



REVIEW



We are a group of interested individuals who would like to educate the Iranian community about life in the UK in order to help them integrate into their new country of residence through culture, art, entertainment, articles and personal stories and also the purpose of our weekly newspaper is to promote the fascination of Iranian culture by exposing the audience to rich traditions in Persian celebrations, literature, cinema, art, poetry, music, and etc. In addition, we provide a common website for more than 3 million Iranian professionals outside Iran. Persian weekly is a non-political, non-religious newspaper that encourages anyone who is interested in Persian culture to contribute with the Persian Weekly Newspaper. You can also contribute through your article, opinion, photographs and any other ideas you might have.

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Toos Foundation in Celebration of the 'Immortal Flowers' of Persian Song and Music

The music and literary repertoire of the programmes known generally as Golha, 'Flowers [of Persian Poetry and Song]', a series of weekly radio programmes produced by Davoud Pirnia and aired on Iranian National Radio between 1956 and 1979, was the subject of a special bi-lingual (Persian/English) symposium held at the Insti-



Jamila Kharrazi

tute of Education's Logan Hall in central London on April 26, 2009. Convened and conceived by Jamila Kharrazi, the dynamic Director of the charitable Toos Foundation, this free symposium (no admission fee was charged) was devoted to introducing one of the most glorious episodes in modern Persian music history to the modern British public.

Logan Hall was packed and attended by over 1300 people, the Toos Foundation's four-hour long symposium having been fully booked weeks in advance. Devoted to reviving the memory and legacy of these programmes, the large audience was offered a spiritual feast which featured a comprehensive overview to the five different types of Golha programmes: (1) Barg-i Sabz; (2) Golha-yi Javidan; (3) Golha-yi Rangarang; (4) Golha-yi Sahra'i; (5) Yik Shakh-i Gul, Golha-yi Tazeh (A Green Leaf, Immortal Flowers, Multi-coloured Flowers, Desert Flowers, A Single Flower, Fresh Flowers).

The approximately 1500 different Golha programmes presented the best and most poetically diverse—recorded collection of the classical corpus of Persian music and poetry made in the 20th century. They covered the entire history of classical as well as contemporary Persian poetry, giving marvellous expression to the whole gamut of traditional Persian music and poetry. With the support of the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library, a researcher at the Music Department of SOAS, University of London, Jane Lewisohn, recently succeeding in compiling and digitalizing the complete archive of the Golha radio programmes. All the different Golha programmes are now safely archived in the British Library in an even more complete and comprehensive form than can be found in the Iranian National Radio (whose archive is incomplete due to both pilfering and destruction by zealous ideologues at the beginning of the 1979 revolution).

Last week's Logan Hall symposium, which was largely modelled on Jane Lewisohn's archival work and recent research, was accompanied by an immaculate exhibition of rare photographs of many of the famous Persian musicians featured in the Golha programmes presented by the contemporary ethnomusicologist and journalist Forugh Bahmanpour (who had brought her photos over from Iran especially for this occasion), each of which was meticulously annotated with captions identifying their year, place and the various persons portrayed in each picture.

As the audience settled into their seats, listeners were drawn back into the intensely romantic ambience of the music of the Golha and reintroduced into the literary, social and political history underlying the programmes. Making use of recorded quotations from

many of the still surviving poets, song-writers, musicians and vocalists who performed on the programmes, original clips of song recordings, along with written texts projected onto a screen in both Persian and English, the audience was soon mesmerized into an attentive silence.

The event opened with a brief historical account of the genesis of the Golha programmes presented (in Persian with English subtitles) by Jane Lewisohn. This was followed by a detailed, decade by decade overview of the life and work of Davoud Pirnia, the founder and original producer of the Golha programmes, illustrated by photographs, live voice recordings, and the hostess of ceremonies: the actress Elizabeth Mansfield's running commentary. Attending the symposium were three of the four of Davoud Pirnia's living sons: Daryush, Shahrukh and Faroukh Pirnia. The eldest son, Daryush Pirnia (a renowned scholar and Pahlavi-period diplomat) appeared on stage to explain in his own words the mystical Sufi background of the inspiration underlying the programmes:

"The Immortal Flowers' programmes," Daryush Pirnia commented, "represent an innovation in regard to presentational approach, involving poetry, music and spoken narrative, which were created to further the understanding and development of the gnosis and spiritual teachings of Persia... The blend of prose, poetry and music in these programmes, where the biography and works of a single mystic was featured and presented to the public over a period of 23 years, were intended to provide a vignette into the spiritual banquet of the Sufis which has roots in millennia of history."

Sociologically speaking, the most fascinating aspect of the symposium was the attention drawn to the grand achievement of the great Persian female vocalists of the 1960s and 1970s such as Marzieh, Khatera Parvaneh, Sima Bina, Homayra, Mahasti, Elaheh, Pooran, Hayedeh, Ahdi'eh, Parvin and Nahid, clips from whose songs were played, preceded by snippets from their biographies. Perhaps the rowdy, vociferous cheers with which these clips were greeted by the audience reflected the fact that for the past three decades in Iran the government of the "Islamic" Republic has acted as if no great Persian female vocalists ever flourished at all during the 20th century. In Iran today—not incidentally—all female singers' voices are currently banned from the radio airwaves, and the sale of CDs by solo female artists is also forbidden throughout the land. London, not Tehran, was thus the natural venue for the Toos Foundation to choose to host this symposium in which the forbidden wine of Persian music could be imbibed in public without fear.

One of the most innovative and thrilling aspects of the entire event



was the presence of some of the most famous living Persian performers who had participated in the Golha programmes. These included the virtuoso tar player Hushang-i Zarif, the famous singer Akbar Golpayigani, the classical Persian female vocalist Nahid Da'i-Javad, three famous Iranian Radio presenters: Azar-i Pazhohish, Firuzha Amir-Mu'izz, and Fakhri Nikzad (specializing in the declamation of poetry, these ladies together represent the most celebrated female presenters in modern Iranian radio history). At various intervals during the event, these celebrities (several of whom the Toos Foundation had brought from Iran especially for the occasion) appeared on stage singing or speaking in turn, charming the audience with their artistry and welcomed by rapturous applause.

Considerable time was also devoted to the famous male singers such as Banan, Adib Khwansari, Hosayn Qavami (Fakhta'i) Naser Mas'udi, Kurush Sarhangzadeh, Mahmudi Khwansari, Zabihi, Golchin, 'Abdu'l-Vahab Shahidi, to song-writers and poets such