
American Folklife Center
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folklife center news

TRADITIONAL CHINESE OPERA OPENS 1991 CONCERT SERIES

The 1991 Neptune Plaza Concert Series opened this year on April 18 with a presentation of traditional Chinese opera by the Han Sheng Chinese Opera Institute of Washington, D.C. The group is under the direction of its founder, Dr. David Lee, and has delighted audiences in the Washington area since 1977. Members of the company are from China and many have Peking Opera backgrounds.

At a full house in the Mumford Room of the Library's James Madison Building, the group presented three scenes that used the formal movements and pantomime characteristic of the genre: in the first, a pretty country girl is courted by a young scholar, who falls in love with her at first sight; in the second, a heavenly maiden is sent to earth to heal one of Buddha's disciples by scattering flowers; and in the third, two warriors, one male and the other female, clash in a carefully choreographed battle. More on page 11.

Judy Huang, an actress with the Han Sheng Chinese Opera Institute, portrays Yu Jiao, a young girl in the opera *Jade Bracelet*, who occupies herself at home by sewing (which she pantomimes here) and tending her chickens, until her life is changed by the attentions of a young scholar who falls in love with her.

Photo by Jim Higgins



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EDITOR'S NOTES

Three Traditions Featured at Center Programs

Folklorists like to point out that new traditions can come into being at any time or place, and in any group of people. True as this is, we should not forget that some traditions are so old as to be called ancient, so essential to a particular group as to be called emblematic. Three such traditions are featured in this issue of *Folklife Center News*: Chinese opera, Noruz, and Hanukkah.

While European opera, as staged in this country, is generally regarded as a high-brow entertainment for a certain "cultured" portion of the population, it is loved by people from all parts of society in its various homelands. The same can be said of the presentation that translates into English as "Chinese opera," a combination of storytelling, singing, acting, elaborate costumes, and instrumental music. For Americans, the "foreignness" of both forms makes them difficult to understand and appreciate; for the people of their respective lands, the very familiarity of the forms gives them the power to engage feelings.

The news from the Middle East has been so bleak for the past few years, it is easy to forget that rich and diverse cultures flourish there. The springtime celebration of the Persian New Year, Noruz, is one of the ancient traditions of the region. Noruz customs resonate with mythical, religious, and historical implications, engaging celebrants on many levels.

Hanukkah may have gained more importance in America than it is accorded in Jewish tradition because it falls at the time of the winter holiday season, when Christmas and New Year's Day holidays are occasions for social gatherings, gift giving, eating, and drinking. Of all the aspects of all traditional cultures, foodways are perhaps the most widely appreciated and easily accepted by others. With that in

mind, the Folklife Center regularly presents foodways workshops during the winter holidays, when the body craves the sweets and fats that enable it to survive the season of darkness and cold. From the 1990 winter workshop, *Folklife Center News* offers the reader recipes for Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. Guaranteed to be high in cholesterol, they should not be attempted until next December.

New Center Board Members Appointed

Three new members have been appointed to the Folklife Center's Board of Trustees. Juris Ubans, a professor of art at the University of Southern Maine, was named by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on June 20, 1990; Robert Malir, a farmer and businessman from Kansas, was named by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on January 15, 1991; and Lindy Boggs, a former member of Congress from Louisiana, was named by the Speaker of the House of Representatives on April 11, 1991. We are sorry to report, however, that Johnnetta Cole has had to resign from the board, citing the many demands placed on her time by her position as president of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Folklife Reading Room Closes

The Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, where the Folklife Center is located, has been under renovation for a number of years. In July the Center will move to a renovated section of the building, and during the summer months reference service will necessarily be curtailed. Beginning June 17, the Folklife Reading Room will be closed. Those wishing to conduct research in the Archive of Folk Culture should call

(202) 707-5510 to make advance appointments. Normal service will resume in our new location on the south side of the Jefferson Building on August 19.

