



The Chakvak Ensemble, who perform Persian Classical with masterful solos, improvisations and arrangements, is part of Tirgan, the Iranian Festival at Harbourfront. The festival began yesterday and runs through Sunday.

Iran plays on

Canada denies visas but music fest thrives: Organizer

It's inevitable a festival celebrating the culture of a country that in U.S. President George W. Bush's world view is part of the "axis of evil" is going to be tainted by politics.

Tirgan, Iranian Festival — it began yesterday and ends Sunday at Harbourfront — is an ambitious, impressive event that shouldn't be missed. The largest festival of its kind ever produced in North America, it features more than 150 musicians, playwrights, dancers, authors, and artists from Iran, the Middle East, Europe, Canada and the States.

That number would've been higher if the Canadian embassy in Tehran had issued visas to about 40 artists to perform at Tirgan, says Reza Moghaddas, the festival's music programmer. "They rejected all the applications except one," says Moghaddas. "They gave a visa to a theatre group on Tuesday so they had to get on a flight right away, but they're here now."

"I hate politics," he says. "I came to Canada to work, not to do political stuff. I'm an artist. I don't want to have anything to

do with politics, but even outside Iran we're having political problems."

And here's a strange twist. While Bush is threatening possible military action against Iran to prevent it from meddling in Iraq and to discourage Tehran's nuclear ambitions, Moghaddas says the U.S. "gives visas so easily to Iranians." And speaking of politics and art making strange bedfellows, you can't help but shake your head in disbelief when Moghaddas says a festival happening in Canada this weekend is one of the largest in Iranian history.

"The last one happened 35 years ago and after that, because of the (1979) Revolution, there weren't that many festivals inside the country and people outside Iran had problems organizing festivals," he says. "This is the first time that high-calibre artists from here and around the world are performing at one festival."

It's a good bet that the sprawling multi-disciplinary festival will allow all of us, including the city's approximately 140,000 Iranians, to forget about politics for a while.

Moghaddas says the idea for the festival was birthed four years back when a group of Iranian students at the University of Toronto organized and hosted a weekend festival at Harbourfront.

"We expected there'd be about three to four thousand visitors, but Harbourfront told us that 22,000 people came by. They asked to work on a bigger festival so we began working on it about two years ago and it's gonna happen this weekend."

Tirgan boasts a strong musical quotient and will introduce us to ace local musicians from a scene that few know anything about.

Local acts worth catching include Shiraz Ensemble, who perform classical Persian and contemporary compositions, on traditional instruments, Chakvak Ensemble, who play Persian classical, and Iran Choir, who perform Persian folkloric music.

"There are so many great Iranian musicians here and around the world that we could have a month-long festival," Moghaddas, a musician himself, says.

"The hardest part was choosing who to invite." For more information on Tirgan, call 416-973-4000 or go to harbourfrontcentre.com

Help! I need a gig

If you're a blues or jazz musician who has absolutely no idea how to land your first gig, I highly recommend you check out a free panel discussion on Tuesday. And I'm not plugging it because I know the panelists.

It's called Get That First Gig and all the speakers are at the top of their game. They include legendary Toronto promoter/talent buyer Gary Cormier, agent Dwight Ireland, communications consultant Heather Kelly, and blues musician and booker Gary Kendall. Rico Ferrara, a booking agent and promoter whose specialty is blues, moderates.

Topics that will be covered include presentation, finding the right contacts, networking, the role of managers, agents, and promoters, and how to publicize your gig.

Space is limited and available on a first come first served basis. Registration is preferred and guarantees a spot. To register, send off an e-mail to bijfworkshops@hotmail.com. 7 to 9 p.m.

Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto, 1774 Queen St. E.

errol.nazareth@sunmedia.ca

Errol Nazareth's
Rhythm N Rhymes column
appears every Friday.

