



Woman.Life.Freedom.

Benefit Concert for Human Rights in Iran

Presented by Cameron Shahbazi in collaboration
with Oper Frankfurt and Opera for Peace

DEC 12, 2022 • 19:30
Oper Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main



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WOMAN. LIFE. FREEDOM.

A BENEFIT CONCERT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

presented by Cameron Shahbazi
in collaboration with Opera for Peace and Oper Frankfurt

Ambur Braid soprano
Lilian Farahani soprano
Kristine Opolais soprano
Giulia Semenzato soprano
Anna Bonitatibus mezzo-soprano
Cameron Shahbazi countertenor

Jeff Cohen piano
Sophia Muñoz piano
Mahan Esfahani harpsichord
Azin Zahedi flute
Micha Afkham viola
Kian Soltani violoncello
Naghib Shanbehzadeh percussion

Video contributions (poetry readings) by
Joyce DiDonato, Thomas Hampson, Barbara Hannigan, Dame Ann Murray KS,
Ahmad Shamlou and Jasmin Tabatabai

Video messages by
Sepideh Moafi and Roya Boroumand
and Ambur Braid, Joyce DiDonato, Mahan Esfahani, Lilian Farahani, Julie Fuchs,
Barbara Hannigan, Lucas & Arthur Jussen, Magdalena Kožená, Sydney Mancasola,
Hera Hyesang Park, Anna Pirozzi, Cameron Shahbazi und Keri-Lynn Wilson

Stage director: Pierre-Emmanuel Rousseau
Lighting design: Gilles Gentner
Lighting: Simon Hild
Sound: Lennart Scheuren, Jim Schwarz, Joon-Sok Lee
Stage manager: Gaby Priebe-Kossak

Subtitles for *The Fish* by Niloufar Talebi (translation from the Persian)
Additional subtitles put together by Konrad Kuhn

All contributing artists perform in the name of Woman. Life. Freedom.
Frau. Leben. Freiheit. زن، ژيان، ژن and, of course, آزادی زندگی زن

The overhead costs of this event were generously sponsored by Sir Simon and Lady Robey, Sue Carpenter, and other anonymous donors.

PROGRAM

CAMERON SHAHBAZI countertenor
KIAN SOLTANI violoncello
Black is the Colour of my True Love's Hair,
Traditional (arr. by Ashok Gupta, 2022)

LILIAN FARAHANI soprano
AZIN ZAHEDI flute
SOPHIA MUÑOZ piano
La flûte enchantée from *Shéhérazade*
by Maurice Ravel

LILIAN FARAHANI soprano
AZIN ZAHEDI flute
SOPHIA MUÑOZ piano
Ich habe genug, solo cantata, BWV 82,
by Johann Sebastian Bach, sung in Farsi –
translation: Mohsen Namjoo

Poetry reading: *The Trees So High* (Anonymus),
read by **JOYCE DIDONATO**

ANNA BONITATIBUS mezzo-soprano
MAHAN ESFAHANI harpsichord
L'alma mia fra le tempeste
from the opera *Agrippina*
by Georg Friedrich Handel

GIULIA SEMENZATO soprano
MAHAN ESFAHANI harpsichord
Lascia ch'io pianga
from the opera *Rinaldo*
by Georg Friedrich Handel

ANNA BONITATIBUS mezzo-soprano
MAHAN ESFAHANI harpsichord
Vanne fido, e al mesto regno
from the opera *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria*
by Nicola Porpora

Video message from **SEPIDEH MOAFI**

Poetry reading: *Man's sons are parts of one reality*, 1. Ketab / 10. Hekayat from *Gulistan* (*Rose Garden*) by Saadi Shirazi (1210–1292),
read by **DAME ANN MURRAY KS**

Poetry reading: *Maadi (The Fish)*
by **AHMAD SHAMLOU** (1925–2000),
read by the author –
Video design: Deniz Khateri

MAHAN ESFAHANI harpsichord
Intertwined Distances (2018)
by Anahita Abbasi (*1985)

