

THE NATIONAL IRANIAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY



THE IRANIAN EXPERIENCE

Keeping Iranian Traditions Alive

Advisory Committee

Robert de Warren

Lady Jamil Kharrazi -The Toos Foundation

Yves Ghiai-Chamlou – Architect, Artist, Arts Patron

Ms. Jane Lewisohn, BA (Pahlavi)PhD –University of London, Research

INTRODUCTION

Since the political changes in Iran, over thirty years ago, many families have chosen exile, starting new lives in many different countries on several continents. This has provoked a complete up-rooting of their traditions and, in many cases, a loss of contact with their mother culture. Several generations of Iranians born outside their country are lacking the links to their motherland and are deeply concerned for the loss of identity this may cause. Iranians have many reasons to be proud of their culture. Great scientists, poets, architects and artists, have made substantial contributions to Mankind through the centuries.

This initiative springs from the treasure of knowledge and culture accumulated during years of painstaking research by Robert and Jacqueline de Warren. They dedicated great part of their lives to researching, studying and documenting the traditional dances and ceremonies of Iranian civilization. The fruits of these many years of dedication have been the foundation on which The Iranian National Folklore Society was built, under the patronage of HIM The Empress Farah Pahlavi and the reason for the creation of this “THE IRANIAN EXPERIENCE”

All Iranians have the responsibility of preserving their ancestral culture and traditions and insure the legacy of these treasures is passed intact to future generations.

THIS IS OUR MISSION

PRESERVATION

TICP will undertake the creation of lost archives, through its Officers and recruiting single individuals, graduates from the Persian program now in exile, with knowledge and experience, to help reconstruct lost data and classify accordingly.

PROMOTION

We will search for opportunities to give or sponsor lectures and demonstrations on relevant themes, at schools, colleges and cultural organizations, participate in multi-cultural festivals and promote

more understanding of diversity.

PERFORMANCE

We will support, collaborate, organize or present professional public performance of Iranian dances and ceremonies, engaging specialized artists for each event. These events will have paid admissions for ticket revenue, free entry for children, students and seniors not usually able to attend such performances, television, internet DVD and other media presentations, publications.

IRAN – Cultural Research 1965 – 1977

INTRODUCTION

By

ROBERT DE WARREN

In 1965 I arrived in Tehran, at the recommendation of Dame Ninette de Valois, founder of the British Royal Ballet, H.I.M. The Shah, had requested her council regarding Dance development of the National Ballet of Iran.

Minister of Arts and Culture, Mehrdad Pahlbod, soon appreciated my deep interest in Iran's multi-faceted cultural heritage. Encouraged by the Her Majesty The Shabanou, the National Folklore Institute was founded and I was appointed its Artistic Director.

Our mission was comprised of several activities leading to the establishment of:

- A - Dance Academy
- B - Performing Company
- C - Research
- D - Archive

Honored to accept this fascinating challenge, my wife Jacqueline and I spent the following years, until 1977, fulfilling this mission.

We embarked on setting the foundations of the National Folklore Society's institute for the formation of artists able to perform the many styles of ethnic dances inherent to the vast tribal areas of the country. Until this initiative, there had not been any methodical research or documentation of Iran's vast ethnic cultural treasures. Activities were mostly limited to presenting small amateur performing groups, brought to the capital by the Ministry of Arts and Culture. However, this valuable experience awoke an awareness of the existing heritage of untapped cultural resources available.

THE INSTITUTE

The Institute became the headquarters of all activities.

We gathered the existing amateur groups of dancers, singers and musicians under the auspices of our Institute. Guidance and expertise was provided to improve their levels of presentation.

Groups: Azarbaijan, Guilan, Assirian Dance, Torbat e Jam and Bojnurd.

A – DANCE ACADEMY

Three Year Course for the formation of professional dancers.

