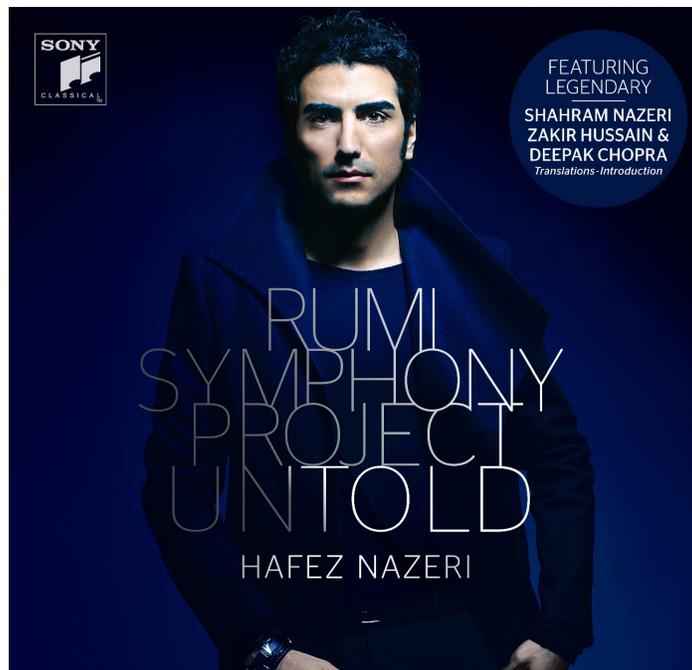


HAFEZ NAZERI'S  
RUMI SYMPHONY PROJECT

# UNTOLD



FEATURING  
SHAHRAM NAZERI, DEEPAK CHOPRA,  
ZAKIR HUSSAIN AND  
38 GRAMMY AWARD WINNERS

2014 PRESS PACKET

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FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, AN ALBUM BY A MIDDLE EASTERN ARTIST HAS HIT #1 IN THE BILLBOARD.COM CLASSICAL CHARTS



## Traditional Classical Albums

Two Weeks	Last Week	This Week	Title, Artist Imprint   label	< April 19, 2014 >	RIAA certification	Peak Pos.	Weeks on Chart
4	2	1	<b>#1</b> <b>Rumi Symphony Project: Untold</b> Hafez Nazeri Sony Classical   Sony Masterworks			1	4
1	1	2	<b>Lent At Ephesus</b> Benedictines Of Mary, Queen Of Apostles Benedictines Of Mary/De Montfort/Decca   Universal Music Classics			1	8
-	5	3	<b>He Is Risen (EP)</b> Mormon Tabernacle Choir / Orchestra At Temple Square (Wilberg/Murphey) Mormon Tabernacle Choir			3	3

FOR THE SECOND TIME, UNTOLD HAS HIT #1 IN  
THE BILLBOARD.COM CLASSICAL CHARTS



## Traditional Classical Albums

Two Weeks   Last Week   This Week   Title, Artist   <   **May 17, 2014**   >   RIAA certification   Peak Pos.   Weeks on Chart

5	3	1	 <b>Rumi Symphony Project: Untold</b> Hafez Nazeri Sony Classical   Sony Masterworks	1	8
3	1	2	<b>Angels And Saints At Ephesus</b> Benedictines Of Mary, Queen Of Apostles Benedictines Of Mary/De Montfort/Decca   Universal Music Classics	1	52
2	2	3	<b>Lent At Ephesus</b> Benedictines Of Mary, Queen Of Apostles Benedictines Of Mary/De Montfort/Decca   Universal	1	12

# How an Iranian musician took ancient Persian poetry to the top of the U.S. charts

FEATURED ON THE FRONT PAGE OF CNN'S INSIDE THE MIDDLE EAST



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**INSIDE** THE **MIDDLE EAST**



Arriving in New York City at the age of 19 to study music, Hafez Nazeri knew he wanted to do big things. A little more than a decade later and he topped the Billboard Classical Music chart with an album featuring 38 Grammy Award winners.

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## How Iranian musician topped U.S. charts

By Gena Somra , for CNN  
July 14, 2014 -- Updated 0541 GMT (1341 HKT)

[CNN.com](http://CNN.com)

(CNN) -- Arriving in New York City at the age of 19 to study music, Hafez Nazeri knew he wanted to do big things.

Now, little more than a decade later, the young Iranian classical composer is riding high with a chart-topping album featuring 38 Grammy Award-winning musicians. "I left Iran with the hope of maybe one day creating music that can connect with the entire world, music that can show another dimension of my culture, and my history," Nazeri says. "I

came to New York with the hopes of integrating two cultures, and creating a new product that is no longer Eastern or Western."

It appears he is well on his way to accomplishing that goal. Nazeri's debut album, "Untold: The Rumi Symphony Project," hit number one twice on Billboard's Classical chart-- a first for an Iranian musician.

"To be number one, this means the world is now listening," Nazeri says. "It is an amazing honor for me, but I feel like it's not about me alone. The success is for Iran, not for me."

Growing up in Iran, Nazeri says he was fortunate enough to be part of a family with strong musical roots.

"I had the opportunity to grow up in a house which was sort of the center for all the great musicians, poets and philosophers, and musical instruments were my toys," he says.

Nazeri's father Shahram Nazeri, who also performs on the album with his son, is one of Iran's most beloved and famous classical singers, and Nazeri says, one of his greatest teachers.



"My father, the tone of his voice, the style of his singing is unique. He broke a lot of Persian classical singing rules and he created his own style by incorporating Rumi's poetry in Persian classical music for the first time 40 years ago."

Rumi, is Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, the 13th century Sufi mystic, poet and philosopher, whose works have been translated into many of the world's languages and whose influence has transcended ethnic and geographical boundaries. Much of Rumi's poetry focuses on love -- more specifically love for the Divine.

And for Nazeri, like his father before him, that love finds a perfect home in musical expression.

"I think music is the sound of God, the sound of the universe for me. Music also has the power to go inside the heart. If you really hear music," says Nazeri. "No matter what it is, if it touches you, you will love it, no matter what background you are from, or what religion you practice."

"One of my ultimate goals," he says, "is to make sure that one day Rumi is as popular as Shakespeare."

And his album is merely the beginning, Nazeri says. Following in his father's footsteps, he brings not only the essence of Persian culture -- but also Rumi's message to an even wider audience than ever before.

"I want to create a revolution with music," the young musician says, "with love rather than hate, or chaos and bloodshed."

"There is another more powerful force in this universe," he continues, "and that force is love, and it's music. And I would love for that message to be the sound of us in this modern time."

<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/14/world/meast/iran-musician-hafez-nazeri-rumi-poetry-peace-and-love/index.html>

# Musician Hafez Nazeri's journey from Iran to New York

FEATURED ON THE FRONT PAGE OF BBC WORLD NEWS

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- Tragic twists of fate
- Those who perished
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- What we know

### Magazine

**From Iran to New York**  
Iranian musician Hafez Nazeri follows his dream

**Bombing Hitler**  
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### Features

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20 July 2014 Last updated at 01:19 BST

Iranian musician Hafez Nazeri left his country 14 years ago to follow his dream in the United States.

The son of acclaimed Iranian singer Shahram Nazeri, he went to New York City to study composing and conducting classical music.

In his first album recorded outside of the country, Nazeri mixed Iranian music with classical Western music, following the path of artists like Yehudi Menuhin and Ravi Shankar who forged music styles in their Grammy Award-winning 1966 album "West Meets East".

In September, he will return to Iran to perform the new music in his home country for the first time.

He spoke to BBC Persian's Sam Farzaneh about his album "Untold" and his musical journey.



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the BBC News Magazine website. The main header is "NEWS MAGAZINE" in white on a dark red background. Below it, there are several menu items: Home, US & Canada, Latin America, UK, Africa, Asia, Europe, Mid-East, Business, Health, and Sci/Environment. A secondary row of links includes Magazine, In Pictures, Also in the News, Editors' Blog, Have Your Say, World News TV, and World Service Radio.

The main content area features a large photograph of a man with dark, curly hair, wearing a white shirt, playing a stringed instrument (likely a tar or similar). Below the photo is the article title: "Musician Hafez Nazeri's journey from Iran to New York". The article is dated "20 July 2014" and was last updated at "01:19 BST". The text of the article begins: "Iranian musician Hafez Nazeri left his country 14 years ago to follow his dream in the United States." and continues: "The son of acclaimed Iranian singer Shahram Nazeri, he went to New York City to study composing and conducting classical music." and "In his first album recorded outside of the country, Nazeri mixed Iranian".

On the right side of the page, there are two sections: "Related video / au" and "Most watched". The "Most watched" section lists two videos: "Ukraine rebels hand over black boxes" (1:31, 2 hours ago) and "The six-year hair pulling selfie" (2:56, 21 July 2014). Below this is a "Top stories" section.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28333811>

# Hafez Nazeri interviewed for BBC World Service Radio

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## Musician Hafez Nazeri's journey from Iran to New York

**DURATION: 08:29**

Persian composer Hafez Nazeri's new album was top of the classical music charts in the United States for two weeks - a rare occurrence for Iranian and Middle Eastern music. BBC Persian's Sam Farzaneh caught up with Hafez to talk about his unique fusion of western and eastern music.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0240kzq>

# VANITY FAIR



Culture - March 13th, 2014

## Persia in New York

HAFEZ NAZERI

Selected by Vanity Fair as the: *#2 most successful Iranian in New York City.*

The son of Iran's most prominent classical musician, Shahram Nazeri, Hafez is a composer who brings East and West together in hauntingly beautiful orchestral pieces. His fifth album, *Untold*, released by Sony March 11, was recorded in five countries with 38 Grammy Award-winning artists.

By Nancy Jo Sales

[http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/03/persian-american-artists-filmmakers-musicians\\_slideshow\\_Hafez-Nazeri\\_2](http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2014/03/persian-american-artists-filmmakers-musicians_slideshow_Hafez-Nazeri_2)

# Hafez Nazeri Bridges Cultures and Galaxies on Untold



By: Richard Gehr on 05.01.14 in Features

## Hafez Nazeri: Rumi Symphony Project

Iranian composer Hafez Nazeri's *Untold* symphony opens with a bang — the Big Bang, to be precise. The first “cycle” of his ongoing Rumi Symphony Project, *Untold* is an attempt to represent the splendor of all creation. Nazeri, who was born in Tehran in 1979, claims to have invested upward of 5,000 studio hours in recording the work, which premiered in 2009. And *Untold*'s opening moments — an all-encompassing cloud of percussive bass tones that soon give way to a gracefully rambling string ensemble — testify to an almost obsessive attention to detail.

*Untold*'s musical aspirations nearly equal its cosmic content.

Steeped in both the improvisatory tradition of his native Iran and Western classical music's rich harmonic strictures, Nazeri takes a boundary-crossing approach, balancing the two and forging a “new sonic universe” altogether. Having lived in New York since 1999, Nazeri pursues a utopian alliance between East and West as well as science and spirit. The good news is that the results mostly justify Nazeri's lofty ambitions.

It's no coincidence that Nazeri's moody opening chords in the “Atomic Peace” section of *Untold*'s “Creation” chapter suggest the sustained double-low C heard in the famous introduction to Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Strauss based that 1896 symphony on a novel by Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher best known for his theory of “eternal return,” which also happens to be the title of *Untold*'s fourth and final chapter. Nazeri also returns to the words of the Sufi poet Rumi as sung by his father, Shahram Nazeri, who popularized the 13th-century Iranian's beatific verses by setting them to music in the 1970s.

Poetry is the cornerstone of Persian culture, and the sound of the voice dominates Persian classical music. In *Untold*, the voices of Hafez and his father represent the human heart of an otherwise uncaring cosmos. Hafez's yearning, wordless voice emerges from the void in the "Dark Matter" section, early in the record. But it's his father's stronger, more expressive voice, improvising swooping, hiccupping variations around Rumi's verses in the following chapter, "Life," that is *Untold*'s first convincing bid for greatness. Wailing above a five-voice choir vamping a catchy two-measure phrase, Shahram embellishes Rumi's stanzas about flesh as the eternal "baggage" of spirit for nearly eight marvelous minutes. A string improvisation in the middle of this section epitomizes the composer's East-West ideal.

There's another sort of fusion at work here as well. The eponymous third chapter is a dizzying dialogue between Nazeri, playing a souped-up eight-stringed version of the traditional six-string Persian lute, and Zakir Hussain, generally acknowledged to be the world's preeminent tabla hero. Nazeri designed his instrument himself, and named it the *hafez* after the 14th-century Persian poet with whom he shares a name. The racing music has the feel of an intense improvisation similar to jazz guitarist John McLaughlin and Zakir Hussain's Indian-jazz project *Shakti*.

