

UNDERNEATH THE SUN

Loving mother of cats

By Ali Amiri*

I was on my Friday morning stroll through the deserted Park-e Shahr (City Park) when I heard a feminine “here kitty, kitty” from behind me. I turned to look and saw a woman trailing a small trolley behind her. She kept on calling her beloved animals and very soon a few cats appeared from behind the bushes and gathered round. She then began to sprinkle what looked like shredded mozzarella whilst whispering loving words to the famished creatures. After watching the cats eating their luxury breakfast for a while, I approached her to hear her story.

“I’ve been doing this for a few years now,” said Touran Beigi, 31. “I love these babies.” There was something motherly in the way she talked about cats. I asked her if there’s any particular reason as to why she does this. “Animals in Iran don’t live in good conditions, generally. Especially cats in this park. They face horrible situations. There’s no food to eat, and the mice are filthy. They could go hungry for days. Also, the addicts catch them and sell them. There are foxes here that eat the kittens, too. And some people cut their tails for talismans.” It was a long list of hardships and the last item was indeed surreal.

Apparently, Touran was pretty well-known in the park. During our conversation a few people stopped to greet her, and one person even donated some cash. I asked about her education.

“I have a master’s degree in governmental management. I used to work for a company but now my father’s sick and I only do this.”

At this point the number of cats around us had doubled. I wanted to know if she did this all by herself, or she is part of an NGO.

“No, I’m on my own. Although it would be great if anybody else is interested in doing this.”

She must have seen many things, bitter and sweet, on her years-long mission.

“Recently an addict took my own cat. The cat that I had raised since it was a kitten and loved to death. He wanted money. I tried for a good six weeks to take back my own cat. I had to threaten him with police intervention to convince him to bring it back.”

Was it alright?

“It was tortured and its fur was gone.”

She wanted to finish her round for the day and so it was time to say goodbye. As the final question, I asked if she was optimistic about the widening awareness regarding animal well-being in Iran.

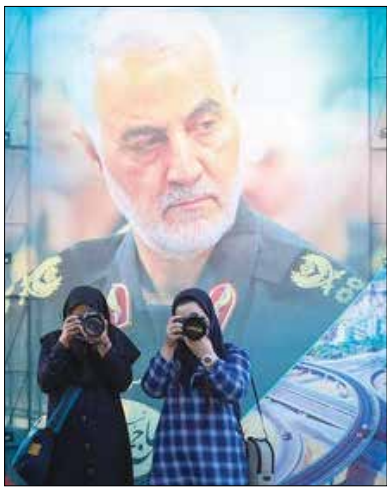
“It’s getting better,” she said with an air of uncertainty. But then she went on confidently to add, “Yes, some people get interested in what I do. Others thank me.”

Finally, as if addressing herself, not me, she murmured, “We need to know all we have are these creatures. What will remain of us but the memories we’ve made, being kind to God’s creatures? I pray for all of them to be safe and sound and be treated nicely.”

*Ali Amiri is a guest contributor at Iran Daily who observes and narrates often unspoken stories of ordinary people.

Final nominees of playwriting section of Lt. Gen. Soleimani festival announced

Arts & Culture Desk



PEJMAN GANJIPOUR/IMNA

The secretariat of the third edition of the Nationwide Theater Festival of Heavenly General, held in commemoration of the Iranian anti-terror commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, announced the 11 final nominees of its playwriting competition section.

The nominees are Davoud Fat’hali-Beigi, Mehdi Akbari, Ali Mirza-Emadi, Ali-Hossein Afshari, Hossein Ahmadvani, Gholamhossein Dolatabadi, Hamed Sehat, Leili Aaj, Kaveh Mahdavi, Asghar Garousi and Mohammad Saleh Karami, IRNA reported.

The jury members are playwright and university professor Yousef Fakhrzai, art and literature researcher, Sadeq Rashidi, and playwright Reza Ghashtasb.

The other sections of the festival are street theater and Radio Theater. The event is being held by Revayat-e Fat’h Cultural Foundation and the general office for culture and Islamic guidance of the southeastern Iranian province of Kerman. Opened on Jan. 7, the festival will end on Jan. 11.

Lieutenant General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were martyred along with their companions in a U.S. drone strike authorized by former president Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

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Vincent van Gogh (Dutch painter)

Art is to console those who are broken by life.

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Iranian actor-cum-director Maadi among U.S. film festival jury members

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian actor, screenwriter and director Payman Maadi has been selected as a jury member of the American Sundance Film Festival 2022, to take place in hybrid format from Jan. 20-30.

Maadi, along with American writer, director, and actress Marielle Heller and TV producer Chelsea Barnard, will be the jurors for the U.S. dramatic competition, ISNA reported.

Maadi is best known for starring in the Academy Award-winning film, ‘A Separation,’ and ‘About Elly,’ both by Iranian director Asghar Farhadi. For his role in ‘A Separation,’ Maadi won the Silver Bear for Best Actor at the Berlin Film Festival. His recent film credits include ‘Night Shift,’ ‘6 Underground,’ ‘13 Hours,’ ‘Camp X-Ray’ and ‘Just 6.5,’ and his recent TV credits include HBO’s ‘The Night Of’ and ‘Westworld’.

Comprising six juries awarding prizes for artistic and cinematic achievements,



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other jurors include British filmmaker Andrew Haigh, American filmmaker Garrett Bradley (U.S. documentary competition) American filmmaker Peter Nicks (U.S. documentary competition)

and veteran documentary cinematographer Joan Churchill (U.S. documentary competition).

