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Far from Home, Reviving an Age-Old Tradition of Diversity

by *Reza Akhlaghi* | on July 15th, 2011 | 0 comments

IRAN



Iran is a land of not only great empires, but also of great traditions and cultures. The traditions that have shaped Iranian culture come from a variety of ethnic groups and cultures, blessing Iran with a longstanding and strong tradition of diversity that continues to date despite efforts

by the current Iranian government to suppress many of them, particularly those traditions that find their roots in pre-Islamic Iran.

But equally beautiful has been the resilience of Iranian communities in preserving their millennia-old traditions, languages, and cultures, irrespective of their geographic articulation. And Toronto's large Iranian community is one such proud community, which has attracted world attention for reviving and preserving the Tirgan Festival.

Tirgan is an ancient festival observed in the month of July, which in the Iranian calendar is the month of Tir, hence the name Tirgan. There are many legends on the origins of Tirgan. One legend describes that Iran and Turan, two longstanding rival powers, decided to declare peace by demarcating the boundaries between the two empires. Arash, the best archer in the Iranian army—whose last name, Kamangir, means expert in bowing—was chosen to ascend a mountain to shoot an arrow whose landing location would determine the boundary between the two warring lands. After soaring from dawn until noon, the arrow finally descended in today's Central Asia, expanding Iran's boundaries beyond expectation. And the Tirgan Festival today, indeed, is the extension of those cultural boundaries.

Tirgan Festival first started as Under the Azure Dome in 2006, then rebranded as Tirgan in 2008, both held at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. Since then the management decided to make Tirgan a regular biennial event.

Today Tirgan has become one of Toronto's cultural hallmarks, attracting tens of thousands of people from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds to the city. The festival, which takes place from July 21 to July 24, puts on display a true mosaic of Iranian culture, featuring internationally acclaimed as well as local artists and performers of Iranian descent, who celebrate Iranian heritage through music, dance, theatre, cinema, literature, and visual arts.

Tirgan also features Iranian cuisine and special arts and crafts presentations made available by vendor kiosks. Tirgan's management hopes to make the festival an engaging, educating, and entertaining experience for a wide range of audiences.

Mehrdad Ariannejad is Tirgan's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who has been involved in the planning and development of Tirgan from its infancy stage as a concept to its present prominent role



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Born in Tehran Iran, Reza Akhlaghi is a freelance writer based in Toronto, Canada. Reza is also a senior writer at FPA Blogs, presiding over the Middle East page and Middle Eastern countries.



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in Toronto's arts and culture scene. Ariannejad points out to the prominent place that Iran has carved out for itself in world cultures with its deep human values. He believes that these values do not belong only to Iranians, but are cultural assets that belong to the entire humanity.

Ariannejad goes on to say that in today's socially and politically tumultuous world the Iranian heritage has a lot to offer to bring people of diverse backgrounds closer together, and Canada's great tradition in multiculturalism offers Tirgan a great chance to achieve its cultural goals more effectively, thus helping us preserve our cultural values and share them with others more effectively and pass them along to next generations.

This year's Tirgan is the fruit of hard work of more than 300 volunteers, who have generously spent long hours over a two-year period to make the festival possible. This July (Tir) Toronto is certainly a must-see place for all lovers of arts and culture.



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