Nazeri juggles his *hafez*, choruses, tabla, vocal solos and stuttering string arrangements throughout movements titled "Detachment," "Unity," "Wonderment" and "Absolute Nothingness." Fortunately, the absolute somethingness of his music offsets these abstractions. (The choral clouds of "Unity" might even remind you of Pink Floyd's "Atom Heart Mother.") *Untold* is formally ambitious but musically accessible and specific; Nazeri waters down neither end of the East-West spectrum.

"Eternal Return," the final chapter of *Untold*, is performed entirely in the *Nava dastagah*, one of the 12 principal modes of the Persian musical system. This chapter's six movements combine Eastern percussion (including percussionist Glen Velez's frame drum), Hafez's *hafez*, and Shahram's voice with Western strings. The writing is optimistic, aspiring and often thrilling. Rather than reflecting Nietzsche's notion of an eternally recurring Universal Everything, Nazeri's return announces a homecoming to the sort of higher consciousness advocated by Rumi.

By the time Nazeri embraces *Untold*'s final frontier, "Eternity," he has introduced us to a sonic world that is neither Western nor Persian nor even the "completely new sound" promised in his liner notes. While attempting to express the universal, Hafez Nazeri has succeeded in creating something exquisitely personal. Here's hoping he returns to it soon.

<http://www.wonderingsound.com/feature/hafez-nazeri>

# Hafez Nazeri Is Bringing Rumi's Words To Life (And Fighting For World Peace)

Posted: 04/09/2014 3:10 pm EDT Updated: 04/11/2014 9:59 am EDT



For nearly 800 years, the mystical Sufi poet Rumi's profound and empowering wisdom has inspired countless seekers, both within the Sufi tradition and beyond, with his timeless message of peace, personal transformation and inner wisdom. Following Rumi's timeless words and his own love of the mystical poet, the Iranian composer, vocalist and instrumentalist Hafez Nazeri is bringing the poet's timeless philosophy to both Eastern and Western audiences through a large-scale musical project inspired by Sufi wisdom.

Released last month by Sony Classical, Nazeri's album *Untold* is the first installment of the musician's ongoing Rumi Symphony Project, his long-running effort to "cross cultural boundaries through a new, universal blending of Eastern and Western classical music." The ambitious new album features 38 Grammy award-winning musicians, and took nearly 5,000 studio hours in five countries to complete -- and debuted at No. 1 on Billboard's Traditional Classical Albums chart.

"*Untold* is not just an album, it's all of my ideas in one single recording," Nazeri tells The Huffington Post. "It's the result of nearly 13 years of my life."

The seeds of Nazeri's magnum opus were planted early in life. His own father, the celebrated Persian vocalist Shahram Nazeri (who contributed vocals to *Untold*),

was the first musician to ever set Rumi's poetry to music. Nazeri followed in his father's footsteps from an early age, growing up in a household full of Rumi's poetry and Sufi philosophy and letting those influences inspire his work.

"I've grown up in a house where Rumi played a significant role," says Nazeri. "I come from a Kurdish family, and my father and family had loved Rumi and practiced Sufism for many years. Rumi was a very significant part of my life since I was three years old."

Nazeri was exposed to many different types of music through his father, and grew up teaching classical music to his father's students. He was deeply moved from an early age by Iranian music of the 14th and 15th century, and of course, by the words of Rumi.

Rumi's philosophy shows us the path to reach God inside each of ourselves, Nazeri explains, helping us "to find the true nature of our existence and being by awakening our consciousness." Rumi's poetry also focuses on an inner journey to finding love -- as the poet once famously wrote, "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

Rumi is the most-quoted and cross-culturally celebrated representative of Sufism -- the mystical dimension of Islam that focuses on inner experience and personal transformation over ritual, tradition and dogma -- which emphasizes the power of music and views creative expression and aesthetic experience as a path to awakening the spirit.

Armed with a love of Rumi's poetry and years of musical training, Nazeri moved from Tehran to New York, and has played sold-out shows across the U.S., including a critically acclaimed performance at Carnegie Hall in 2009. Inspired by his new surroundings, he began to weave more Western themes and composition elements into his work.

Having developed a unique style of harmony and orchestration, Nazeri's work is characterized by a melding traditional Iranian music with the complexity of modern Western classical music into a new and undefined genre of music. "This product is no longer Western nor Eastern -- it is a balance of them both," says Nazeri.

Creating a musical product that balances these opposing inspirations has been his biggest creative challenge, says Nazeri. But his goal with the Rumi Symphony Project and his career as a whole transcends the creative -- after witnessing years

of political conflict in his home country, Nazeri hopes that his musical melding of East and West will help to ease tensions between Iran and the West.

"Our country has contributed to the evolution of philosophy, music and literature for many many hundreds of years in a very impactful way," says Nazeri. "But it has also been misinterpreted by the world through a lack of communication.... I hope that one day I will have the honor to represent the reality of my beautiful country and culture through the resonance of my music."

With a growing presence in the U.S., Nazeri is doing just that. The virtuoso joined forces with Deepak Chopra last year, who was inspired by his project and became a supporter. Chopra translated Rumi's poems for Nazeri's recording and wrote an introduction to *Untold*. Later this year, Chopra will join Nazeri for a Los Angeles concert to celebrate Rumi's universal message of peace, love and unity.

"We are living at a time where there is no map anymore and no boundaries," says Nazeri. "We are all becoming part of the same map through the Internet and social media. We really have to be more understanding of one another and music can have a really big role in doing that."

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/hafez-nazeri\\_n\\_4994095.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/hafez-nazeri_n_4994095.html)

## MEET THE IRANIAN MUSICIAN TOPPING U.S. CHARTS WITH CLASSIC PERSIAN POETRY



By Staff writer | Al Arabiya News  
Thursday, 17 July 2014

Meet Hafez Nazari, an Iranian classical composer who is taking the American charts by storm with a new album featuring 38 Grammy Award-winning musicians.

What's the twist? Nazari, who moved to New York when he was 19, draws inspiration for his chart-topping work from 13th Century Persian poet and philosopher Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi.

Nazari's debut album, "Untold: The Rumi Symphony Project," made it to number one twice on the Billboard's Classical chart since its release in March.

In an interview with **CNN**, Nazari said "I want to create a revolution with music, with love rather than hate, or chaos and bloodshed.

"I came to New York with the hopes of integrating two cultures, and creating a new product that is no longer Eastern or Western," he added.

He then won the UCLA creativity award for most distinguished young composer and the Irvine City Hall Award of Distinction in Kurdish music.

Nazeri was raised in Iran and partly credits his success to his upbringing. "I had the opportunity to grow up in a house which was sort of the center for all the great musicians, poets and philosophers, and musical instruments were my toys," he told CNN.

He names his father Shahram Nazeri, who features on his album, as one of his teachers as "he broke a lot of Persian classical singing rules and he created his own style by incorporating Rumi's poetry in Persian classical music for the first time 40 years ago."

Much of Rumi's poetry focuses on love, especially love for the Divine. This is a sentiment shared by Hafez; "I think music is the sound of God, the sound of the universe for me. Music also has the power to go inside the heart. If you really hear music, no matter what it is, if it touches you, you will love it, no matter what background you are from, or what religion you practice.

"One of my ultimate goals is to make sure that one day Rumi is as popular as Shakespeare."

[http://hafeznazeri.us3.list-manage2.com/track/click?  
u=2ed21edf162e0a58e25f7e57c&id=6a04c67528&e=8fcbf38953](http://hafeznazeri.us3.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=2ed21edf162e0a58e25f7e57c&id=6a04c67528&e=8fcbf38953)

# Hafez Nazeri's 'Untold' Crosses Cultural Boundaries

Posted in [News](#) on March 4, 2014



The internationally acclaimed Rumi Symphony Project, by Iranian composer Hafez Nazeri, was created to cross cultural boundaries by integrating Western and Eastern classical music into a new and universal harmony. Inspired by the messages of love and unity by the poet and philosopher Rumi, this groundbreaking project features Nazeri's legendary father, Shahram Nazeri, dubbed the "Pavarotti of Iran" by the New York Times, along with Deepak Chopra, who has greatly impacted and influenced cultures with his wisdom and insights. These revolutionaries will be accompanied by an eclectic ensemble selected from some of the most renowned and influential performers from the East and West in the Symphony's 2014 World Tour. BMI spoke to Nazeri about the tour and the Sony Classical release of the first cycle of the Rumi Symphony, Untold.

## **Tell us about developing the Rumi Symphony project.**

RSP is my ongoing project in the form of different cycles over the years that aspires to cross cultural boundaries through a new universal blending of Eastern and Western classical music. A music, that while keeping the integrity of its ancient Eastern derivation, melds with the complexity of modern Western harmony and orchestration into a new and yet undefined genre of music. The result is no longer one nor the other, but instead a balance of both. This is what I believe has been the main challenge for most of

the cross-cultural projects in the past, because generally one culture will dominate over the other.

One could think of the Rumi Symphony as a child who has an Eastern father and a Western mother. This child would no longer represent either culture, but would be a new identity all its own with an indivisible essence of both. The title of this project is also a symbol for this communion between world cultures. Symphony, which comes from the word “symphony” meaning “musical harmony,” represents the West, and Rumi, who is an iconic mystic Persian poet, represents the East.

**What inspired you about the poet and philosopher Rumi?**

Rumi is a mystic Persian poet, philosopher and spiritual visionary from the thirteenth century. The word of Rumi aspires to show us the path to reaching the true god inside of ourselves and the true nature of our being, by awakening our consciousness. What really fascinates me the most about Rumi is how the words of a man who had passed his vision to us over 800 years ago are still so profound and advanced for us to fully grasp even today. When incorporating the poetry of Rumi into my project, I never wanted to simply use the words of Rumi’s poetry in a lyrical manner, but instead wanted to communicate the ideology and the message of love and unity behind his poetry into my music.

**What dimension does the legendary Deepak Chopra add to this project?**

My connection with him is very magical. I feel that he is like a family member to me. We met the first time only for nearly 12 minutes; those 12 minutes felt like 12 lifetimes. I shared some of my ideas and he loved them and he agreed to be a part of this journey. Since then, everyday he has become more and more of a connection of my soul, as we both hope to take human consciousness to a different awaking. I mean, he has been doing this for years and I hope my music can do the same. I am so delighted and honored that he is next to me.

**How did you go about integrating Western and Eastern classical music?**

I have explained a bit of that on the description of Rumi Symphony, but within the compositions of this recording I have attempted to take traditional Persian music, which is close to the music of the 14th or 15th centuries in the Western world, and transport it into the 20th century by incorporating a variety of modulations, dissonant harmony and chromaticism. These modulations and harmonies are only found within Western Classical music and are not seen in music of Eastern tradition.

**What are the differences between the two sonically and how did you weave them together?**

Eastern music is mostly monophonic and more of an improvisation and soloistic stylization. In our culture, our music is basically a means to reach God. Although Western classical music is polyphonic and rooted mostly in its harmony and orchestration, I think

the main challenge in the balance of these two, and the central difference between them is the concept of harmony. Trying to infuse harmony into Eastern music in a way that doesn't infringe upon its true nature and feeling is the main key to success here.

My goal has always been to find a true balance when integrating the two by fusing the similar musical elements of each in a mannerism that creates my own sense of harmony. So I could say my approach is very personal and hard to explain. I am just expressing the vibrations of my soul and the sounds that I am hearing from the universe into music.

**What do you hope will be the reaction to your music as you play in concert halls across very different cultures?**

In the past, it has always been received very well. Music is a universal language, an audible vibration of our souls, so no matter what language, what music, it would always find its way to peoples' hearts. If there is a powerful and innovative message behind it, then it's even better because it can take the evolution of our mind and imagination of our society to a new height, and *Untold* hopes to present the true essence of that evolution.

**What's it like working with your father, Shahram Nazeri? How has he influenced your career and your ambitions?**

It's a great honor working with him; he has taught me to be different, to be unique and have my own signature in everything I do, as to not be asleep, but instead chisel my own path. I feel that I am a very privileged musician who always had the chance to be among the greatest artists. Even for my recording, *Untold*, I had the honor to involve 38 Grammy award-winning individuals who all have helped me to bring to this epic that which is yet untold to life.

**Tell us about your album *Untold*. What does the name signify?**

*Untold* is the first cycle of my Rumi Symphony Project and portrays the story of our universe from the dawn of time until the very end, through my eyes. It is composed of four distinct chapters that represent the cycles of our existence, and our journey through the seven stages of enlightenment. Over the course of four years, it has taken me 5,000 hours and traveling to 5 different countries to complete this epic.

What makes *Untold* significant and unique is that it is among very few recordings in our time that introduces an innovation and change in all the three major components of music: vocals, composition and orchestration, all at the same time and in one single recording.