Nationwide publicity attracted high-school graduates to audition. The Course offered a Diploma and the possibility of being accepted in the Performing Company. Students auditioning were selected following certain criteria:

Physical attributes, instinctive musical sense, instinctive dance sense, personal interests and ambitions, general education.

We devised a Curriculum unique in its capacity to form artists capable of understanding the wide variety of styles in Iranian Folklore.

Subjects: Dance Technique - new syllabus Mime and Acting
Music – Classical *Dastgha*, Tribal rhythms, Urban Music Movement Analysis
Performing Skills

Courses were full-time, requiring a constant commitment.

B - THE PERFORMING COMPANY

It was imperative to have a Professional Dance Company capable of presenting a wide variety of performances at the new Roudaki Hall in Tehran.

An intensive selection process followed by an equally intensive formation course, assured the first performances within a period of six months. Most of the selected dancers were “natural” dancers who, with specific direction could reach an acceptable artistic level. Their enthusiasm was a vital element of our success.

THE MAHALLI DANCERS OF IRAN – The performing Company that toured the World as ambassadors of Iranian Culture.

The first tour to London, established THE MAHALLI DANCERS OF IRAN as a definitely beautiful entity on the international dance circuit. Princess Anne attended the opening performance at the famous Sadler’s Wells Theatre.

The following, are Works created by us until the completion of my duties in 1977:

TRIBAL DANCES:

FESTIVAL IN KURDISTAN DANCES FROM GUILAN NOW RUZ IN AZARBAIJAN DANCES FROM BALUCHISTAN
TORKAMAN FOLKLORE DANCES FROM BOJNURD and TORBAT E JAM in Khorassan Province YEZLEH FROM
KHUZESTAN

FESTIVAL IN BOUCHER BOYER – AHMADI from KOHKILUYEH DANCES FROM LORESTAN JIROFT KERMAN
WEDDING IN SHUSHTAR

MYSTIC CEREMONIAL: A DERVISH CEREMONY ZAR – KHUZESTAN ZURKHANEH

COURT DANCES - Based on the Ancient Arts of Miniatures and inherited traditions:

HAFT PEYKAR RAKHSE SAFFAVID ZARB E ZANGULEH
QAJAR COURT DANCES CHEHEL SOTUN

POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT:

KHEIME SHAB BAZI HAJI BABA

MYTHOLOGICAL THEMES: SIMORGH ZAL VA RUDABEH

Performances in Iran were presented at:

ROUDAKI HALL, NYIAVARAN PALACE, GOLESTAN PALACE, SAADABAD PALACE, NIRTV, JASHNE FARHANGE HONAR, TAKHT E DJAMSHID,

International Touring:

ENGLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, USA, PAKISTAN, QATAR, DUBAI, EGYPT, MEXICO, VENEZUELA

C - RESEARCH

Systematic Research was a prime objective. A specific plan was evolved and funds were allocated to allow for a Research Team, which I headed. Most of Iran was covered during this specific period from 1967, when I organized the first excursion to Kurdistan, until my departure in 1977.

Research Team: We travelled usually in two Jeep or Land Rover with, two dancers from the Academy, Cameraman, Sound Technician, Administrator/organizer, Interpreter (engaged locally for dialects.) Occasionally included designers or musicians.

Objectives: Find local tribal or community leaders, contact local Education, municipal or health officers. Obtain pointers for events of particular interest. Talk to people in bazaars, outside mosques and tea-rooms. Follow-up on information received, and finally visit areas of interest to film, record music, photograph and design all artifacts, clothes, accessories, etc.

RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS TO:

AZARBAIJAN: Tabriz, Heriz, Eastern and Western areas. Ta'ati, Shasavan tribes.
Rezaieh Assirian dances

BALUCHISTAN/ SISTAN: Zahedan, Zabol, Iranshahr, Bampur, Chah Bahr, Hash, Saravan

FARS: Shiraz, Minab, Bandar Abbas, Kaserun, Kavar, Firuzabad GUILAN : Lahijan, Rasht, Deylaman and most Caspian Area.