FOLKLINE

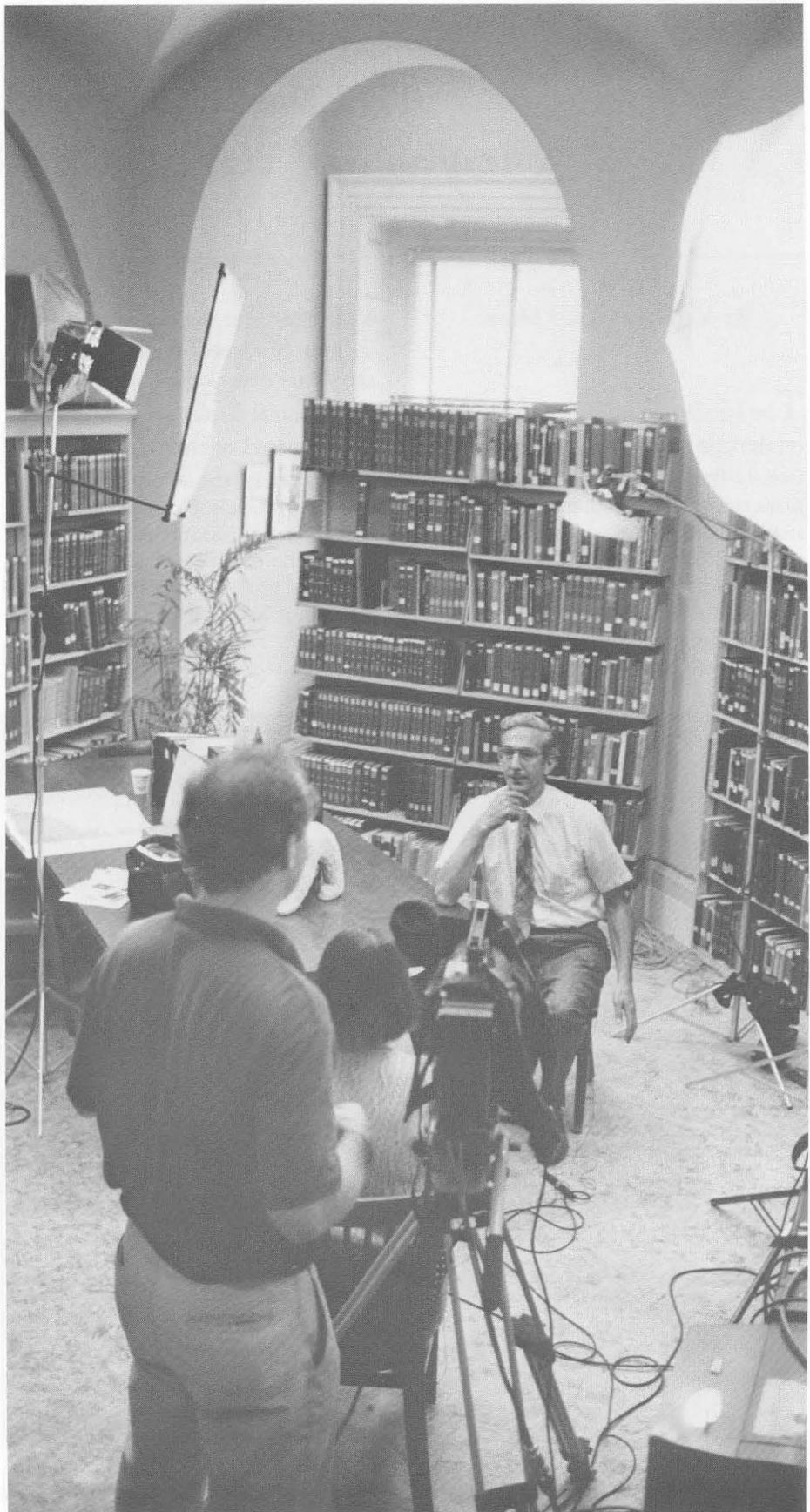
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FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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On August 13, 1990, Marie Hackett of the Fox television network interviewed Center director Alan Jabbour about North Carolina storyteller Ray Hicks. The setting was the Folklife Reading Room, which closes for a time this summer while the Center moves to new quarters in the Library's Jefferson Building. *Photo by Gerald Parsons*

THE MAGIC OF NORUZ

Iranian New Year's Day Celebrations

By Yassaman Amir Moez

The Iranian New Year, Noruz, falls on the first day of spring, on about the twenty-first of March. Noruz traditions include a folktale that introduces many of the customs associated with the event. Uncle Noruz is an old man. He is the emblem of benign authority, a wise and humble elder. Year after year, invisible to the world of humans, he appears at the time of the new year.

Year after year, an old woman waits for him. She has cleaned her dwelling; she wears new clothes; she has set up a ceremonial display; and she has prepared special offerings. Once everything is ready, she falls asleep. During her sleep, Uncle Noruz rings in the new year and disappears. While she sleeps, the old woman dreams of rebirth and renewal. Her private dream is the public myth of the whole nation.¹

Noruz is observed at a time when

day and night are equal; when the sun enters the zodiac sign of the Ram; when the constellations of Leo and Taurus, at their zenith, coincide with the spring equinox. Noruz celebrations reaffirm the connections between human beings and the natural world. Noruz customs illustrate the way Iranians once attempted to control a mysterious environment and render it comprehensible through nature rites, ceremonial acts, and symbolic paraphernalia. All these festivities and



A lecture and reception sponsored by the American Folklife Center on March 13 brought together many members of the Iranian community in Washington, who enjoyed an evening of fellowship and celebration in honor of Noruz, the Iranian New Year. Shown here with two members of the community is the evening's lecturer, Yassaman Amir Moez (right); a version of her paper appears above. On the table is the traditional ceremonial display of items symbolic of Noruz—flowers, grain sprouts, candles, the Koran, a mirror, eggs, coins, and a goldfish in water. Legend has it that by gazing into a mirror at the time of the change of the year, Iranians can protect themselves from the evil eye. *Photo by Reid Baker*

rituals aim at leaving behind pain, hunger, disease, vice, want, and greed, for the blessings of plenty, love, health, and wealth.

