

'EXPERIMENTS IN DEFIANCE'

Yalda Zamani, 02.04.2023, Hamburg

Would our music be the same, if we were living in a different world?

As the sands of time have shifted, so too has our perception of artistic perfection. We no longer strive for a flawless representation of the natural world. We have learned to embrace the raw beauty of imperfection by recognizing that it is the unique variances within each of us that make our human experience truly valuable. Art has become an act of bravery, requiring us to look deep within ourselves, confronting our own judgments and self-doubts to create works that reflect the most vulnerable truths of our being.

The 32 years old Toomaj Salehi has been tortured in prison for over 150 days now. He was taken into solitary confinement a few days after the Women, Life, Freedom revolution started. He is charged with "corruption on Earth" and faces the death penalty. But what has he possibly done that is considered such a grave threat by his oppressors?

In a world rife with misery, injustice, and pain, can artists become catalysts of change? Does art still hold relevance in the face of such overwhelming challenges?

The 25 years old Shervin Hajipour, faces charges of "propaganda against the regime" and "instigating the violence,". He is also banned from leaving Iran.

What has he done to deserve this?

What do we do as artists with the massive transformation of our world unfolding before our eyes at this very moment of history?

Pretend none of it is relevant to us, bury our head in the sand, and continue doing what we have been doing so far, waiting for all this to go away? or is there a chance that any of this could make us observe and reflect upon our place in all this mess, and on the meaning of the arts and the power of the artist once again?

Shouldn't we ask ourselves if our mission is relevant to the world, rather than thinking if what is happening in the world is relevant to us?

What do we do with this awareness in the face of all those empty seats in our concert halls?

We might not have the answers, but are we at all asking the right questions?

On January 17th, Armed forces raided Elmira Rahmani's house in the central city of Isfahan and took her to an unknown location. Her personal electronic devices and musical instruments were confiscated. What has she done?

How are we relevant?

If we do not react to our contemporary world, contemporary issues, and contemporary ideals and visions, how are we relevant, and what are we doing calling ourselves promoters of contemporary music, when we close our eyes to what makes us and the composers whom we

program, contemporary? Would our music be the same, if we were living in a world with a different collective experience that we have?

Elmira did not give up. She is a concert cellist, a woman from a religious minority that was previously banned from playing on stage, and was subject to systematic discrimination and harassment, property confiscations and imprisonment, but despite all that, she did not give up on her art.

Shervin could not stay silent. He is a singer-songwriter who could not stay silent in the face of ongoing protests in Iran over the death of a 22-year-old woman Mahsa Jina Amini in police custody. He wrote a song based on the outpouring of public anger and the dreams of a nation for a free and democratic Iran on Twitter, and his song received more than 40 million views in less than 48 hours before it was removed from Instagram and won the Best Song For Social Change award at the 2023 Grammy Awards.

Toomaj could not stay indifferent. He is a rapper who spent his artistic life on writing and singing about social issues faced by Iranians. He challenged the authorities and fearlessly stood up against injustice to define new boundaries for artistic expression.

Toomaj, Shervin and Elmira, and other artists like them had one thing in common: they experimented with defiance, but not by choice. Their very existence as artists, and their self expression as art was a vehicle for progress and social change and a beacon of hope for millions. Their refusal to give up, to stay silent or indifferent scared the hell of an entity that despite its rooted ignorance, in its core, is well aware of the impact of art on a society. It amazes me that they are more convinced of this than we artists are.

They challenge the status quo, they dare to dream of a different reality. They use their art to shine a light on the issues that matter most. They give voice to the voiceless and they stand up for what is right. They define the rules of the game instead of playing by the given rules. They look beyond the familiar and the comfortable to find the raw material of their art. And for that, they tap into the depths of their own emotions and experiences, finding the common ground that unites us all in the human experience.

Let's be honest; As musicians, we often struggle to find our place in the world where we the "artists" and we the "humans" could find a meaningful way of communication that does not compromise our artistic integrity; But I deeply believe that A transformational process is needed for us to see it as our duty to work towards a better understanding of our global connectedness on all levels. It's by cultivating empathy and raising awareness about our responsibility towards each other that we no longer take our own privileges such as equality, democracy, and freedom of expression for granted, but rather see these essentials as common values that bring us closer to one another.

In the end, the power of art lies not in its ability to simply entertain, but in its capacity to inspire, challenge, and transform. A call to action, a means of resistance in an uncertain world.