Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall

NOWRUZ:
IRANIAN NEW YEAR
Saturday, March 26, 2022 @ 8 p.m.

Carl St.Clair, conductor
Shardad Rohani, conductor
Alireza Ghorbani, vocalist
Lily Afshar, guitar
Mojgan Shajarian, vocalist
Pacific Symphony

The Saturday performance is generously sponsored by
Anoosheh & Alan Oskouian
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PROGRAM

Shardad Rohani: Dance of Spring Overture
Vivaldi: Concerto in D Major for Guitar, RV 93
Lily Afshar, guitar
Mussorgsky/arr. Rimsky-Korsakov: Night on Bald Mountain
Shardad Rohani, conductor
Steven Mahpar: Darius the Great
Mohammadreza Shajarian: Bouye Baran
Mojgan Shajarian, vocalist
Shahin Yousefzamani: Spring of Love
Mojgan Shajarian, vocalist
— Intermission —
Steven Mahpar: The Music of Alireza Ghorbani
Arranged for orchestra by Shardad Rohani

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alireza Ghorbani was trained to recite the Qur’an while growing up and began vocal lessons at 12. He developed his vocal abilities at a young age, going on to master the numerous scales of Middle Eastern music. By his 20s, he was a solo vocalist with the National Orchestra of Iran. Ghorbani is widely regarded as a major influential singer of the Persian song. He is a great artist deeply rooted in the tradition, but also has an insatiable curiosity and open-mindedness with respect to the other cultures. Born in the midst of the turbulence of 1970s and 80s Iran, Ghorbani has laid claims to being a worthy successor of the man regarded as the undisputed master of Persian classical song, Mohammed Reza Shajarian. Ghorbani has released 19 albums in Iran and Europe.

Ghorbani has participated in several international projects, some multi-cultural projects in Iran, France, India, Mali like: Le Rhythm de la Parole, SOUFFLES DU MONDE and some other collaboration with the Tunisian singer Dorsaf Hamdani in concert with the Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra Vienna, Cologne Philharmonic and the Vancouver Opera Orchestra. Ghorbani has collaborated with film and television artists and has sung some of the popular themes in Iran’s serials. The most important of these are the Sheb-e Dahom, Madar-e Sefr Darajeh, Kimia and Aghigh.

Ghorbani is invited every year to major international music festivals and is recognized as the most active traditional
Guitarist Lily Afshar is a virtuosa who brings passion to her performances. Acclaimed as "one of the world's foremost classical guitarists" according to Public Radio International. Her unique life story finds expression in her art. The Washington Post has described her onstage performance as "remarkable, impeccable." She is the only classical guitarist in the world who blends excellent formal training in the United States and Europe with the rich cultural heritage of Persia to present to audiences an extraordinary musical experience.

What brings excitement to a performance by Lily Afshar is her remarkable technical precision plus a passionate musicality that is the product of her personality and life story. Appearing onstage in the United States and around the world, she has delighted audiences not only with a fresh approach to the standard classical guitar repertoire, but also with music that is new and different. Afshar introduced quarter tones on her 2006 CD Hemispheres by adding fretlets to her guitar to reproduce accurately the tones required by an eclectic repertoire of new compositions and arrangements. Performing as a soloist at Wigmore Hall in London, she included the quarter-tone pieces as part of the program.

England’s Musical Opinion Magazine praised Afshar for her “fresh sense of programming” and “her ability to draw listeners onto the edge of their seats...” Embracing her Persian heritage, Afshar has not only performed her arrangements of Persian and Azerbaijani pieces; she has also fascinated concertgoers with occasional live performances on the sehtar, a traditional Persian instrument which evolved over many centuries into the guitar. Afshar taps the ancient root of the instrument which predates its arrival in Spain from Persia via the Arab conquest of Andalusia in the eighth century A.D. Her performances always include music that is as rich and beautiful as a Persian miniature or tapestry.

Vocalist Mojgan Shajarian is an Iranian-American musician, painter, graphic designer and sculptress. She studied under distinguished Iranian musicians such as Mohammad Reza Shajarian, Mohammad Reza Lotfi, Hossein Alizadeh and Parviz Meshkatian. She has performed extensively as singer and Setar player in major international festivals and prestigious concert halls in Europe, North America and Australia with the acclaimed Iranian master musician (her father), Maestro Mohammad Reza Shajarian. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2012 and currently lives in Southern California where she performs and teaches Persian classical singing (Awaz) and Setar.

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Conductor and composer Shardad Rohani was born in Tehran and educated at the Music Academy and Conservatory of Music in Vienna, Austria. Currently, Rohani is the musical director and principal conductor of the Tehran Symphony, having served in this position since 2015. The resurrection of the symphony in the early 2000s has been instrumental in connecting Tehran to the international arts community, including recent collaborations with noted conductors such as Riccardo Muti. In addition to his role as director of the Tehran Symphony (2016-2020), Rohani wrote and performed the anthem for the Iran National Soccer team’s appearance during the World Cup in 2018. He was also commissioned to compose the music for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 13th Asian Olympic Games held in Thailand.

An acclaimed composer and conductor, Rohani has worked with some of the top ensembles in the world including the London Symphony Orchestra, the Prague Symphony Orchestra, the Vancouver Opera Orchestra, the Austrian Chamber Orchestra and the London Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra. He captured the attention of audiences around the world as the conductor, arranger and performer for the open-air concert Yanni Live at the Acropolis, the second-best-selling music concert video of all time. The show was simultaneously televised all around the world; more than 500 million people watched the live concert in 65 countries. His most recent project is the Sinus Persicus Suite, originally recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra and the London Voices at Abbey Road Studios. Over the past year, the Sinus Persicus Suite has been performed throughout Europe and the United States. Rohani has been the recipient of several important scholarships and awards both in Europe and the United States, including the A.K.M Scholarship (Vienna, Austria), the ASCAP Scholarship (Los Angeles, Calif.) and the Jerry Fielding Award for film composers. His recording of classical masterpieces, including all of Tchaikovsky’s ballets, have received rave reviews by Japan’s In Tune magazine.
Of all the Persian national festivals, the New Year celebrations are at once the most important and the most colorful. This festival embodies a wealth of ancient rites and customs, and it is about the only one in Persia that is not confined to the traditions of only one religious group. It symbolizes the continuity of ancient Persian culture, which has survived so many adversities and vicissitudes. The Nowruz celebration stretches over a period of 13 days, the last being a special occasion calling for particular ceremonies. The period begins with the first day of spring, when the sun enters the zodiacal sign of the Ram.

At Nowruz, people join nature in making a fresh start, full of joy and hope for the coming year. The origin of Nowruz is traditionally attributed to Jamshid, the mightiest and the most glorious of the legendary kings of Persia. Nowruz is reckoned by a solar calendar. This was adopted in ancient times by the Zoroastrians, and it is used today as the national calendar of Persia. However, one must bear in mind that the Zoroastrian year did not always begin on the 21st of March (1st of Farvardin). There are reasons to believe that at one time it began with the commencement of autumn.

Nowruz and Mehregan, another ancient festival, continue to be the main national Persian festivals. Today, while many of the ancient festivals have faded away in most parts of the country, Nowruz remains a national Persian festival, and its advent brings joy to the hearts of the people. Although many of the old customs and ceremonies, as recorded in histories and travel books, have vanished with the passing of time, what remains makes Nowruz the most fascinating of the Persian festivals, rich in folkloric details and symbolic reminiscences.