The ancient themes of Noruz can be traced back to the early empires of the Near East in the third century B.C. In Babylon, one of the ancient religious centers of Mesopotamia, the holy time began at the spring equinox, which marks the rebirth of the year. This period of conflict between the sun and winter was believed to repeat the conflict that took place at the dawn of time between the demiurge and chaos.

The "Poem of Creation," on seven tablets, dating from the ninth century B.C., was recited in the course of the Babylonian festival. It tells of the victory of Marduk, the sun-god, who also symbolized the forces of spring.² These hymns of creation were honored by the many people who inhabited Mesopotamia—like the Sumerians, the Semites, and the Indo-Europeans—and can be compared to later celebrations like Passover, Good Friday, and Easter.

When myth and history are mixed, as in the *Shahnameh*, the Iranian national epic, the tale of the creation of the universe is recounted with fantastic stories of the death and resurrection of legendary kings and heroes: The first legendary hero, called Gayomard, was also the first king. He reigned for thirty years. When Gayomard was killed by the demon, his seed was purified by the sun and from it grew a rhubarb plant, out of which developed Mashya and Mashyana, the first mortal man and woman. When their son, Jamshid, became king, he ruled with great glory over men, beasts, and demons for more than six hundred years. He promoted the well-being of the human race and taught his people craftsmanship and skills. Happiness reigned, and evil, old age, sickness, envy, and extremes of weather were banished. At the height of his power, Jamshid rose to the skies to reach the sun in a throne carried by slave demons. Jamshid commemorated this day by instituting Noruz (which means new day), the New Year's festival, on the first day of spring.³

Many of the rituals of Noruz can be understood in the context of the sacred

gods and natural forces of the Indo-Iranian pantheon in second millennium B.C. Persians converted to Zoroastrianism by the first millennium B.C. and to Islam in seventh century A.D., but kept alive vestiges of the old local rituals, and the major religions could not totally supplant customs of previous times. The people carried on the traditional ritual practices of Noruz, which represent for the Iranian nation supreme cultural values.

Some of the early Noruz customs have been lost or altered over time (the ancient authentic forms are unknown), but many others have continued to the present day. Sometime before Noruz, Iranians germinate seeds of wheat, barley, lentils, and many other grains. The process is started well in advance so that the sprouts will stand green and tall on a ceremonial display during the first thirteen days of the year. The seeds are washed thoroughly and immersed in water for a few days. At the appearance of the first shoots, the grains are spread out on a plate or in a clay pot, and covered with a cloth both to speed the growth of the sprouts in the darkness and to protect them from the gaze of strangers and the evil eye. The cloth is removed when the sprouts are long enough. In some areas of western Iran, a circle is left open in the middle of the sprouts to be filled with a bowl of water, orange flower water, or painted eggs. In central Iran, seeds are germinated in special niches built in the walls of adobe houses and left to grow until the last days of the celebrations.

Germinating seeds is a symbol of the wholeness of human commitment to the renewal of nature. The ritual is attended by women only. Women are the vehicles of life and nourishment, with powers like those of the earth goddess. The sprouts are watched closely, cherished, and regarded as part of the great pattern of life by those who follow the tradition. Others may not treat the sprouts so reverently. The first time my sister germinated seeds for Noruz in California, she came home one day to find her American husband eating part of them with his salad. As Henry Glassie says, "Con-

text is the source of interpretation, the environment of significance. Outside context there is no understanding."⁴

Preparations for Noruz begin a month or so in advance of New Year's Day. Celebrants clean the inside of their dwellings thoroughly and ritualistically. They replace old furniture and rugs, give away pans and clay pots. In some homes the walls are painted. The walls in adobe houses are covered with new mud. Rooms are purified with aromatic wild rue, considered a spirit chaser. Flowers are planted in gardens or in niches in the walls.

New clothes and shoes are acquired to be worn on the first day of the new year. The wealthy give their old clothes to the poor and buy new ones. Some people buy fabric to make new clothes. In the Qashqa'i tribe of southwest Iran, gifts of cloth are given and received. According to the seventeenth-century French traveler John Chardin, Noruz was commonly called the feast of the new clothes.⁵ More recently, the renewal of whole wardrobes has been replaced by the tradition of wearing at least one new item at the time of the change of the year.

Noruz brings joy to both children and adults. Before the Islamic revolution of 1979, streets and buildings in Iran were decorated with lights and lanterns a few weeks before the new year. Peripatetic entertainers and musicians appeared in the streets of the cities. Among them were the clowns of Noruz, Haji Firuz, with blackened faces, tall pointed hats, and flamboyant red clothes, who played tambourines or pipes, whistled, and joked with the crowds they attracted. They sang and danced the burial of winter and celebrated the rites of spring. Haji Firuz has replaced the older clown named Atash Afruz, described by Henri Massé as having a demonic appearance, with a black-spotted face and a crown-like cap with two horns.⁶

The Feast of Wednesday, called Chaharshambah Suri, is particularly rich in rituals and ancient customs. According to Adam Olearius,⁷ Iranians considered the last Wednesday of the

year as the most sacred day of the year and treated it as a holiday. It is observed on Tuesday night with rites of water and fire purification. Family members, especially women, sprinkle water on each other's heads and around in their homes. Youngsters wait by water sources to splash those who come to fetch water. Pots are filled with water that is then spilled in the entrances of dwellings. Women hold pots of water, sprinkle water in the air, and then break the pots to destroy the clay.