ISFAHAN, Isfahan city, Shahreza

KERMAN: Kerman city, Bam, Jiroft, Sirjan, Mahan

KERMANSHAHAN: Kermanshah, Kerend, Sar-ePol, Tazeh Abad, Davarud KHORASSAN: Bojnurd, Torbat e Jam, Neishapour

KHUZESTAN: Ahwaz, Bandar e Busher, Dezful, Shushtar, Bandar e Lengheh, Shush KORDESTAN: Sanandaj, Saqqez, Kahriz, Mahabad, Miandobad

LORESTAN: Borujer, Khorramabad, Malayer, Arak

MAZANDERAN: Gorgan, Turkoman Folkore, North-East Caspian region CITIES OF INTEREST VISITED: Kashan, Qom, Hamadan, Mashad, Yazd

D – ARCHIVES

All material gathered during research was analyzed, classified, indexed and placed in the ARCHIVES.

Great attention was given to insure legitimacy of the material collected.

If foreign influences were detected, they were removed. Sometimes music from a neighboring tribe was used, or songs from another country. We insured they were all identified.

Wedding ceremonies, Circumcision Customs, Funerals, all were catalogued with appropriate information about costume, ornaments, specific music, and historical background.

The ARCHIVES were divided into the following CLASSIFICATIONS: 1 – TRIBAL DANCES

Clear identifications of origin Musical accompaniment

Alphabetical names of Dance Steps and description Related ethnic details

HISTORICAL DANCES

Literary research; Ancient Manuscripts, Museums Illustrations: Miniatures
Frescoes Sculpture, Musical Modes

MYSTIC CEREMONIAL

Pre- Islamic: Now Ruz

Post- Islamic: Dervish Ceremonial, Zurkhaneh, T'azieh

URBAN DANCES

Wedding Ceremonies, Kheime Shab-bazi (Iranian puppets) Baba Karam (popular family entertainment)

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS – On our research we always sought to obtain original musical instruments. They were also exhibited under:

TRIBAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS - TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

British Dance Magazine – DANCE AND DANCERS

Copies of articles appearing on the presentation of

THE MAHALLI DANCERS OF IRAN

At

SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE

LONDON

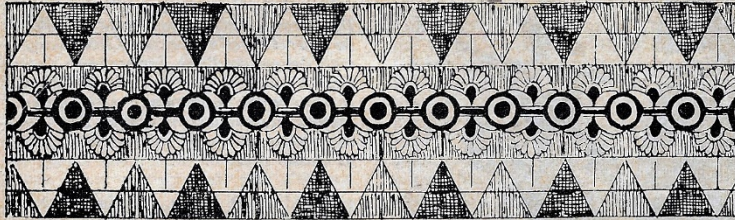


CONTINUED;

Sadler's Wells
THEATRE
ROSEBURY Avenue
LONDON EC1

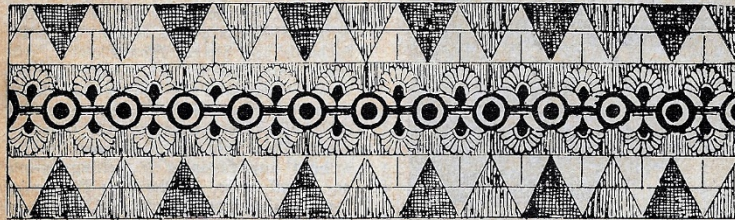


THE
MAHALLI
DANCERS
OF
IRAN



Discovery in Persia

ROBERT DE WARREN talks to d & d about his search for Persian folklore in forming the Mahalli Dancers of Iran



When you first went to Teheran, the original idea was that you should work with the classical company, since you had been a classical dancer with the Royal Ballet?

