



## Two Flags on the Streets of New York

**Azadeh Moshiri**

On the heels of nuclear discussions in the Oval Office, a large crowd gathered on Madison Avenue to join the New York Persian Parade in honor of Norouz, the Persian New Year. The streets were heavy on Sunday with bejeweled floats, elaborate fabrics and the weight of 160,000 people gathered to celebrate more than just their own heritage, but also the union of two nations: Iran and the United States of America.

New York was reminded of a reality that, as of late, has been muted in the press and in Washington's boardrooms: that politics aside, Iranians both cherish their culture and celebrate a nation that has welcomed them into its folds.

Surrounded by both Iranian and American flags, the New York Police Department Band opened the parade by playing the Iranian national anthem, followed by the Star Spangled banner. With that, the floats launched down Madison Avenue and the New York Persian Parade officially began.

Kayhan London interviewed Dr. Shabnam Rezzazadeh, Founder of the Persian Parade, who recalled that while the event has always been apolitical in nature, the founders initially doubted their submission to the City of New York would be accepted: "We used to celebrate Norouz in ballrooms and hallways, and the Americans didn't get a chance to see it, so we weren't lucky enough to share it with our host country. We sent an application just thinking that they would say no because of the political situation, and then they approved us. We had a few days to organize it and that first year we had 3,000 spectators." Year by year, the parade has grown in numbers with hundreds of thousands now joining Dr. Rezzazadeh and her fellow Directors and Trustees for the event's 12th anniversary, traveling from as far as Los Angeles and Australia.

Persian magazines and television channels, as well as academic and professional associations, sponsored the floats, coated in green, white and red. One such float was graced with the Aftab Dance Group, 'aftab' meaning sun in Farsi, a student run Iranian dance group. One of their dancers, Roxy Pirnia, was spotted in a corner rehearsing her routine, spurred on by what she called "a great vibe, energy and community."

New York's Persian Parade is more than a cultural celebration. "My American friends find it very educational" said Dr. Rezzazadeh. Indeed, the founders began this tradition in the hopes of giving back to a nation that has opened its doors to them by sharing a meaningful milestone in their own lives, each year.

As the final floats descended the streets, families began tucking their children back into strollers, laying the two nations' flags beside them and making their way home. Those that gathered on the streets that day were willingly oblivious to any talk of deals or agendas. They were there to celebrate the birth of a New Year, one that will be lived in a country that has welcomed Persian expatriates and is now home to a new generation of American Iranians.

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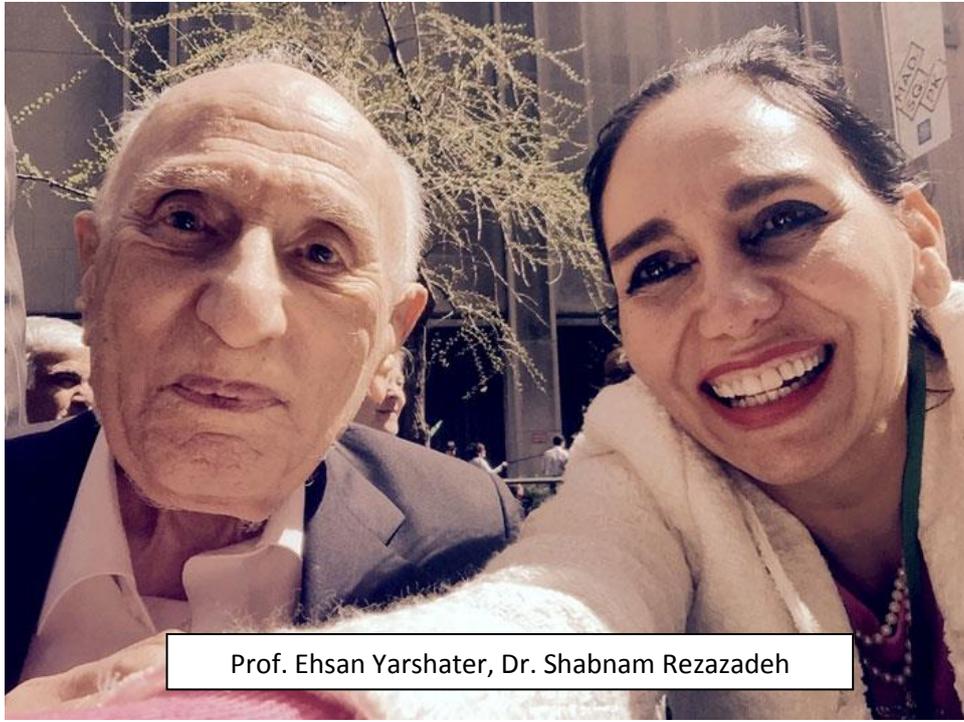
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Prof. Ehsan Yarshater, Dr. Shabnam Rezazadeh





Iranian artist: Ardavan Mofid