Also, Haigh joins Egyptian film producer and screenwriter Mohamed Hefzy

and film curator La Frances Hui on the world cinema dramatic competition jury, while Cannes artistic adviser Emilie Bujès, former U.S. ambassador Patrick Gaspard and American documentary filmmaker Dawn Porter will judge the world cinema documentary competition.

The other two sections of the festival are the NEXT competition and the short film program competition.

The festival, which has been held in Park City, Utah, for close to 40 years and supports artists by creating a community for independent storytelling, will be held fully online for the first time ever in 2022, according to upmatters.com.

Sundance took place both online and in person in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite ambitious COVID protocols, the Omicron variant put a dent in this year’s plans, with its high rate of transmissibility jeopardizing the health and safety of attendees.

Biography of student martyred in Ukrainian plane crash published

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran published the biography of one of the victims of a 2020 Ukrainian plane crash near Tehran, concurrent with the second anniversary (Jan. 8) of the tragic incident.

Titled, ‘Toronto Tour,’ and written by Mohammad Ali Jafari, the biography narrates the story of Iranian student Amir-Hossein Qorbani, who was martyred during the plane crash, Mehr News Agency reported.

Comprising 141 pages, the biography has been published by Revayat-e Fat’h publications and is available on the market.

On January 8, 2020, the Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752, flying to Kiev while carrying mostly Iranians, crashed minutes after takeoff near the Iranian

capital, killing all of the 176 passengers and crew on board.

Hours before the tragedy, Iran had launched a retaliatory missile strike, as part of its revenge for the Jan. 3, 2020 U.S. assassination of anti-terror commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, against a U.S.-run base in western Iraq and put the country’s air defenses on high alert due to increased American aerial activity in the aftermath of the strike.

Iran acknowledged days later that the mismanagement of an air defense unit’s radar system by its operator was the key human error that led to the accident.

Tehran has promised that all those culpable in the incident would face justice and allocated 200 million euros for compensation to the victims’ families.



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Hollywood trailblazer Sidney Poitier dies at 94

Sidney Poitier, the first black man to win a best actor Oscar, died at the age of 94.

The Hollywood star’s death was confirmed to the BBC by the office of Fred Mitchell, the Bahamas’ minister of foreign affairs.

Poitier was a trailblazing actor and a respected humanitarian and diplomat. He won the Academy Award for best actor for ‘Lilies of the Field’ in 1963.

The actor and Academy Award winner, Denzel Washington, said, “It was a privilege to call Sidney Poitier my friend. He was a gentle man and opened doors for all of us that had been closed for years. God bless him and his family.”

Born in Miami, Poitier grew up on a tomato farm in the Bahamas and moved to New York, aged 16.

He signed up for a short stint in the army and did several odd jobs while taking acting lessons en route to becoming a star of the stage and screen in the 1950s and 60s.

Poitier broke racial barriers in Hollywood. His appearance in ‘The Defiant Ones’ in 1958 earned him his first Oscar nomination – in itself a historic achievement for a black man in a lead category at the time.

Five years later he went one better, taking the glory for ‘Lilies of the Field,’ in which he played a handyman who helps German nuns to build a chapel in the desert.

Speaking on a live Facebook stream on Friday, Prime Minister of the Bahamas Philip Davis said, “Our whole Bahamas grieves. But even as we mourn, we celebrate the life of a great Bahamian.”

He added, “We admire the man, not just because of his colossal achievements, but also because of who he was: His strength of character, his willingness to stand up and be counted, and the way he plotted and navigated his

life’s journey.

“The boy who moved from the tomato farm to become a waiter in the United States, a young man who not only taught himself to read and write, but who made the expression of words and thoughts and feelings central to his career.”



DOUG MILLS/AP

Sidney Poitier is seen in this picture holding his honorary Oscar in 2002.

The actor was a regular on the big screen at a time of racial segregation in the U.S., appearing in ‘A Patch of Blue’ in 1965, and then ‘Heat of the Night’ the year after, followed by ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner’, playing a black man with a white fiancée.

In ‘Heat of the Night’ he portrayed Virgil Tibbs, a black police officer confronting racism during a murder investigation.

His other classic films included ‘The Blackboard Jungle’ and ‘A Raisin in the Sun’, which he also performed on Broadway.

He went on to direct a raft of films, and a Broadway play about his life and career was announced last month.

‘Tackled racism head on’

Empire magazine’s Amon Warmann told the BBC: “He was a pioneer, he’s so influential and paved the way for so many in the industry to make their own mark, not least Denzel Washington, who paid tribute to him when he won an Oscar.”

Washington, who won an Oscar in 2002, on the same night Poitier won an honorary Oscar, joked as he said, “Forty years I’ve been chasing Sidney and what do they do – they go and give it to him in the same night.”

Warmann added that Poitier “tackled racism head on” in his work but was also “so versatile”.

“He really helped change the game for how black actors were viewed at that time [of his Oscar win]. He was one of the biggest stars during that period.”

Viola Davis, the first black American to win an Oscar, an Emmy and a Tony Award, said, “No words can describe how your work radically shifted my life.”

Poitier became the first black actor to receive a life achievement award from the American Film Institute in 1992.

Five years later, he was appointed the Bahamas’ ambassador to Japan and he received a knighthood from the Queen in 1974.

As a Bahamian citizen he was eligible for a substantive knighthood, but given that he was a U.S. resident and Bahamian by descent, the Bahamian authorities preferred it to be an honorary award.