On the Feast of Wednesday, fires are lit on rooftops and on nearby mountains. Dried thorns and bushes, gathered from plains and mountains or purchased from itinerant merchants, are arranged in piles outside of dwellings.

At sunset, seven fires are lit, and men and women, young and old, come together and, in turn, jump three times over the fires, chanting verses of purification for the expulsion of evil: "my yellowness to you, and your redness to me." The color yellow, symbolic of age, sickness, and the paleness of winter is ritually traded for the color red, symbolic of life, new blood, and earth.

Women sprinkle seeds of wild rue in fires to purify the air from the power of curse and the evil eye. Glowing coals are brought into dwellings and circulated to bring health, abundance, and love to the home.

The Qashqa'i tribesmen celebrate Chaharshambah Suri with special rites. The nomads are still in their winter pasture where the weather is mild. When evening descends on the encampment, fires are lit on nearby hills and mountains. Men return from pastures passing by fields of wheat and barley in every shade of green. The tent-dwelling Qashqa'i gather their herds in the middle of the encampment and pass them between two large fires. Then they jump over smaller fires, and the celebration continues throughout the night, with members of the families dancing and singing close to the fires.

Jumping over fires finds its deeper significance in ancient beliefs and customs. According to their sacred writings, the Vedas and Bundahishn, the Indo-Iranians believed the universe

was created in seven stages: sky, water, earth, plants, animals, man, and fire. The seventh stage was the creation of fire, the endless light from which the six initial creations were formed and received life. Fire was the element that mediated between man and the gods, and offerings were made to be carried through the flames upward to the gods.

Jumping over fire is the most dramatic ritual of Noruz and leaves those present in a state of ecstasy due to the exertion required, the heat of the fire, the fascination of the flames, or simply the sense of belonging to a community engaged in a deeply significant rite.

The fires are left to die, and ashes are gathered in a clay pot and taken as far away as possible by a woman. Upon returning to her dwelling, she requests permission to enter. Inside the lights are turned off, and family members question her: "Where do you come from?" She answers: "From a wedding." It is completely dark. The men do not talk but listen carefully. The women inside ask her another question: "What have you brought?" And she answers, "Abundance." Then she enters and turns on the lights. Pain, anger, disease, vice, want, greed, and winter have been symbolically cremated and thrown away with the ashes, and the celebrants are ready to receive the blessings of the goddess of plenty, the glorious and radiant Farrah (*Kua-renah*), one of the most important divinities of the Indo-Iranian pantheon.

The Feast of Wednesday is also a time when women and children of both sexes, hiding their identities under veils, set out on trick-or-treat expeditions (*qashoq zani*), taking along bowls and spoons. They bang the spoons against the bowls, expressing their request for treats. They do not speak. A single word could break the spell, and their wishes would not come true. Families buy a mixture of dried fruits and nuts, as well as special sweets called "difficulty unraveller," to eat throughout Noruz but also to give away when spoon bangers come for treats. The food gathered is brought back home by the spoon bangers, who share it with others and

