

ArtsIn new light, sorrow blends with beauty

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While strolling on a warm Miami night last year, Nahid Khaki was struck by the curves and lighting of a nearby building and had an impulse. The Wellesley photographer urged a niece, Neda, to dance in front of the dramatic facade as she shot photo after photo. At the time, Khaki wanted simply to capture a "beautiful, spontaneous moment." But months later, tragic news about another Neda in Khaki's native Iran would give her photo series, "NEDA: In the Light," a somber poignancy.

On June 20, 27-year-old Neda Agha-Soltan was shot through the heart and killed as she stood near an election protest in Tehran. A video of her death, recorded by a bystander, then rocketed across the Internet. Within days, the aspiring underground singer (women in Iran are not permitted to sing in public) became an international symbol of the unrest over the election's results and the face of the untold victims of the government's crackdown.

"I had been working on printing this group of images for several months when this woman in Iran gets killed for just watching a riot, and it really affected me," said Khaki. "I already had the name "NEDA: In the Light" because I named the series for my niece, but when I learned the killed woman's name was also Neda, I felt I must show this work and that it was appropriate to dedicate it to her."

The owner of galleries in Wellesley and Boston immediately began pulling together a show. The similarities between the two Nedas were many - both from Iran, both musicians, both young women with their lives ahead of them. But the contrast between Neda Khaki's dancing moment in Miami, and Neda Agha-Soltan's murder in Tehran couldn't be greater.

"My Neda is dancing so freely and expressing herself so beautifully without fear. In a beautiful moment, she's just being herself, and it's amazing that one can do that here," said Khaki, who immigrated to the United States 35 years ago. "But it's such a tragedy that for another Neda back in Iran, she not only cannot express herself in any way, not with her clothing or in any way, she also gets killed for just being there, and that is really outrageous and sad. This poor woman died because of an idea of freedom that all those young people in Iran want."

Viewed in this context, the Neda photos straddle a strange emotional divide. Gorgeous and gemlike with glowing sepia hues, they cradle the viewer in the comfort of the warm tones and draping curves of the facade. But the silhouettes of her lithe niece - though as light and easy as the breeze that billows in her dress - now also carry the funereal weight of a solemn memorial. Impromptu joy mingles with a fierce reproach of oppression. One girl dancing in the street

becomes the imagined freed spirit of another who died in it.

"I'm not a political person, I'm just an artist," said Khaki. "But I feel that being a woman and Iranian, it's my responsibility and duty to say something, to voice my opinion, to contribute. . . . I'm hoping that Iran will come out of this with a better government, but there's this fear now all over the country because they know the price of freedom is so great."

Joining "NEDA" at the two Khaki Gallery locations is "Az Kavir Az Khak/From Desert From Earth," a series of black-and-white photographs by Iranian Soroush Payandeh that cannot be shown in his country, since they contain nudity. Taken in the Khara Desert in southern Iran, the images depict small, nude male figures wandering among the dunes in immense barren landscapes, a metaphor for a spiritual wilderness.

"His treatment of the figure is so interesting and different. He is not interested in the details of the body but in the spiritual aspect of man in the landscape, and they are beautifully done," said Khaki. "This turmoil in Iran affects people so much that it has created a whole wave of artists . . . Because of the oppression by such a fanatic, backward government, it's unbelievable the things you see in their art."

"NEDA: In the Light" and "Az Kavir Az Khak/From Desert from Earth" run through this month at the Khaki Gallery in Wellesley, 9 Crest Road, and Boston, 460 Harrison Ave. A reception with the artists is 6-8 p.m. tomorrow at the gallery in Boston's South End. 781-237-1095; 617-423-0105; www.khakigallery.net.

TEENS CREATE MUSICAL: The flier announcing the premiere of Patrick and Daniel Lazour's original musical seems to say it all: "Tribulations of the Millionaire - A New Musical - The most depressing time in American history set . . . to music!" But what's missing is that the siblings are just teens - Boylston teens who spent three years writing and revising the show, and are producing and directing "Tribulations of the Millionaire" in a three-performance run opening tomorrow at their hometown's Calliope Theatre.

"The score is very sophisticated for high school students," said Worcester theater veteran Eric Butler, a mentor for the project. "The lyrics are often witty. They understand what drives a good musical number. I'm really impressed by their work.

"They certainly are storytellers, and that they are able to put that to music is fantastic."

A warm-hearted morality tale about greed, the story follows wealthy Abigail Lorraine, her stockbroker fiance, Cleveland Sellers, and other highfliers from boom to bust. Daniel wrote the score, Patrick the lyrics, and together they created the stage production's book. It was an epic effort that began in 2006 - when Daniel was 12 and Patrick 15. Excitedly, falling into each other's sentences, the brothers explained.

"They have this play competition at Tahanto, our old school, and a friend asked me if I'd write him a play," said Patrick, who graduated this spring from St. John's High School in Shrewsbury.

