

# NOWRUZ: IRANIAN NEW YEAR

## SPECIAL CONCERT

Carl St. Clair, conductor  
Shardad Rohani, conductor and piano  
Shahram Nazeri, vocalist  
Hafez Nazeri, vocalist

Glinka	<b>OVERTURE TO RUSSLAN AND LUDMILLA</b> Shardad Rohani, conductor
Gassemi	<b>PERSIAN WALTZ</b>
Strauss Jr.	<b>PERSIAN MARCH</b>
Rohani	<b>OZRA'S DANCE</b> Shardad Rohani, piano
Rohani	<b>ETERNITY</b> Shardad Rohani, piano
Rohani	<b>DANCE OF SPRING</b> Shardad Rohani, piano
Intermission	

### THE MUSIC OF SHAHRAM NAZERI AND HAFEZ NAZERI

This evening's performance is generously sponsored by **Anoosheh and Alan Oskouian**, with additional support from **J.P. Morgan Private Bank** and members of Pacific Symphony's **Cyrus Society**.

This concert's special cultural sponsor is the **Farhang Foundation**.

For additional information on this evening's sponsors, see the dedicated Nowruz program book.

**Saturday, March 28, 2020 @ 8 p.m.**

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Renée and Henry Seegerstrom Concert Hall

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# PROGRAM NOTES

## Celebrating Nowruz

In Iran and around the world, the joyful holiday of Nowruz—the traditional Persian New Year—is celebrated on the vernal equinox. It is a time of new beginnings, of hope and of thoughtful contemplation. Music helps us to appreciate both the beauty and meaning of Nowruz.

Mikhail Glinka:

### Overture to *Ruslan and Ludmilla*



Mikhail Glinka is a composer whose music is better known for its importance than its charms, which are many. Born in 1804, Glinka was chronologically first among a group of Russian composers

known as The Five, and his influence upon them was seminal even though he was not present at their historic meeting in St. Petersburg in 1856, when they formed their informal association. He died just a year later. (The quaint designations “the mighty five” and “the mighty handful” for these composers, who also included Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, are rarely used these days.) While Glinka is often regarded as the father of Russian classical music, his modern claim on the classical repertory rests almost exclusively on two works, his superb operas: *A Life for the Czar* and *Ruslan and Ludmilla*. Of these two, *Ruslan* is generally cited by critics as musically superior, mainly known for its buoyant overture—a foolproof way to rouse the spirits of players and listeners alike.

The music captures listeners through its loud, fast and virtuosic playing. From its thunderous opening chords underscored with a booming *timpani*, the overture is off to the races with a signature run of 15 notes that seem to fly off the violin strings and leap into the air. The question is not just whether the string players can articulate these fleet notes in unison, but whether our ears can hear that fast. Over successive decades, performance tradition has pushed the tempo far beyond Glinka’s original pace (judging from the metronome marking in early editions). In the finale, with its chords that echo the opening bars, a traditional *accelerando* pushes the pace even faster. How fast is too fast? After you’ve shown

your appreciation for tonight’s hard-working players, you might try comparing your memory of their performance with some of those available on YouTube. They range from dissonant, slow-motion car wrecks to blazing interpretations that only dogs can hear.

### Abbey Gassemi: Persian Waltz



Music is often called the universal language, but few musicians have used it so powerfully as Abbey Gassemi to promote understanding that transcends differences and national borders. In his work as conductor and

pianist of YPHIL-International Philharmonic Orchestra, he helps bring together 100 talented young musicians from 74 countries, including Israeli and Palestinian players. They represent their countries through music in Seven Epic Concerts, a concert series, including a concert for global peace at Carnegie Hall, New York during a recent United Nations week.

In compositions such as *Persian Waltz*, Maestro Gassemi combines classical Persian and European influences, bringing the rich musical heritage of Iran to Western concert halls and orchestras. As the distinctive, Persian-inspired sound of the *Waltz*’s introduction gives way to the familiar lilt of three-quarter time, we hear how close and how bridgeable two seemingly distant cultural traditions can be.

