

Iranian cinema breaks 24-year audience record

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian cinema industry achieved a remarkable feat, surpassing its highest audience figures in over two decades. Up to December 31, the number of cinema-goers in Iran exceeded 28.6 million, breaking the record set in 2000.

This surge in attendance has also boosted box office revenues to an impressive \$200 million. With several months left in the Iranian calendar year, there is potential for this figure to rise even further, possibly surpassing the 33-million audience record from 2000, IRNA reported. Currently, three comedy films are drawing significant crowds: 'Seventy Thirty', 'Pressure Cooker', and 'Breakfast with Giraffes'. 'Seventy Thirty', with its later release compared to the other two, has the potential to attract more viewers in the coming weeks and months.

This strong lineup, combined with the upcoming Nowruz (Iranian

New Year) screenings, which are expected to begin in mid-March, suggests that both audience numbers and box office earnings could climb even higher, setting new milestones for Iranian cinema.

So far in 2024, six films have grossed over \$12.5 million, and ten films have attracted millions of viewers. Leading this list is the comedy 'Texas 3', which drew 4,446,000 viewers and grossed \$31.25 million, accounting for 16% of this year's total audience.

Another comedy, 'Pressure Cooker', which was expected to perform even better, has sold 3,730,000 tickets and grossed \$26.12 million, representing 13% of the total audience so far. 'Seventy Thirty' has sold 3,050,000 tickets and grossed \$21.5 million, capturing 11% of the total audience.

These three popular and high-grossing films have collectively accounted for 40% of the total audience and \$77.87 mil-

lion in box office sales.

The Iranian cinema has attracted 28.6 million viewers so far this year, compared to 28.26 million last year.

If the industry surpasses the 33-million audience mark from 2000, which is within reach, the next milestone would be the 33.9-million audience from 1999. The real challenge, however, lies in matching the 39.9-million audience from 1997, which would require a strategic distribution of various film genres throughout the year.

A drawback in 2023 was the limited success to just two films, 'Fossil' and 'Hotel'. This year, the number of impactful films has increased, with a focus on comedies. Maintaining a diverse range of influential films, including social and children's films, could lead to an even more successful year in terms of box office sales and audience numbers.

The production trends over the past months suggest that



social and children's films will have a more significant pres-

ence in next year's screenings, potentially giving comedies a

run for their money in terms of popularity.

Street art: Vibrant expression of life and community



By Niloufar Mansouri
Guest contributor

Artists are eager to showcase their work, prompting them to immediately share images and videos on social media. The sweet sounds of a harmonica played by a woman in light clothing in the subway, a young man playing a *santur* (a hammered dulcimer of Iranian origins) by the water's edge, a young woman painting in a street corner, or a group of young men harmonizing with various instruments—even in the cold—make us feel alive, providing a momentary escape from the monotony of daily life. Nowadays, watching street musicians or painters brings passersby into a beautiful world of art. Urban life takes on a new hue as enthusiasts flock to their favorite hangouts, such as Bagh-e-Ferdows, Iranian Artists Forum, and Qeytariyeh Park, where nightlife thrives. They can be seen in every corner of the city, offering their art to the eyes and ears of those

passing by. Some sociologists believe that this style of art serves as a social phenomenon for visibility. Street art is an expanding trend that is gaining momentum each day.

As dusk approaches, artists arrive with their luggage from various corners of Bagh-e-Ferdows, preparing their setups. They announce their performance locations in advance on social media. Paintings and charcoal works are arranged side by side, and the sounds of music and singing create a romantic atmosphere. The diversity of art caters to every taste. Sara, one of these street artists, captivates passersby with her paintings. She states, "An artist must be present in society and among the people. An artist who interacts with the community can discover great artistic ideas. Painting is my profession, and I accept commissions based on the skills I've learned, such as creating murals in indoor spaces."

