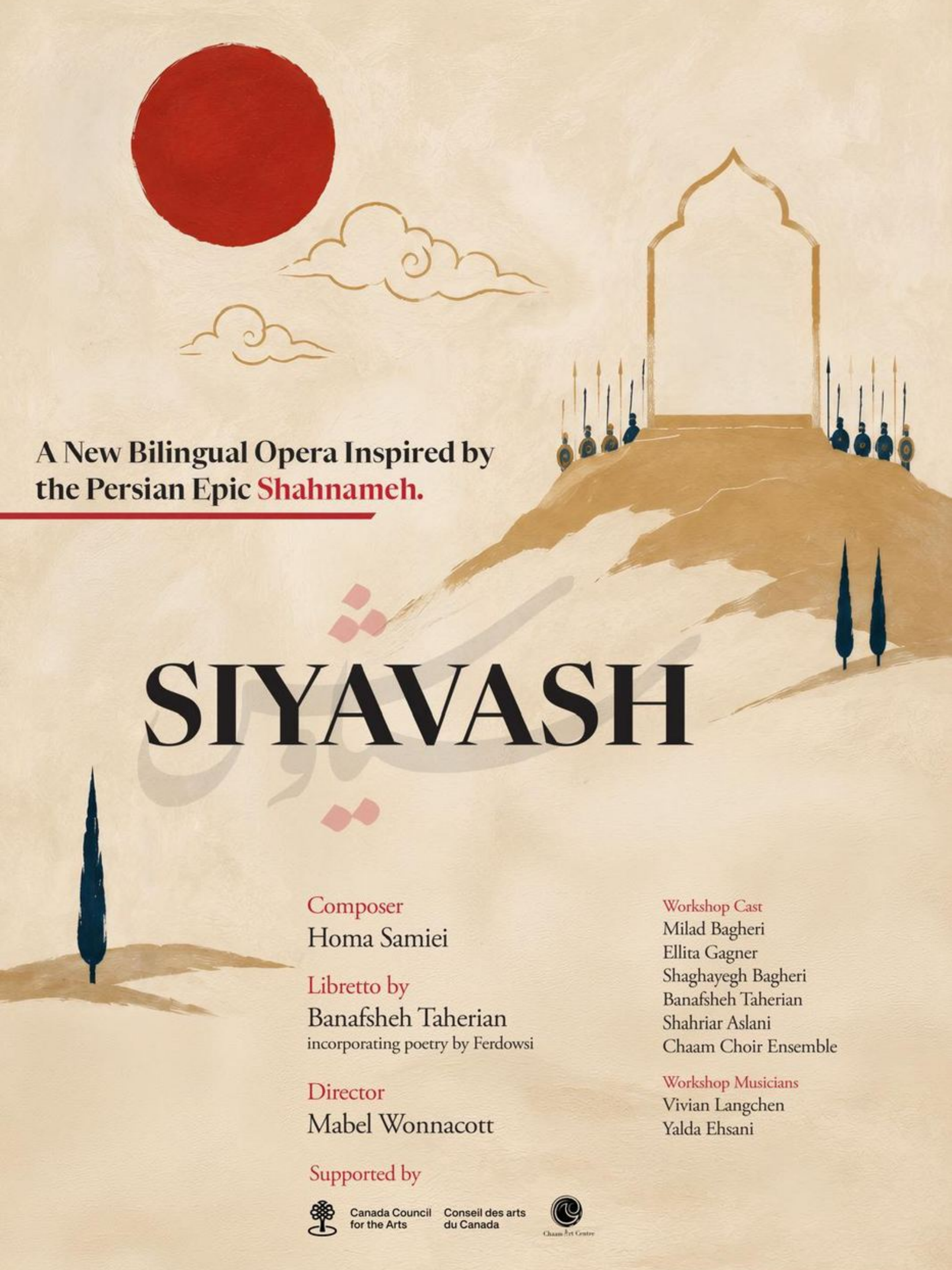




A New Bilingual Opera Inspired by
the Persian Epic **Shahnameh**.

