

In The Name of Music: Azadeh Azimi's mission to keep classical music alive in Iran

FOR THREE decades, the State's deliberate suppression of classical music and the lack of any musical institution even in major Iranian towns and cities have left behind a hostile yet nevertheless fertile environment for musical development.

It may be hard for some to imagine a society in which music is excluded and yet, for many years, possessing or playing a musical instrument has been prohibited in Iran by extremists through a conflict of religious belief and artistic musical expression.

In this environment and in the face of opposition, Azadeh Azimi has set out to make sure that the great cultural and educational value of classical music is kept alive in Iran and made available to all. Having herself experienced opposition in her early years as a self-taught musician, Azimi set out to create her own unique teaching method based on the characterization of sounds, rhythms and harmonies and the links between them, a method designed to develop an intimate relationship with music within a relatively short period of time.

The formation of a choir was a natural extension of Azimi's determination and belief in the power of music to transform lives. Although a choir of both male and female voices, conducted by a woman, has been, and still is, met with enormous resentment, intimidation and, sometimes, even violence, the human voice remains the musical instrument that everyone possesses and everyone has in common. It draws no attention to itself and it may be taken anywhere

The SAMAT Choir was formed in 2000 and, since then, many hundreds of those who had benefited from her teaching method, have been initiated into a full range of music, from Renaissance to Gospel. Concerts have been organized with the greatest difficulty despite the ruthless discouragement from the Ministry of Islamic Culture & Guidance - or 'Ershad'.

The SAMAT Choir owes its existence to Azimi's inspiration and determination. No wonder, then, that it has won an important place in the hearts of its singers, as they learn to sing together and to create a more harmonious and conscientious life for themselves and for their immediate environment.

While pursuing her own musical education outside Iran, principally in Germany, Azimi has dedicated her life to musical education, to cultural exchange with other countries and to the evolution of her choir. For the people of Iran, she represents a rare progressive image of womanhood to the outside world – a young Iranian female conductor composing, teaching and singing classical music against all the odds.

The SAMAT Choir was born in the beautiful and legendary town of Shiraz, twenty five kilometers from the Valley of Persepolis, where it continues to fill the world with music to this day.