Poetry reading: *Reading-Book*, from *West-Eastern Divan*, 3. Book: *Ushk Nameh (Book of Love)*, Nr. III by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), read by **JASMIN TABATABAI**

MICHA AFKHAM, viola
Prélude (I.) and *Gigue* (VI.)
from the Suite No. II in D minor, BWV 1008,
for violoncello solo by Johann Sebastian Bach,
in the version for viola

Poetry reading: *Inevitable*, from *West-Eastern Divan*, 3. Book: *Ushk Nameh (Book of Love)*, Nr. XIV by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), read by **THOMAS HAMPSON**

AMBUR BRAID soprano
JEFF COHEN piano
Vissi d'arte from the opera *Tosca*
by Giacomo Puccini

MICHA AFKHAM viola
KIAN SOLTANI violoncello
SOPHIA MUÑOZ piano
Introduktion (I.)
from *Five Pieces for two violins and piano*
by Dmitri D. Shostakovich, in the version for
viola, violoncello und piano
(arr. by Levon Atovnyan)

NAGHIB SHANBEHZADEH percussion
Le Voyage (2021) for percussion
by Naghib Shanbehzadeh

(continued on next page)

Poetry reading: *A Triptych*
by Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883); after
three Rubaiyat by Omar Khayyam (1048–1131),
read by **BARBARA HANNIGAN**

Video message from **ROYA BOROUMAND**,
Cofounder of Abdorrahman Boroumand
Foundation

KRISTINE OPOLAIS soprano
JEFF COHEN piano
Ave Maria from the opera *Otello*
by Giuseppe Verdi

KIAN SOLTANI violoncello
Persian Fire Dance for violoncello solo
by Kian Soltani

KRISTINE OPOLAIS soprano
JEFF COHEN piano
Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém (Song to the Moon)
from the opera *Rusalka* by Antonín Dvořák

Video message from
AMBUR BRAID, JOYCE DIDONATO,
MAHAN ESFAHANI, LILIAN FARAHANI,
JULIE FUCHS, BARBARA HANNIGAN,
LUCAS & ARTHUR JUSSEN, MAGDALENA
KOŽENÁ, SYDNEY MANCASOLA, HERA
HYESANG PARK, ANNA PIROZZI, CAMERON
SHAHBAZI and KERI-LYNN WILSON
Video design: Joseph Paris

CAMERON SHAHBAZI countertenor
KIAN SOLTANI violoncello
SOPHIA MUÑOZ piano
Lalae (Lullaby) by Googoosh (*1950),
(arr. for countertenor, violoncello and piano
by Kian Soltani and Cameron Shahbazi)

Title: Lalae / Album: Mordab, Googoosh 2 – Persian Music /
Original Performer: Googoosh / Songwriter: Parviz Ghiasian /
Lyricist: Karim Mahmoudi / Record Label: Caltex Records /
Publisher: CTX Publishing

Donations

€5 from every ticket sold goes towards putting the evening on, the rest goes straight to the non-profit organisation Abdorrahman Boroumand Centre (ABC), who have been fighting for more democracy in Iran for years and document violations against human rights.



Scan the QR code to make direct donations to ABC.



To our friends — the friends of Iran, friends of music, and friends of humanity — welcome.

Tonight's efforts are, in their way, really an answer of light to darkness. Since the first day of the protests and civil disobedience in Iran following the regime's murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Zhina Amini, you — our friends and the friends of art — have made a sign of friendship and love with your Iranian friends and colleagues all over the world to tell us that you are on our side.

Those of you sitting on stage and sitting in the audience are matching actions to those emotions. This evening's concert is to support and aid the work of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, which promotes democratic values and, more importantly, documents the countless human rights abuses committed by the regime that for 43 years has brought destruction to Iran and disrepute to its international reputation. I encourage you to further your support of this organisation in whatever way you can.