SIYAVASH

Composer

Homa Samiei

Libretto by

Banafsheh Taherian

incorporating poetry by Ferdowsi

Director

Mabel Wonnacott

Supported by

Workshop Cast

Milad Bagheri

Ellita Gagner

Shaghayegh Bagheri

Banafsheh Taherian

Shahriar Aslani

Chaam Choir Ensemble

Workshop Musicians

Vivian Langchen

Yalda Ehsani



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SIYAVASH

Synopsis:

The Shahnameh (The Book of Kings), composed by the Persian poet Abu al-Qasim Ferdowsi around 1010 CE, is one of the world's greatest epic poems. Preserving myths and legends that stretch back more than 2,500 years, it recounts the mythical and historical kings and heroes of Iran from the creation of the world to the fall of the Sasanian Empire.

Inspired by the 2,500-year-old legend of Siyavash preserved in the Shahnameh, this bilingual opera explores innocence, justice, betrayal, and the cost of remaining faithful to one's conscience.

Raised by the legendary hero Rostam, Prince Siyavash grows into a young man admired for his compassion, wisdom, and unwavering integrity. Upon returning to the court of his father, King Kay Kavous, he is named heir to the throne. But when Queen Soudabeh, driven by obsessive desire, falsely accuses him after he rejects her advances, the kingdom is thrown into crisis. Unable to choose between truth and political stability, Kay Kavous subjects his son to the ancient Trial by Fire. Siyavash emerges unharmed, proving his innocence.

Later, as commander of Iran's army, Siyavash defeats the Turanians but refuses needless bloodshed, choosing diplomacy over revenge. When his father demands that he violate a peace treaty and execute innocent hostages, rather than betray his word, Siyavash releases the hostages and chooses exile over dishonor.

In Turan, King Afrasiab welcomes the exiled prince with generosity, while his daughter, Farangis, becomes Siyavash's devoted wife and partner. Together they built Siyavashgerd, a city founded on justice and peace. Yet Karsivaz, Afrasiab's brother, driven by jealousy, poisons the king's mind with suspicion, transforming trust into fear. Bound by honor even in the face of betrayal, Siyavash refuses to fight those who once offered him refuge and is unjustly executed, while the pregnant Farangis carries their unborn son, Kay Khosrow, whose future promises the restoration of justice.

From the place where Siyavash's blood touches the earth, a sacred plant grows, symbolizing renewal and the endurance of truth. More than two millennia after the legend first emerged, "Siyavash" continues to ask timeless questions: What is the cost of choosing integrity over power? Can justice survive political manipulation? And how does one remain human when surrounded by fear, violence, and betrayal?



SIYAVASH

Creative Team



Banafsheh Taherian
Librettist

Banafsheh Taherian is a bilingual (Farsi-English) actress, voice artist, and writer with over a decade of experience in the performing arts. She is the creator and host of the acclaimed podcast Chai with Banafsheh, which has garnered more than 6 million streams through its contemporary retelling of ancient Persian stories.

A former Artist-in-Residence at Canadian Stage (2021–22), Banafsheh is also recognized for her sold-out stage adaptation of Nezami's Khosrow and Shirin, her work as an emcee for major cultural events including Tirgan, and her voice performances for TVOKids. Through storytelling and performance, she brings warmth, creativity, and a deep sense of cultural connection to every audience she engages.



Homa Samiei
Composer

Homa Samiei is an Iranian composer, pianist, performer, and artistic director based in Toronto whose work blends Persian musical heritage with contemporary classical, operatic, and interdisciplinary performance practices. As a composer and performer, she has appeared at the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre of the Canadian Opera Company and collaborated with ensembles including the International Contemporary Ensemble and the Thin Edge New Music Collective. Her recent projects include Nowruz-e Siyavashan, Sing Us to Dawn, The Light Remains, and the opera Siyavash, supported by the Canada Council for the Arts and scheduled for workshop presentation in July 2026. She is also one of the composers of the IFCA Collaborative Opera project and co-founder of Chaam Project and Chaam Art Centre.