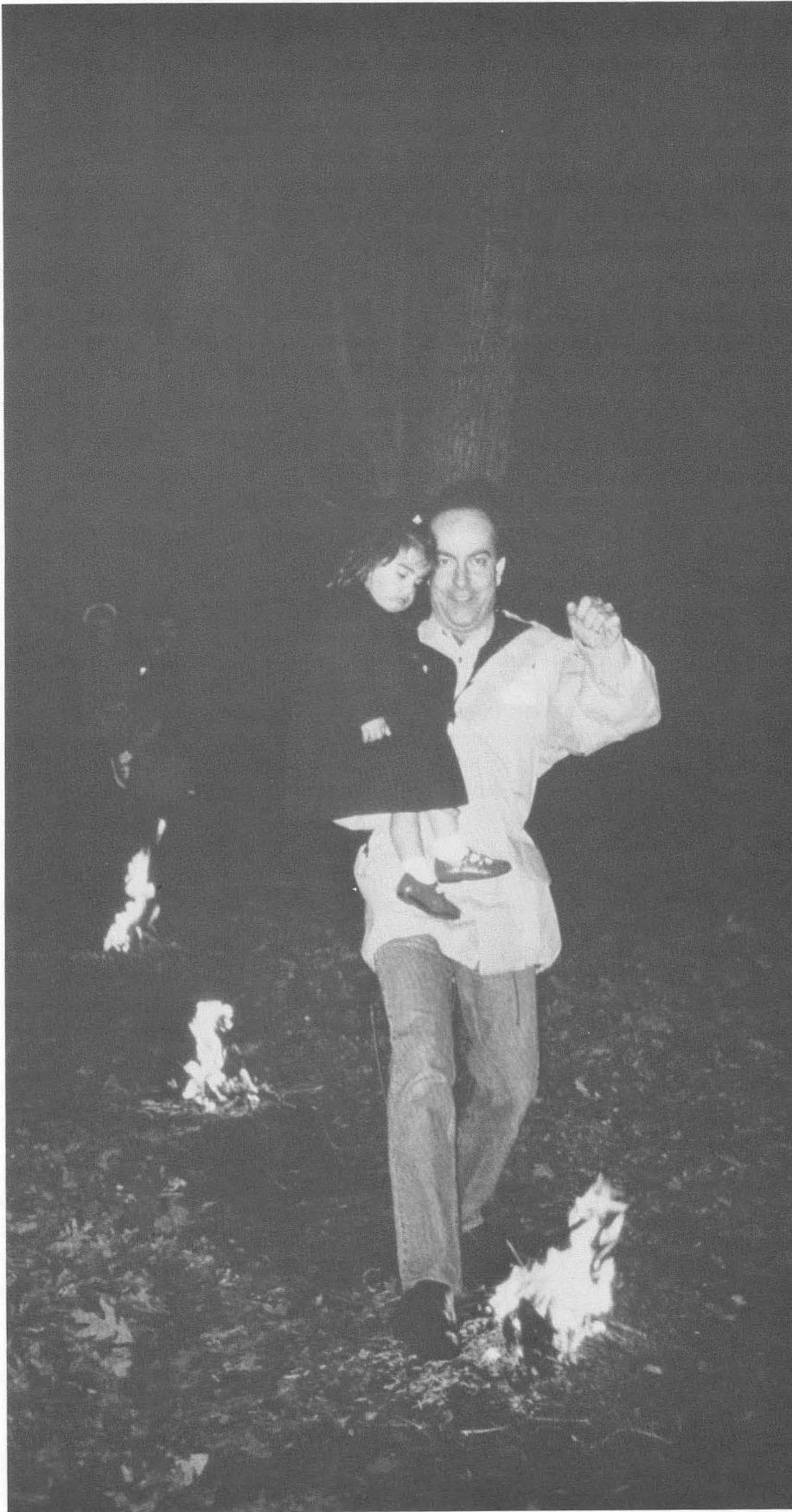
especially with those who are sick or deprived. Thus they redistribute wealth and abundance.

A few days before the change of the year, a variety of sweets are baked to be eaten during the celebrations and sent out to those in need. Eggs are boiled, and children help their mothers paint them with a variety of colors and patterns.

A few hours before the change of the year, Iranians spread a cloth on the ground or on a table and set up a ceremonial display consisting of a mirror, candle, wild rue, a gold fish in one water bowl, a bitter orange and a green leaf in another, a copy of a holy book, water in a jar, coins and newly minted money, the twigs of seven different kinds of trees, scented hyacinths, narcissus, and tulips. The sprouted seeds set in a plate or a pot occupy a place of honor and around them are arranged sweets, the everyday bread, salt, milk, yogurt, cheese, as well as vividly colored eggs, pomegranates, and the seven sacred foods which start with the Persian letter *S*, including apples (*sib*), vinegar (*serkeh*), sumac (*somagh*), garlic (*sir*), herbs and vegetables (*sabzi*), a wheat porridge (*samanu*), and bohemian olive (*senjed*). These are seven offerings to each of the seven gods of the seven stages of creation, of the seven celestial climes symbolically rising to the seat of eternity.

Family members dressed in their bright new clothes and shoes gather around the ceremonial offerings. They sit spellbound in anticipation of the moment of the change of the year. Custom has it that the new year will be spent in the same spirit of family closeness and happiness as that of the first moment of the year. Those who do not join in will spend the year in homelessness and loneliness. Celebrants prepare themselves for the change of the year. People look at their own reflection in the mirror and at the candle lights. Some hold coins in their hands wishing for prosperity and believing that money attracts money. Others gaze at the sprouts or the fish in the water wishing for health and fertility.

The moment of the change of the year is announced these days by the



Yassaman Amir Moez (dimly visible in the background) and her husband, along with their children, jump over fires to celebrate the coming of the new year. The ritual is one of many ancient Iranian traditions still practiced today. *Family photograph 1991, courtesy of the author*

radio, the television, or by three blanks fired from a cannon in cities in Iran. At the moment of the change, family members hug and kiss and wish one another a happy new year. The oldest distribute gifts of money and new coins to youngsters and inferiors. Many seventeenth-century travelers noted an older ritual of exchanging eggs at Noruz.⁸

The first moments of the new year are filled with rituals. Mothers and children walk out of their homes, taking with them water, salt, and bread. They spill the water on their doorsteps and blow into the air the breath of life. They return home with a feeling of renewal, having purified the way, and as the first visitors of the year they step in ritually, offering their best wishes for a happy, healthy, and prosperous year.

The lights of Noruz are kept lit, and candles on the ceremonial display are left to burn out. Mothers sit at the ceremonial display and eat hard-boiled eggs from it, the number of eggs depending on the number of their children. Others take bits of sweets and put them in the mouths of each family member.

The first night of the year is called the "Night of the Herb" and is celebrated with special foods consisting of fresh and smoked fish, a rice made with dill and parsley, and a type of fried omelet filled with chopped herbs. Another food is noodle rice and sometimes a chicken. The Qashqa'i traditionally eat broiled lamb and rice on Noruz.