[http://www.bmi.com/news/entry/hafez\\_nazeris\\_untold\\_crosses\\_cultural\\_boundaries](http://www.bmi.com/news/entry/hafez_nazeris_untold_crosses_cultural_boundaries)

# This Iranian composer makes a new kind of music that's neither East nor West

PRI's The World

Producer [Shirin Jaafari](#) March 12, 2014 · 6:30 PM EDT



Iranian musician [Hafez Nazeri](#) has been shaking up traditional Persian music for years. Take, for example, his latest album called "Untold," in which he says he wants to make a completely new "creature."

"I've taken the similar musical elements and integrated them from those common points — so the result is not eastern or western. It's this new creature. It's like an eastern man marries a Western woman and their child is not eastern or western, but has its own identity," Nazeri says.

Nazeri says most cross-cultural projects lack balance and that often times when eastern and western music mix, one dominates the other.

He wants to change that and one way he has done that is by limiting the words he uses. That's apparent in in his latest album, titled "Untold."

"[My goal was] to create a music that you can't really define that music by its language. It's mostly the harmony, the rhythm and the sound that's going to communicate with the listener rather than the words," he says.

Besides composing, Nazeri is also a vocalist. He takes a traditional Persian vocal technique, called "tahrir," and transform it into a new form. Nazeri insists that he is not taking traditional Persian techniques and fusing them with Western music. He says he is transforming it.

"If you completely delete the Western aspect [of my music] and play that for an Iranian, they will say this is new," he says.

Classical Persian music is very conservative, Nazeri says, and students strictly follow the their instructors. That's why his new music raised eyebrows in Iran.

But that runs in the family.

Nazeri's father, Shahram Nazeri, who is one of the greatest traditional singers, took a different path than his teachers 45 years ago.

"He broke the tradition and created his own new style and up to this day, people still criticize him," Nazeri says.

Nazeri grew up listening to traditional music as well as playing it. He began taking voice lessons at 3 and by the age of 9, he started playing alongside his father.

He says he's not yet sure how Iranians will react to his latest album. It's scheduled to be released in Iran in a couple of days.

But he does mention a recent press conference: "The great masters of Persian classical music were there and we played seven minutes of this music and they were all very surprised. They didn't know what they were listening to," he says.

And that's the goal for Nazeri: to make a "musical creature" no one has heard before.

<http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-03-12/iranian-composer-makes-new-kind-music-thats-neither-east-nor-west>

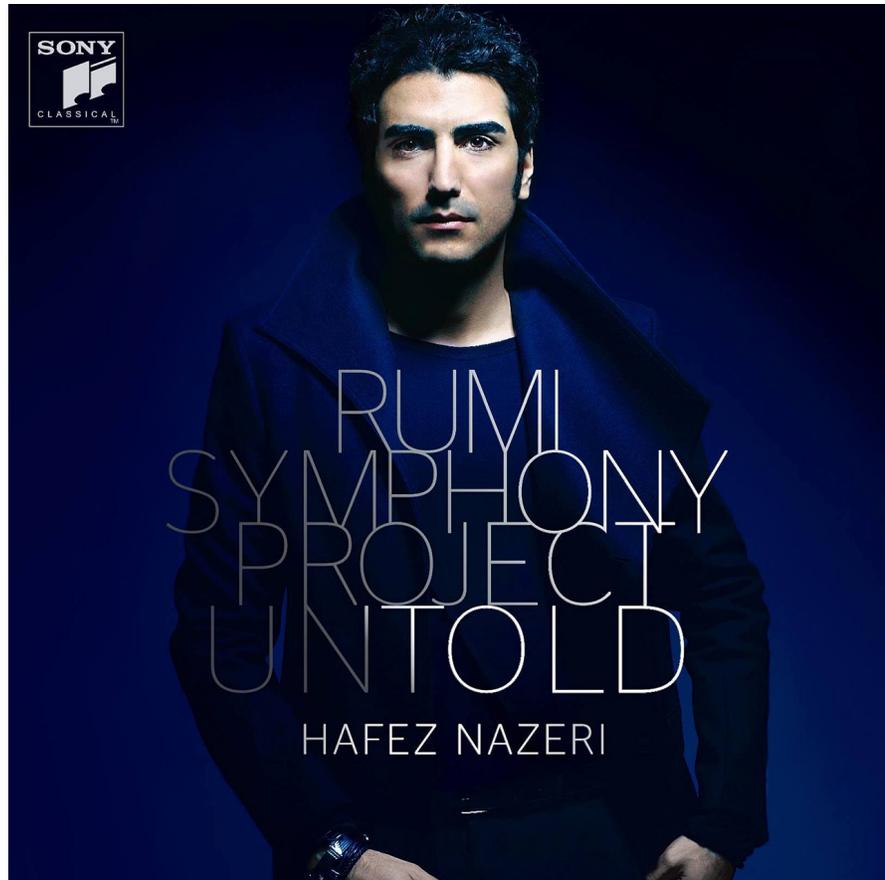
# SUPERB AND MASTERFUL HAFEZ NAZERI

BY TJNELSON - MARCH 29, 2014

There are music critics out there that sit back stone faced like some disinterested Roman emperors willing to offer a tepid thumb up or down. I am not one of those critics. No, I want to be dazzled, overwhelmed, awed and surprised. I want to grab the arm of the person next to me and shake him. As I had no person next to me as I listened to Hafez Nazeri's Rumi Symphony Project Cycle 1 Untold, out on the Sony Classical label, I can report that the cat left supremely

annoyed. Words like masterful or brilliant are pale expressions to describe Iranian composer, vocalist, musician and instrument inventor Hafez Nazeri's Untold, an ongoing project that seeks to musically draw a map of our world and humanity through the poetry and philosophy of the 13th century Persian poet Rumi.

Mr. Nazeri notes, "This album has been an extremely challenging project and has created quite the learning curve for all involved to say the least. I wanted to forge a unique and enduring new direction in music that will bridge all of our world divisions and unify us under a new and universal type of music. A lofty goal, I know, but one that's driven me to leave my beloved home country and reinvent myself and my work over the past decade."



Mr. Nazeri doesn't placate the listener, choosing instead to unapologetically hurl the listener headlong into a musical space that straddles the strictures of classical and modern and the traditions of East and West, entwining the elements to construct a sound that captures the beginning of time in the cosmos, the emergence of earth, the rise of life and the path to spirituality and enlightenment.

Casting a wide web, Mr. Nazeri packs the soundscape of *Unfold* with the Rumi Symphony Orchestra and guest artists viola player Paul Newbauer, cellists Matt Haimovitz and Johannes Moser, tabla and udu drummer Zakir Hussain, frame drummer Glen Velez and special guest Iran's Nightingale and Mr. Nazeri's father, composer and vocalist Shahram Nazeri. Mr. Hafez Nazeri adds his own vocals, percussion and his version of the setar the hafez to his deliciously rich compositions.

Supporter, transcriber of the Rumi poetry in the liner notes and well-known author Deepak Chopra adds his impression of Mr. Nazeri's music this way, "I think this music has the capacity to totally transform our consciousness, literally cause a mutation in our consciousness and as that shifts everything shifts: the way we think, the way we behave, the way we speak to each other and the way we interact with the world."

Divided into chapters "Creation," "Existence," "Untold" and "Eternal Return," *Untold* takes the listener on a spectacular journey that unfolds with spare string lines on "Atomic Peace" before giving way the mystery of "Dark Matter" that is punctuated by the spectacular vocals by Mr. Nazeri.

The spare sweetness of the opening of "Life" transforms as the elder Mr. Nazeri takes over the vocals and the track turns plaintively languid. *Unfold* just gets better and better with additions of choral group and orchestra on such tracks as "The Quest." Tabla work by Mr. Hussain against setar on "Love" shouldn't be missed. "Unity" is richly worked and the vocals prove to be breathtaking. "Dance of the Galaxies," "Freedom" and the elegant "Eternity" are just as astonishing.

*Untold* is by turns boldly brazen, finely intimate and wrenchingly visceral in its tightrope walk between East and West. It is savagely superb and masterful.

<http://worldmusiccentral.org/2014/03/29/superb-and-masterful-hafez-nazeri/>

# HAFEZ NAZERI'S RUMI SYMPHONY PROJECT



April 23, 2014. 12:16 pm • Section: [Entertainment](#), [Events](#), [Music](#)  
Posted by: [Stuart Derdeyn](#)

Hafez Nazeri's latest album is the culmination of a lifetime of musical education and performance.

The 35 year-old Iranian composer's Untold – Rumi Symphony Project – Cycle 1 is a star studded release on Sony Classical which brings together some of the world's leading Persian musicians as well as Indian tabla master Zakir Hussain, Deepak Chopra and legendary singer, and Hafez's father, Shahram Nazeri.

“Back when I was still living in Iran, I began to think about taking Persian classical music, which has remained unchanged for millennia – and approach it a new way, bringing in harmony and more Western classical influence,” says Hafez Nazeri, “I came

to New York to study Western composing and began working on the Rumi Symphony Project in 2005.”

A skilled setar, tanbour (stringed instruments) and daf (Persian frame drum) player, Hafez continued touring and performing. Often accompanying his famous vocalist father. He never stopped laboring away at Untold, which he wanted to be a spiritually moving work.

The Rumi Ensemble which he had formed also often performed across the U.S., introducing pieces as they came about.

“It is not a symphony about Rumi, the renowned poet, theologian and Sufi master, but more a work deeply influenced by his writings,” he says. “It took over five years and 5,000 hours of studio time to put together. There are 38 Grammy Award-winners on the recording which is epic. Thanks to Sony for having the patience.”

The album hit No. 1 in the Billboard Classical charts and has received mostly positive reviews, particularly for the second chapter, Existence/Life.

“I think in many ways that is my most favourite section so far because I went from modal harmonies to Persian singing to a 20 minutes of vocals with no words and just pure emotion,” he says. “Then it gets into even modern dissonance, so you have three different major artistic movements in one piece.”

Nazeri is deeply committed to the classical sounds of both his country of origin and his adopted homeland, but feels strongly that now is the time when music should be expanding its boundaries and bringing more ears to the session.

Taking his inspiration from the 13th Century scribe who is said to be the most popular poet in not only Iran but in the U.S. as well, Hafez Nazeri hopes that his works will prove as enduring and inspirational.

<http://blogs.theprovince.com/2014/04/23/hafez-nazeris-rumi-symphony-project/>



## Composer-musician-vocalist Hafez Nazeri

*The young Iranian-born composer, multi-instrumentalist and vocalist talks about his pioneering and innovative music.*

Hafez Nazeri is Iran's most influential and innovative new composer-vocalist and credited with introducing Persian/Sufi music to the Western world. He began performing with his father, legendary musician Shahram Nazeri, at music festivals in Europe and the Middle East at age nine. At age 21, in a search for new artistic ground, he studied Western classical music in New York and has gone on to perform sold-out concerts at the world's most prestigious concert halls, including Carnegie Hall and the Royal Albert Hall. Nazeri's much-anticipated major label debut, "Rumi Symphony Project Cycle I: Untold"—which took more than 5,000 studio hours in five countries to complete—was released worldwide this year.

*watch now at:*

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/interviews/hafez-nazeri/>

## EAST MEETS WEST IN HAFEZ NAZERI'S UNTOLD

by ALEXANDER VARTY on APR 23, 2014 at 12:54 PM



**BLAME IT ON** Easter. After one short week at the head of *Billboard's* classical charts, Hafez Nazeri's *Rumi Symphony Project: Untold* has been knocked back to number five, with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's *He Is Risen* capturing the top spot. Nonetheless, it's miraculous that an album combining contemporary choral music with Iranian art song should rise so far—and telling that Nazeri's surprise hit is the culmination of a lifetime's work.

“It took me nearly 20 years,” the 34-year-old Nazeri explains, speaking in lightly accented English from his New York City home. “Through *Untold*, I've created my own universe. It has everything; it has my childhood, the way I grew up....it's a combination of so many things that finally came together at the end.”

Some aspects of *Untold* find Nazeri paying homage to his musical roots and genetic heritage. He's the son of the celebrated Persian singer Shahram Nazeri, one of the Rumi Symphony Project's principal soloists, and grew up surrounded by music. “By the age of four or five I completely knew the Persian repertoire,” he says. “And when I was nine years old I started playing percussion instruments as

well, so I had a very good perspective on Persian singing, the Persian instrumental repertoire because I played *setar*, and I also learned this percussion instrument, *daf*, which gave me a very good perspective about rhythm. I had all of this with me as I was growing up, and finally, before I left Iran when I was 18 years old, I created a small band and basically brought western harmony to an ensemble of three melodic instruments.”

The rise of Nazeri’s innovative Rumi Ensemble coincided with the loosening of restrictions on musical performance: at its peak, the band could pack stadiums with its youthful take on an ancient tradition. But its leader wanted more. He was already conceptualizing an unprecedented fusion of western harmony and Middle Eastern melody, and knew that in order to make it work he’d have to learn classical music from the inside. Enrolling in Manhattan’s Mannes College, he continued to play Persian music while earning degrees in composition and conducting. *Untold*, in a sense, is his master’s thesis.

