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From ashes to eternity, Rumi's legacy lives on in marionette opera

Iranian playwright: Rumi conveys timeless message of love, peace

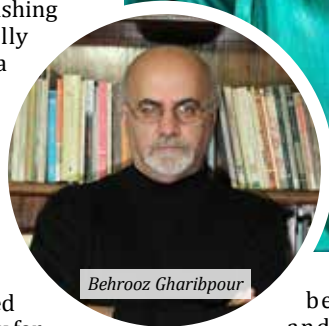
Mehrnoush Khalaj
 Guest contributor

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Opera begins with the Mongol conquest of Iran. The Mongol forces are laying waste to the homeland of the towering Persian poet, Jala al-Din Muhammad Rumi, killing everyone including the elderly, women and children. "They burned everywhere! They killed everyone! Oh my God! Oh my God!" a man shouts. The Mongol forces are invading, picturing the darkest eras in the history of Persia. A period that etched a permanent fear and substantial hate in the collective subconscious of Iranians. Epic music accompanies. A Mongol commander on a neighing horse turns a deaf ear to the begging women, appealing to him not to kill children. He commands mercilessly and violently, "The old, the children, the young, shed their blood. Set every land on fire." This is the bitter beginning of 'Mowlavi (Rumi)', an opera theatre written, designed and directed by Behrooz Gharibpour, a noted Iranian director and produced by Roudaki Artistic and Cultural Foundation. Since November 12, about 150 spectators sit around 6 pm every evening in Ferdowsi Hall to watch this opera whose performers are not people but marionettes. The opera is performed by

Gharibpour's Aran National Opera Group (formerly Aran Puppet Theatre Group) with more than 100 marionettes. Its music is composed by Behzad Abdi in collaboration with conductor Vladimir Sirenko, the National Orchestra of Ukraine and renowned vocalists as late Es'hagh Anvar, Homayoun Shajarian and Mohammad Motamedi. 'Mowlavi' narrates the life of the 13th century poet Rumi starting from his emigration to the Turkish city Konya after the Mongol blitzkrieg to meeting his spiritual instructor Shams-e Tabrizi. Gharibpour has written the opera based on the poems of Rumi in Persian in Masnavi (more than 25,000 verses) and Divan-e Shams Tabrizi (over 36,000 verses). In an interview with Iran Daily, Gharibpour explains why he and his Aran Group have chosen to reperform 'Mowlavi' after a five-year hiatus instead of their other operas for marionettes and how 'Mowlavi', which was staged first in 2009 and last in 2019, remains relevant today. "[The mankind] is experiencing a very difficult and critical condition. Different territories, if not involved in a war, are ... [facing the risk of] civil wars," says Gharibpour. When the Mongol general, in response to the appeals for mercy, sheds blood and destroys everything, this resonates with what the human being is experiencing in 21st century as the lives of the children and families

are being devastated in conflicts. Gharibpour has combined Persian poetry and classical music, Ta'zieh religious opera, with his interest in marionette theatre to help revive a national opera while relying on global experience. "I have always believed that Iranian music, Iranian singing has the potential to be the basis of opera singing. I even told many times that the oldest opera writer and screenwriter of Iran is Hakim Abol-Qasem Ferdowsi (Persian poet and author of 'Shahnameh' (Book of Kings)," he says. He started with establishing a theatre hall specially for marionette opera theatre. In 2003, he converted a deserted place owned by Roudaki Artistic and Cultural Foundation into Ferdowsi Hall, which he says is one of a kind because very few countries have allocated a theatre hall exclusively for marionette opera theatre. He and the then Aran Puppet Theatre Group performed their first marionette opera 'Rostam and Sohrab' in Ferdowsi Hall in 2004. Aran National Opera Group is also the brainchild of Gharibpour, founded in 2003. Over the past two decades, Gharibpour has defined a mission for the group which is educating young manipulators for the world of puppetries and theatre. Gharibpour says, this has been an onerous task but he has never been afraid of walking into difficult roads because they will bring about "great results". "The marionettes must have biofeedback, live actions and reactions with the eleven main strings attached to them that should move simultaneously," he explains. "Based on my method ...these are ... not strings but nerve cords. This is very difficult," he adds. Gharibpour can say his mission is accomplished. Some 80 percent of members of Aran Group are young now. They are aged