When Dame Ninette de Valois asked me to go, it was in 1965, and the ballet company in Teheran had been going for a few years. During my first two years I was entirely dedicated to the ballet company. The Minister of Arts then asked me if I could look into the national arts of Persia. Nobody had previously done any research into folklore or any of the national dances. So I got working on it, and at the same time the Empress donated a large sum of money to found the national folklore organisation. That was how it all began in 1967. For the following four years I was directing both the classical and folklore companies. We gave a lot of performances at the Opera House with the permanent classical company, and the folklore also appeared there.

Is there no longer a classical company?

Yes, the classical company still exists, though at present without a permanent ballet master; they invite people from abroad to come for a period and do productions. We—my wife and I—left the company two seasons ago because we had an offer from the Ministry and the Em-

press to give our whole time to the folklore company.

How did you become interested in the possibility of Persian folklore?

Having been born in South America, I was always interested in the dances of Argentina and Uruguay, anything that had any kind of Spanish influence. When I was with the Royal Ballet I would rush to see any Spanish companies that happened to be in London. I have always been fascinated by folklore, so when I discovered how much there was in Iran I was naturally very curious to follow it up.

How did you become conscious of the fact that there was so much Persian folklore?

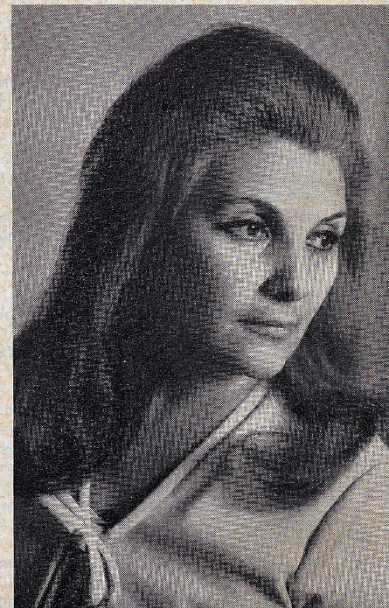
I was very lucky because a very dear friend of ours, General Hassan Arfa, had done campaigns all over the country, and since he was married to a former dancer with Diaghilev's company, Hilda Bewicke, he was very interested in the dance. Talking to him it was possible to find out what regions had something that would be interesting to follow up. Then I discovered from all kinds of people various things they remembered from when they were young, such as the dances and festivals that took place in their local villages. Gradually I began to explore all these regions and it became much easier to research—one village led to another, one district to another—and I began to discover things that people didn't know even existed.

How did you start? Did you go to some region that you thought might be having a festival?

The first journey I did was to Kurdistan. This was known to be a region very



ANTHONY CRICKWAY





rich in dances, but everyone said that they were very monotonous and repetitive and that one wouldn't be able to get anything out of them. Understanding the Kurdish temperament, I felt this couldn't be, so I took off for the mountains in Kurdistan with a team—a cameraman, a sound-recording man and one of my dancers. We found about 38 different dance figures, variations on original ones that belonged to a whole tribe, or ones that belonged to a small group. This was how I became aware that it was so much a part of the whole life of these people. In fact, as a result of this, the Kurdish tableau in our programmes has been a sort of trademark ever since.

When do they actually do these dances, on what sort of occasion?

The Kurds have dances for all occasions—for weddings, for births and circumcisions, even for funerals. There is a little village up in the mountains where they have one special dance for somebody who has died in the family. The musician sits on the roof of the house playing a wailing tune, the family dance, then accompany the body to the grave and they carry little glasses of wine. Just before the dust and stones and earth are thrown on to the

body (which in Persia is not in a coffin) they pour in the glasses of wine and depart with a very jolly dance; they feel that this has been a happy end to the person's life.

In your Mahalli programmes you have several rituals, such as those for the Dervishes: when are these done?