Nazeri is not, of course, the first to hybridize eastern and western forms, but *Untold* is certainly one of the most satisfying attempts of its kind.

“We have seen a lot of integration of western and eastern musical concepts, and in my opinion 99 percent of these projects are not successful, because whenever two cultures come together, always one culture dominates the other one,” he says. “So my main goal with the Rumi Symphony Project has been to create a balance.”

Still to come, for Vancouver at least, is a full orchestral performance of *Untold*; economics dictate that, for now, Nazeri is touring with a scaled-back band of violin, viola, cello, and two percussionists. Both Nazeri and his father will sing, and the younger musician adds his own *hafez*, an updated version of the *setar* that he’s made more guitarlike with the addition of extra strings. The smaller group’s sound won’t have the heft of Nazeri’s impressive recording—but the spirit of his expansive vision should come through intact.

<http://www.straight.com/music/632336/east-meets-west-hafez-nazeris-untold>

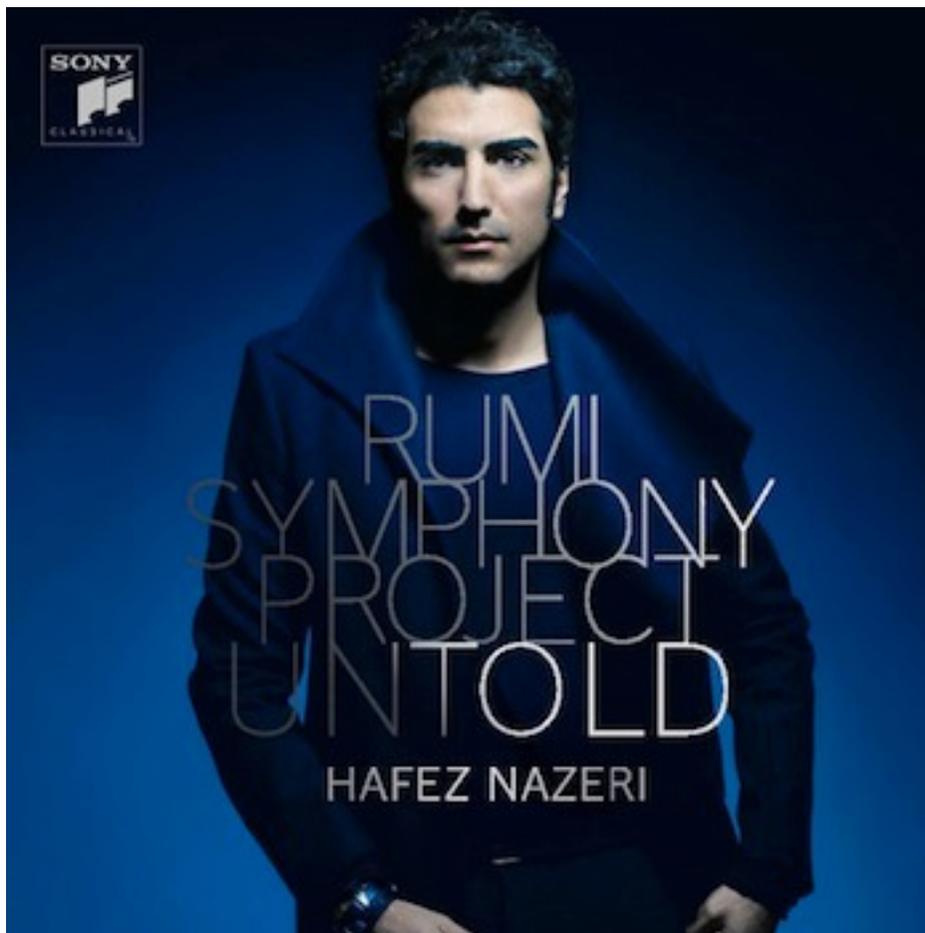
# Music Review: Hafez Nazeri – ‘Untold: The Rumi Symphony Project’

Posted by: Richard Marcus

March 30, 2014 in Album Reviews, Classical, Folk, Music, Music Genres, Reviews music, Top Stories, World

Ever since the first of their three *West Meets East* collaborations was released in 1966, many other musicians from both East and West have attempted to follow in the footsteps

of violinist **Yehudi Menuhin** and sitar virtuoso **Ravi Shankar**'s attempt to find common ground between the two musical traditions. While there's no question the results have always been intriguing none of them have found a way to merge the two with any real success. Usually the results have been the superimposing of one over the other with either switching to conform to the harmonics and rhythmic patterns of the other.



If one were to think of it in terms of linguistics, it would be the equivalent of trying to merge Farsi or Hindi with English or German and creating a language with enough elements in common speakers of the original languages would be able to understand the new tongue. This is what classical Persian composer, Iranian **Hafez Nazeri** has attempted

to accomplish with his latest composition, *Untold: The Rumi Symphony Project*. The new work, released on the **Sony Masterworks** label reflects the poetry of the 13th century Sufi mystic and poet Jalal as-Din Muhammad Balkhi, better known as Rumi in the West, as his inspiration for the music and the themes it expresses. To accompany the new release, Nazeri is also touring North American concert halls throughout March and April.

While the choice of a medieval Persian mystic's poetry might seem an odd one to serve as a bridge between Western and Eastern classical traditions, it's important to remember some of the most awe-inspiring classical music in European history have been spiritual works. Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Bach, and many others all wrote pieces glorifying spiritual love in much the same vein as Rumi's poetry. If you think, well one is Muslim while the others are Christian, the following Rumi quote included in the liner notes show you the poet didn't make that distinction, so maybe we shouldn't: "We dance behind veils/Muslim, Christian, Jew are the masks we wear/in truth, we are not here/This is our shadow dance."

However, even with the establishment of thematic common ground Nazeri still had to find a way of blending the musics of two cultures with vastly different histories and means of expression. Aside from undertaking an extensive study of European classical music, he also took the extraordinary step of modifying a traditional Persian stringed instrument, the setar, to work as the bridge between the two forms. Working with Iranian luthiers, and 40 prototypes later, he added two strings to the lute like instrument to increase its range and allow it to play both polyphonic sounds and harmonies, two integral elements of Western classical music lacking in its Persian counterpart. He named the new instrument after another great 13th century poet, the man he was named for, Hafez.

The setar has always been a key element in Persian music with its distinctive sound being central to most classical pieces. The modifications Nazeri introduced to the instrument have done nothing to change the way it sounds, but has expanded its abilities. Instead of being a solo instrument, it can now played in concert with others and be part of a larger ensemble. In the case of this piece that consists of cello, violin, viola, tabla, udu drum, frame drums (hand held drums), choir and solo voice.

*Untold* is divided up into four chapters with each of the chapters: "Creation", "Existence", "Untold", and "Eternal Return" representing a different aspect of the spiritual history of life on both a cosmic and human level. According to Nazeri's liner notes the first and second chapter deal with first the creation of the universe and life respectively. The third chapter deals with the steps humans take on the road to spiritual enlightenment while the fourth is about the possibility of exploring new horizons and

finding the means to combine traditions in order to create a “new consciousness, a new experience of self-identity, a new whole that is larger than the sum of the parts.” (Hafez Nazeri)

As to the music itself, I don't have sufficient knowledge of Persian classical music to comment on how successful Nazeri has been in bringing about its union with its European counterpart except in the broadest of generalities. What I did notice and appreciate was how he has managed to keep both their unique voices alive instead of allowing one to drown out the other. Take for example the use of the string section, (cello, violin and viola) when accompanying the work of both Nazeri and his father, the world renowned Iranian tenor **Sharam Nazeri**, as solo vocalists. Instead of their voices being alone in carrying the melody with the instruments providing a rhythmic counterpoint, they, and the hafez, play either harmony or melodic support.

Improvisation around specific themes has always played a major role in the music of South East Asia. We are probably most familiar with this as it is practiced in the classical music of India where the sitar plays ragas which are improvisations based on a set of previously determined notes in a specific scale. (That's a very simplistic way of describing what is an incredibly complicated process that can take years to master) Allowing the Western stringed instruments to improvise in the midpoint of Chapter Two, “Existence”, is a daring move which preserves the form of its Asian heritage while utilizing the sounds of instruments familiar to Western ears.

In the classical music we're most familiar with, percussion hardly ever plays more than a supporting role. Except in very specific instances, we hardly ever notice kettle drums and similar instruments amidst the massed strings, brass and woodwind instruments of an orchestral or chamber piece. The same cannot be said for Eastern music, where instruments like the tabla play a prominent role. Normally, a tabla player works within certain pre-existing parameters to provide the rhythmic accompaniment for either voice or instrument. However, in this piece, the tabla plays a mixture of melody and rhythm with added textures being supplied by both the cello and the hafez resulting in a collage of sounds both beautiful and astounding.

However, technical details like those described above, fade into the background as one listens to the results created by Nazeri and his fellow musicians. The true mark of his success is how quickly you forget about the different styles and instruments and how easily you're captivated by the music. From Shahram Nazeri's stirring voice in the second and fourth chapters, the intricate and beautiful instrumental magic provided by all the musicians, to the choral accompaniment at various points throughout, *Untold: The Rumi Symphony Project* is a constant source of awe and wonder.

There's no way of knowing how it will resonate with specific individuals on a spiritual level, but emotionally is a different matter. You'd have to have ice in your veins and a heart of stone not to be moved while listening to this music. Without a doubt this is one of the most beautiful pieces of music I've heard in a long time. Hopefully this marks the beginning of a brand new musical tradition, one with the ability to move audiences no matter what their religion, cultural or ethnic background.

<http://blogcritics.org/music-review-hafez-nazeri-untold-the-rumi-symphony-project/2/>

# Los Angeles Times

**L.A. Times recommends "The Passion of Rumi" for the Best Traditional World Music Album for this year's Grammy Award**

**Grammy voters: Now hear these!**

M.I.A., Of Montreal, Beck and others have contributed works of quality this year that you might overlook. Please don't.

Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

The recording Academy has mailed out some 11,000 Grammy Award nomination ballots to voting members, who have until Nov. 7 to consider the possibilities and return them for tabulation. While they're mulling the countless options, Calendar's pop music staff and contributors offer a few humble suggestions -- artists or individual of most voters -- that deserve to be heard before those final nominations are chosen.

**Traditional World Music Album:**  
Shahram and Hafez Nazeri, "The Passion of Rumi"  
(QuarterTone Productions)

In the world-music categories, the line between "traditional" and "contemporary" has often been blurred, a reflection of the increased marketability of cross-genre world recordings. The result too often has been a shotgun marriage between exotic ethnic sounds and studio-produced grooves. Not so with Shahram and Hafez Nazeri's "The Passion of Rumi". Shahram's extraordinary singing soars through his improvisations on Rumi poems, accompanied by his son Hafez's stunning blend of Middle Eastern musical structures with the trappings of Western orchestration.-- Don Heckman



*The Passion of Rumi*

# Los Angeles Times

## Iranian composer takes Rumi's poetry to new heights

By Don Heckman  
August 16, 2007

The words "Rumi" and "Disney" may not seem to belong in the same sentence -- or even the same location. But they'll be together Friday night, when Iranian composer **Hafez Nazeri** presents the world premiere of his Rumi Symphony Project at Disney Hall, celebration the 800th birthday of the Persian poet and mystic.

Nazeri is the son of vocalist Shahram Nazeri, an icon of Persian music described as the "Persian Nightingale" and "Iran's Pavarotti." The elder Nazeri will be featured in the Rumi Project.

"My father was the first Iranian singer to set Rumi's poetry to music, 35 years ago," Nazeri says. "And I grew up studying, learning so many things about Rumi's life."

"We consider Rumi not just a poet, but a philosopher. And what we wanted to do, especially since he has become so popular in the West, is show his reality in our music. You know, in one of his poems, Rumi says, "I'm not a poet. Poems are just an excuse for me to say what I want to say. Go beyond my poetry."

Nazeri's composition for a seven-piece ensemble combines Western instrumentation (violas and cellos) with Iranian setar, daf and Indian percussion.

"We tried to portray Rumi's philosophy of life, the message of love, the message of peace," Nazeri says. "And that's my challenge, especially when the media is full of war and fighting. Here I am, a 28-year-old Iranian guy, coming to Disney Hall with a music that tries to bridge West and East, that tries to be the sound of the billions of people who are calling for peace, not war. I like to think that's something Rumi would have understood."



Nick Saglimbeni

***CHALLENGE:** "We've tried to portray Rumi's philosophy of life, the message of love, the message of peace," Hafez Nazeri says.*

# The Washington Post

Arts Beat

## Rumi's Time Has Come (Again)

With U-Md. Conference on tap; 13th-Century Poet Is Still Touching Hearts

By Rachel Beckman Washington Post Staff Writer

Rumi is hot.

