

The Scarlet Stone Play: A Mythological Look at Human Nature, In Search of the Iranian Human

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The “Scarlet Stone” drama, which is the result of several years of research and cooperation between Shahrokh Yadegari, composer, sound designer and director residing in San Diego and Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam, dancer, actor, and director residing in Paris, is a mixture of music, dance, theater, minstrelsy and pardeh dari (screen based storytelling), is an adoption of the story of “Rostam and Sohrab” From Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* and is inspired by the latest epic work of Siavash Kasrai, who is the creator of *Arash Kamangir* poem.

After opening in San Diego and having three successful runs in this year’s Tirgan Festival in Toronto, this multimedia play was brought on stage on Sunday, August 29th in Los Angeles University’s “Royce Hall” in Persian language accompanied by English subtitles.

While keeping its connection with deep roots of the Iranian culture, the “Scarlet Stone” drama communicates with modern audience using innovation and through a new form.

In this play, in addition to Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam who plays Sohrab and is the choreographer and costume designer, other acclaimed artists have participated; Such as Afshin

Mofid (son of Bijan Mofid) and former New York City Ballet's stars, in the role of Rostam, Miriam Peretz, international dancer of folklore ballet, in the role of Tahmineh, Ida Saki, one of the youngest talents of dancing scene, in the role of Gordafarid.

The Story of the Scarlet Stone Play

Lights are out. The play begins with a sound of music similar to a wakeup call of an unknown and previously unheard traditional instrument. In a dimly lit stage resembling man's eternal battlefield and good and evil penumbras, the Persian speaking –Ferdowsi- narrator (Fatemeh Habibzad “Gordafarid”) appears in form a woman in a magnificent purplish costume, in front of labyrinthine curtains, which are hanged in the background of this imaginary field.



The sound of music, which seems to be heard from faraway forever invisible centuries, is linked with the powerful yet delicate voice of the narrator through the counted silence and persistence of percussion rhythms. Having taken the first step with “in the name of God”, the narrator is “the seeker of the prime times” and “the inquisitor of past words” and it seems that she has come to stage in search of mysteries regarding human attitude and behavior, the enigma of “the secret of life” and eternal human mysteries.

Shahrokh Yadegari, music professor of University of California in San Diego, has finished his education in Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustic and Music (IRCAM) located in Paris/France, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Media Lab, “MIT”, and University of California San Diego. He has worked with such prominent artists as Peter Sellars, Robert Woodruff, Ann Hamilton, Christine Brewer (Soprano singer and one of world's most famous vocalists) in the field of music and theater sound processing.

Mr. Yadegari, who has been acquainted with Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam and his artistic works since a long time ago, says: “after a period of research for poems in Iran’s modern literature, we decided to prepare a musical and multimedia play which was inspired by the last poem of the late contemporary poet – Siavash Kasrai. This poem was suggested to us by Bibi Kasrai (poet’s daughter) and since both of us are interested in modern arts with new and unexperienced forms, we welcomed this suggestion and decided to make this poem the basis for our work.”



Mr. Yadegari states that Kasrai’s long poem is about the events around Iran’s 79 revolution and issues that are still relevant: “The Scarlet Stone does not forget about past hardships but with a burden of hope and responsibility asks the audience to pay attention to Iran’s present state. Kasrai has written the story in a way to be accessible to every Iranian whose life has been transformed in relation to the revolution. He has an insightful and wise perspective on his and Iran’s past- “Lest the compassionate ones don’t take the wrong path henceforth – and see the path clearly with this scarlet light”. In fact, both Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* and Scarlet Stone consider intellect and wisdom a light for the future.”

Like other elements of this play, its music is a mixture of elements taken from Iranian old and traditional music using a new form and approach. This means integrating aesthetic symbols and Iranian traditional music principles and regional music tones of Iran’s vast territories with modern and electronic music without losing the originality and identity of each of the above musical forms. “In this production, I have tried to reach a new form of music and sound using traditional and old instruments such as Balaban, Tanbor, Sorna, Daf, and Tombak along with western music instruments such as violin, cello and electronic sounds. The product is a music

that is at times seductive and introspective, and at times climactic and energetic mainly for the purpose of creating the appropriate context for story-telling and dance.

Unanimity with the Play's "Sohrab"

Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam says that the Scarlet Stone is one of the most intensive and massive projects that has required a lot of effort from the pre-conception moment up to its creation and afterwards in different stages of its development and completion.

He says: "In fact, bringing together this many people, each with great reputation, has proved to be very difficult. One example is Afshin Mofid who dances and acts infinitely beautifully in the role of Rostam. Afshin, who was one of the best ballet dancers and among the top students of George Balanchine, finally agreed to come back to the stage after twenty years of silence due to our persistence."



Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam, who has studied dramatic arts and art history in Paris and who has been a student of Ariane Mnouchkine - one of the most important and prominent theater directors of 20th century - states that through theater, he has learned how to convert dancing from movement to message and sound. "I have already had some designs on the role of *Shahnameh*'s Sohrab but the perspective of Siavash Kasrai regarding the story changed my viewpoint about this myth; namely I found affinity with the Sohrab of this play since he pleads and wants to know how he has been condemned by such an evil fate. In his plea for justice, Sohrab asks Ferdowsi how he has been able to pass over such an event so quickly in his *Shahnameh*? Why the role of Sohrab is non-significant to this extent? Why such a powerful tragedy has been weakly addressed? Why, after reading the story, no one reprimands Rostam's character?"

The Story of the Scarlet Stone, Tragedy of Misunderstandings

Gordafarid – playing the role of narrator – who has worked with Shahrokh Yadegari for adaptation and adjustment of the text in parts related to Ferdowsi's poems, considers the story of Rostam and Sohrab a tragedy of unknowns and misunderstandings.

“Perhaps this is a tragedy of unawareness. Despite some interpretations, I do not see Rostam as the symbol of tyranny at all. The same way Sohrab, too, is not representing an innocent and defenseless youth. In comparison with innocent youths such as “Siavash” and even “Iraj”, the Sohrab of *Shahnameh* acts more as an invader and even a trespasser to Iran's borders. This is because I believe that the youth of Zahak's period are the ones whose bodies, souls and thoughts have been cruelly ruined. It is Zahak who stands out in *Shahnameh* in the form of youth wasting and dictatorship government.”

“In my opinion, Rostam has lived in the millennial memory of people who have recollection of heroism and sacrifices for protecting the homeland and youth's security of that country. However, Sohrab is sympathetic because he, too, is a victim like Rostam and both are captives and victims of countless deceits and conspiracies.”