With the Dervishes, there are many different orders. The one we have based our scene upon, the Moulavi order, was founded in Persia in the 12th century by a famous philosopher and poet. The idea behind the ceremony is to get the dancers into a state of ecstasy where one's body has lost contact with reality and the earth so that it is possible to assimilate the philosophy of the group. Groups of these Dervish orders have remained in Iran, cut off from others, and their dances and ceremonies have been influenced by the local folklore so that you can see the difference between the local ceremony and the one, for instance, that is performed in Baluchistan which is the one that we use particularly. In fact I think it's all for the best from a theatrical point of view because the local groups have allowed extra movement to come into the ceremony. In fact these ceremonies go on

DIRECTORS (opposite page): The director of the Mahalli Dancers, Robert de Warren, with his wife Jacqueline who his assistant and also professor of the dance.

DERVISH CEREMONY (left): Stage performance of the Dervish ceremony based on that performed by the Moulavi order

for hours and hours until eventually the dancers fall on the ground. Some orders stick knives into their bodies to prove to themselves that they don't feel pain, or shake their heads instead of whirling, or do other movements that will bring on the same state of mind.

That's presumably the idea of whirling and why they have become known as Whirling Dervishes, such as used to appear in fairs and so on?

Whirling Dervishes and the other sects are all very secret orders and don't like to do it publicly, but now, of course, the world is very interested in ethnology and all such subjects and these things are done publicly. But they do whirl for that reason.

Quite different from this, of course, are the Turkoman dances which are much heavier—all that grunting and stamping around.

Nobody really knows why this dance exists or how it came into being. There is a folk tale about a man whose love was enclosed in a tree, and that all the men were dancing around the tree, grunting and making noises, asking the spirit of the tree to release her. I don't think this is really the origin; from what I can find, it appears to be more of a war dance. When they build up their grunting and their step and the heaviness, and it becomes more intense, they are actually preparing themselves for war; this gives them courage in battle. The man in the middle of the circle is actually chanting about the women they are going to leave behind when they are away fighting. This counterpoints the rhythm of the growl.

Do you notice a great difference between the folklore of people who live in mountainous regions and those who live in flatter regions near sea level?

Yes, there is a big difference. On the shores of the Caspian, which is below sea level, the vegetation is very lush, the people are very jolly, gay and busy with their daily work—planting rice or picking tea or whatever it is—and their dances reflect this joy. The movements are very light and rather sensual in their festive dances, whereas up in the mountains you find that everything is more severe, the emotions are not expressed so freely, and they dance with a very serious concentrated look on their faces. The temperament is very different.

Do you think you have explored most of Iran and that you have collected most of what there is to collect?

No, nothing like. For instance, just before we came with the company to England I was in Kuzestan which is the oil region. It is a very arid mountainous province. We drove up to about 2,500 metres

and found a beautiful valley called Kokiluyeh. The valley is full of vegetation, very old oak trees, and the grass full of flowers, rather like Switzerland, but entirely different from the Caspian where the vegetation is dense and tropical. The tribes in Kokiluyeh have some beautiful dances which rather reflect the nature of the region, and I have collected them for a new piece which I shall give after we return to Teheran.

Do any of the court dances survive, because there appear to be, in old Persian paintings and miniatures, considerable suggestions of some kind of court dance?

In the miniatures one can find the best evidence of this. Even before the 15th century the earliest miniatures depict dance. When the Arabs invaded Iran and the Muslim religion took over, it was against the religion to play music or to dance. Through centuries of Arab rule, Persians kept hidden their feeling for music and dance, but when they were eventually free of the caliphs, these arts immediately blossomed forth and the music really developed. Each shah would encourage artists to come and live in the court and, like they did in the French courts, create a national tradition of art. Though, of course, they didn't go as far as establishing an academy or even creating a system of dance, but one can trace back the musical rhythms of the period and from the miniatures, which are so clear, it is easy to compare the movement. If you place, say, 20 miniatures side by side it's easy to see how the movement developed. Then studying the Persian temperament is very important. I find that

you could easily put the same movement to a jazz rhythm, but if you keep in mind the lyrical character of the Persians and the femininity of the women, and the fact that they dance practically for their own husbands alone, rarely in public, then it is possible to discover the quality of movement. It's very individual to Persia: it has a little bit of Arab, and its own tradition; it may have a more Eastern influence as well, but I don't think it can be compared to north Indian dance or any other form of dance.