The 13th-century Persian poet inspired a symphony in Los Angeles recently that brought 2,000 people to their feet. About 750,000 books of his poetry have been sold, a quality that would make many Pulitzer Prize-winning poets drool. The University of Maryland is hosting a three-day conference about him in September. Some would call it the year of Rumi.

But wait -- they have

The United Nations declared 2007, the 800th anniversary of the poet's birth, the International Year of Rumi. Mr. Popularity was born Sept. 30, 1207, near Balkh in what is now Afghanistan. He became an Islamic scholar and embraced Islam's mystic tradition of Sufism. Along the way, he wrote thousands of poems. An untitled snippet:

In the body of the world, they say,  
there is a soul  
and you are that.

But we have ways within each other  
that will never be said by anyone.

It's mostly his romantic and spiritual poems that have captured English speaking fans. (He's quite popular on the wedding circuit these days.)

Rumi -- like Shakespeare and Mozart -- travels well, says Akbar Ahmed, chairman of the Islamic studies department at American University. Rumi's message of unity and peace is needed in America right now, he says.

"You're seeing the Americanization of Rumi," Ahmed says. "I am mighty pleased, because the message is coming across -- the message of love. We are transcending our prejudices and stereotypes."

Ahmed says Rumi's popularity is ironic because the poet's birthplace is a country that many Westerners are quick to associate with the Taliban

Poet Coleman Barks is widely credited with introducing Rumi to the English-speaking world. In 1976, he said, poet Robert Bly handed to be "released from their cages." Nearly 20 volumes of translated poems later, Rumi is one of America's top-selling poets.

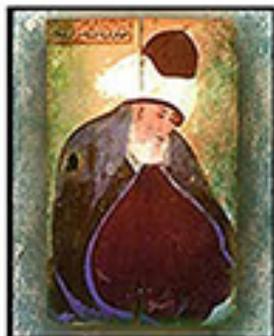
"Western civilization has discovered the beauty of his ecstatic vision," Barks says. "The sense that being in a body is a state of rapture. And an interconnectedness among all life."

Hafez Nazeri is a New York based composer who premiered his Rumi Symphony Project two weeks ago in Los Angeles. He counted nine standing ovations. "Oh my god, it was crazy!" he says. "I would never expect people to respond ... like that."

His father, Persian music icon Shahram Nazeri, was the first vocalist to set Rumi's poetry to music, 35 years ago, he says. Hafez Nazeri started memorizing the poems at age 6. Nazeri's symphony, which sold out Walt Disney Concert Hall, combined elements of Persian classical music with Western instruments such as violas and cellos.

Closer to Washington, the University of Maryland's Center for Persian Studies will offer a free three-day conference on the mystic poet that will bring together about 20 Rumi scholars. Topics include "Rumi in New Media," "Sexual Difference and Spiritual Knowledge: The Bedouin and His Wife in Rumi's Masnavi" and "Rumi, Best Seller."

*The Conference runs Sept. 28-30, at the University of Maryland, College Park. Free; no registration necessary.*



Composer Hafez Nazeri, left, premiered his Rumi Symphony Project in Los Angeles recently to standing ovation. Above, an image of the Persian poet graces a book of translated Rumi poems, Colman Barks's "The Glance: Songs of Soul-Meeting"



## Dreaming of Peace, Iranian Composer Heads to Carnegie Hall

by [KARYN MONGET](#)

Posted **FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 04, 2009**

From [WWD ISSUE 09/04/2009](#)



Hafez Nazeri

Photo By [George Chinsee](#)

For Hafez Nazeri, the opportunity to be the first Iranian composer to headline Carnegie Hall with his opus titled "Iranian Sounds of Peace" will fulfill a dream of helping promote peace and understanding between Eastern and Western cultures, especially after the crackdown on the 2009 Iranian election protests in June.

The New York debut on Nov. 14 will be presented by the Nazeri Music Foundation, Absolutely Live Entertainment and the Asia Society. Nazeri's New York appearance with his father, Shahram Nazir, long considered the Pavarotti of Iran, will follow a presentation in Los Angeles on Oct. 3 at the Pantages Theatre, titled "Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One." Nazeri describes the modern concept and philosophy behind this opus as a "musical discourse to promote world peace."

"At a time when all that we hear about Iran is filtered through headlines of intolerance, chaos and violence, I feel it is important to portray a 7,000-year cultural history with its deeply poetic and artistic mystical traditions," says Nazeri. His goal is to be the "new face of Iran in the West, and create something that talks to young Iranians."

Nazeri's works, including the newest, "Night Angel," to be released in 2010, could well do that. Reminiscent of a fairy tale set in ancient Persia's purple night sky, it evokes the passion of a star-crossed angel and his lover, a Persian flower. The result is a combination of classical Western music with the pitch and tone of his homeland, his Kurdish heritage and Indian ragas (melodic modes).

Nazeri, whose work has been performed at a number of venues including London's Royal Albert Hall, the Theatre de Ville in Paris and the De Bijloke in Belgium, notes, "Americans are going to understand my work fairly easily because they will hear their own classical music, but they will hear something very different in it. Because we will be singing in Farsi, it will be like going to an opera and hearing something in Italian."

Nazeri, 30, is his country's most influential young composer. A main inspiration is gleaned from Rumi, the 13th century mystic poet. He also created a new musical instrument based on the traditional four-string sitar called The Hafez, which has two additional low strings to craft greater a melodic range.

Here, Nazeri talks about his work as well as his Carnegie Hall debut.

**WWD:** When did you begin what you describe as a free and borderless sound of both classic Persian and Western music?

**Hafez Nazeri:** I started playing Persian music when I was three years old, the sitar and the tanbur lutes, the daf drum, and at age 9 started singing at music festivals in Paris and Avignon, France. I lived in Iran until I was 19. I attended Mannes College of Music in Manhattan and received a diploma in composition and conducting in 2005. I had no idea I would be coming to New York to study Western classical music.

**WWD:** What was the turning point in your career?

**H.N.:** I always wanted to create something different. When I first composed "Passion of the Rumi" at age 19 in Iran, I gathered four other young musicians. It was the first time a great musical master, my father, played with five young musicians. The Middle Eastern mentality is very conservative. It was a huge controversy and everybody went crazy.

**WWD:** So far, what has been your biggest accomplishment?

**H.N.:** The "Rumi Ensemble" with my father in 2000, a 20-city tour across Iran including the late Shah's palace. We even played in front of 140,000 in Tehran. This is what I want to do again. I need to bring Western classical music to them, but I need to talk to the government and tell them, "Let me do this for the young people. They have nothing to listen to." Young people are burning and dying over there for culture and music. They can't record anything and they don't have access to concerts, just traditional Persian music. When I was growing up I was a huge Metallica fan.

**WWD:** Have you spoken with the Iranian government about this project?

**H.N.:** Yes, a minister in the Department of Culture said we'll do it. But it has to go through so many channels. And one of the laws over there is you can't have more than 8,000 to 10,000 people in one place.

## An Iranian Musician Composes Songs of Peace

By John Jurgensen



Shore Fire Media

Hafez Nazeri

Thank the famous Iranian singer Shahram Nazeri for helping to popularize Rumi, a 13th century Middle Eastern poet whose verses about finding an inner god struck a chord with New Agers in the West. "When my father sang Rumi everybody laughed at him. Now, Madonna sings Rumi, too," says Nazeri's son Hafez.

The junior Nazeri predicts a similar cultural makeover for Ferdowsi, whose first

millennium epic poetry is said to have inspired C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, not to mention countless Eastern writers and artists. Hafez Nazeri has written the verse of Rumi and Ferdowsi into compositions that make their New York debut Saturday night at Carnegie Hall, where the Nazeri will present a concert called Iranian Sounds of Peace.

For the performance, the 30-year-old composer and musician has assembled a pan-national ensemble, including himself, his father and members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Nazeri first staged a version of the concert last month in Los Angeles.

His goal has been to combine Western classical music and Middle Eastern music. "Most of the time when two cultures come together, one dominates the other," he says, adding that his work represents "essentially a new music."

Such fusion doesn't come easy. The musicians spent about four months in rehearsals as the classical players absorbed Middle Eastern techniques, which incorporate different rhythms and harmonies, and invite embellishments and improvisation. Part of the rehearsal process: asking his classically-trained colleagues to ignore the sheet music. Nazeri says, "You close your eyes and translate the moment into the music."

Nazeri was raised in Tehran, where he absorbed the lessons of his father's circle of virtuosos. He relocated to New York about 10 years ago, giving up the high life as the Iranian equivalent of "Michael Jackson's son," he says, and a successful music career of his own. Shortly after 9/11, he enrolled in the Manhattan School of Music, where he steered clear of the expatriate community and pursued his musical ambition to "show another dimension of Iran."

Back home, however, many view his music with deep skepticism, he says, because Persian folk musicians are so reverential of tradition. But the music's attachment to history is what's holding it back on the world stage, Nazeri says. "That's been the issue with Persian music that never evolved. How come Indian music could introduce itself to the world? Or Arabic or African music? Why not Persian music?"

## Iranian father and son make music to bridge gap

By Richard Roth, CNN

November 17, 2009 2:55 p.m. EST

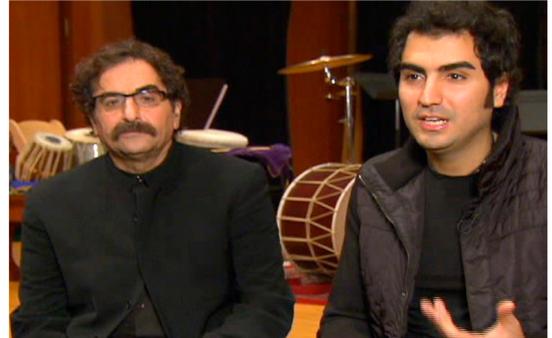
**New York (CNN)** -- Diplomacy hasn't worked. Sanctions have achieved little. Relations between Iran and the United States are, at best, chilly. So why not try music?

On Saturday night, for the first time, Iranians were the headline performers at New York City's famed Carnegie Hall. A father and son from Iran led American musicians in a hybrid session of traditional Iranian and classical Western music.

Thirty-year-old Hafez Nazeri told CNN he was pleased to present "another dimension of Iran and Iranian culture to the Western people."

Nazeri, who now lives in the United States, said, "We hear mostly about the other side -- bloodshed, chaos -- and I wanted to be able to present the reality of our culture, which is about peace and love and unity."

Nearly 3,000 people, many of them Persians, flocked to Carnegie Hall for the concert. One patron said, "The message was completely obvious: Love all the way. Peace!"



Shahrem Nazeri, left, and his son Hafez Nazeri hope their music shows Americans another side of Iranian culture.

With just a few musicians, they form a rare group, blending Persian traditional themes with Western classical style. It's very simple in presentation: a cello, percussion and an improvised setar -- a Persian instrument like a lute -- played by Hafez Nazeri.

The Nazeris' [music](#) is based on the 13th-century Persian poet and philosopher Rumi.

"The idea of the music is to bring unity and to be able to create a music that is not just for Iranians, it's for people from all over the world," the younger Nazeri said.

Rachel Cooper, director of cultural programs and performing arts at the Asia Society, said, "You're seeing the Iranian culture and the Western culture in something that's a kind of hybrid, that I think represents the times that we live in."

The Nazeris receive cultural support from the nonprofit New York-based Asia Society, Cooper told CNN.

"We've been going through this time period where we've been thinking about the Berlin Wall coming down, and throughout that period of the Cold War, cultural relations were always a really important component. So I think that cultural relations -- music in particular -- are a really important part of how we know each other as human beings," Cooper said.

The Nazeris have performed in cities across the United States in recent years.



Click to play

Video: Iranians play Carnegie Hall

[Our] music ... is not just for Iranians, it's for people from all over the world.

--Hafez Nazeri, Iranian musician

The Nazeris said it was an honor to be onstage at the historic music center. The younger Nazeri said his music might be able to bridge cultural divides between Iran and the United States.

His father, Shahrem, still lives in [Iran](#). Speaking in Farsi, the man known as the Iranian Pavarotti talked about the demonstrations that followed June's disputed Iranian presidential election.

The tenor said some of the people in the streets are "requesting something, and I think it's important to answer to their requests. The government should answer to their requests and they have to see what their people want."

The Nazeris are two of the few Iranian musicians allowed to freely travel and perform in Iran. Western-style popular music is banned in Iran.