Having grown up in Mazandaran, Sara has developed a strong connection with nature and animals, often

reflecting them in her works. She shares, "I've painted several collections featuring the nature and various animals found in my northern home, from chickens and roosters to different birds and insects."

Fatemeh Rahimi, a 28-year-old graduate of the Painting Department at Shiraz University, has experienced various jobs, including street vending, kindergarten teaching, and dental assisting. Yet, she believes that painting represents another aspect of life: "At the suggestion of a friend who was street vending, I ventured into street painting. Although I had held several exhibitions before, I was initially quite anxious. However, once I gained confidence, I decided to stay. Painting on the streets elevates my capacity and teaches me a lot. This style of painting confronts us with the realities of society, helping us understand our place and what is happening around us."

Fatemeh describes her interactions with people on the streets: "Painting in public is intriguing for people, and they look at me and my artworks with great affection. They say that these paintings beautify the city and the streets. They thank me for bringing art to the streets. However, there are occasional disturbances; some people kick over my works, damaging them. There was a time when many of my pieces went missing and were never found. Sometimes, the municipality obstructs our work. Yet, when I set up in recreational or historical sites, the responsible authorities often try to assist us."

A box, an easel, some painting supplies, paint, and fabric are the tools Fatemeh sets up daily in a corner of the street to create beautiful images on the city walls. She remarks, "I don't disturb anyone in the street or historical sites. People come to watch

and sometimes sit down to share their thoughts. I provide materials to those interested in painting so they can create whatever they like, from the elderly to children and teenagers. Some even come to recite poetry or play music. This interaction is incredibly enriching—an engagement I have never experienced in enclosed spaces."

Sound of street music

The chill in the air prompts passersby to quicken their pace. Amidst the cacophony of horns, the cries of taxi drivers, and the hustle and bustle of urban life, the sound of an instrument draws attention. As I get closer, the music grows louder. A young man plays softly, performing pieces that gradually attract a crowd around him. In keeping with the tradition of street performers, his instrument case lies open for passersby to contribute based on their interest.

"Playing music on the street isn't easy. You might go unnoticed and be overlooked, especially if you are a beginner. But when you finally find an audience, you realize that enduring the neglect is worthwhile," says Reza Nikpour, a 22-year-old music student and *santur* instructor. When asked about his income and why he chose to play in the street, he explains, "I enjoy playing music for people, and music is not as accessible to everyone in today's society. People need to hear it and incorporate it into their lives." Reza reflects on the music of decades past, noting, "There was a radio program that introduced people to authentic and folkloric Iranian music. It aired in five parts, covering local music from Khorasan, poetry recitals, instrument and vocal introductions, and contemporary music. Unfortunately, this program was discontinued. During that time, people

listened to it frequently, and in a society where 80% of the populace was illiterate, many could recite selected poems by Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, and other poets by heart, demonstrating their familiarity with Iranian music. My grandfather may not have formally studied music, but he can distinguish between Dashti and Homayoun just by hearing them, thanks to that radio program in the past. However, such programs are no longer common, leading to a disconnection from our true and authentic music."

Reza has been playing the *santur* in the street for five years, striving to resonate this instrument's sound with the spirits of passersby, even if only for a brief moment. He says, "I derive satisfaction from the idea that the sound of the *santur* might linger in people's auditory memory, and if just one person shows interest among many, that's enough for me. There have been instances where someone who heard the violin on the street became interested and is now taking violin classes. The same happened to me. One day, while I was playing the *santur*, a young man approached, asked me questions about the instrument, and showed such enthusiasm that he is now learning it."

He adds that performances should not exceed an hour and a half, as both the performer and listener's ears become fatigued after about 45 minutes. "This was also the case with the old radio music programs, typically running between 18 and 50 minutes. Moreover, the *santur* is quite sensitive to the weather, so I usually don't play for more than an hour in this environment." Regarding his street music earnings, Reza states, "The income is quite unpredictable, ranging from \$0.5 to \$61 at the least and, if the songs are popular, sometimes reaching up to \$24."