### Johann Strauss, Jr.: Persian March



It was one of the great musical dynasties of all time, and it was, by the Viennese standards of the day, big music business: Johann Strauss the Elder and his sons Johann II (also known as Johann

Jr.) and Eduard. All were conductors of dance orchestras and composers of music, primarily waltzes.

At various times they were partners and rivals, strategizing with and against each other in ways more complex than we need to remember. For our purposes, it helps to keep our eyes and ears on Johann Jr.—the Strauss whom we now know as the “Waltz King,” an affectionate

designation that extends to polkas, marches and even whole operettas.

When it comes to New Year’s celebrations, the world looks to these Viennese musical confections, and especially to the music of Johann Jr., for a unique style of elegant gaiety. In his *Persian March*, the *Waltz King* salutes Persian cultural traditions with a sound that is Viennese, but infused with colors and textures that seemed exotically Eastern to his contemporary audiences. (He did the same in his *Egyptian March*, composed five years later, in 1869.)

The composer conducted the first Viennese performance of this march at a concert in December 1864 at a concert in the Vienna Volksgarten to mark the 20th anniversary of his composing debut.

### Shardad Rohani: *Ozra’s Dance* *Eternity* *Dance of Spring*



As gifted as he is versatile, the Iranian-American musician Shardad Rohani is a composer, violinist, pianist and conductor. Born in the city of Rasht, capital of the Iranian province

of Gilan, Shardad and his brothers followed in the footsteps of their father Reza—gifted musicians all. Shardad began playing the piano at age 6 and studied violin with the renowned Persian violinist Ebrahim Rouhifar; at age 10 he began conservatory studies in Tehran. Continued study then brought him to Vienna’s revered University of Music and Performing Arts, where he studied composition and conducting. In 1984 he moved to Los Angeles to attend UCLA.

Maestro Rohani’s engaging compositional style reflects the breadth of his musical roots. It has been described as “adult contemporary” and “new age,” and can be heard in scores for films and in pop music as well as in the orchestral repertory. From 2016 until the beginning of this year he served as music director of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra.

*Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic, and editor-in-chief for The Santa Fe Opera.*

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## SHARDAD ROHANI

Conductor/Piano



Born in Tehran, Maestro Shardad Rohani was educated at the 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 under Maestro Rohani's tutelage has been instrumental in connecting Tehran to the international arts community, including recent collaborations with noted conductors such as Maestro Riccardo Muti. In addition to his role as director of the Tehran Symphony, Rohani wrote and performed the anthem for the Iran National Soccer team's appearance during the World Cup in 2018. During the World Cup, the orchestra performed in halls throughout Russia including the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow. He was also commissioned to compose the music for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 13th Asian Olympic Games held in Thailand.

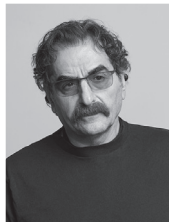
An acclaimed composer and conductor, Rohani has worked with some of the top ensembles in the world including the London Symphony Orchestra, the Prague Symphony, the Vancouver Opera, the Austrian Chamber Orchestra and the London Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra. He captured the attention of audiences 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, California) and the Jerry Fielding Award for film composers. His recording of classical masterpieces, including all of Tchaikovsky ballets, has received rave reviews by the *In Tune* magazine in Japan.

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## SHAHRAM NAZERI

Vocalist



Shahram Nazeri is the undisputed icon of classical Persian and Sufi music. Born in a Kurdish musical family, he was the first vocalist to set Rumi's poetry to Persian music 35 years ago.

Thus, he was able to establish a tradition of Sufi music within both classical Persian music and Kurdish music. His music was instrumental in introducing Western musical audiences to both Sufism and the poetry of Rumi. *The New York Times* dubbed him the "Persian Nightingale" and the *Christian Science Monitor* has called him "Iran's Pavarotti."

