



Salam Toronto Publications

Issue # 385

نشریه دوزبانه سلام تورنتو

Tirgan Pleased and Entertained Despite some Adversity

Audiences were treated to a plethora of colourful music, exuberant dancing, eclectic food and thoughtful art this past weekend as the Tirgan festival hit Toronto's Harbourfront Centre.

Based on what we saw, the festival was very successful.

Large crowds convened outside the Sirius Satellite stage, a covered outdoor venue overlooking Toronto's harbour, as musical performances enthralled crowds. Children were kept busy by several activities geared towards them, such as storytelling and balloon-making. An art exhibit showcasing the community's best was set up in the York Quay Centre.

Even Sunday's rainy conditions did not deter crowds much, as Iranians and non-Iranians alike came out to explore the four-day event (Thursday to Sunday) featuring the diversity of Iranian culture.

"We had an amazing number of visitors despite rain and uncooperative weather," commented Maria Moghaddam, one of Tirgan's organizers. "Some of our ticketed events were sold out; we had to cancel or relocate a few events owing to rain, but attendance in most shows was really amazing. It was an amazing experience; the mood was so positive, so joyous."

On Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, crowds were dancing and bopping to the infectious tunes and dancing of Saeid Shanbezadeh, who with his mix of unique instruments, gyrating dances and cheerful persona, quickly became a fan favourite.

Not all went smoothly, however, as arguably the festival's biggest draw, Mohamad Reza Lotfi, almost didn't make it into Canada. With most of his accompanying band, the world-renowned Shayda Ensemble, unable to come to Canada due to visa issues, the elderly Lotfi had to change his travel plans and drive from Washington D.C to Toronto alone. As such, he had to adjust and play with whoever could make it, which turned out to be only two members of the 12-member Ensemble.

The problem may lie with the Canadian embassy in Tehran and its rejection of almost all visa applications by artists in Iran. This made it very difficult for several to make it, including the Shayda Ensemble.

This is especially ironic given information that the neighbouring United States – for all its anti-Iran rhetoric – has recently expressed a desire to ease visa restrictions for Iranians.

Festival music programmer Reza Moghaddas relayed his frustrations to the Toronto Sun last Friday, "They rejected all the applications except one," he said.



Azim Ahmed



The weather also put a scare throughout the weekend, as cloudy skies threatened for parts of Saturday, and heavy precipitation fell for much of Sunday. While crowds on Sunday were not as large as they were on Friday and Saturday, for those that braved the weather, it did not deter them in the least.

Overall, the mood was festive and joyous. Musical performer Darya Dadvar excited crowds at the Emwave Theatre on Saturday night, as she brought her dazzling display of traditional and modern musical elements to Toronto. On Friday evening, a long line of eager theatre goers were ready to fill the Studio Theatre for an evening show.

While exact numbers and figures were not released at the time of print, a quick walk through the market area as well as the Food court café fully illustrated the great attendance. In addition to Persian cuisine, Mexican, Arabian and other international food was present. While the crowds were decidedly Iranian, there were significant numbers of non-Iranians present. Many of them, as we can see by the pictures Salam Toronto took, were thoroughly enjoying the performances.

Matt Thomas from Toronto, for instance, was on hand with friends. "I think this is great," he says over the loud music emanating from the Saeid Shanbezadeh concert. "I don't know much about Iranian culture, but based on what we're seeing here today, it's definitely something I'd love to get to know more of!"

Thomas and his friends were simply strolling along the harbour front area on a Friday evening when they heard the festive music and large crowds gathering, and it was plain curiosity that led them to the festival. There were undoubtedly others much like them.

"People were stopping us (the organizers) and thanking us for great performances, lectures, organization, punctuality and professionalism," Moghaddam says. "I believe people loved the event; we have been getting so many congratulatory notes, emails, and phone calls."

"What a pleasurable and entertaining extravaganza this all is," exclaimed Geert van Basten, who was visiting Canada from Holland with his wife. "When we arrived in Toronto earlier in the week we took a look at some of the events of interest, and this was one that appealed to us. We're certainly glad we came out, and get to experience how beautiful this Iranian culture is."

While the crowd was content, the performers themselves also enjoyed the event.

Moghaddam relates, "The artists seemed very happy with the professionalism of the organization of the event as well as operation."

There was also significant coverage from the mainstream media, as the likes of the Toronto Sun and Toronto Life were present. In addition, several dignitaries were on hand, including Encyclopedia Iranica Director Dr. Ehssan Yar Shater.

"This has been a worthy celebration of Persian culture," Dr. Yar Shater remarked. "It's about understanding and friendship among the Iranian-Canadian community as well as other people in North America and Europe."

Dr. Reza Moridi, Liberal Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for

Richmond Hill, and the first Iranian-Canadian to be elected to the Ontario government, added: "This great festival has allowed us to say to Canada; we Iranian-Canadians are a part of this wonderful country, and we also have something to contribute as Canadians. I salute the artists, organizers and volunteers, and thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Moridi also used the occasion to announce that he and his riding association would be organizing Mehregan, a celebration that will be occurring on October 3rd.

Another dignitary, Susan Kadis, Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) for the Thornhill riding, also was on hand to celebrate Tirgan.

"It's been an extreme pleasure to be an honorary patron of the Tirgan festival and everything that it stands for and that it has brought to our community, province and our country," Kadis says. "It is precisely what culture has done for our country that sustains and grows the cultural fabric of Canada and our very foundations."

She adds, "I'm always inspired when I come to events such as Nowrooz and now Tirgan within the Persian community and see how it is celebrated; with the joy, positive spirit, humanity, peaceful encouragement of relationships between all the different communities. It really serves as a model to me and inspires me in my work as a M.P of Thornhill."

So, despite facing some adversity through external factors such as the weather and visa issues, the organizers, volunteers, and artists worked together to make the Tirgan festival a highly successful event.

In fact, as this event closes, thoughts are already looking forward to the next one.

"I do hope that this will be repeated," Dr. Ehssan Yar Shater shares, "and all of these purposes will be further served by the organizers of this event."