

In Iran, Tehran Symphony Orchestra Leaves Stage rather than Bow to Demand to Ban Female Members

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Women of Tehran Symphony Orchestra

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra cancelled a performance that had been planned for the closing ceremony of an international wrestling event on November 29, 2015, after the authorities objected to the presence of women musicians among the orchestra members.

The Iranian Student News Agency's (ISNA) report of the incident [\[1\]](#) suggested that the women musicians had not fully observed the hijab, or female head covering.

"I said all of us will perform together or we will leave the hall," ISNA quoted Ali Rahbari, the orchestra's artistic director. "Some tried to resolve the problem but eventually they said the women cannot be allowed to perform, so I said we will not perform."

Rahbari described the treatment of women musicians as "embarrassing" and added, "The women musicians were going to perform the country's national anthem. Why shouldn't they? I have said many times that I was born in this country and I know very well where the red lines are. As long as I'm the director of this orchestra, I will not allow this kind of treatment."

The head of the Wrestling Federation, Rasoul Khadem, wrote a letter to Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Ali Jannati, indicating that his organization had not opposed to the concert, and he issued a new invitation for the orchestra to perform the national anthem at another international wrestling event in Tehran in January.

"This incident has left a negative impact on public opinion and among art lovers in the country," Khadem added.

During the past year there have been several concert cancellations, mostly in the provinces. But on January 15, 2015, *Shahrvand* daily reported an incident in Tehran, involving Alim Qasimov and his daughter Ferghana, prominent singers from the Azerbaijan Republic. They were planning to perform a duet in Tehran for three nights. The first two nights went by without any problem. On the third night, the police refused to allow Qasimov's daughter to perform publicly, only allowing the concert to proceed without her.

"I respect Iran's laws but nowhere in the world are women artists treated in such a way," Alim

Qasimov told the audience in an expression of apology on stage.

Afterwards, Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry Spokesman Hossein Noushabadi said the Qasimov concert had all the necessary permits. "Unfortunately when undue interferences happen on the margins, it will have security implications," he added.

A week before the Qasimov concert, the prominent musician Majid Derakhshani was stopped airport security forces at Imam Khomeini International Airport in Tehran on his way to Dubai and told he was banned from leaving the country. He had previously been interrogated by Iran's Intelligence and Public Security Police about his formation of an all-female musical group, the Mah Banoo Ensemble.

On September 2, 2014, the Shargh daily reported that the presence of women musicians at live performances had been banned in 13 provinces. Pirooz Arjomand, who was at the time in charge of the music department at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, opposed the ban and said it went against the Ministry's policies. "Separating women is a kind of gender segregation. Other institutions may have a problem with women on stage but this does not reflect the view of the Guidance Ministry," he stated.

During President Rouhani's term in office dozens of concerts have been cancelled despite having permits from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The cost has not just been monetary: the citizens of Iran have been deprived of these many musical performances by renowned and beloved artists.

International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

P.S.

* DECEMBER 2, 2015:

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/12/women-musician-ban-in-ran/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/94090804643/مجلس-مجلس-مجلس-مجلس-مجلس-مجلس-مجلس>