



Alexander (Ali) Rahbari (L) conducts in the Tehran Symphony Orchestra at a rehearsal session at Vahdat Hall, Tehran, Iran, in 2015.
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describe the characteristic of a great and professional orchestra in one sentence, what would that characteristic be?

The characteristic of a good orchestra is very simple. It has one essential feature that, unfortunately, has not yet happened in Iran. That is, the musicians must unanimously want to have a conductor at a very high level and must want to constantly maintain and improve their own artistic level. An orchestra is teamwork. Exactly like a football team in which all members work together for victory. I have worked with great orchestras in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Toronto, Tokyo, London, and many other important music centers around the world, but in all of them I have encountered one common characteristic: you are facing a team; a team that wants to be the best.

This has not yet happened in Iran. In Iran, decisions regarding orchestra musicians are usually influenced by institutions such as the House of Music, the Music Office, or the Rudaki Foundation. Of course, I believe none of these organizations are necessarily to blame because their main expertise is not managing a professional orchestra at a global level.

We have very good musicians in Iran. There are many valu-

able talents, but one day, these very musicians must want to build a great orchestra themselves. If you study the history of the world's great orchestras, you will see that in many cases, it was the musicians themselves who caused an orchestra to rise to a higher level.

The conductor is important, but it is not only the conductor who builds an orchestra. The conductor is actually the artistic director, but the musicians must want that team to succeed. Just as in football, if the players of a team do not want to win, no coach can make that team a champion; the same is true in an orchestra. The musicians must want to raise their own level.

You have had experience collaborating with and knowing some of the greatest conductors in the world. Tell us about Valery Gergiev's view of you and the position of your collaboration with the Mariinsky Opera.

About 12 years ago, in Vienna and in the presence of several major Austrian artistic figures, Valery Gergiev said that: "I have known this conductor for about 40 years; since the time when I myself was the director of the Rotterdam Orchestra and he was the director of the Brussels Orchestra." He said

that during those years, he had watched my performances through Belgian television, which could also be watched in the Netherlands, and that he knew who I was and what activities I had carried out.

For me, this was truly a great honor because as a professional conductor, I know the level at which Gergiev stands and the great position he holds in the world of classical music. My honor is that about 40 years after Karajan, a figure like Gergiev invited me to work at the Mariinsky, a place which I believe is one of the most important music centers in the world.

Gergiev gave me the opportunity to conduct between 7 and 12 concerts a year at the Mariinsky, an orchestra that has more than 400 official musicians and is considered one of the largest and most prestigious musical institutions in the world. A few weeks from now, my sixth artistic season of collaboration with the Mariinsky in St. Petersburg will begin.

I have a very good relationship with Gergiev. I love him very much, and during these years, our relationship has become very close and sincere. As an Iranian, as a conductor, and as a composer, I cannot imagine a higher position

than this.

The Mariinsky is the very place where many of the great Russian composers have presented their works, and being present in such an institution is a great honor for me. One of the important features of this collaboration is that at the Mariinsky, I have a great deal of artistic freedom; I choose the programs myself, I choose the soloists myself, and I even make decisions about the timing of performances. After many years in which I have served seven times as an artistic director in different parts of the world, I think this is the highest position a conductor can achieve. Here, everything is provided for a professional conductor: a great artistic director who is not involved in non-artistic issues, jealousy, or unhealthy relationships; wonderful audiences; halls that are always full; and one of the best musical environments in the world. I truly do not know what could be better than this for a conductor.

Considering the events of recent years and the sanctions imposed on some artists and musicians, what is your view

on cultural sanctions?

I am fundamentally opposed to sanctions, especially sports and cultural sanctions. In my opinion, sanctions have never been the right solution. Sanctions, in many cases, are not very different from directly harming people.

In the experience of sanctions against countries such as Iraq or Iran and some other countries, it has repeatedly been seen that the ordinary people, especially children, have not been able to receive their medicines and essential needs on time, and many have suffered because of these conditions.

Cultural sanctions are also wrong to the same extent. In today's world, there is an obvious double standard; some countries and artists are easily sanctioned, while such decisions are not made against others.

In my opinion, sanctioning Russian musicians was a very big mistake. Especially when at the same time, we see that such restrictions are not imposed on artists from some other countries, this raises serious questions.

Art and music must go beyond political issues. Music belongs to human beings, and artists should not be punished because of their nationality or the political circumstances of their country.

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The works I have written for My Mother Persia, around 12 or 13 pieces, are very Iranian. The reason is that I learned traditional Iranian music from childhood, and this music became deeply rooted within me. Although my main success has been in Western music and conducting, the reality is that a very large part of my childhood was spent with traditional Iranian music. Therefore, these Iranian elements naturally appear in my works. If I were to mention only one or two works among my compositions, perhaps the piece Persian Blood, which I wrote at the age of 19, is one of the most important ones. Another work is Nohe-Khan.

Alexander (Ali) Rahbari, globally-renowned Iranian composer and conductor, leads the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra with passionate intensity during a 2019 performance.
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