The Flames of Ingratitude

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The late Esmaeil Mehrtash, as a child, built himself a Kamancheh using a butternut squash, horsehair, and a kebab skewer. When his family noticed his talent, they took him to Master "Darvish Khan" to learn the Tar.

In his youth, Master Mehrtash established classes in elocution, theater, and acting—classes that later became known as the "Barbad Society".

Abdolvahab Shahidi, Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, Mohammad Montasheri, and dozens of other music masters were among Esmaeil Mehrtash's students.

He composed 450 folklore songs that are still repeatedly broadcast on television today during Nowruz or Yalda night. Many individuals who achieved success in Iran's music, theater, and acting scenes undoubtedly spent time at the Barbad Society.

During the revolution, the Barbad Society theater, along with all of Master Mehrtash's records, was set on fire.

The following is a memory recounted by Master Mehrtash, an event that, according to the master himself, deeply affected him:

A cigarette seller used to set up his stall in the hallway of the Barbad Society. Occasionally, police officers would come and confiscate his cigarette stand.

One day, the cigarette seller came to me and said: "I have a wife and children, and I beg you to tell the officers that you have given me permission to set up my stall here."

I agreed and told the officers that this gentleman was part of our collective and had my permission.

No one bothered him anymore, and for twenty years, he made his living with that same cigarette stand in front of the theater doors.

Years passed until one day, I was informed that they were going to set the theater on fire! I rushed there immediately. I saw that the very first Molotov cocktail was thrown by this same cigarette seller.

I looked at him. He turned to me and said, "Is being an entertainer (Motreb) even a real job? Go find yourself another line of work."

My entire life burned to the ground—the costumes, the sets, the records, and the tapes of national music and local folk music from various cities and regions of Iran that I had collected. Everything burned, but all that burning and destruction did not devastate me nearly as much as that person's words.