and dance also increasingly occupied positions of prominence. By the time of its final plan in 1977, the Shiraz Arts Festival had received an uncommon



international recognition and prestige. Nearly all of its programs, many of which were sponsored or commissioned by the Festival, stood out for their high quality. The collective participation of native musicians, plus large numbers of artists from European, American, Asiatic, and African countries in Shiraz, a provincial city some 1,000 kilometers south of the capital, [Tehran](#), was in itself a remarkable feat. It was not long after it began in 1967 that the attending foreign journalists hailed the Festival as singularly different from other music festivals.

The Shiraz Festival paid particular attention to the presentation of the traditional modal (*dastgāh*) system of Persian music. Every year a number of the most prominent performers of this tradition were invited to participate in nightly concerts. The venue was the garden of the mausoleum (termed the [Ḥāfeziya](#)) of [Ḥāfez](#), the renowned 14th-century poet of Shiraz. The concerts began late at night and often ended past one o'clock in the morning. The celebrated musicians who were featured in these concerts included: Aḥmad 'Ebādi, Jalāl Zolfonun (Ḍu'l-Fonun), and Sa'id Hormozi (*setār*); Jalil Šahnāz, 'Ali-Akbar Šahnāzi, Loṭf-Allāh Majd, Farhang Šarīf, Hušang Zārīf, Ḥosayn 'Alizāda, Moḥammad-Rezā Loṭfi, and Dāryuš Ṭalā'i (*tār*); Ḥasan Kasā'i and Ḥasan Nāhid (*ney*); Farāmarz Pāyvar, Majid Kiāni, and Moḥammad Ḥaydari (*santur*); 'Ali-Ašgar Bahāri (*kamānča*); Ḥosayn Tehrāni, Jamšid Šemirāni and Moḥammad Esmā'ili (*tombak*); 'Abd-al-Wahhāb Šahīdi, Tāj Ešfahāni, Moḥammad-Rezā Šajariān, Maḥmud Karimi, Nur-al-Din Rażawi Sarvestāni, and Parisā (vocalists), and many others. These were artists who were known through their radio and television programs and revered by Persian audiences. But they, and the refined art of Persian classical music that they presented, were largely unknown to the foreign audience that was attracted to the Festival in increasing numbers, year after year.

An additional, quite significant aspect of the plan was that the Festival made a point of including presentations of Persian folk music. The native urban population is at home with the classical or the *dastgāh* system, but, given the vastness of the country and the diversity of folk traditions within its boundaries, regional music was generally unknown to the urbanite communities. Over the years the audience at the Festival were treated to programs of folk music from such provinces as Kordestan, Khorasan, [Azarbaijan](#), [Baluchestan](#), and from [Qeshm Island](#) in the Persian Gulf. The inclusion of folk musicians in the programs of native music was a novelty greatly appreciated by audiences both foreign and domestic.



Another significant point of the plan was the inclusion of *ta'zia* (passion play), a unique musico-dramatic tradition in Persia, associated with the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn, the grandson of the Prophet Moḥammad and the third Shi'ite imam. There are a number of plays, written in verse, on the events leading to the tragic death of Ḥosayn and his small band of followers by the army of Yazid b. Mo'āwīa (the Omayyad caliph) near the oasis of Karbala in the Mesopotamian plains in Moḥarram 61/October 680. In a *ta'zia* presentation, the protagonists sing their lines while the antagonists speak their parts in declamatory fashion. A small instrumental ensemble of native woodwinds, brass, and percussions participate, not as accompaniment to the singing but to enhance the impact of the scenes of conflict. They also perform during the short interludes when the actors exit the stage in order to change costume and reappear. There was a steady decline in *ta'zia*'s popularity in the 20th century, to the point that it was rarely performed in large cities. It is the Shiraz Arts Festival that must be credited for the reawakening of interest in this unique religious, musico-dramatic art form. In the first Festival (1967), a *ta'zia* production of the drama of Ḥorr-e Riāḥi, one of the leading figures on Imam Ḥosayn's side in the Battle of Karbala, was staged with great success. Two other *ta'zias* were presented in the course of the Festival in 1970 and 1971. In the 1976 Festival, *ta'zia* was featured prominently with an international symposium and the enactment of seven plays.