Behrooz Gharibpour

between 20 and 25 years old. These young people have gradually gotten to know Persian culture, mysticism, philosophy and the impact a play can have on society while their talents are shown. The 74-year-old researcher, playwright and a director and Aran Group have so far performed marionette operas such as 'Macbeth' (2007), 'Ashura' (2008), and 'Hafez' (2012). Their works have been on stage in different Iranian cities and countries such as Italy, France, Czech Republic, the UAE and Georgia. Gharibpour plans to re-perform 'Hafez' soon. His group is working to stage this opera in the next Iranian year (to start on March 21, 2025) with Alireza Ghorbani, reputed Iranian traditional music vocalist, as singer and Amir Pourkhalaji as composer. Gharibpour is grateful to the Roudaki Foundation for allocating Ferdowsi Hall to the group, but complains about not receiving financial support for production of his works. He has a new work about Persian poet Khwaju Ker-

mani (1280-1352). Its music is recorded but Roudaki Foundation cannot afford the cost of production. A connoisseur of Persian literature, music and theatre, Gharibpour also regrets that no publisher has embarked on publishing operas he has painstakingly written. Now, it has been about two months that the 105-minute 'Mowlavi' has captivated the audience. The tickets are sold out up to January 10. It is not clear for how many more days it will remain on stage. When asked about the main audience of his operas, Gharibpour says, "The vast majority of our audience consists of girls and women who come to watch our works with their families or alone." "It is extremely valuable that the young generation gets to know the old and ancient literature of Iran," he stresses. In the waiting room of Ferdowsi Hall, Maryam, a young university instructor of Persian literature, is waiting with a friend to watch 'Mowlavi'. Maryam wants to see 'Mowlavi' because she is fasci-

nated by Rumi's poetry and his transformation after knowing Shams. Shams taught Rumi to walk in the path of love for God rather than fear. This is why Rumi can relate with the human being after hundreds of years, she says. "Definitely, Mowlavi (Rumi) is always alive...Of course, he is physically mortal like other humans, but his message remains... immortal and eternal," says Gharibpour and explains that the eternal message of Rumi as it is reflected in 'Mowlavi' opera is "the message of love, ...peace and friendship". In the closing minutes of the opera, the spectators see the Mongol general again and he commands: Shed the blood of the old, the children and the young and set every land on fire. But this time is different. Rumi's poetry has given mankind a guide: The serenity of Love. As the opera closes, the marionettes of Rumi and his followers do Sema (whirling dance) and sing: "O Love, scatter your essence on our fortune!" ... "Come! Let us begin to be Lovers again!" ... "Come! Let us be the new spring of Love!"



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Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 140,000 metric tons of Iron Ore Pellet (%Fe:65) on basis of F.O.B at Barco. Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: www.geg.ir. All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 09:00 A.M. on 21. Jan.2025 to to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road). Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 09:00 A.M. on 21.Jan.2025 at the office of the Seller.

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S	0.01	Max
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Al2O3	0.7	Max
CaO	0.9	Max
MgO	2.5	Max
CCS (kg/p)	Ave 250	
8-16 mm%	Min 90	
-6 mm%	Ave 5	
A.I%	Max 3.8	
T.I%	Min 95	
Prosity%	19-24	
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Iranian director Hosseinpour wins two awards at NY festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Ramin Hosseinpour received the Best Director of a Short Film and the Best Short Screenplay awards for his short documentary 'Sculpture' at the New York International Film Awards (NYIFA). The awards were presented in December 2024 and January 2025, marking the sixth year of the NYIFA. The festival, known for showcasing some of the best short films each month, selects films through a rigorous three-stage process involving preliminary, semi-final, and final rounds of judging. 'Sculpture' is a historical documentary that delves into the lives of Rumi and Shams, set in the year 642 AH (1245 CE). The film is based on real historical accounts and has

been recognized for its compelling storytelling and direction. 'Sculpture' has already secured a place among the top 50 short films, documentaries, and music videos on IMDB for 2025 and is currently in contention for the 2026 Academy Awards, Canadian Academy Awards, and BAFTAs. In addition to his recent accolades, Hosseinpour's 'Sculpture' was selected for the Best Short Documentary category at the Rhode Island International Film Festival in 2022, where it placed third. The film was also nominated for Best Short Documentary at the 78th Festival Internazionale del Cinema di Salerno in 2024 and won the Best Director of a Short Film award at the Crown Point International Film Festival in Chicago in September 2024.