Those dances that the women did in the percussion piece in your Mahalli dance programme, are they what might have been court dances?

Yes, those are absolutely pure movements from what women even dance today. It's traditional in Persian parties that women get up and dance in the middle of the party, and many of these movements I have used have come from these dances that have been done for generations. Adding to this what one has found from research in miniatures and from references in literature, it has been possible to find this style. The main quality of the Persian women's dancing is in the femininity and grace, in the hand movements and the way they use their shoulders very slightly, without any vulgarity. Whereas some of the Arab and Egyptian dances can be rather cheap, merely belly dancing.

Is there any vocabulary of the hand movements, anything written down apart from what you find in miniatures?

No, there's nothing at all. It's something that is totally improvised, and like traditional Persian music it's meant to be

done by an individual. The tendency today is to try and group things, to make a complete orchestra of traditional instruments and westernise it, but I think it is much more important in dance and in music to keep the original form because the character of the dancer and the musician is so very important. So I only use the group of the girls in black at the back to reflect what the two soloists in white are doing. I allowed them liberty in their own style when I choreographed it.

Then they are based on traditional rhythms, aren't they?

Yes, the drummer who came with us, his name is Ismaili, has made a deep study of the question of percussion in Iranian culture. He has used rhythms that are constant throughout the whole of Persian music, but he has grouped them in a different way and he brought in camel bells, cymbals and different wooden instruments that were used before, and combined them in this composition. It was rather a venture, something new.

You collected all this material and got these programmes together, how long did this take you?

As I said, I have been working on the folklore for about six years. Each year I do about three research travels lasting about 20 days. I was lucky in my last one because the Kokiluyeh region is so rich in different tribes that I found enough material for four programmes in a row that don't resemble each other at all. But I am not always as lucky as this, on one trip I might not find more than just two or three dances that cannot be used very well, then I have to wait until I find some more and build them up into a programme.

How do you discover these different villages, is there a kind of bush telegraph that gives you this information?

Usually we arrive at the capital of a district. I will go to some official and his first reaction is to call in the tribal chiefs of the region. Today the tribal chief is more of a father figure, without the power he used to have in the past. He can tell us which section of his tribe is more gifted for a certain thing. Then we plan how many days we can spend on a certain project, and the chiefs become our hosts and receive us in their tents or houses in the mountains; we live very closely with the tribe. This is really the only way to find out what there is, because the government officials themselves don't know. Often they believe there is nothing whereas we insist that there is.

Presumably, like any folklore, all these dances have been handed down from generation to generation with nothing written down?

Nothing of the dance and music is written down—the melodies are handed down. Some of the instruments are over 200 years old. The melodies and the traditions and the folk stories are all handed down, and some of them go back anything up to 2,000 years. For instance the Assyrians have remained in their part of



JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY: de Warren, left, with his team and General Alizadeh (in glasses), the governor of Kokiluyeh, an area where a great deal of folklore has recently been discovered

Persia for nearly 3,000 years; they were the first ethnic group to become Christian and they have very intricate dances and music, rather like the Kurdish but they are performed in a different context and are more religious.

In Assyrian reliefs one can see quite a number of horns and harps.

Yes, they were possibly the first group

of people to use the harp, but the interesting thing is that harps disappeared from Persia later and only came back in the 15th century courts. The Assyrians themselves now cannot play the harp so they use a very long horn, called the sorna, and the drum. There are very intricate rhythms and very many different steps in the dances.

