



Author Dowlatabadi denounces Gaza massacre

Tehran Times Culture Desk

TEHRAN — Iranian veteran writer Mahmud Dowlatabadi expressed his sympathy with Gaza people during a drama reading session at the Iranian Artists Forum on Thursday.

Invited to the session of drama reading of Mohsen Yalfani's "In an Iranian Family," Dowlatabadi expressed his solidarity with oppressed people of Gaza.

"I announced that my name is beside the name of other literati who signed petitions against the recent Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip," he mentioned.

Artists and literati are people loving people who are against the inhuman crimes committed in the world like the Israeli crimes in Gaza, he added.

On December 29, Iranian cinematic figures signed a petition against the recent Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip and announced their support and sympathy for the oppressed people of Gaza. Tehran cinema halls and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art dedicated their entire ticket sales on Wednesday for the benefit of the people of Gaza.

Gharibpur to introduce Iranian traditional puppet show to Londoners

Tehran Times Art Desk

TEHRAN — Londoners will be familiar with Qajar era Keimeh Shab-Bazi, a kind of traditional Iranian puppet show as part of a workshop, which will be held by Behruz Gharibpur at the British Museum in April.

The workshop will be in line with the Magic of Persia (MOP) programs, which have been scheduled to be held from April 9 to 12.

A non-profit, non-political charity registered in the UK and the USA, MOP educates young people on the value and unique contribution of Persian culture to society.

Gharibpur will also stage 6 performances with Mobarak, the main character of most of the Keimeh Shab-Bazi shows.

Gharibpur, 59, has previously directed opera puppet shows of "Macbeth" and "Rustam and Sohrab".

He also plans to stage "Ashura," another opera puppet show on the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein (AS) and a number of his followers in Iran in the near future.

Maestro Kamkar unimpressed by Ukraine orchestra's 'unprofessional' performance

Tehran Times Art Desk

TEHRAN — Violin maestro Arsalan Kamkar is convinced that the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, conducted by Vladimir Sirenko, gave a very unprofessional performance in Tehran.

A number of Iranian musicians along with violinists, cellists and other string instrumentalists from the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine joined together to perform the concert by giants of traditional Iranian music Mohammadreza Darvishi and Hossein Alizadeh at Tehran's National Grand Hall on December 26 and 27.

Selections performed included Iranian tar virtuoso Hossein Alizadeh's "Osyan" ("Revolt," 1983) "Torkaman" ("Turkmen," 1986), and "Neynava" (1995) and Mohammadreza Darvishi's "Kalidar" from their repertoire.

Kamkar criticized Darvishi's recent comments on the Tehran Symphony Orchestra's incapability of performing "Kalidar" and told MNA, "When Darvishi said that that the Tehran orchestra or any other Iranian orchestra is not capable of performing the pieces, I was not upset and even thought that he might be correct because 'kalidar' is a complex composition and the Tehran orchestra might not render an adequate performance. But after I saw the performance, unfortunately, I must say it came across as a bad and inept performance."

"Kalidar," the latest composition by Darvishi, is based on a novel of the same name authored by Iranian novelist Mahmud Dowlatabadi.

In a press conference before the concert, Darvishi remarked, "Strictly speaking, there isn't a real symphony orchestra in Iran and only with difficulty can one find 40 violin-family string instrumentalists with a good conductor. In addition, there is the problem of finding a good studio where music can be recorded professionally. We also don't want to ruin a good composition with a bad performance. There are several



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good orchestras in Kiev of which the National Symphony Orchestra is the best and all are always busy with performances."

Kamkar later added, "I had no idea about the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, but had heard the members and the conductor are all professionals, but what I saw was quite the opposite. The movements of conductor Vladimir Sirenko in conducting the piece "Neynava" were not at all similar to those of other professional conductors.

"The members also presented very weak performances with a few exceptions, including the lady playing the violincello. This is while the musicians of the ex-Soviet Union and Moscow are among the best in the music world, and Ukraine is also the same," he highlighted.

"I think it is wrong to call the group an orchestra, because a symphony orchestra is much bigger, and wind instruments and percussions play major roles in them. But this was more a string orchestra and it

appears that either it was not the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, or that the Ukraine National Orchestra is really not world class, or possibly the musicians went on stage without benefit of a previous rehearsal. If any of these possibilities were true, I believe it was an insult to the audience and the viewers."

Kamkar later emphasized that Darvishi should retract his words about the Tehran Orchestra and continued, "I dare say the Tehran Orchestra or even the Parsian Orchestra would have performed the pieces better. Alizadeh surely remembers his 'Neynava' that was performed ten years ago by conductor Iraj Sahbani or even last year's performance by the Parsian Orchestra."

He further talked about the composition of "Kalidar" and said, "On hearing the piece, the first question that arose was why is there no sign of the regional music of Khorasan, where the story takes place. The second point is the

duration, which if shortened by 10 minutes, would be no problem, but the composition required 45 minutes to perform without anything special occurring.

"Darvishi had declared that the composition was intended to reach the depths of the story, but the question is that if he had made use of Iranian music, would it have remained on the surface? I believe a professional musician is the one who presents an impression of himself, his nationality, dialect and language of his homeland in his composition.

"Darvishi is more of a researcher of regional music rather than a musician, and I am surprised that he did not make use of the rich treasure of regional melodies in his composition. If he had done so, his composition would have been transformed into an international work, because both Iranian and foreign listeners prefer music with regional overtones," he concluded.

Heath Ledger 2008's biggest movie story: poll



Heath Ledger is shown on a screen during a memorial to the late actor at the 14th annual Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles, January 27, 2008.

(Reuters/Danny Moloshok)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Australian actor Heath Ledger beat all-comers in a 2008 movie poll released on Thursday, sweeping the biggest news story, most missed star and best villain categories thanks to his posthumous hit film "The Dark Knight."