RELATED TOPICS



AUGUST 4, 2009

## Hafez Nazeri Premieres Rumi Symphony Project In L.A. And NYC

**Iranian Composer Seeks New Dialogue Between East And West**

*by Tom Pryor*

Iranian composer Hafez Nazeri recently announced the opening of his new project, The "Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One" this fall. The piece will debut in two parts. In Los Angeles, the performance entitled "Rite of Fall: Mehregan" will be presented at the Pantages Theatre on Saturday, October 3rd. In New York City, the performance entitled "Iranian Sounds of Peace" will be presented at Carnegie Hall on Saturday, November 14th. "Iranian Sounds of Peace" is the first Iranian headlining event at this Carnegie Hall.

The works to be performed are composed by 29-year-old Hafez Nazeri, Iran's most influential young composer and mark a new chapter in integrating Middle Eastern and Western traditions through the music of both cultures. Nazeri describes the

concept and philosophy behind this opus as "a musical discourse to promote world peace."

"At a time when all that we hear about Iran is filtered through headlines of intolerance, chaos and violence, it is important to portray a 7,000 year cultural history with its deeply poetic and artistic mystical traditions," explains Nazeri.

Together with his internationally acclaimed father, Shahram Nazeri - dubbed the "Iranian Pavarotti" and the first to set Rumi's poetry to music over 40 years ago - the Nazeri's will continue their legacy of expanding the definition of Persian music with the "Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One."

Musicians joining Hafez Nazeri ("Hafez" setar/vocals) and Shahram Nazeri (vocals) are: Artists of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Paul Neubauer, viola; Ida Kavafian, viola and Fred Sherry, cello; in addition to Matt Haimovitz, cello; Tim Cobb, double bass; Hussein Zahawy, percussion and Salar Nader, percussion

Nazeri's music captures and preserves the essence and elemental structures of Persian music, while embracing new ideas developed out of Western Classical music such as orchestration, harmony, rhythmic patterns and melodic forms. The music's broad accessibility opens the cultural dialogue to new listeners worldwide, and matches the transcendent tone of Rumi's Sufi poetry, transposed into the context of a new age.

Not only is Hafez Nazeri the composer of the work but he will also sing and play the new instrument he has created based on the traditional setar. The instrument is named "Hafez," referring to the composer and his namesake, the great 13th century mystic poet. The "Hafez" extends the range of the setar by incorporating two additional low strings to craft greater melodic and harmonic range - making it the first new Iranian instrument developed in modern times.

# Hafez Nazeri: From Iran, Music Beyond Politics

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by *Lara Pellegrinelli*



[Enlarge](#)  
 Courtesy of the artist  
 Hafez Nazeri's "Sounds of Peace" program will make him the first Iranian to headline Carnegie Hall.

November 14, 2009 - On Nov. 14, Hafez Nazeri will headline at Carnegie Hall. The young Iranian musician has been attracting attention for "Sounds of Peace," an East-meets-West program inspired by a progressive political vision. Or is it?

## Troublemaker

Nazeri likes to think of himself as a troublemaker.

"I was always controversial, because whatever I do, I always wanted to make change," Nazeri says. "So many people, they don't like it. The conservative people don't want to see the change, and if you touch, it means you are destroying a tradition."

The 30-year-old has never been big on "Look but don't touch." Son of the famous vocalist Sharam Nazeri, young Hafez was only 3 when he started to play the *setar*, a traditional Persian lute. By 9, he was performing alongside his father at European festivals. In his latest ensemble, the Rumi Symphony Project, Nazeri is joined by his father, percussionist Hussein Zahawy and Western classical string players — a gesture symbolizing unity among cultures.

## East Meets West

Nazeri became interested in creating this kind of musical mix when he came to New York and studied composition at Mannes College The New School for Music.

"Western composers, when they talk about Middle Eastern music, right away, they talk about quarter tones," Nazeri says. "You know, 'It's so cool. Yes, how does it work?'"

Those are notes that would literally fit between the white keys and the black keys on a piano, a characteristic feature that gives Persian music a melodic richness.

For the Rumi Symphony Project, Nazeri chose to play in a melodic mode that has almost no quarter tones in order to meld these traditions. It's hardly a radical solution, but then again, fusion: between Persian and Western classical traditions are nothing new.

## Barriers

Stephen Blum, a Persian-music scholar and professor at the CUNY Graduate Center, says that military bands helped make Western music important in Iran in the late 19th century. He says that Western influences became controversial with cultural policies instituted after the Iran-Iraq war in 1988.

"The government was very opposed to what they called the cultural invasion of the West," Blum says, "so they encouraged indigenous classical music and also music of the regions, and started to have festivals in the mid-1990s."

The careers of musicians like Nazeri's father were able to blossom as a result. They were a select few, though, and it's even tougher to succeed today.

"Young musicians don't have enough opportunities to perform," Blum says. "It's very difficult to arrange concerts. And even when something has been approved, the approval can be taken away at the last minute."

On the Nazeris' "Passion of Rumi" tour in 2000, they performed to 140,000 people over four nights at Tehran's Saadabad Palace, former home of the shah. Having had the experience of living in New York for the better part of a decade, the younger Nazeri still doesn't see much difference between being a musician in Iran and the West.

"Of course, in Iran, we have certain laws and rules and limitations, but I don't think that's a huge difference," Nazeri says. "For instance, a limitation is that woman can't sing in public. When you are releasing a recording, or if you are going to have a concert, you have to get permission from the cultural minister, whoever represents music in Tehran. They have to know about the poetry you use."

Not a big difference? Maybe not, if you're descended from musical royalty.

"Sometimes they let you do it; sometimes they don't," Nazeri says. "I don't think that happens to me and my father, that they don't allow us to do something because my father is an icon there. They respect him very much."

## Unavoidable Politics

Vocalist, composer and performance artist Sussan Deyhim was born in Iran but has lived in the U.S. since 1980.

"Right now, we don't have the luxury of being apolitical," she says. "It's just a situation that's just not in the picture. Every single person counts. Every single person can help shedding light. But the problem is, you have to be informed."

It's been a while since she has taken the stage at Carnegie Hall, but she packed Le Poisson Rouge in Greenwich Village for a protest and solidarity concert. It was Sept. 24, the same day Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was greeted by protesters at the U.N.

Nazeri wants to use Rumi's poetry to create a music beyond politics, to help create a more positive image of Iran than what he sees in the American media.

"This is a different time," he says. "We don't want to hear about war. We want to hear about peace and love. We want to hear how people wanted to be next to each other, to work with each other, to love each other, rather than hearing all this conflict and hearing all these negative things from news and the bad things that happen in the world."

Deyhim, who had always been skeptical of activism, says that Iranians have already begun to change that image themselves.

"When the image is a bunch of penguin-looking dark-veiled women with bearded men, you know that whole thing," she says. "Then, suddenly, you see this whole new generation of young people who are so Internet-savvy, so cyber-eloquent ... it's liberating."

These may not be the sounds of peace, but for many people, that was the whole point of coming together after the election.

## Hafez Nazeri Plays His Setar



by [John Oseid](#)

For a string musician, a broken fingernail will ruin your day. When Persian classical [setar](#) player [Hafez Nazeri](#) stopped by the *Condé Nast Traveler* offices recently to share his music with us, he was vexed over just suffering that fate. And then he promptly set to work improvising to the poems of the great thirteenth-century mystic [Rumi](#) and gave me goosebumps.

In this video shot by *Condé Nast Traveler* photo editor Damian Vincent, the 30-year-old NYC-based Hafez talks about how he blends eastern and western sounds with his setar (he calls his customized instrument with two extra strings the "Hafez"). In his master class 14 stories above Times Square, he talks about his love for Persian culture and about modern Iran. I can't wait to see him onstage.

Hafez will perform his Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One on October 3 at Hollywood's Art Deco gem, the [Pantages Theatre](#), and November 14 at [Carnegie Hall](#). Both shows will feature Hafez's famous father, Shahram Nazeri, on vocals, and members of the [Chamber Music Society](#) of Lincoln Center.

### More music:

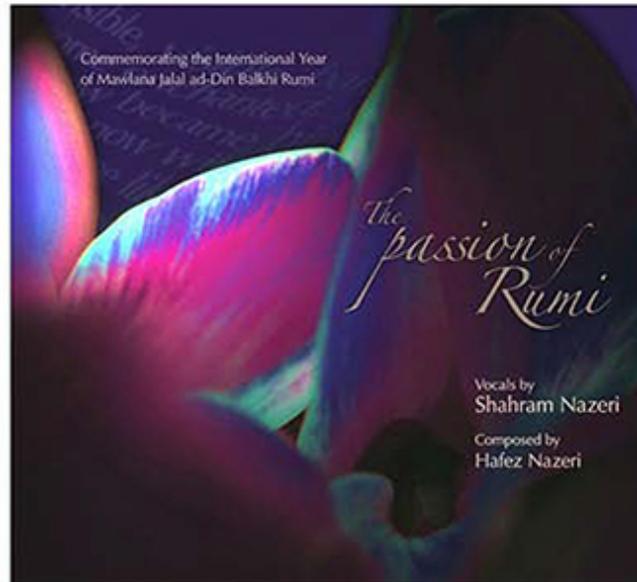
\* A collaboration between Hafez and his father, Shahram Nazeri, [The Passion of Rumi](#) album was recorded in Tehran in 2007.

\* Last year in [Boom Box](#) we brought you the Kurdish musician [Kayhan Kalhor](#).

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# Los Angeles Times

The Best of 2007  
**The year in music**



Prince, Radiohead, Common and Robert Plant are among the artists who made an impact in 2007. Read the breakdown from the Times' pop music critics.  
Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

Don Heckman: World music reveals global connections  
18 Nov. 2007

**The Passion of Rumi as one of the Best Five CD of 2007**

**Shahram and Hafez Nazeri,**

“The Passion of Rumi” (Quarternote Productions) The extraordinary vocals of Iran’s much-honored Shahram Nazeri are stunningly combined with his son Hafez’s blend of Middle Eastern musical structures and the sounds and textures of Western orchestration.

# The Washington Post

## Making Art Between East and West

By Vishakha N. Desai  
From the Asia Society  
Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Shahram and Hafez Nazeri brought together classical Persian tradition and western training more equally. Shahram Nazeri is one of the foremost singer/musicians of Iran; his son, Hafez, who lives in the United States, is trained in western classical music. Hafez's



*Shahram & Hafez Nazeri*

compositions celebrated Sufi poetry by including both western instruments and Persian instruments such as the setar and daf. Although at times the sheer strength of Shahram's voice threatened to overpower the other musicians, the gifted ensemble was able to balance the voice beautifully. By placing classical works right in the midst of more experimental works, the Nazeri duo managed to create greater dynamism, sometimes through dissonance.

All these performances illuminate the wide interstices of space between "East" and "West" that artists mine for their creative expressions. This is more than simple fusion; it is about creating new frontiers.

These artists are paving the way for a daring new world emerging out of the in-between-ness of cultures that befits the inter-culturality of the 21st century.

# The Boston Globe

## **The Passion of Rumi**

As one of The Best Seven World Music CD's of 2007

## **Rumi's poetry in motion**

December 18, 2007

**Shahram and Hafez Nazeri**

**The Passion of Rumi ( Quartertone )**



*Hafez & Shahram Nazeri*

One of this year's saddest albums is also one of its most riveting - and ode to 13th-century Sufi poet Rumi, marking his 800th birthday. Mourning Persian motifs are infused with a transcendent, symphonic beauty, cared aloft by the nuanced vocals of Tehran's Shahram Nazeri ( "Iran's Pavarotti" ) and inspired compositions from his son Hafez Nazeri. Drawn to Rumi's themes - letting go of the self and material attachments to achieve peace and security - Shahram is Persian classical music, which is traditionally improvisational. For "The Passion of Rumi," Hafez employed Western orchestration techniques to arrange his father's songs for his young Rumi Ensemble. The results are exotic and often stunning, beginning with "Mystic" and its slow and purposeful melancholy. "Evan Madaen," a standout, introduces an arresting, yearning refrain that sounds as though it came straight from a middle Eastern version of the "New World Symphony." The album then begins heaving and sinking through a mélange of emotions, bristling with passion and intrigue by the time it reaches its gripping finale, the nine-minute title track.(Tristram Lozaw)



## “In the Path of Rumi”: Shahram Nazeri with Hafez Nazeri

Thorne Auditorium; Sat 17

**B**ack in the 18th century, the Persian mystic Moshtaq Ali Shah came up with a new name for the traditional, three-stringed *setar*—a lutelike instrument, carved from the mulberry tree, essential to the Sufi-inspired form of song known as *avâz*. He dubbed it *tchoub-e-sagzani*; literally, “a stick to beat dogs.” Not unlike Woody Guthrie’s fascist-killing guitar, the *setar* was a weapon against those who would repress the music. The fabled musician added a fourth string to the *setar*, which is how you’ll hear it when a trio of traditional Persian performers joins in a summit meeting of sorts with a pair of classical chamber musicians and, for good measure, a *tabla* player.