The festivities of the new year reinforce community relationships and customs. On the first twelve days of the year, Iranians pay visits to each other in order of age and seniority. Visits are ritually marked with eating sweets and exchanging gifts of newly minted money, coins, and eggs. Noruz is a time for close and distant family members to come together, and each visit is reciprocated. It is a time for forgiveness and for reestablishing all weakened or broken ties.

The thirteenth day of the year, called *sizdeh bedar*, is spent outdoors. Family members pack up food and other items necessary for the day and find a picnic place in a green fresh spot

under the shade of a tree. It is the custom to spend the day frivolously in wonder and joy. Children frolic; adults play games of chess, backgammon, and cards. A noodle stew with herbs is the honored food of the day, along with lettuce leaves dipped in vinegar syrup.

Some of the principal activities in Iran on the thirteenth day of Noruz used to be horse-racing, polo, wrestling, and bull or cock fighting, as well as dancing, singing, and playing music. On the last day of the festivities, women and especially girls tie knots in the grass so that their wishes come true in the following year.

The last ritual of Noruz consists of throwing the tall sprouts prepared for the ceremonial display into the running water of a stream or a river, in symbolic surrender to the magical pattern of life, to the cycle of birth and rebirth, the cycle of the seed being born from the primeval water and being buried in its source to be born again.

The celebrations of Noruz reflect a nation at a moment of exuberant life, a people turned for two weeks or so into a unanimous community, all participating in a single symbolic event. The rituals of Noruz are passed on from generation to generation. Other important Iranian festivals have disappeared. Religions as well as dynasties have come and gone in Iran, but Noruz has remained untouched by any institution. Noruz is celebrated in remote tribal territories, in villages, and in cities. Noruz has been kept alive in areas that used to be part of the Iranian territory or were deeply influenced by Iranian culture. In the Republics of the Soviet Union, Noruz has been officially authorized since 1988. In Afghanistan, Noruz is observed with new clothes, gifts, and a special dish of seven fruits and nuts on the first day of the year. In Turkey, Noruz is celebrated among families but also with festive public manifestations of singing and dancing. In India, Noruz is called the feast of Jamshid

and observed by the Zoroastrian Parsees who have adapted its rites of spring to local rituals.

Noruz is observed by Iranians who live outside of Iran, who jump over fires on the Feast of Wednesday, gather around a ceremonial display at the change of the year, and set out on a picnic on the thirteenth day of the new year. The magic of Noruz lies in its rites of purification, of renewal, and its promise of abundance and happiness. For Iranians, it is their birth-right. It is a way they live beyond history, with its invasions, wars, dictatorships, and exiles. Purified by the rites of spring, year after year, they are ever willing to start again. □

Yassaman Amir Moez is a cultural anthropologist who received her doctorate from the Sorbonne University in Paris. She has lived in the United States for four years and has been a Smithsonian Fellow at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. Dr. Moez would like to thank Christopher Murphy, Roya Marefat, and Ali-as Asghar Moez for their contributions to her paper on Noruz.



A greeting card depicting the clowns of Noruz, Haji Firuz, who dance in the streets and joke with crowds of onlookers to celebrate the new year (the practice ended with the advent of the Islamic Republic in 1979). Their blackened faces symbolize the death of the old year and their flamboyant red clothes symbolize new blood, rebirth, and the purification of fire. The traffic signal reads Happy New Year. *Greeting card, courtesy of the author*

Notes

¹ Fardideh Fardjan, *Uncle New Year: An Original Folk Story* (Tehran: Carolrhoda Books, 1972).

² Pierre Grimal, *Larousse World Mythology* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1963), 55-70.

³ Ehsan Yarshater, "Iranian Historical Tradition," in *The Cambridge History of Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 3(1): 343-481.

⁴ Henry Glassie, *The Spirit of Folk Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 17.

⁵ Sir John Chardin, *Travels in Persia* (London, 1720). Reprint editions: London 1927; 1972.

⁶ Henri Massé, *Croyances et Coutumes Persanes* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1938), 147.

⁷ Adam Olearius, *Relation de Voyage* (Paris, 1639), 399.

⁸ Pietro Della Valle, *Les fameux voyages* (Paris: G. Clouzier, 1662?), 286.

HANUKKAH

Feast of Dedication, Festival of Lights

By Devorah S. Sperling

Hanukkah is an eight-day festival, commencing on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev on the Jewish calendar. The holiday commemorates the purification and rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 B.C.E.

The story of Hanukkah, which is found in Maccabees I and Maccabees II in the *Apocrypha*, involves the efforts of the Assyrian Antiochus Epiphenes to unify his conquered lands into a powerful homogenous kingdom. He embraced Hellenism as a political strategy, proclaiming that all peoples of the empire were to serve Grecian gods and in effect become Greeks.

Resistance from the monotheistic Jewish population led to a new royal decree addressed to the people of Judea in Kislev 167, B.C.E., and designed to force the Jews to change their peculiar ways. Idols and offerings of swine flesh were introduced into the Temple, circumcision and the observance of Jewish feasts were banned, and Torah scrolls were burned. Disobedience was punishable by death.

