

The journey begins . . .

The 1001 journeys of the Armenians in Iran starts in 1604, when Shah Abbas (1587-1629), as he was retreating from his campaign against the Ottomans, forcefully moved the entire town of Julfa (10-12,000 Armenians) and later the entire population of the Ararat valley (some 300,000) to Persia. Thousands died in the move. They were settled across the banks of the Zayandeh Rud and a town, called New Julfa (*Jugha*), was constructed especially for them. The forced deportations established the basis for the Armenian diaspora in Iran (and India).

Soon, the community became alive again. Indeed, Armenians living outside Persia—traders and artisans—flooded to Isfahan, making Julfa a showcase for Safavid Dynasty's achievements in economic, social and religious spheres. Isfahan became an example of tolerance and understanding among diverse ethnic and religious groups in the region.

But a prosperous Diaspora meant disaster in the homeland. Intermittent population moves, hardships and battles were common in the history of the region in general and the Armenians in particular. In modern times, the Genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I was a defining national catastrophe for Armenians. Thousands of Armenians escaped to Iran during the genocide.

More recently, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 caused another wave of migration, this time to the West. As one historian put it, the Islamic Revolution "ended the second golden age of the Armenian community in Iran." New restrictions, the Iran-Iraq War, and the economic problems resulting from Iran's isolation forced the exodus of 100,000 Armenians. However, the Islamic government today is very accommodating to the Armenian community, which has its own schools, clubs, and churches.

Today there are more Armenians living in the Diaspora than in Armenia. In the last 100 years alone, major wars, regional conflicts, revolutions and civil wars have forced hundreds of thousands of Armenians from Iran, the Middle East, the former Soviet republics and other places to further spread around the world. The journeys toward regeneration and revival continue—accompanied by memories of the homeland, childhood, nostalgia, longing and determination to succeed. Like the branches of a "Blossoming Cherry Tree" (the last dance), thousands of Armenian small and large communities around the globe have at least one commonality: preservation of a rich cultural heritage and, most important, celebration of life.

The themes in tonight's programme are reflections of these collective and individual journeys started centuries ago. They are hope for humanity and celebration of life itself.

migration . . . programme

Dele Yaman *Unfolding the story...*

"Death March" *Hratch Tchilingirian (1962—)*

Shadakhi Tsernapar
(*Shadakh Dance*)

This dance represents a rite of passage: the end of one stage of life and the emergence of another. In the narrative of this programme, the dance is the march of forced migration. There is a sense of pride, dignity and longing in the dance, but also determination to start life anew.

regeneration

Choreography: Petros Karapetian
Music: Shoghaken Ensemble

"The Monument"
"I Travelled the World" *Eghishe Charents (1897—1937)*
Sayat Nova (1722—1795)

Zangezur Par
(*Zangezur Dance*)

Also known as *bakhtavari* ("good fortune"), this is a dance from Armenia's mountainous southern region of Zangezur, bordering Iran. The dancer portrays elements of everyday life and tradition.

Traditional; arrg. by Shakeh Tchilingirian Major

"Akhtamar" *Hovanes Toumanian (1869—1923)*

Eem Anoush Davigh
(*My beloved lyre*)

The dance unfolds a tale of unrequited love. The sweet sound and beauty of the lyre are linked symbolically to the maiden who is being pursued by someone other than her beloved.

Choreography: Yerdjanik Djambazian Martikian
Traditional song, arrg. Khachatur Avetissian

"Dibaou yeguedonya"
"Pahradé" *Sayat Nova (1722—1795)*
Ruben Haroutounian (tar)
Vahan Kerovpyan (dhol)

catastrophe

"Protest" *Frik (13th—14th centuries)*

Boghok
(*Protest*)

This is a powerful dance of prayer and defiance in the face of injustice. It expresses grief and disenchantment, subjection, compassion and hope.

Choreography: Yerdjanik Djambazian Martikian
Music: *Gagachner*, traditional

dispersion

"I should like to see" *William Saroyan (1908—1981)*

Garod
(*Longing*)

Garod is one of the difficult Armenian words to translate: it is imbued with longing, love, hope and comfort when faced with uncertainty, recollection of warm relations and expectation of reunion... all these emotions are reflected in the dance.

Choreography: Victoria Khanamirian

"Infinite Limitations" *Hratch Tchilingirian (1962—)*

Tsaghgats Baleni
(*The Blossoming Cherry Tree*)

In this lyrical song-dance we are reminded of a blossoming cherry tree: the arching branches, the wide roots, heavy boughs alive with the flow of sap, the promised fruits with sun ripened juices. Nature announces the arrival of spring.

Choreography: Yerdjanik Djambazian Martikian
Traditional song, arrg. Khachatur Avetissian