Participation of musicians from countries in Asia and Africa was made for experiences hitherto unknown to both Persians and most foreign visitors who attended the Festival. In the course of the eleven years of its life, the Shiraz Arts Festival featured prominent musicians and instrumental groups from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Tunisia, Nigeria, Senegal, Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Bhutan. The most extensive representation was from India, which featured its top classical dancers and such renowned musicians as the sitar players Vilayat Khan, Imrat Khan, and Ravi Shankar; *veena* players Doreswamy Iyengar, and S. Balachander; *tabla* virtuosi Alla Rakha, Shanta Prasad, and Latif Ahmad Khan; also *sarod* artists Amjad Khan and Sharan Rani; the *sarangi* player Ram Narayan; the *santur* player Shiv Kumar Sharma; and the great *šehnāy* virtuoso Bismillah Khan.

Presentations of gamelan music and dance from Bali and West Java were received with wonder and enthusiasm, as this type of orchestral music, so



prominent in the cultures of the southeastern regions of Asia, was totally unknown to the domestic audience as well as most Western visitors. No less exciting were representations of music and dance from China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

Theatrical productions with strong musical component included the *Noh* drama of Japan, *Kathakali* of India, the Tibetan folk opera *Llamo*, Yoruba music of Nigeria, and the Afro-Brazilian martial arts dance music (Capoeira). To this category also belongs *Golestān*, Maurice Bejart's creation for the Festival with participation of Persian musicians from National Iranian Radio and Television's Centre for Preservation and Propagation of National Music.

In its programming of Western classical music, the Shiraz Arts Festival attempted to familiarize the native audience with modern trends that are some times referred to the avant-garde. Many among the well-educated Persians were reasonably familiar with the standard repertoire of the Classical and Romantic periods, but the very modern was often unknown, as indeed is also the case in Western societies. In the course of its eleven years of life, the Festival brought to Shiraz composers such as John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Bruno Maderna, Olivier Messiaen, Luis de Pablo, Krzysztof Penderecki, Gilbert Amy, Betsy Jolas, Iannis Xenakis, Ivo Malec, and Morton Feldman. New works by some of these composers were premiered, while Maderna and Xenakis were actually commissioned to create new compositions for the Festival. Orchestras from European countries and the Chamber Orchestra of the National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT) were engaged in the performance of these works. The Festival also endeavored to promote works of native composers who wrote according to the techniques of Western composition. New compositions by Morteżā Ḥannāna, Hormoz Farhat, Moḥammad-Taqi Mas'udia, Fozia Majd, 'Ali-Reżā Mašāyeki and Dāriuš Dawlatšāhi were commissioned and performed by the NIRT Chamber Orchestra.

Musical events, dance and theater productions were scheduled to begin in late afternoon. Lecture sessions were organized in the morning, beginning at 10 o'clock, when composers, writers, or theater directors discussed their work presented in the course of the Festival and responded to questions from the audience. There were also ancillary events throughout the day such as art exhibits and film screening of major oeuvres by a prominent director.

Although in its programs of Western music the Festival tended to foster



modern works, the standard repertoire of classical music was not altogether neglected. Over the years, a number of eminent performers, as well as ensembles and orchestras, participated in the Shiraz Arts Festival. Yehudi Menuhin, Arthur Rubinstein, Christian Ferras, Cathy Berberian, Ivan Erod, Yvonne Loriod, Martha Argerich, Michel Beroff, Idil Biret, and the Persian pianist Novin Afruz, were among the famous, international figures who gave recitals. Melos Ensemble of London, Juilliard String Quartet, the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, the L'Orchestre National de L'ORTF, L'Orchestre du Domaine Musical, L'Orchestre de Chambre de Toulouse, London Sinfonietta, The Hague Residence Orchestra, Les Percussions de Strasbourg, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Cracow Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir were among the famous ensembles that performed at the Festival. The music as performed by these artists and ensembles covered the full range of Baroque to contemporary compositions.

Most of the native audience attending the musical events were young and enthusiastic, many of whom had traveled from Tehran and other large cities and stayed for the duration of the Festival. However, a much wider audience had a chance to hear these programs, as they were also video-recorded and aired on television throughout the year. All things considered, this unique Festival made a significant impact in the promotion of interest in music and theater in Persia. It opened a window to the world of music and theater hitherto largely unknown. It revealed the diversity and richness of music, and the important place it has in the culture of so many nations.

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