A small army of Jews led by Judah the Maccabean rose up to restore the service in the Temple and to install their own religious leaders. According to legend, when the Maccabees prepared the Temple for rededication they found only a small flask of oil to light the candelabra. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days.

The central themes of the popular Hanukkah narrative are (a) the victory of the "good moral values" of Judaism over the "evil forces" of Hellenic hedonism and (b) the revolt as populist anti-colonialist uprising. The historical record, however, reflects a deeper idea: The Maccabees defended the principle that in a diversified society the function of the state is to embrace—not to subordinate—constituent cultures, and that the character



At a December 14, 1990, program at the Library of Congress on Sephardic culinary traditions, Annie Totah demonstrated the preparation of *atayif* (left) and *baklava* (center), which are traditional Hanukkah foods in her native Beirut Jewish community. Photo by Gregory Jenkins

and complexion of a multi-ethnic state cannot be determined by the arbitrary dictatorial imposition of a single pattern of behavior on all elements of the population.

The holiday of Hanukkah is a minor one in the Jewish calendrical cycle. The actual observance of Hanukkah involves a special candelabra called a *hanukkiyah* or Hanukkah menorah, which holds eight candles plus an extra candle called a *shammash* used for lighting the others, moving from right to left. The customary practice is to start with one flame and increase the number by one each evening at dusk, while reciting a blessing.

The foodways of the holiday are associated with the symbolic oil. Hanukkah is a high cholesterol, high fat-content holiday. Jews of Ashkenazi background traditionally devour potato *latkes* (fried potato pancakes) with apple sauce and/or sour cream. Sephardic culinary traditions are somewhat more diversified; some examples include *sufganiyot* (jelly-filled doughnuts), *bimuelos* (fried doughnut holes), *atayif* (cream-filled pancakes with nuts), and *simola* (semolina and rosewater cake). Recipes for several of these specialties appear on page 10. □

Devorah Sperling is a folklorist who specializes in Jewish culinary traditions.

HANUKKAH RECIPES

A Library of Congress program on December 14, 1990, featured Sephardic culinary traditions presented by members of the recently established Sephardic synagogue Magan David. Annie Totah offered recipes for the preparation of *atayif*, which is traditionally made and eaten for Hanukkah in her native Beirut Jewish community. Denise and Charles Suissa, immigrants from Casablanca, offered a recipe for *sufganiyot*, which became the dominant Hanukkah food in Israel following the mass immigration from North Africa in the 1950s. And Dina Doron provided a recipe for *simola*, a custard or pudding-like cake, which she remembers her grandmother baking every Hanukkah in Ankara, Turkey.

SUFGANIYOT

(Doughnuts)

By Denise and Charles Suissa,
from Casablanca, Morocco
(Yields 4 dozen)

½ teaspoon sugar
1 cup warm water (about 105–115 degrees)
1 package active dry yeast
1 large egg, beaten
2 cups flour
Pinch of salt
Vegetable cooking oil (safflower, canola, etc.)

In a large bowl, dissolve yeast and sugar in warm water and let stand until mixture bubbles. Add beaten egg. With your hands or a wooden spoon, stir sifted flour into yeast mixture. Beat dough vigorously until it is smooth and elastic, like the consistency of glue. Leave it to rise, covered with plastic wrap, in a warm place for 1½ to 3 hours or until it triples in size. Punch down. With wet hands, make doughnut shapes and drop into hot oil. Turn over to fry evenly. Drain on paper towels. While still warm, dip doughnuts in honey, confectioner's sugar, or jam as desired.

ATAYIF with ASHTA (Pancakes with Cheese Filling)

By Annie Totah,
from Beirut, Lebanon
(Yields about 60 pieces)

Batter

½ cup lukewarm water
2 teaspoons sugar
2 packages active dry yeast
2 cups flour
1 cup farina
1 teaspoon baking powder
3 cups lukewarm water
Oil or Pam spray for skillet

Ashta

½ pound ricotta cheese
2 teaspoons sugar
4 ounces Cool Whip
Ground pistachios

Syrup

1½ cups sugar
¾ cups water
½ lemon
A few drops orange flower water

Atayif: Add 2 teaspoons of sugar to the lukewarm water. Stir to dissolve. Mix in the yeast and set aside for 10 minutes. Combine the flour, farina, and baking powder in a large bowl. Stir the yeast and add to the dry ingredients. Stir in the water gradually to make a thick batter. Cover and set aside for 8 hours or overnight. If the dough is too thick the next day, add a little lukewarm water so that the consistency will be that of pancake batter. Stir well. Grease a heavy skillet lightly with oil or Pam and heat. Drop 1 tablespoon of batter onto the hot skillet and spread out into a round pancake with a diameter of 2½ to 3 inches. (Four of these may be made at a time in a large skillet). When the edges curl up slightly, remove with a spatula and put on a platter. Cover with a kitchen towel to avoid drying. Repeat until all the batter is used up.