Cameron Shahbazi, countertenor & producer
photo by © Nanda Hagenaaars

The music selected this evening encompasses a wide range of artistic backgrounds and aesthetics that include not only new music by Iranian composers but arias and works inspired by the values that we share across cultures and peoples. Your act of enjoying the music with tonight's performers is not a passive act of mere listening, but an active display of your belief that the darkness will finally leave Iran. We are proud to be here with you tonight, and we thank you.



Cameron Shahbazi

Many Iranian children commonly learn a slogan told to us by our elders هنر نزد ایرانیان است و بس (roughly, “art is the sole province of Iranians”). Behind this sort of patriotic table-talk is a kernel of accuracy in terms of the historical role of Persianate culture throughout the Old World and the reputation of Iranians amongst their neighbours in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Indian Subcontinent. From the glittering Moorish court of medieval Córdoba to the Ottoman academies of Sarajevo to the princely establishments of the Indus Valley and the rich merchant cities of Transoxiana, Iranians were appreciated as architects, translators, poets, and of course as musicians.

How interesting it is, then, that tonight’s event should be in an opera house, an institution which traditionally has disseminated the prodigious fruits of an originally Italian art form (along with the Italian language) throughout Europe; the Persian language has functioned in much the same way, with Ottoman and Mughal and Mamluk court music being sung not in their local languages but rather *in Persian*.

A pithy historical lecture aside, my intention is to tell you that this evening’s performance is Iranian not only in the sense that it draws attention to the abuses Iran’s ages-old culture receives at the hands of a regime of monsters, but also because art — the making of it, the enjoying of it — is at the core of our culture. And because art represents mankind’s *resilience*. Throughout all these privations — the abuse visited upon the heads and bodies of Iranian sisters and mothers and daughters in particular — the Iranian nation has been, if nothing else, truly resilient. This resilience has deep historic roots.

I have no qualms in re-expressing the sentiment of the motto above. Our resilience, whether in or out of Iran, makes me deeply proud and indeed patriotic, and I am unapologetic in displaying this side of myself as a representative of my people. As for what I cannot express in words, we shall leave that to the music. Believe me: it says everything.



Mahan Esfahani

LYRICS

BLACK IS THE COLOUR

Black is the colour of my true love's hair,
Her lips are like some rosy fair,
The purest eyes, and the neatest hands.
I love the ground whereon she stands.

I love my love and well she knows
I love the ground whereon she goes
And still I hope that the time will come
Where she and I will be as one.

Text: Traditional

LA FLUTE ENCHANTEE

L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort
Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie
Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.
Mais moi, je suis éveillée encor
Et j'écoute au dehors
Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie.
Un air tour à tour languoureux ou frivole
Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
Et quand je m'approche de la croisée
Il me semble que chaque note s'envole
De la flûte vers ma joue
Comme un mystérieux baiser.

Text by: Tristan Klingsor

THE ENCHANTED FLUTE

The shade is soft and my master sleeps,
A cone-shaped silken cap on his head,
And his long yellow nose in his white beard.
But I am still awake,
Listening to the song
Of a flute outside that pours forth
Sadness and joy in turn,
A tune now languorous now lively,
Which my dear lover plays.
And when I draw near the casement,
Each note seems to fly
From the flute to my cheek
Like a mysterious kiss.

Translation by: Richard Stokes

ICH HABE GENUG

Ich habe genug,
Ich habe den Heiland, das Hoffen der Frommen,
Auf meine begierigen Arme genommen:
Ich habe genug!
Ich hab' ihn erblickt,
Mein Glaube hat Jesum ans Herze gedrückt,
Nun wünsch ich, noch heute mit Freuden
Von hinnen zu scheiden.
Ich habe genug!
Text by: Anonymus; sung in Farsi –
Translation by: Mohsen Namjoo

L'ALMA MIA FRA LE TEMPESTE

Recitativo:

Io stessa, io stessa!
Nulla più si trascuri; all'opra, all'opra!
Lode ha chi in libertà
per lor s'adopra.