Tonight features the great Iranian vocalist Shahram Nazeri, born in 1949 in the western province of Kerman-shah, where the transcendentalist

rituals of the whirling dervishes held sway. Nazeri has always walked in the path of the great mystic poet Rumi, as the program is billed. But on this occasion, the artist and his cohorts will explore some new directions as they set poetry to music. The concert aims to connect the dots between the metaphysical foundations of *avâz* form and the contemporary string sound of cello (Edward Arron) and viola (Liuh Wen Ting). Shahram’s son Hafez Nazeri will play the *setar* and *tanbour*, sure to conjure a droning, spiraling aura, and a third member of the family, Siavash Nazeri, will play percussion.

The idea behind “In the Path of Rumi” is to modernize the Persian classical tradition, fusing the quarter tones common to its scales with European harmonic approaches and rhythms. The bet is that Near East can meet West and do a lot more than coexist, summoning ancient timbres to speak fluently to the moment.

—Steve Dollar

# Los Angeles Times

## CALENDAR

### WORLD MUSIC REVIEW

## A 'Nightingale' so mesmerizing

### Shahram Nazeri's astonishing voice soars over a mix of Iranian and Western sounds

By Don Heckman  
August 20, 2007

Iranian singer Shahram Nazeri has been described, with some hyperbole, as "The Persian Nightingale" and "Iran's Pavarotti." But his performance Friday night at Disney Hall suggested that neither label provides an accurate depiction of the length and breath of either his art or his voice.

The program featured a pair of ensembles -- five players in the first half; seven in the second -- performing compositions by Nazeri's son, Hafez, incorporating combination of Western and Iranian instruments. At the center of the music, driving it, illuminating it, enhancing it, was Shahram Nazeri's voice.

Terms such as "Nightingale" and "Pavarotti" are inadequate because they are far too simplistic as references. Nazeri is indeed as mesmerizing as a nightingale, but his interpretive range -- even for listeners who have no understanding of his language -- reaches beyond night music into the full full gamut of emotional expressiveness.

Nor is he a tenor, like Pavarotti, singing a familiar repertoire. Nazeri's vocal range reached from whisper soft, utterly intimate chest tones to ringing, high falsettos, sometimes sliding with astonishing ease from one to the other.

What he sang -- much of it based up on poetic Rumi lines such as "I have returned, returned from my beloved..." -- was spontaneously invented. Like a jazz artist, Nazeri's improvisations were delivered within specific musical frameworks. And the genius of Nazeri -- like that of, say John Coltrane or Charlie Parker -- is his capacity to create, on the spot, extraordinary aural visions.

At one point, Nazeri came on stage alone, accompanying himself on a lute-like setar, singing a tune familiar to the many Iranians in the full house. Unlike the soaring impromptus, its simple, repetitive melody had the instant familiarity of pop songs from every culture. Yet even here, Nazeri brought a transcendent quality to every note he sang.

The compositions by Hafez Nazeri -- the "Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle I" -- reached beyond the iconic Persian poet-philosopher to find inspiration from Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, as well.

The younger Nazeri's goal has been to find a common ground between instrumental cultures without having to distort the essential elements of each. For the most part, he succeeded in doing so.

The opening "OM" segment, for example, featuring the brilliant playing of cellist Ben Hong, moved from a meditative beginning into a Western-like cadenza, subtly combing qualities of East and West.

Other segments took similar tacks, with well-crafted playing from bassist David Moore, cellist Dennis Karmazyn, violists Louise Schulman and Liuh Wen Ting, and dramatic displays of daf drumming from Hussein Zahawy and Indian tabla playing from Salar Nader.

A few passages, especially in the premiere performance of "Eternity," could clearly have benefited from additional rehearsal time.

But that's a small complaint for a program that allowed Shahram Nazeri's voice to soar over an ambitious collection of cross-cultural music.

## Iranian father-son musical perform for peace

By SHAYA TAYEFE MOHAJER (AP) — Nov 9, 2009

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — It's a seemingly simple approach to one of the modern world's most complicated political problems: By marrying the dainty lutes of the East with thrumming violas of the West, composer Hafez Nazeri says he wants to create harmony between the U.S. and his native Iran.

Nazeri's troupe of musicians from East and West, The Rumi Symphony Project, premiered his new symphony in Los Angeles last month and will perform it Saturday at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

"We're hearing all about nuclear weapons and all these crazy things," said Nazeri. "Look at us, people who come together from different cultures, different musical backgrounds and we all create love together, for you, for the world."

Nazeri's father, Shahram Nazeri, a famed classical singer known as Iran's Pavarotti, is scheduled to perform "Cycle One: Iranian Sounds of Peace" alongside his son and classical musicians from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

In the piece, violin strains are punctuated with the rumble of the daf, a hand drum ringed with metal pieces that tremble when it is struck. At times, the string instruments of East and West are plucked in sync in a style that could be considered controversial.

Cultural authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran have worked to prevent foreign influence for decades, in backlash to the previous regime of the Shah, often criticized for being pro-Western.

Though easily purchased on the black market, Western-style pop music is banned under Islamic rule, frowned on by austere mullahs for its sensual female solo singers and frivolity.

But blending cultures in music is now natural to Hafez Nazeri, 30, who moved to the U.S. 10 years ago and where he's studied Western music, collaborated with American artists and fallen in love with New York City.

Even the instrument Hafez Nazeri performs on is a traditional Persian instrument he's improvised by adding two strings to increase the Persian setar's range.

Hafez and his father are among the few artists allowed to travel freely and perform and record music inside Iran. His political views are strictly pragmatic and pacifistic — what concerns him isn't so much who governs Iran, but that all Iranians can live safely in their country.

Shahram Nazeri's music has escaped harsh censorship, in part because he sings the poetry of Iran's great poets to traditional music. His album "Gol-e-Sad Barg" sold 40 million copies and even in the most far-flung villages of Iran, small children can sing his renditions of Rumi's poetry.

At the premiere performance of the new fusion symphony in Los Angeles, the performance earned standing ovations from an audience of mostly Iranian expatriates.

One audience member, an elderly gentleman who stormed out during the third act, groused loudly during an intermission that the music "may be opera, or it may be disco, but it is not Iranian!"

But it brought others to tears. Thundering applause continued at the end of the performance until Shahram Nazeri came out to sing a few of his best-known tunes for encores.

The father briefly obliged those who repeatedly called out for him to sing "Iran-e-Kohan" or "Original Iran," a song that regained popularity as a soundtrack for YouTube videos of violent street demonstrations following Iran's June 12 elections.

The song first became popular during Iran's eight year war with Iraq in the 1980s, with lyrics that sing "The world watches for the freedom of Iranians/Be aware, the original Iranians are in danger."

The audience grew still after Shahram Nazeri sang the first few lines of the mournful song. Appearing to sense the darkening of the auditorium's mood, he quickly broke from the tune, and finished on two upbeat favorites as the audience sang along and then roared with approval.

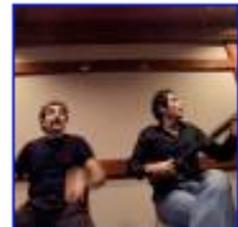
On the Net:

- Hafez Nazeri's MySpace page: <http://www.myspace.com/hafeznazeri>
- Carnegie Hall: <http://www.carnegiehall.org>

Photo 1 of 4



This photo taken Oct. 1, 2009 shows Iranian musician Shahram Nazeri, left, and his son Hafez posing for photos in Beverly Hills, Calif. By marrying the dainty lutes of the East with thrumming violas of the West in his latest symphony, composer Hafez Nazeri says he wants to create harmony between the U.S. and his native Iran. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)



# Los Angeles Times

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# THE HUFFINGTON POST



## Mike Ragogna

*music biz vet, entertainment writer*

Posted: August 31, 2009 03:39 AM

### **\*\*\*Composer Hafez Nazeri To Premiere First Modern Iranian Instrument This Fall**

Known for his innovative blend of Persian and Western musical styles, 30-year-old Iranian musician Hafez Nazeri has created a new instrument: the "Hafez." Named in honor of his own namesake - the great 13th century mystic poet - the "Hafez" extends the range of the sitar by incorporating two additional low strings, crafting greater melodic and harmonic range.

The "Hafez" allows Nazeri to express his musical philosophy, preserving the essence and elemental structures of Persian music, while embracing new ideas developed out of Western Classical music such as orchestration, harmony, rhythmic patterns and melodic forms.

The "Hafez" will make its U.S. debut during the 'Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One' in LA October 3rd at the Pantages Theatre and in NYC November 14th at Carnegie Hall.

Alongside the new instrument, the concerts will showcase Nazeri on setar and vocals, and his legendary father Shahram Nazeri (vocals), as well as artists of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: Paul Neubauer on the viola, Ida Kavafian, viola and Fred Sherry, cello; in addition to Matt Haimovitz, cello; Tim Cobb, double bass, Hussein Zahawy, percussion and Shane Shanahan, percussion.

Hafez featured on the cover of the most circulated Iranian-American publication in the United States.

سال پست و هشتم، جمعه دوم خرداد ماه ۱۳۹۳ شماره ۱۴۰۶ Friday, May 23, 2014 Issue No: 1406

# JAVANIANI™

INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY MAGAZINE

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# The New York Times

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009

RUMI SYMPHONY PROJECT

[Carnegie Hall](#)

You knew that anticipation ran high for the Rumi Symphony Project, assembled by the Iranian composer Hafez Nazeri, long before you set foot inside Carnegie Hall on Saturday night. Shortly ahead of curtain time, ticket lines still extended to the sidewalk. Even after the start was delayed for 20 minutes, dozens of audience members (and at least one reviewer) missed an opening section of the performance.

Mr. Nazeri's ambitious attempt to fuse musical idioms in an expression of peaceful coexistence went smoothly by comparison. Mr. Nazeri — the son of Shahram Nazeri, a celebrated Iranian Kurdish singer — trained in Persian music almost from infancy, and later studied Western classical music. His "Cycle One" has set to music verses by the 13th-century poet Rumi and a portion of "Shahnameh," an epic by the 11th-century poet Ferdowsi.

The violist Paul Neubauer and the cellist Fred Sherry played sinuous lines and chugging cadences; a tidy melding of the Persian Nava mode and the Western key of G minor also enabled them to harmonize behind Shahram Nazeri's powerful singing. Hafez Nazeri plucked delicate asides on a customized setar (a Persian lute). Two skillful percussionists, Hussein Zahawy and Shane Shanahan, were propulsive and flashy. The cellist Matt Haimovitz, the violinist Ida Kavafian and the double bassist Timothy Cobb made potent contributions in later sections.

Accommodating a harmonious mix meant smoothing over the distinctive microtonal complexities characteristic of Persian music. Still, a large audience that included many Iranian-Americans voiced its approval with repeated ovations, and sang along when Shahram Nazeri offered a brief tantalizing passage from his album "Gol-e Sad Barg" during the encore. STEVE SMITH

## CALENDAR

# November



Bernadette Peters

**1** Stay in bed. Clocks “fall back” an hour today. Also, **stop texting while driving**, which was always stupid but starting today is illegal.

**2** Everything related to Jonathan Safran-Foer's eating habits will be illuminated: His investigative-scientific-philosophical memoir, ***Eating Animals***, is released.

**3** Go out and **elect a mayor**.

**4** The Supreme Court hears ***Pottawattamie County v. McGhee***, which questions the legality of **suing prosecutors who've knowingly withheld evidence** and sent innocent people to prison—a case that should set a tone for the newly reconstituted court. On a lighter note, the sixth annual **New York Comedy Festival**, hosted by Ricky Gervais, begins today.

**5** The vexing but never boring **British provocateur Tracey Emin** opens a show at Lehmann Maupin.

**6** How much ***Donnie Darko*** goodwill does director **Richard Kelly** have? His thriller ***The Box*** was supposed to open a year ago. Now it should open today—hopefully more ***Darko*** and less ***Southland Tales***, his disastrous 2007 follow-up.

**7** OMG! Are you going to the Miley Cyrus concert tonight in New York City? **No—because she's performing in Newark**. A petition's being organized as we speak (for real) to get her to NYC.

**8** From your house to Bauhaus at their house: **MoMA's epic “Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity”** opens tonight.

**9** **Bernadette Peters croons at an AIDS benefit at the Minskoff Theatre**. And it's high season for the high court, as the justices rule on whether sentencing minors to life without parole for non-homicidal crimes constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

**10** The Museum of the City of New York mounts a much-needed, first-ever **retrospective for Finnish architect Eero Saarinen**, designer of JFK's monumental TWA terminal.

**11** Go out and **salute a veteran**.

**12** Don't laugh: A **retrospective of films directed by Jerry Lewis** starts today at Anthology Film Archives. Sadly, they're not showing the Holocaust clown movie.

**13** **Wes Anderson's stop-motion animated film, *Fantastic Mr. Fox***, becomes the season's third children's-book-based movie.