Ashta: In a separate bowl gently mix the cheese, Cool Whip, and sugar. Set aside in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Syrup: Combine the sugar, water, and lemon juice in a small saucepan and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes. Add orange flower water. Remove from heat and cool.

Fold the pancakes in half and pinch the sides near the folded end part-way to seal and form a small pocket. Stuff these pockets with the ashta. Decorate with ground pistachios. Arrange the stuffed atayif on a serving platter and keep refrigerated. Spoon the cool syrup over top or serve separately from a small bowl with a spoon.

Variation: Use walnut filling instead of the ashta. Fill the pancakes with the following and seal all around edges. Deep fry in hot oil.

Mix

1½ cups chopped nuts
1 tablespoons sugar
½ teaspoon cinnamon

SIMOLA

(Semolina Cake)

By Dina Doron, from Ankara, Turkey
(Yields one cake, 15–20 pieces)

5 cups warm water
1 cup milk
1 cup semolina
1¼ cups sugar
½ cup crushed almonds
Rose water
Ground cinnamon
Cake or gelatin form

In a large steel pot or sauce pan, add the milk and sugar to warm water (slightly hotter side of warm, about 115–120 degrees). Slowly whisk in the semolina, making sure that it dissolves without being lumpy. Heat mixture slowly on stove and stir while bringing it to a boil. Reduce heat and continue to stir until it starts to bubble and thicken. Remove from heat and stir in almonds. Lightly coat cake form with rose water. Pour the mixture into the cake form. Let it cool. Turn it over to a cake plate. Sprinkle top with rose water and ground cinnamon. Slice into 15–20 pieces and serve.

CHINESE OPERA

Stylized Forms Characterize Ancient Tradition

By Terence Liu

For thousands of years, the Chinese have developed and performed *hsi-chu* (pronounced *see chew*), the art of combining fantastic stories, singing, acting, elaborate costumes, and instrumental music. *Hsi-chu*, when translated into English, becomes "Chinese opera," but it is very different from European opera. In the fourteenth century, Chinese opera became one of the most popular genres of Chinese arts. Still popular today, it is performed on outdoor stages by itinerant companies and in the theaters of opera institutes by professional actors. It is also played and replayed on videotapes.

There are over three hundred kinds of Chinese opera from the various regions and cities of China, each

characterized by a distinct acting style, musical structure, repertory, or dialect. *Ching-hsi* (pronounced *jing see*), or Peking Opera, is the most dominant. Peking Opera resulted from a combination of several Chinese opera styles popular around the end of the nineteenth century in Peking (Beijing), the capital city of China. It enjoyed the patronage of emperors, especially during the reigns of Ch'ien-lung (1736-1795), Tung-chih (1865-1875), and Kuang-hsu (1871-1908). Today, the governments of both China and Taiwan, as well as Chinese people all over the world, remain proud of this magnificent traditional dramatic art form.

Few stage props are used in the productions—sometimes only a table and two chairs. Actors employ the techniques of mime to create stylized

representations of mountains, battlefields, and palaces. When an actor carries a riding crop and swings his leg over a vacant space, the audience knows he has mounted an imaginary horse. By reaching forward, grasping the air, pulling back and stepping over an imaginary threshold, an actor opens a door and enters a room.

Costumes are as elaborate as the stage is bare. Male characters (*sheng*) are distinguished by long black beards, which they tend to stroke whenever deep in thought. Old men (*lao sheng*) have white beards while young scholars (*hsiao-sheng*) have none at all. Clowns (*ch'ou*) have white patches of paint on their faces and constantly act silly. Warriors (*wu-sheng*) pantomime the martial arts. Refined women (*ch'ing-i*) have long sleeves, which they fold and refold to indicate contemplation or fling to represent shyness, anger, or fear. Coquettish women (*hua-tan*) flirt with coy glances, and warrior women (*wu-tan*) brandish swords and move about with fighting skill.

Painted-faced actors (*ching*) represent larger-than-life characters, usually generals or officials. The color of their face paint reveals their personalities: red for loyalty, black for coarseness, green for impulsiveness, and blue for fierceness.

Generals, government officials, student scholars, beautiful women, and even heavenly spirits act out historic, romantic, and mythic stories that Chinese people love. Characters reveal their inner thoughts and motives through their actions. Audiences judge them by the standards of Chinese virtue—patriotism, loyalty, bravery, honesty, and justice. □



Yu Jiao (played by Judy Huang) displays shyness in the presence of her suitor, Fu Peng (played by Zhu Chushan), in this scene from the opera *Jade Bracelet*, which was presented at the Library of Congress on April 18 by the Han Sheng Chinese Opera Institute. Photo by Jim Higgins

Terence Liu is a program specialist at the Folk Arts Program, National Endowment for the Arts. Dr. Liu is an ethnomusicologist who specializes in Chinese traditional arts.



The Han Sheng Chinese Opera Institute performed at the Library of Congress on April 18, the first program in the Folklife Center's 1991 Neptune Plaza Concert Series. In this scene from *Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers*, actress Wu Hong skillfully manipulates a long ribbon to portray the wind that carries a heavenly maiden to earth to heal one of Buddha's disciples. Article on page 11. *Photo by Jim Higgins*

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