Aria:

L'alma mia fra le tempeste
ritrovar spera il suo porto.

Di costanza armato ho il petto,
che d'un regno al dolce aspetto
le procelle più funeste
son oggetti di conforto.
Text by: Vincenzo Grimani

I HAVE ENOUGH

I have enough;
I have taken the Savior, the hope of the pious,
Into my yearning arms.
I have enough!
I have seen him,
My faith has held Jesus to my heart,
Now I desire but even today in peace
To depart from here.
I have enough!

AMIDST FIERCE STORMS, MY SOUL

Recitativo:

I myself, I myself!
We must not hesitate; to work, to work!
Hail to those in freedom
who take action for them.

Aria:

Amidst fierce storms, my soul
expects to find a safe harbor.

My breast is so armed with resolve
that, at the sweet image of the reign,
the most dreaded tempests
are objects of comfort.
Translation by: Konrad Kuhn/Andrew Schneider

LASCIA CH'IO PIANGA

Lascia ch'io pianga
mia cruda sorte,
e che sospiri
la libertà.

Il duolo infranga
queste ritorte,
de' miei martiri
sol per pietà.

Text by: Giacomo Rossi

VANNE FIDO, E AL MESTO REGNO

Vanne fido,
e al mesto regno
reca pace e libertà.

Di' ch'io vinsi e che l'indegno
fier nemico al suolo esangue
nel suo sangue immerso sta.

Text by: Anonymus

VISSI D'ARTE

Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore,
non feci mai male ad anima viva!...
Con man furtiva
quante miserie conobbi, aiutai...
Sempre con fe' sincera,
la mia preghiera
ai santi tabernacoli salì.

LET ME WEEP

Let me weep
My cruel fate,
And that I
should have freedom.

The duel infringes
within these twisted places,
in my sufferings
I pray for mercy.

GO THERE, MY FAITHFUL COMPANION

Go there, my faithful companion,
and bring peace and freedom
to the realm of sadness.

Let them know that I vanquished the ignoble
And that he is lying on the ground, lifeless
In his blood.

Translation by: Konrad Kuhn

I LIVED FOR ART

I lived for art. I lived for love:
Never did I harm a living creature! ...
Whatever misfortunes I encountered
I sought with secret hand to succour ...
Ever in pure faith,
My prayers rose
In the holy chapels.

Sempre con fe' sincera
diedi fiori agli altar.
Nell'ora del dolore
perché, perché Signore,
perché me ne rimuneri così?
Diedi gioielli
della Madonna al manto,
e diedi il canto
agli astri, al ciel, che ne ridean più belli.
Nell'ora del dolore,
perché, perché Signore,
perché me ne rimuneri così?
Text by: Luigi Illica / Giuseppe Giacosa

AVE MARIA

Ave Maria, piena di grazia, eletta
fra le spose e le vergini sei tu,
sia benedetto il frutto, o benedetta,
di tue materne viscere, Gesù.
Prega per chi adorando a te si prostra,
prega nel peccator, per l'innocente,
e pel debole oppresso e pel possente,
misero anch'esso, tua pietà dimostra.
Prega per chi sotto l'oltraggio piega
la fronte e sotto la malvagia sorte;
per noi, per noi tu prega, prega
sempre e nell'ora della morte nostra,
prega per noi, prega per noi, prega...
Ave Maria...
nell'ora della morte.
Ave!...Amen!
Text by: Arrigo Boito

Ever in pure faith,
I brought flowers to the altars.
In this hour of pain, why,
Why, oh Lord, why
Dost Thou repay me thus?
Jewels I brought
For the Madonna's mantle,
And songs for the stars in heaven
That they shone forth with greater radiance.
In this hour of distress, why,
Why, oh Lord,
Why dost Thou repay me thus?