Mabel Wonnacott
Director

Mabel Wonnacott is a Toronto based opera director, arts educator and puppeteer whose work has been described as “powerful” and “ingenious”(Opera Canada, LudwigVan Toronto).

Directing highlights include Ramla and the Dessert with Tarragon Theatre's Greenhouse festival (2026), Tapestry Opera's Briefs (2025), The Tender Land with Toronto City Opera (2025), Le nozze di Figaro with Laurier Opera (2025), L'enfant et les Sortilèges and L'enfant Prodiges with The Glenn Gould School (2024) and Lysistrata Reimagined with U of T (2024, world premier). Mabel regularly designs, builds and choreographs puppets and has created puppets for Tapestry Opera, Laurier Opera, Tarragon Theatre, the CCOC and the University of Toronto. An avid believer in opera as a vehicle for human connection and social change, Mabel is also the Ontario Provincial coordinator for Opera InReach.



SIYAVASH

Workshop Cast



Ellita Gagner
Story Teller

Canadian mezzo-soprano Ellita Gagner, currently based in Montreal Quebec, has been praised for her "gorgeous, warm tone and winning gamine personality" (Gianmarco Segato, La Scena Musicale).

Ellita has performed leading and supporting roles in companies across Canada, including: Opéra de Montréal, L'Orchestre de L'Agora, Opera Nova Scotia, the Brott Festival, London Community Orchestra, Maritime Concert Opera, Uxbridge Messiah Singers and Orchestra, Chorus Niagara, GoodMess Opera, and Can of Soup Collective. She has workshopped scenes from Opéra Magnolia's Opera Creation Forum (2026), the role of Gabby in Mikael Karlsson and Royce Vavrek's Melancholia, and Mimi in scenes from Indians on Vacation by Ian Cusson and Royce Vavrek. She's a current member of the Atelier Lyrique at the Opéra de Montréal and this season will perform Célénia in Aty's (Dawe), Countess Ceprano in Rigoletto, and Alto solo in Mozart's Requiem. Also at the Opéra de Montreal, she will cover Octavian in Der Rosenkavalier and Maddalena in Rigoletto. She will appear in The Messiah with Uxbridge Messiah Singers, in a solo recital at the Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance, and in scenes staged by Stephen Lawless. In December 2026, she will workshop the role of Young Hester in A Prayer for Owen Meany (Luna Pearl Wolf) for Pacific Opera Victoria.

She has been a young artist with Brott Opera, Toronto Summer Music, The Castleton Festival, Equilibrium Young Artists (with Barbara Hannigan), Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance, Rebanks Fellow (Glenn Gould School) and Manitoba Opera.



Milad Bagheri
Siyavash

Milad Bagheri is an Iranian vocalist, performer, and music producer based in Toronto whose work blends Persian traditional and Kurdish folk music with contemporary and interdisciplinary performance practices. Known for his expressive vocal style and cross-cultural approach, he creates performances that combine storytelling, folk traditions, and contemporary sound worlds.

Bagheri made his operatic debut in 2015 performing the role of Zaal in Roudabeh with the Ayrik Opera Ensemble. Since then, he has continued to explore the intersection of opera and Persian musical traditions through new works and interdisciplinary collaborations.

As a performer, Bagheri has appeared at the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre of the Canadian Opera Company, Scotiabank Arena, TD Music Hall, and Meridian Arts Centre, collaborating with artists and ensembles across Canada and internationally. His recent projects include the album The Confidant (Ham Khalvat), a collection of original works that weaves Persian poetry, folk traditions, and contemporary musical language, as well as collaborations in opera, orchestral, and multidisciplinary performance.

A co-founder of Chaam Project and Co-Artistic Director of Chaam Art Centre, Bagheri continues to develop multidisciplinary performances rooted in Persian musical traditions while fostering new artistic collaborations. In Siyavash, he performs the title role, bringing to life one of the Shahnameh's most enduring symbols of integrity, courage, and sacrifice.