**14** Composer **Hafez Nazeri** becomes the **first Iranian to headline at Carnegie Hall**. Metallica becomes the umpteenth metal band to rock out at MSG.

**15** Houdini: Henry Ford: Archduke Ferdinand!



Fantastic Mr. Fox



Tim Burton at MoMA.

***Ragtime*, the musical, jumps from Washington, D.C., to Broadway.**

**16** Punk-country crooner **Neko Case** plays the **Beacon theater**. In L.A., Brooklyn-based **Grand Rabbi Naftali Tzi Weisz**, convicted of an \$8.5 million tax-evasion scam, faces a sentence of up to five years in jail.

**17** **David Mamet's newest play, *Race***, begins previews at the Ethel Barrymore. Expect the author of ***Oleanna*** to deliver something incendiary.

**18** **Philip Glass's celestial-themed opera, *Kepler***—an ode to the astronomer who discovered the laws of planetary motion—has its U.S. premiere at BAM.

**19** Yes! on Equality must collect 694,354 signatures by this date to ensure that a **Proposition 8 repeal is on the California ballot in June 2010**.

**20** That sound you hear is a million tweens squealing as **Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart** reprise their roles in the ***Twilight* sequel, *New Moon***, in theaters now.

**21** For a more bloodcurdling take on vampires, pop by Tribeca Cinemas for **day four of the**

# UNITED HEMISPHERES

## Bridging the Persian Gulf

*Iranian composer Hafez Nazeri has spent the past decade shaking up traditional Persian music. This month, he brings his signature style to New York.*

**Author** Jenny Eliscu **Photography** Tom Betterton



**HAFEZ NAZERI** takes the idea of cultural fusion very seriously. The 30-year-old Iranian composer—who brings his modern version of Persian classical song to Carnegie Hall on November 14, becoming the first Iranian musician ever to headline a show there—has spent the past decade persuading audiences around the world to explore one another’s traditions. “To Western ears, our music is the sound of this unknown country, which has seven thousand years of history,” Nazeri says over tea at a Midtown Manhattan bakery. “I want to be the new face of the country, to show people that through music we are all becoming one.”

Growing up in Tehran as the son of celebrated vocalist Shahram Nazeri—“the Pavarotti of Iran”—Hafez began performing with his father when he was only three. By 10, he’d already invented a new way of playing the daf, an ancient tambourine-like percussion instrument. In Nazeri’s household, musical rules were meant to be broken: During the early ’70s, his father was the first Persian singer to interpret the ancient verses of Sufi poet Mawlana Jalal-al- Din Rumi. “Because of the vocabulary Rumi used, his verses didn’t match with Persian classical music,” Hafez explains. “But my father wanted to have his own signatures, and this was what he taught me. He never let me become an imitator.”

A decade ago, after Nazeri, then 20, wowed his countrymen with his Rumi Ensemble—which toured the country and attracted a record-breaking 140,000 concertgoers in Tehran—Nazeri moved to New York to attend the Mannes College of Music, where he began studying Western classical music. “In Iran, everyone thought of me as just the son of this famous singer,” he says. “When I came here, I thought, ‘Nobody knows me anymore. I can do whatever I want,’ and I knew I had the potential to create more excitement here.”

Nazeri began his Rumi Symphony Project in 2007 “to create a universal music using Rumi as a symbol of peace.” Eight hundred years after the renowned mystic died, Nazeri notes, he has become the best-selling poet in America. “Rumi’s poems are part of our background in Iran, but they don’t belong to anybody,” says Nazeri. “The whole message is to first just close your eyes to the outside and go find that diamond inside you. If you find it, let it shine, because the more it shines, the more you can do important things for your life and others.”

**JENNY ELISCU** *hosts a show on Sirius XMU, Saturday through Tuesday from noon to 6 p.m.*

## Observations: Persian poet's musical journey

By Anne Penketh  
*Friday, 9 January 2009*

He has performed sell-out concerts across America and in his native Iran. The Composer Hafez Nazeri is hoping that this year, his mystical musings inspired by the Persian poet and philosopher Rumi can be just as successful in Britain.



"I'm trying to bring the world together with a music that can talk to everyone," says the classically trained Nazeri who is now in London, where he has just recorded his first CD with the London Symphony Orchestra. Nazeri's brand integrates the melodic sounds of the West with those of Iran, to produce a "spiritual journey" based on the work of Persia's great Sufi poet, who has also inspired Madonna.

"I'm bringing a fresh sound to classical music," says Nazeri, a 29-year-old tenor who is an accomplished player of the setar and the tambour, traditional Persian string instruments. "The idea behind it is a political message of unity, of peace and friendship and love."

Nazeri emerged from the shadow of his father, Shahram Nazeri, when he put together a Rumi ensemble while the legendary singer, who has been called the "Pavarotti of Iran" was on tour. But his father encouraged him to follow his own path from a young age: the piece performed by Nazeri with the LSO, *Night Angel*, was written when he was 16.

Now he is working on a project for a Rumi symphony, whose first cycle was performed in August 2007, marking the 800th anniversary of the poet's birth. Nazeri plans to return to London with his father as part of a world tour.

Rumi has become America's most popular poet, and Nazeri senses that British audiences will respond to his bridge-building approach. "The idea of the Rumi symphony is to show another dimension of my country, to show the beauty of the country," he says.

# The Star-Ledger

November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## **Composer Hafez Nazeri makes Carnegie Hall debut**

**By Jay Lustig/The Star-Ledger**

**November 06, 2009, 6:16PM**

Composer Hafez Nazeri will make his Carnegie Hall debut and become the first Iranian to headline at the venue's Stern Auditorium when he presents his "Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One" Nov. 14 at 8 p.m. He describes the composition as "a musical discourse to promote world peace."

Nazeri, who plays the lutelike setar, is the son of Shahram Nazeri, a singer who has been called "Iran's Pavarotti." Both will perform at the event, along with members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and other musicians.

Tickets are \$30-\$350. Call (212) 247-7800 or visit [CarnegieHall.org](http://CarnegieHall.org).

# Los Angeles Times

## Picks of the Week: Sept. 28 – Oct. 4

- Oct. 3. (Sat.) **Hafez Nazeri**. Iranian composer Nazeri's unique blend of Eastern and Western classical musics will feature his *Rumi Symphony Project: Cycle One*, performed by an ensemble of Iranian and American players. The highlight of the work will be the extraordinary singing of the poetry of Rumi by **Shahram Nazeri** (Hafez's father) — a singer whose brilliant vocal excursions are one of the great pleasures of Iranian music. [The Pantages Theatre](#). (800) 745-2000.

# THE NEW YORKER

November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009

## GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
15	16	17	11	12	13	14

### "IRANIAN SOUNDS OF PEACE"

Hafez Nazeri is an acclaimed singer and virtuoso of the *setar* (an ancient Persian lute), a composer alumnus of the Mannes College of Music, and a performer with magnetic, pop-star appeal. As part of his Rumi Symphony Project, he teams up with his father, the distinguished singer Shahram Nazeri, and with such musicians as the violist Ida Kavafian and

# Iranian sounds get tuneup for today

Hafez Nazari strives to bring ancient music into modern times

### FROM CHAIRS

Hafez Nazari built a modern version of the ancient stringed instrument, the *setar*, in his home. He is both the creator of Nazari and a performer at the Sony Centre Sept. 30 in a show titled *Iranian Sounds of Peace*.

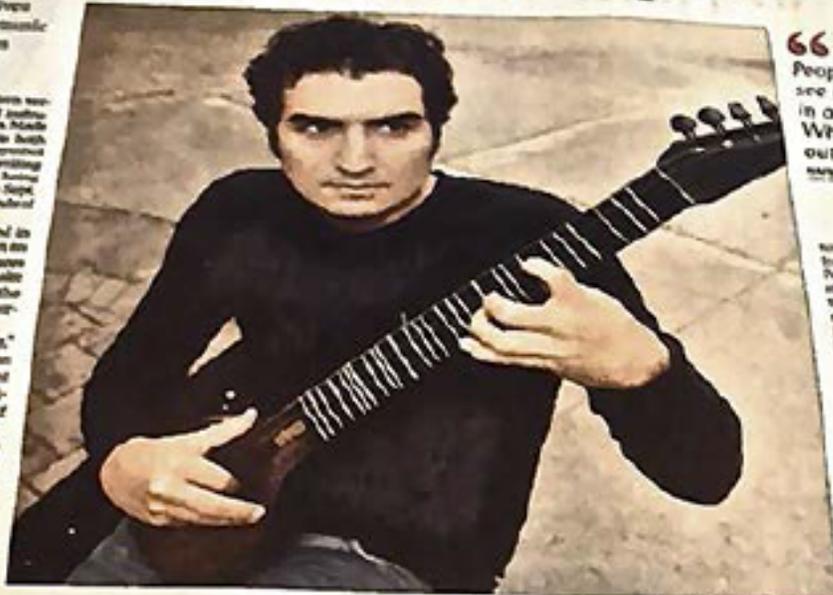
Iranian music has been locked in tradition for 100 years, he says in an interview in Toronto as he prepares for the concert. It is time to shake things up and introduce it to the Western world with creative flourishes born of his world travels.

"We close our eyes, we improvise," Nazari says of traditional Iranian music, which adheres to ancient practices and reveres older musicians. "People come to see us as if we were in a museum."

"Why can't we come out into the world? We are preserving the tradition but integrating it with harmony and structure of the Western classical music that is sophisticated and evolved over 200 years."

His father Shahrbanu Nazari, who's joining him for Saturday's concert, is one of Iran's most famous musicians — he's known as the *Peyman* of Iran. For 40 years, the elder Nazari has been putting the words of poet Rumi, who wrote 800 years ago, emphasizing values of "love, peace and unity" to music.

Hafez Nazari was raised in a house filled with the best musicians of his country and frequently travelled with his father to Europe for his performances, playing in his en-



ANY GEMSE/TORONTO STAR

Hafez Nazari and his modernized instrument dubbed the Hafez are coming to the Sony Centre on Saturday.

semble as a teenager. Now 32, Nazari says he became aware of how isolated Iran was culturally and how little was known about his country's culture and music elsewhere.

He studied music in New York, receiving his student visa — which he applied for in Paris — shortly

after 9/11. It was an astounding piece of luck, he admits, and he was aided in his application by the dean of the Mannes College, the New School for Music who'd "written a letter like you'd write for Mozart."

Unlike all the other music geniuses at the school from around the world, he had received no training

in Western music and had to start from scratch to learn composition, orchestration and history of global music traditions.

Now a U.S. resident and living in New York, Nazari has returned to Iran to perform but feels his greater mission is to take Iran's new music to the world. That's one of the rea-

**66** People came to see us as if we were in a museum. Why can't we come out into the world?

HAFEZ NAZARI

sons he returned the ancient Iran-inspired setar to the east. Fused with the setar into a stringed instrument with a brass reed and greater capacity for instrumentation, it is called the *Hafez* — not after the creator but after a Persian poet.

Nazari chose the poetry of Rumi for his symphony because the poet is not only revered in Iran but is also popular with North American audiences drawn to his message of peace and harmony. Premiered recently in New York, the symphony will receive its Canadian premiere at the Sony Centre.

Although he knows many people of Iranian heritage will attend the concert, Nazari is hoping that others will be drawn to the new music crossbreed of tradition and inspiration.

"My dream is to open the boundaries and make music that is universal."

### JUST THE FACTS

**When:** Hafez and Shahrbanu Nazari  
**Where:** Saturday, Sept. 30 at 8 p.m.  
**Where:** Sony Centre, 1 Front St. E.  
**Tickets:** \$30-\$200 via Ticketcity

### CONCERTS

**ACTIVE CHILD** The indie pop artist just released his debut album *How Are All?* Sept. 24, 8 p.m. (812) 466-0000. \$25. The Danforth, 1977 Dundas St. W.

Thacker and Alexa Willis on violin, Alexander Mac and on viola and cello. Sarah Stavros.) team up with accordion player Lou Marini for this concert featuring a revised piece by Chaim R. R. called *Changings*. Sept. 25, 8 p.m. (416) 461-4100.

**ELTON JOHN** The legendary singer and composer, one of the most successful artists of all time, performs his greatest hits from his three-decade career. Sept. 29, 8 p.m. (905) 575-1500 at 905-430-8880. Concert Place, 1000 Bay St.

**TORONTO STAR**

[http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2011/09/06/iranian\\_sounds\\_get\\_tuneup\\_for\\_today.html](http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/2011/09/06/iranian_sounds_get_tuneup_for_today.html)

Shahram Nazeri, and Deepak Chopra receiving the "Record Breaking Performance" recognition from A.E.G. Live after their great performance at the Nokia Theater in L.A. on March 29th, 2014, the largest Classical Iranian concert in the U.S..