HAIL MARY

Hail Mary, full of grace, chosen
among wives and maidens art thou,
blessed be the fruit, o blessed one,
of thy womb, Jesus.
Pray for the one who kneels in prayer before you,
pray for the sinner, for the one who is innocent,
and for the weak and oppressed, and for the mighty,
also wretched, show thy mercy.
Pray for the one who bows his head
under injustice and under misfortune;
for us, pray thou for us, pray
ever and in the hour of our death,
pray for us, pray for us, pray.
Hail Mary ...
in the hour of our death.
Hail! ... Amen!
Translation by: Rebecca Burstein

MĚSÍČKU NA NEBI HLUBOKÉM

Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém,
světlo tvé daleko vidí,
po světě bloudíš širokém,
díváš se v příbytky lidí.

Měsíčku, postůj chvíli,
řekni mi, řekni, kde je můj milý!

Řekni mu, stříbrný měsíčku,
mé že jej objímá rámě,
aby si alespoň chvíličku
vzpomenul ve snění na mě.

Zasvit' mu do daleka, zasvit' mu,
řekni mu, řekni, kdo tu naň čeká!

O mně-li duše lidská sní,
ať se tou vzpomínkou vzbudí!
Měsíčku, nezhasni, nezhasni!
Měsíčku, nezhasni!
Text by: Jaroslav Kvapil

SONG TO THE MOON

Moon high and deep in the sky,
Your light travels far,
You travel around the wide world,
and see into people's homes.

Moon, stand still a little while
and tell me where is my dear!

Tell him, silvery moon,
that I am embracing him.
For at last momentarily
Let him recall dreaming of me.

Illuminate him from far away
and tell him, tell him who is waiting for him!

If his human soul is really dreaming of me,
may the memory awaken him!
Moon, don't disappear, don't disappear!
Moon, don't disappear!
Translation by: Marc Verzatt

LALEE (LULLABY)

Lullaby to sleep, your sleep is beautiful
There are thousands of colors of moonlight at night
Do not wake up from the sleep of the story
Do not set foot in the city of grief for a while
Lullaby, mom, her eyes are awake
Like every night, Lulu is behind the wall
No more kites in the thread
It does not reach the torn cloud
Lullaby Lullaby
Mom will not leave you alone
She loves you, she loves you
She sits at the foot of the cradle
Everything was the same and not the same
Your eyes tell me that the sea is jealous
If you throw a stone in the sea water
Shaitan comes with me to the war and the sea
The clouds will take you away from me
The flowers in our garden will die without you
Lullaby Lullaby
Mom will not leave you alone
she loves you, she loves you
He sits at the foot of the cradle
Lullaby Lullaby
Mom will not leave you alone
She loves you, she loves you
She sits at the foot of the cradle
Lullaby Lullaby
Mom will not leave you alone
She loves you, she loves you
She sits at the foot of the cradle
Text by: Karim Mahmoudi,

December 12, 2022

To our listeners and theatres, to the cities and communities that support our art,

We — performers, managers, Intendants, directors, designers, technical staff — have chosen our professions because of our love of our respective art forms and because it gives us and audiences alike a feeling of joy that affirms life itself. In affirming life, we uphold the very reasons for human existence and the basic rights enshrined in what it means to be human.

We cannot remain silent as one of the world's great civilisations is trampled upon by a regime which denies people basic human rights, including the right to practise what we have chosen as our life's work. Iran is the source of so much art and poetry and philosophical thought. She has produced a vibrant diasporic community that contributes greatly to our well-being and collective success. We recognise and stand with this great civilisation that has nourished us with its artistic values and respect for human life.

Our courage to be on stage, to give something of ourselves at our best moments, is nothing compared to the courage of the Iranian people who rise together to throw off the repressive evils they currently face. The heroism we see from Iran's youth and most importantly from her women is the heroism we think is only possible in the theatre — the pure love of Leonore, the conviction of Norma, the inexhaustible Brünnhilde — and from which we draw inspiration as a culture.

We invite you to join us in holding hands across the gap of physical space with the people of Iran. They are, in essence, dying for life. We thus live for them.