It was an off-the-cuff, unserious request. The friend didn't know that Patrick was a writer (short stories, primarily). But Patrick took the offer seriously and so did his brother.

"So, Daniel and I wrote a 30-minute musical about elections called 'Tuesday in November,' and we were pleased to get really good responses to it. So that's what got us started, and then we decided to undertake a two-act musical," said Patrick.

"And we were walking at Tower Hill, bouncing around ideas, and we first thought about the Great Depression, but said, eh, that would be way too depressing," said Daniel, a sophomore at St. John's. "But then we came back to the idea and it sprang up from there."

"We tried to keep the musical as least depressing as we could," said Patrick.

"Right," added Daniel. "In the '30s, musicals were written in a high comedic sense using high-class jokes and we tried to incorporate that old humor into it, and that portrayed the Wall Street crash in a happier light."

Alternating between sounding like the teenagers they are and the writers and composers they seek to emulate, they discuss comic relief techniques, character arcs, and femme fatales. They expound on old Broadway versus new Broadway. They discuss how they Googled Depression-era slang such as "Holy horse feathers!" and "Just ducky!"

"At first, when we wrote it, we took a break after we got it out there. But we had so many critiques from people that it was a little bit, dare I say, amateur. So we went back and we really revised it," said Patrick.

Daniel began acting in the fourth grade and now performs with area community and professional ensembles. His theater contacts provided the initial script feedback. Then, John Deedy, an English teacher at St. John's, encouraged the brothers to improve the work. Finally, after a staged reading at St. John's last fall, they landed a new mentor. Butler, the Catholic school's director of annual giving and an area theater director, volunteered to guide them through the final revision and production process.

"We've had some great mentors that really taught us what great playwriting is," said Patrick.

"Getting more mature eyes to look at the script really helped," added Daniel.

Though Patrick is the writer and Daniel the composer, they closely collaborate on everything. "We're always in the same room when we write. We always shoot ideas back and forth," said Patrick.

They say they've brainstormed this way for years.

"We've always had ideas," said Daniel.

"We used to play games when we were kids and we would make up scenarios," added Patrick.

"After I got into theater, we thought it would be a great channel for all of that," said Daniel. "We just always had a very big imagination," said Patrick.

They also have follow-through. With the support of Roger Deal, a Boylston selectman, the brothers auditioned the show at Calliope Productions. They got approval to use Calliope's recently

renovated theater, and in thanks will donate all proceeds to the nonprofit institution.

"In the beginning, we were very naive, because we thought, oh, this will be on Broadway. But then we realized that's a really lofty dream," said Patrick. "But we still knew this was a good show and we knew we had to produce it."

"It definitely wasn't going to be just an exercise," added Daniel. "We worked too hard on it to let that happen."

A cast of 17 teens was recruited, mainly via Facebook, and rehearsals began June 2, with Patrick stage directing and Daniel the musical director. Another Boylston teen, Jessica Heslin, who graduated from Tahanto Regional High this spring, is the choreographer.

As for what's next? The answer comes in the usual tandem rush: "We do have another show," said Patrick. "But we don't know if we want to release what it is yet," added Daniel.

"We will tell you that we're going to set it in a library," threw in Patrick. "Yeah," added Daniel. "We're definitely going to work on some other stuff, and we're definitely going to keep writing."

"Tribulations of the Millionaire" will be performed 7:30 p.m. tomorrow and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday at Calliope Theatre, 150 Main St., Boylston. Tickets: \$12; students, seniors \$10. 508-869-6887, www.calliopeproductions.org.

BEATLES BUFFET: Free concerts featuring music by the Beatles are "Here, There, and Everywhere."

Tonight at 7, the band Beatles for Sale performs at NARA Park, 25 Ledge Rock Way, in Acton. No rain date. For information, call 978-264-9608.

Tomorrow at 6:30 p.m., the Nowheremen take the stage on the Lexington Visitors Center lawn, 1875 Mass. Ave. (hop on your bike to get there if you like; it's right off the Minuteman Bikeway). No rain date. Call 781-862-2480.

And on Tuesday, HELP! brings the mop tops to Claflin Hill's Family Night at the Bandstand, 6:30 p.m. at Milford Town Park, Walnut and Congress streets, in Milford. Rain date is next Thursday. 508-478-5924, www.claflinhill.org.

Let's just hope they'll all have cause to sing "Good Day Sunshine."

Have an idea for the Arts column? Please contact westarts@globe.com.

Credit: Denise Taylor, Globe Correspondent

Illustration

Caption: Christine Peterson for The Boston Globe; Christine Peterson for The Boston Globe; Photographer Nahid Khaki found an unexpected poignancy in the series of images of her niece that are on display this month in her Wellesley and Boston galleries as "NEDA: In the Light." Christine Peterson for The Boston Globe; Boylston siblings (from left, front) Patrick and Daniel Lazour are

overseeing a cast of teens in tomorrow's premiere of "Tribulations of the Millionaire" at the Calliope Theater. Christine Peterson for The Boston Globe

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