

Hamidreza Naimi, a leading director and actor in Iran's theater, has made significant contributions with successful performances such as 'King Lear,' 'Faust,' 'Shining of the Promised Hour,' and 'Socrates.'

His latest theatrical work, 'Frederick or the Crime Boulevard,' penned by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, is about the theater – about intrigues between actors, about a stupid playwright and greedy manager, about happiness and curse of the acting, and, of course, about love. In the play, theater, and life are inextricably intertwined as two poles of the whole. The play, held at Tehran's City Theater from November 28 to January 18, got kudos by large number of audiences and critics. The warm reception motivated us to sit down for an exclusive interview with the director.

In an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Naimi talked about the adaptation of plays for contemporary audiences, the challenges faced by Iranian playwrights, and the balance between catering to both general and astute viewers. He dismisses the notion that free theatrical adaptation always leads to a more audience-friendly experience, emphasizing the long-lasting power of classical and neo-classical works. Discussing the adaptation of 'Frederick' for Iranian audiences, Naimi explains the deliberate infusion of Iranian cultural and literary elements into the play.

The full text of the interview follows:



Naimi has previously recorded successful performances such as 'Faust,' 'Shining of the Promised Hour,' 'Socrates,' 'Far East Near East,' 'Assassination,' 'The Good Soldier Schweik,' 'Once Upon a Time a Dog' and 'Richard III' in his professional portfolio.



Theater Group has a 30-year history, founded by individuals like Shahram Karami, Yaghoob Sabaahi, Behnaz Nazi, Hamidreza Azarang, Mandana Abqari, and myself during our college days. Over the years, we've invited individuals, some of whom are still with us, including Shabnam Moqaddami, and Kambiz Amini.

Certainly, the enduring success and stability of the group, along with the effort to create brilliant, thoughtful, and impactful works, are not hidden from the eyes of the Iranian audience. In 'Frederick,' we may not have a familiar face from television or cinema, but our credibility assures the audience that they can trust our shows from the very beginning. Obviously, the continuation of the reception depends on direct interaction with the audience. If the work is not good, audience won't recommend it to others.

In the play, Frederick is constantly changing costumes with different colors. What is the purpose behind this?

We are dealing with a star performer from the early 19th century. He is widely popular among the general audience. He is an artist whose attire, behavior, and style of this artist have always been under the scrutiny of his audience, much like today's cinema and theater stars who attract attention from photographers, magazines, and media. Therefore, considering just one costume for him from start to finish wouldn't be fitting. In the play, we see him in three different scenes, portraying different characters and types each time, requiring special costume designs for each character.

In staging this performance, you perform it in a manner that suggests Frederick is Iranian, grappling with the current issues faced by every Iranian. If its French elements were deleted, it could be considered a wholly Iranian piece. Explain about such artistic adaptations.

I have never written or adapted a play that does not relate to the conditions of Iranian so-

ciety. Even when performing a foreign script, I have always considered the necessity of its performance for my audience. The pain and suffering of 19th-century French plays sadly mirror the struggles of today's theater families in our country. Narrow-mindedness, jealousy, economic crises in producing artistic works, censorship, theater closures, wasting talents, and the despair of the cultural community to continue their work... these are the challenges we face today.

What is your opinion about adding Iranian cultural and literary elements to adaptations of Western plays and novels?

I don't perform this play in its original language, French, for a French-speaking audience. I perform it in Persian for Iranian audience. The translator has the flexibility to use Persian idioms, proverbs, and expressions to convey the meaning quickly. Consider a German proverb: "Lieber den Spatz in der Hand als die Taube auf dem Dach." A translator might change it to "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

I once asked Jamal Mirsadeqi why a Russian work

The play is about Frederick Lemaitre, a 19th-century larger-than-life, popular actor, an eccentric, a seducer, and a revolutionary for whom nothing is too much. Paris is fascinated by him. He seems ready for anything except love. On the stage, he is the embodiment of passionate love, whereas behind the scenes he has to buy ready-made love. When he meets Bérénice, a young and mysterious woman with no connection with the stage, he faces a crucial dilemma: love as an illusion or love as reality? The stage or real life?

was translated as "Rows of Tabrizi trees..." He said readers in Iran know that type of tree as "Tabrizi." Look at Ahmad Shamlou's translation of Federico Garcia Lorca's poems. Lorca, in Spain, mostly wrote folk and rural songs, but in Shamlou's translation, it strongly resembles Shamlou's own poetic language. The nuances and rules of translation is very important, but translating dialogues and plays of Shakespeare, which are poetic, differs from the artistic prose of Ibsen and all are considered in Persian translations. About the modern dance of the elderly in the play, it's a deliberate break I've used in many other shows. In 'Socrates,' everyone wears suits and ties, but Socrates wears Greek attire. In 'Assassination,' all citizens of Kufa wear golden-colored watches. I use these jump cuts a lot in my shows, blurring the line between past and present.

Regarding the failures of artists in a society, as depicted in the play, can you briefly explain the current situation of artists in Iran?

It's exactly what I depict in the play. Talented individuals always bear the brunt the most. In the world and Iran, the basis of suffering is knowledge. Great artists and young talents are getting sacrificed much, while those tied to political parties benefit from privileges, favors, and blessings.

What's your reason for not using HF microphones?

Theater actors should have trained and eloquent expressions. There's no meaningful use for HF microphones unless for a specific purpose or dramatic reason. Using it without reason can be considered a shortcoming for actors and performance.

The stage design, especially the costume design, added to the appeal of this production. What were the challenges of costume and stage design for this work?

Unfortunately, we had to borrow money from family and friends to cover the costs of décor and costumes. I feel sorry for the indifferent officials who don't care about the hardships of artists.

What's the reason for playing the lead role, Frederick, yourself?

A renowned actor was supposed to play the role of Frederick, but 10 days before rehearsals, he left our project. This led to losing sponsors and our producer. It was a harsh blow, unexpected. In the short time I had, I contacted several well-known figures like Hamed Behdad, Amir Ja'fari, Amir Jadidi, Hamed Komeili, and Parviz Parastui, but they were all occupied with other projects. At the end of the day, with confidence in my ability to perform this role, I decided to play it myself, and I am very happy that the show was well-received despite the absence of recognizable faces. This shows that in theater, it's the quality of the performance that matters to the audience, not the presence of faces and stars. I hope producers and sponsors understand this.