Most recently, he was the first Iranian musician to be awarded the prestigious Chevalier des Arts et Lettres medal from the government of France for his lifetime achievements in Iranian and Sufi Music. In November 2007, Asia Society awarded Shahram Nazeri with the prestigious Lifetime Cultural Heritage Award for his pioneering efforts of introducing the poetry of Rumi to the West through his music. The Ministry of Culture in Iran named him the "Best Singer of Classical Persian and Sufi Music."

Shahram has released over forty recordings to date. His *Gol'eh Sad Barg* recording has held the record for the best-selling album of classical Persian music and Sufi music in history. His latest collaboration with his composer son Hafez Nazeri, "Untold" is the first album in the history of the Middle East to hit the number one spot on Billboard's Classical chart twice. His "Untold Tour" is the highest-selling concert tour in the history of Iranian music with nearly 400,000 in attendance in the 2015-16 season.

He has performed at major venues worldwide, including the Festival of Aix-en-Provence, the Festival of Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, the Tokyo Summer Festival, the Kodak Theatre (Oscar ceremony) in Los Angeles, the Royal Albert Hall, Barbican, the Festa Del Popolo in Italy, the Beiteddine Festival in Lebanon, the Kölner Philharmonie in Germany, Asia Society, World Music Institute, the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in New York, the Roma Europa Festival in Rome, Sao Paulo Music Festival in Brazil and Fes Festival in Morocco, along with many others.

In 2005 and 2006, Shahram, along

with his son's new musical ensemble, launched "In the Path of Rumi," a highly successful North American tour that performed record-breaking, sold-out concerts, to rave reviews. The venues included Los Angeles' Kodak Theater, in the most highly attended classical Persian music concert outside of Iran. Then in 2007, his work *The Passion of Rumi*, composed by Hafez Nazeri, was chosen by the *LA Times* and *Boston Globe* as one of the five bestselling CDs in World Music in 2007.

The United Nations has honored Shahram with a recognition award for his legendary contribution to the revival of Kurdish and Iranian Classical Music. The Irvine City Hall "Award of Distinction" in Persian music was given to Shahram for his contributions in spreading Rumi's spiritual message of peace through music. UCLA has honored Shahram with the Living Legend Award.

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## HAFEZ NAZERI

Vocalist

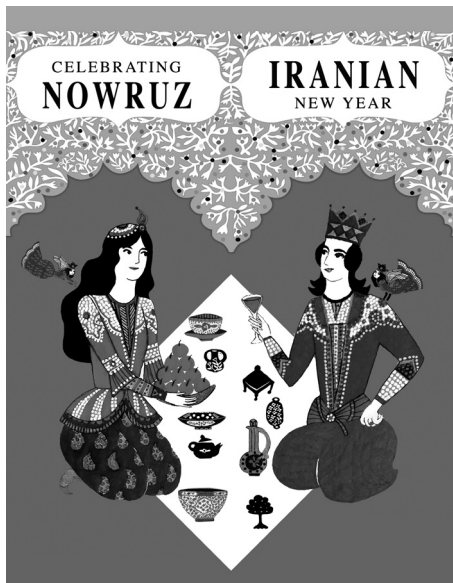


Hafez Nazeri is Iran's most influential and admired new composer and singer, and is the son of legendary musician Shahram Nazeri. Together they have accomplished the prominent role of

introducing Persian/Sufi music to the Western world.

Hafez's most anticipated recording, "Untold," involving 48 Grammy Award-winning artists and producers was released in 2014, making him the first Middle Eastern musician to be on Sony's Classical label. "Untold" is also the first album in the history of the Middle East to hit the number one spot on Billboard's Classical chart twice. The "Untold Tour" is the highest-selling concert tour in the history of Iranian music, with nearly 400,000 in attendance in the 2015-16 season.