We speak and sing for them. We stand for Woman - Life - Freedom | زن - زندگی - آزادی

With gratitude,

 Cameron Shahbazi co-intendant and producer	 Mahan Esfahani harpsichordist	 Kian Soltani celist	 Lilian Farahani soprano	 Micha Afkham violinist	 Azin Zahedi flutist	
 Benjamin Appl baritone	 Ryan Bancroft conductor	 Stanislas de Barbeyrac tenor	 Anna Bonitatibus mezzo-soprano	 Ambur Braid soprano	 Philippe Castro Director of Cabinet Théâtre du monde arabe	 Jeff Cohen pianist
 Donagh Collins CEO, Akosmos Holt	 Julie Fuchs conductor	 Emmanuelle Haim conductor	 Marc-André Hamelin pianist	 Thomas Hampson baritone	 Barbara Hannigan soprano	
 Brian Jagde tenor	 Sumi Jo soprano	 Arthur Jussen pianist	 Lucas Jussen pianist	 Magdalena Kožená mezzo-soprano	 Julia Lagazuère General Director Opéra de France	 Jack Lang Former Minister of Culture (France) Président de Théâtre du monde arabe
 Sydney Mancosola soprano	 Pumeza Matschikiza soprano	 Myriam Mazouzi Director of L'Académie Opéra de Paris	 Paul McCreesh conductor	 Lucas Meacham baritone	 Sophia Muñoz pianist	
 KS Dame Ann Murray mezzo-soprano	 Paula Murrihy mezzo-soprano	 Anne-Sophie Mutter violinist	 Judith Neuhoff Managing Director Center Stage Artist Management	 Hera Hyesang Park soprano	 Marlis Petersen soprano	 Jakub Józef Orliński countertenor
 Michala Petri, R.I. recording player	 Anna Pirozzi soprano	 Anita Rachvelishvili mezzo-soprano	 Anthony Roth Costanzo comedian	 Pierre-Emmanuel Rousseau stage director	 Carolyn Sampson soprano	
 Giulia Semenzato soprano	 Klara Maria Taube Artistic Manager Center Stage Artist Management	 Rolando Villazón tenor	 Joshua Weilerstein conductor	 Keri-Lynn Wilson conductor	 Tabca Zimmerman violinist	

It is tragic that Iran, a nation with such a magnificent historical and cultural heritage, has been under the yoke of a quasi-medieval theocracy for over four decades.

Western colonialism and the greed for oil bears more than a little responsibility in this story, though nothing can excuse the regime's terrible record on women's rights, the extreme cruelty to its LGTB community nor its deranged antisemitism.

I am thinking of the extraordinarily courageous women, men and children who are currently protesting for their freedom and hope against hope that they will succeed in their mission.

George Benjamin

George Benjamin, London, 14 November 2022



Basic human rights. Something those of us who live in certain bodies, in certain places, and who are blessed with certain life circumstances take for granted. We live in our own experiences, unaware that the world is not the same for everyone. For those of us who live with the freedom to express our beliefs without fear, to question authority, to vote for those who determine our laws, and to protest that which we believe is unfair, unkind, or inhumane, it is hard to acknowledge and accept that there are places where people do not have this basic human right, this essential human right.

Some of the events that have taken place in Iran since the tragic death of Mahsa Amini at just twenty-two years of age have been terrifying and despicable. Among those horrors, there are also courageous and revolutionary events taking place. Despite the very real dangers, people are standing up and protesting against the oppressive regime and tyrannical laws that have been in place in Iran for decades. This is one of the most significant and important movements in our world's history.

Harriette Hamilton wrote the following in her lyrics to Oscar Peterson's iconic Civil Rights anthem, "Hymn To Freedom": ***"When every heart joins every heart, and together yearns for liberty, that's when we'll be free. When every hand joins every hand and together molds our destiny, that's when we'll be free."*** These statements remain equally as powerful and as important now as they were the day they were written, almost 60 years ago. Freedom is never achieved because of one person; freedom is achieved because of people coming together, standing up, raising their voices, joining their hands, opening their hearts, and demanding that human rights be granted.

