

A short report of the Toos Foundation's last event:

## Ziryab the Father of Flamenco Music

with the participation of Lady Simin Jalavand

From *Bazar Hafte* (a translation)



The Toos Foundation, the only unpretentious Iranian art and culture foundation which, based on its activities over the last 14 years, carries the mark of ability and honesty in protecting and promoting the cultural heritage was proud to stage a programme about one of the Iranian cultural icons, Ziryab, who has had a major influence on Western Culture. In a beautiful combination of Iranian and Spanish music and dance, it staged a successful event in the 1000-capacity Logan Hall in London. The story of the genius Ziryab was recounted on stage by an imaginary granddaughter performed by Simin Sarkoob (Jalalvand) one of the most senior Iranian dubbing artists. The event was awarded to her, alongside a bust of Ferdosi, which made the night even more memorable in Iranian cultural archives.

Ziryab was born from Kurdish origins in Baghdad in the 8th century, probably with the name of Abulhasan Ali Ibn Nafi (or Abulhasan Abutati). He became known as Ziryab (black bird). He was forced to leave Baghdad and travelled to Tunisia and Al Maghreb and finally lived in exile in Cordoba during the reign of the Umayyad Caliphates. Ziryab was not only an Iranian musician and singer, but also an astronomer and thinker who according to Spanish sources is one of the fathers of Flamenco music.

One of the most valuable achievements of Ziryab was to fuse traditional Indian and Iranian music with the music of North Africa and the Gypsies; the result of which was the creation of the famous Andalusia beat based on Cantao techniques. This was the precursor to Flamenco. He set up the first Andalusia music school and by embarking on the difficult task of combining different traditions from different cultures made the road easier for the future generations.





Before Islam, Iranians had a special tune for each day of the year. These were based on Barbod's 30 musical themes. Ziryab's music transformed the traditional Arabic music, which was originally based on what camel riders used to sing in their loneliness, later developed further by adding the sounds of women crying and wailing. Arabs, had not much more culturally to offer other than monotheism. But with his arrival and long stay in Cordoba, Ziryab changed their way of cooking, hair styles and seasonal clothing. He also showed them how to separate and differentiate clothing according to rank and how to dress in court.

All those were in addition to creating a new musical instrument like the Guitar. He also added the fifth string to the Persian musical instrument Oud and helped to further the recognition of this instrument in Europe. With the correction of musical vocabulary (beginnings of Flamenco) Ziryab created a new Arab-Andalusia music style and was the founder of the first academy of music in the world which included female teachers and students.

Persian civilization and the great spirit of the ancient East had come to the Arabs and spread throughout the entire world. Also with the work and help of Iranian ministers and other well known leaders, the Sassanid culture was revived in the courts of Arab Caliphates in Spain. It should be noted, the only two countries which did not accept Arabic language and kept their own even after the invasion, were Iran and Spain.

The last king of Spain, Rodriguez was said to be from Iranian origins and from Isfahan. It is also said he gave the name of his birthplace *eshbane* to this land, which later became Spain. Abd-Al Rahman, the first Arab ruler of Spain, ruled like a Sassanid king. Arab Kings were copying King Khosrow and other Sassanid Kings for their code of laws and ways of living and even followed their architecture, like the horse shoe shape which they took from Taq Kasra or the famous vase of Alhambra with its miniatures and Chinese enamel which reminds us of Kashan masters in Iran.