Hafez's voice lessons began at the age of 3. Shortly after he went on to place first in many voice competitions. At 7, he began focusing his studies on the daf, tanbour and setar and made innovations that have been replicated ever since. By the age of 9, Hafez had already begun to perform alongside his father in many prestigious music festivals in Europe and the Middle East. At the age of 16, he had performed at the Sfinks Festival in Belgium, the Festa Del



Popolo in Italy, the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and the Beiteddine Festival in Lebanon, along with many others.

In 2000, Hafez formed the Rumi Ensemble. The ensemble performed Hafez's original compositions in a series of landmark concerts in 20 Iranian cities. With 140,000 in attendance, the Rumi Ensemble's concert in Tehran set a record for the highest attended concert in the entire Middle East. Selected pieces from this tour have been performed by the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra in London's Royal Albert Hall, and at music festivals including the Sodra Teatern in Stockholm, the De Bijloke in Ghent, Belgium, as well as at the Fez Festival in Morocco and the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris.

At the age of 21, Hafez came to New York to study Western classical music. In 2005, he received a diploma in composition and conducting from the Mannes College of Music. Later

that year, Hafez launched "In the Path of Rumi," a highly successful North American tour that performed record-breaking, sold-out concerts at venues including the Atlanta Symphony Hall and Los Angeles' Kodak theater.

In 2006, February 25 was declared "Hafez Nazeri Day" by the mayor and the chairman of San Diego County's Board of Supervisors. Soon after, he received awards from the sheriff of Los Angeles and the United States Congress, and was invited to lecture at Emory University and Harvard University.

Hafez premiered The Rumi Symphony in 2007. It was performed in the United States at the Walt Disney Concert Hall and received a standing ovation. He also released a new CD called "The Passion of Rumi," which the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Boston Globe* chose as one of the five best CDs in World Music for 2007. Later that year, as the first Middle Eastern musician in history, he premiered his Rumi Symphony at a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall.

Over the past years, he has performed sold-out concerts at the most prestigious concert halls around the world such as Stern Auditorium, Carnegie Hall, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Atlanta Symphony Hall, Kodak Theater and Royal Albert Hall among many others.

Hafez's international appeal led to several invitations to speak at various media outlets, including radio stations such as KPBS, KUSC, KPFK, KPFA, TIME, UC Berkeley Radio and NPR in the United States. Hafez's musical compositions have been praised in major publications such as *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *L.A Weekly*, *Boston Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Washington Post*, *San Diego Tribune*, *Atlanta Journal*, *Telegraph*, *The*

*Independent*, *Republica*, and *Le Monde* among others.

He was also featured in broadcast interviews, which included 10-minutes on CNN's Live with Kyra Phillips, BBC World Service's program, The Ticket with Mark Coles, a live appearance on the Fox Channel, an exclusive on ABC News and an exclusive with the Associated Press.

Hafez is the recipient of a UCLA Creativity Award for Most Distinguished Young Composer. The Irvine City Hall Award of Distinction in Kurdish music was given to Hafez Nazeri for his contributions in spreading Rumi's spiritual message of peace through music. The United Nations Association also recognized Hafez's efforts in undertaking the "In the Path of Rumi" tour.

Hafez has also engineered a new instrument affectionately named the Hafez, paying homage to the philosopher and poet Hafez with whom he shares the name. The Hafez is the first-ever modernized instrument stemming from the rich Persian culture.

**THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR:  
FARHANG FOUNDATION**

Established in 2008 in Los Angeles, Farhang Foundation is a non-religious, non-political and not-for-profit foundation with a mission to celebrate and promote Iranian art and culture for the benefit of the community at large.

## CYRUS SOCIETY



**Pacific Symphony gratefully acknowledges the support of The Cyrus Society, a group of business, community and cultural leaders with a passion for classical music, who may open avenues of engagement to the Iranian communities of Orange County. Cyrus Society members are generously supportive of Pacific Symphony's efforts to build long-term partnerships with the growing number of Iranian and Iranian-American leaders and residents in our region in order to support cultural celebrations and deepen understanding.**