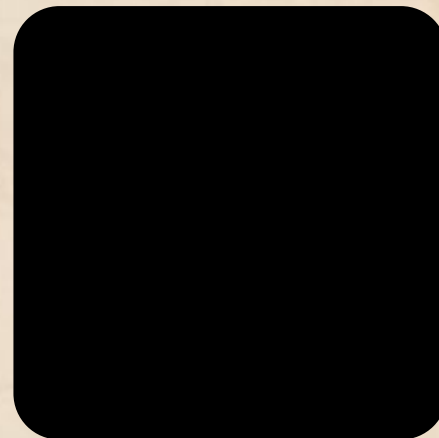


Shaghayegh Bagheri
Soudabeh

Shaghayegh Bagheri is an Iranian singer, performer, educator, and poet whose work bridges classical music, Persian traditional singing, contemporary vocal practices, and experimental performance. Known for her expressive depth and microtonal sensitivity, she creates performances that combine storytelling and cross-cultural musical traditions.

As a performer, She has appeared at the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre of the Canadian Opera Company, Opera From Scratch in Halifax, and festivals including DifferAZioni in Italy, Randfestspiele in Germany, and Let Her Sing in the United States. Her recordings include Seyr und Silence, Aphrodite, and Timeless Melodies of Iran, released by CambiataArts Records.

She is the founder of Toronto Singing House in Canada and Chant Singing School in Iran, and received the IFCA Singer-Composer Award in 2025.



Shahriar Aslani
Kay Kavus

Shahriar is a semi-professional vocalist and composer, he has been actively involved in international music communities across Paris, Toronto, and his hometown of Tehran. These diverse musical experiences have shaped his musical perspective and fostered a lasting passion for vocal music.

Alongside an active performance career as a singer, his work centers on composing for a cappella choirs and vocal ensembles. As a chorister, he has performed with some of Canada's most distinguished ensembles, including the Orpheus Choir of Toronto and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir.

He has a particular interest in the vocal repertoire of the 20th century, drawing inspiration from its rich diversity of harmonic language, and expressive possibilities.

Chaam Choir Ensemble (from left to right): Arezoo Eshraghi, Reza Yavari, Tina Rahimzadeh, Samaneh Taghipour, Ali Sazesh, Hanna Samiei, Farid Yari, and Morvarid Alinejad.





SIYAVASH

Workshop Musicians



Yalda Ehsani
Clarinet

Yalda Ehsani is an Iranian clarinetist and music educator based in Toronto. A graduate of the University of Tehran, she has performed with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra and the Iran National Orchestra. Dedicated to both solo and ensemble performance, she has collaborated on international projects across diverse musical styles. In 2025, she joined the Small World Music Incubator as part of its fifth cohort, and in 2026, she joined the Labyrinth Ontario Ensemble as a member of its second cohort. She performs with Saffron Tea and collaborates on a range of multicultural music projects across Toronto.



Vivian Lang Chen
Piano

Pianist Vivian Lang Chen is currently based in Toronto, Canada where she is leading a diverse and fulfilling career as a performer, teacher and collaborative pianist. Vivian has won numerous prizes at national and international competitions and is active as a soloist internationally, performing at venues in and around various parts of Canada, the United States, Europe, and China. Recent highlights include winning an Artist Prize in the 2023 Eppan Academy in Italy, Third Prize in the 2022 Prix Ravel of the Fondation Ravel in France, and her US solo recital debut at the Kennedy Center (2021) as the First and Audience Prize Winner of the 2021 Washington International Piano Competition. She has also collaborated with orchestras such as the Avanti Orchestra and Orchestra 914 in the United States and the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra, York Symphony Orchestra, Georgian Bay Symphony Orchestra in Canada. Vivian completed her formal studies with Arie Vardi in the fully funded artist diploma program at the Tel Aviv University from 2021-2023. Vivian also holds a master's degree in piano performance from the University of Michigan, where she studied with Christopher Harding, and a bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto, where she studied with Lydia Wong. During her studies there, she performed in Weill Recital Hall as her Carnegie Hall debut (2017), won the First Prize in the Canadian Music Competition (2015), the Bronze Prize in the Vancouver International Music Competition (2017). Her favourite part of being a pianist is getting to connect with people from all over the world, both with the piano and away from it.



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