Ledger, whose death at age 28 in January of an accidental prescription drugs overdose shocked the world, was voted the biggest movie news story of 2008 by 83 percent of voters in the poll by AOL's online movie site MovieFone.com.

The actor also topped the list of movie stars voters will most miss after their deaths, edging out the late Paul Newman by 56 to 20 percent of votes.

Ledger has won Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild nominations for his supporting actor role as The Joker in the Batman movie "The Dark Knight", which was released six months after his death.

"The Dark Knight", the biggest-grossing box office movie worldwide of 2008, easily won the best action movie and "movie most worth your cash" in the MovieFone poll.

But teen vampire movie "Twilight", a favorite with young girls around the world, gave Ledger and "The Dark Knight" a run for the money.

"Twilight" was the best flick of 2008, while actor Robert Pattinson was voted breakout star of the year and Pattinson and his "Twilight" co-star Kristen Stewart won the best on-screen couple with 41 percent of votes.

But Jolie and her partner Brad Pitt came second to Will and Jada Pinkett Smith as the best off-screen couple with 32 percent and 38 percent of votes respectively.

Looking ahead, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince", out in July 2009, was the most anticipated movie followed by the latest "X-Men" installment "X-Men Origins: Wolverine".

The poll ran from Dec 17-29 and attracted 3.5 million votes.

Films from 49 countries line up for Fajr festival

Tehran Times Art Desk

TEHRAN — Foreign films from 49 countries will go on screen at the 27th Fajr International Film Festival which will be held from February 1 to 11, 2009 at various Tehran theaters.

Nineteen countries from Asia, eighteen countries from Europe, seven countries from America, Four countries from Africa and one country from Oceania will screen their films during the gala.

The films, provided with Persian subtitles, will go on screen in several competitive sections of the festival, including International, Asia Cinema, and Spiritual Cinema and also in the non-competitive section of the festival.

This edition of festival will pay tribute to world-renowned cineastes and has dedicated sections to them.

Four Oscar-winning films by John Ford "The Quiet Man," "How Green Was My Valley," "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Stagecoach" will go on screen at the festival.

The festival will also review films directed by renowned British filmmaker Mike Leigh in a section entitled "Mike Leigh, Political and social critic, like Ken Loach".

Born in 1943 in Britain, Mike Leigh is an English film and stage director, screenwriter, and playwright. Leigh began his career in the 1960s, and is often compared to filmmaker Ken Loach, who also makes social realism-orientated films that focus on the banal conflicts of everyday life of ordinary people.

Some of his well-known films include "Life is Sweet," "Topsy Turvy" (1999), and the bleak working-class drama "All or Nothing" (2002).

A section of the festival entitled "Silent but Alive" is dedicated to world filmmakers who lost their lives in 2008.

Films directed by late world filmmakers Anthony Minghella (Britain), Robert Mulligan (USA), Youssef Chahine (Egypt), Kon Ichikawa (Japan), Dino Risi (Italy) and Sydney Pollack (USA) will go on display at the festival.

The late American actor Paul Newman will be also commemorated and several films in which Newman starred will go on display during the festival.

The festival will present Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan with a lifetime achievement award.

Holy Quran encyclopedia now online

Tehran Times Culture Desk

TEHRAN — The encyclopedia of the Holy Quran and Quranic sciences, recently launched by experts at the Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences in Qom, is now available on the Internet.

The website www.hawzah.net contains over 2000 issues on the Quran, questions and answers on the Quran, as well as articles and about 700 abstracts of students theses collected by experts at the center.

This encyclopedia is one of the most comprehensive works on the Quran with its numerous research articles, the executive manager of the project Ali Tabatabaai told the Persian service of IRNA.

Information about the Quran, Quranic sciences, different translations and interpretations, religions in the Quran, the Quran and civilizations, and the Quran, art and literature are included on the website.

Also available are questions and answers about the miracle of the Quran, Quranic interviews, the library of Quranic sciences, and the history of interpretation of the Quran, he added.

God in the Quran, the prophets in the Quran, the world in the Quran, man in the Quran, family in the Quran, women in the Quran and the youth in the Quran are also among the issues available on the site, Tabatabaai concluded.

Good movies, prices help Hollywood in recession

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — A slew of quality movies and higher ticket prices helped Hollywood hold its own in 2008 despite recession, while 2009 promises more 3-D pictures and some big blockbusters to keep audiences coming in.

Box office revenues in the United States and Canada fell less than 1 percent to \$9.6 billion in 2008 compared to \$9.68 billion the year before, tracking firm Media By Numbers said.

Attendance fell by about 5 percent in 2008 but with average ticket prices up slightly, revenues held firm.

Paul Dergarabedian, president of Media By Numbers, said the high quality of the 2008 releases insulated the industry from the economic downturn.

He expects well-reviewed movies late in 2008, such as "Slumdog Millionaire", "Gran Torino", and "Doubt", to entice audiences to come out to movie theaters in 2009.

Batman movie "The Dark Knight", the top grossing film of 2008, ranked second only to 1997's "Titanic" on the all-time U.S. and Canadian box office leader board, with \$531 million.

The critically-acclaimed "Iron Man", starring Robert Downey Jr., ranked second in the 2008 box office race with \$318 million.

"The movies were so exciting, the product was so good this year that it is instilling in the audience a lot of goodwill," Dergarabedian said.

Experts said box office revenues are resistant but not immune to the recession.

"It's not necessarily that people rush out to see movies because the economy is bad, but because it's a bargain compared to other out-of-home entertainment it doesn't suffer as badly," said Patrick Corcoran, director of media and research for the National Association of Theater Owners.