We are proud to stand beside the women and children of Iran, the families who have lost their loved ones, and all the protesters and activists who have been working tirelessly since long before these recent events, and especially now as

they protest more loudly, at great personal risk. It is our collective duty, not just as human beings, but as human beings with the rights and freedoms that everyone deserves, to ensure that the volume of the voices of change is not muted, that these voices remain heard on a mainstream level. Silence is complicity – dangerous complicity. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” and “...our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” This matters. We will not be silent.

We would like to thank Cameron Shahbazi and his partners, Oper Frankfurt and Opera For Peace, for presenting this concert, using music to lift voices in solidarity. Additionally, we are thankful for each and every person who contributed to this important event for this most important mission. Your dedication to justice is what will protect those whom we have not yet lost.

Zan. Zendegi. Azadi. | Woman. Life. Freedom

Sincerely,
Kelly and Céline Peterson
November 2022

The Estate of Oscar Peterson | Céline Peterson Productions

WIGMORE HALL

06.12.2022

I was very pleased to hear about this special concert for peace, as we celebrate extraordinarily courageous people who speak up for women's rights, the LGBT community, and many minorities. We hope for better times and send all possible good wishes to everyone involved in this worthwhile event. We long for equality for the people of Iran.

All good wishes,



John Gilhooly CBE, Artistic and Executive Director

WIGMORE HALL

36 WIGMORE STREET
LONDON W1U 2BP

ROYAL PATRON

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE DUKE OF KENT, KG

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JOHN GILHOOLY



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December 12, 2022

Greetings,

I am a British-Iranian multi-media artist living in UK since 1978. I left Iran on the cusp of a revolution that changed the culture and the ideology of my nation behind my back.

Since 1979 the women and girls of Iran have paid the highest price, with the government's first undertaking being to revoke the Women's Social Services Act soon after the revolution - making them its first martyrs. For the last 43 years Iranians continue to suffer violations of their civil and political rights. 60% of the university graduates are women but they only form 14% (in 2021) of the work force in Iran, so they are educated and frustrated. Constraints on women's rights are a key characteristic of the regime. The veil has long been a proxy for politics in Iran the compulsory veiling and regulation of women's bodily integrity and freedom have grown to an ideological corner.

Mahsa Amini's tragic death was the most recent case of a decades-long state sanctioned and systemic sexism and misogynistic politics in Iran. Her death was a breaking point revealing how law enforcement not only does not protect women, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, and dispossessed citizens - but rather exposes them to threats and death. A basic demand for bodily integrity and right to choose their own clothing threaten the very ideological core of the ruling authorities in Iran and has resulted in peaceful protests led by young women demanding freedom and justice. The protests though started about hijab, are about much bigger issues concerning every aspect of people's lives, women have half of the legal rights of a man, they are second class citizens in a country that struggles with crippling corruption that has mishandled the economy, the Covid crisis, environmental matters, high inflation, failing healthcare and the lack of freedom of speech.



With 60 % of the 80 million population below the age of 30, it is a very youthful country but one with high unemployment and no security. The uprising by young protesters who in their slogans demand fundamental change and an end to four decades of brutal theocratic rule in their country, a slogan that has grown to the main symbol of the current protests is Women, life, freedom. Iranians' civil disobedience and cry for justice has been met with violence, tear gas, live bullets, beating and arresting demonstrators. They have called for freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, against the death penalty and extrajudicial executions, against torture, enforced disappearances and systematic impunity.

As I write these words Iranian cities are on fire. Large protests are ongoing in every corner of Iran, with no identifiable leader, women are leading this feminist revolution with girls as young as 8 chanting "Death To The Dictator". The persistence of widespread and systematic violations of human rights committed by Iranian authorities with total impunity demands a global action. I call for solidarity with women, men, political dissidents, and the disadvantaged in Iran.

Sincerely,

S. Sokhanvari

Soheila Sokhanvari