

# The history, soul of Persia

By Andrea Pflaumer  
Special to The S.F. Examiner

Shahzad Khorsandi and Farima Berenji, both Bay Area performers of Iranian descent, are on a special mission to preserve the spiritual heritage of Persian dance.

"I always danced informally. It's so much woven into the culture. In my family we'd just grab a pot or pan and bang on it and start singing our folk songs. And everybody would dance," says Iranian-born dancer Khorsandi, whose unique contemporary Persian dance includes quintessential Persian movements that are informed by training in other dance cultures.

Berenji, who has degrees in art history, anthropology, archeology and performance, showcases dances of ancient Persia with rich meaning and transcendence.

This weekend, both appear at ODC Theater in the latest installment of its "Dance and Diaspora" series. They are accompanied by musicians Saman Mahmoudi on santoor and Samandar Dehghani on percussion.

Berenji approaches Persian dance with the passion of a historian.

"Due to the lure of technology and city life, the ancient nomadic dances are rapidly disappearing," she says. "But if we have saved them for 5,000 years, the younger generation can do so for the next 100 years."

While preserving the culture, she discovered mystical meanings in dances associated with Persian



COURTESY TATSUKI KOBAYASHI



COURTESY JUAN SOTO

poetry and art.

"The number seven is extremely important in Persian and Central Asian mythology," she says. "The ancient folk dances celebrate the seven gods and goddesses of Persia, who created this world."

The influence of the gods, each represented by a different color, is seen in the Dance of the Seven Scarves.

"Red is the color of love, blue of water, etc." Berenji said. "You see

these same colors in Persian rugs. They bring them all to unity in the weaving."

Khorsandi, whose family left Iran in the middle of the Iranian Revolution in the late 1970s, began Western dance training in a Bay Area high school but she sought her own artistic voice after returning to Iran in her 20s.

"I got very emotional reconnecting with the culture, taking back what I

had lost for 13 years," she says.

Over time, she developed, what she described as, an intuitive Persian dance form.

"When I perform for Persian audiences, I'm told, 'I've never seen dance like this before, but it's so Persian,'" Khorsandi says.

But with today's prohibition on dance in Iran how do her countrymen get to see her performances and classes? "YouTube," she says.

## IF YOU GO Dance and Diaspora

With Farima Berenji  
and Shahzad  
Khorsandi

**Where:** ODC Theater,  
3153 17th St., S.F.

**When:** 8 p.m.

**Saturday-Sunday**

**Tickets:** \$20 to \$35

**Contact:**

(415) 863-9834,  
www.odcdance.org

Farima Berenji, far left, and Shahzad Khorsandi appear in a program of Persian dances in ODC's "Dance and Diaspora" series this week.

## EVENTS

### FRIDAY

**Pam Benjamin:** The comedian appears in the one-woman show "Does This Joke Make Me Look Fat?" 8 p.m., \$10.

Mutiny Radio, 2781 21st St., S.F., <http://perccollective.org>

**Nancy and Beth:** SF Sketchfest presents actresses Megan Mullally and Stephanie Hunt as their comedy musical alter egos. 8 p.m., \$30. Jewish Center, 3200 California St., S.F., (415) 292-1233 or [www.jccsf.org/arts](http://www.jccsf.org/arts)

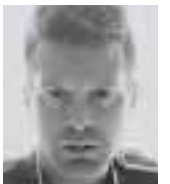
### Royal Southern Brotherhood:

Featuring musicians from the American South's most revered families. The band's lineup includes Cyril Neville, Devon Allman, Mike Zito, Charlie Wooton and Yonrico Scott. 9 p.m., \$21. Great American Music Hall, 859 O'Farrell St., S.F. (415) 885-0750, [www.slimspresents.com](http://www.slimspresents.com)

### SATURDAY

**Tribute to J.J. Cale:** High Sierra Music and Mr. Hat present a tribute to the life and music of the American singer-songwriter (who died in July) with Guitarmageddon, a project featuring Bay Area guitar heroes Josh Clark (Tea Leaf Green), Dan "Lebo" Lebowitz (ALO, Jack Johnson), Jeff Miller (New Monsoon) and band leader Sean Leahy. 9 p.m., \$12-\$15. Brick and Mortar Music Hall, 1710 Mission St., S.F., (415) 800-8782, [www.brickandmortarmusic.com](http://www.brickandmortarmusic.com)

**Mayer Hawthorne:** The singer — who draws influence from Curtis Mayfield, Isaac Hayes, Barry White, Smokey Robinson and J Dilla — is also a DJ, who appears at Temple, 540 Howard St., S.F., following his East Bay concert. 8 p.m., \$27.50. Fox Theater, 1807 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, (800) 745-3000, [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)



# Baryshnikov lights up 'Man in a Case' at Berkeley Rep

By Georgia Rowe  
Special to The S.F. Examiner

Mikhail Baryshnikov is a magnetic presence in "Man in a Case." Even when he's sitting perfectly still, the great dance artist is the moving force in this slender but beguiling 75-minute adaptation of two Anton Chekhov short stories at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

Created by Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parson of Big Dance Theater, the show is an inventive mix of Russian melancholy and contemporary humor with high-tech visuals and Old World narrative. Music and movement buoy the production, which begins with the title story and ends with Chekhov's "About Love."

Baryshnikov, in his second Berkeley Rep appearance after he made

his company debut as the star of "In Paris" in 2012, is the central character of each tale.

In the title story, he plays Belikov, an insular professor whose courtship of an extroverted young woman ends in humiliation. In "About Love," he's a lonely single man hopelessly in love with another man's wife.

Lazar and Parson evoke the Chekhovian atmosphere in decisive touches — actors in wintry coats telling hunting stories with videos of village life projected on big screens. A name-day party yields a mournful song and an exuberant dance.

The action spills across the borders of Peter Ksander's bisected set, with Jennifer Tipton's lighting, Tei Blow's sound designs and Jeff Larson's video creating the warmth of a parlor and the claustrophobic chill of Belikov's



COURTESY T. CHARLES ERICKSON

bedchamber, a rain-soaked cemetery. At the same time, the directors keep the action transparent. Blow and Larson remain onstage, running

## REVIEW

### Man in a Case

Presented by the Berkeley Repertory Theatre

**Where:** 2015 Addison St., Berkeley

**When:** 8 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays-Saturdays, 7 p.m. Wednesdays; 2 p.m. most Sundays; closes Feb. 16

**Tickets:** \$45 to \$125

**Contact:** (510) 647-2949, [www.berkeleyrep.org](http://www.berkeleyrep.org)

Tymberly Canale, left, and Mikhail Baryshnikov do a dance of unrequited love in "Man in a Case" at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

effects on laptops. Peppy contemporary songs inject humorous notes.

The actors walk the stylistic line with finesse. Tymberly Canale is

alluring as Barbara, a luscious sugar plum of a woman whose reckless edge draws Belikov like a moth to a flame. She's just as indelible as Anna, the graceful and refined wife in "About Love."

Chris Giarmo's Ivan and Lazar's Burkin make wry contributions and Aaron Mattocks exudes menace as Kovalenko.

Yet the production doesn't go very deep, and the two halves don't add up to a satisfying whole. Still, Baryshnikov's performance is riveting. Whether he's tumbling down a flight of stairs, dancing to a jazzy melody, describing a full moon or simply sitting motionless, it's impossible to look away. He's the embodiment of Chekhov's humanity, a man caught in the exquisite and unbearable ecstasy of unhappiness.