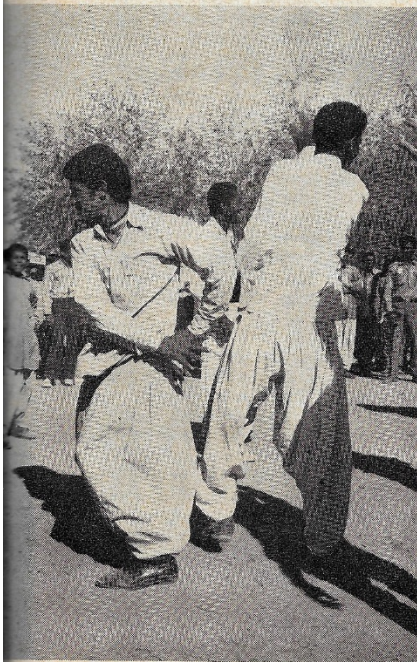
After you have discovered and filmed all these things, do you notate them?

Every day when we are in research we record on two recorders and film. Then when we get back to our base camp or hotel we write down absolutely everything, because the danger is that if you don't do this immediately everything will get mixed up. I have copy books full of all the steps and how they are danced, which foot is used with which arm and the music that goes together with them. We are now building up a whole file system joining everything together—the costume, literary, musical and dance material. This is all a part of the Iran Folklore Society.

Also, when we are out on our research we ask the tribal people to dress in their best costumes, or in their oldest costumes, and if they have old paintings (in Persia many of the tribal people paint on glass) we can find references to old costumes in this way. We have found many fascinating things and our designer, Mrs Partovi, has also done great research into mystical, ritual and folk costumes. She reproduces them for the stage just adding a slight touch of theatre, because otherwise one wouldn't be able to appreciate the detail.

You get a good subsidy from the government?

Yes, we are very lucky because our Minister of Arts and Culture is an artist himself, and he is in a very good position being a member of the Royal family. The other great asset is that the Empress herself is very interested in all the Persian arts. She is our patron and has given enormous funds to the company, also a



KOKILUYEH AND BALUCHISTAN: Above, de Warren with dancers of the Boyer Ahmadi tribe in Kokiluyeh. Left and top, Baluch villagers dancing in the streets in Baluchistan

THE MAHALLI DANCERS: The work done by de Warren and his team through Iran has led to the folklore being adapted for the stage. Below, dances from Torbat-Jam, from the north-eastern province of Khorassan, near the Afghanistan border.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Top, Turkoman men's dance. This tribe has been in the north-east of Iran for many centuries.

Below left, a detail of the Dervish ceremony with the dancers whirling into an ecstatic state. Below right, girls of the company in a Bracelet Dance from Baluchistan, a remote province on the borders of Pakistan



piece of land on which we are going to build our new institute. When one has backing on this scale it is possible to go very deeply into the subject.

The important thing behind the Mahalli company is that from the beginning we were able to establish a proper school. Originally it was three years of study in which the students had to learn music and the history of Persian art, folklore and literature as well as dance. This year the government has turned our institute into a college, and the students will graduate with a degree equivalent to an American college; it is now a four years' course. We have three sections—one for dance, one for music and one for painting—and we hope eventually to get our dancers,

designers and musicians from the school.

Your Mahalli dancers are now in a sense virtually the court dancers of the Shah?

In a way we are, because we perform whenever there are state guests and we are often called to the palace for the bigger celebrations, perform in the palace gardens for receptions and are even received as guests after the performance. So we have a very close relationship with both the Shah and the Empress who give their opinions on the programme and can even distinguish differences in choreography and style and make comments about them. Without this support it is impossible to develop a company of this nature.

than just for the limited number of aficionados. The preservation of steps and music is extremely valuable not only to dance but also to the arts as a whole and even to those concerned with sociology. Most countries, apart from those of north-west Europe, have sent out folklore companies, and today we seem to know quite a bit about the peoples of this earth from what they show. In the end it is those who have disciplined their forces in a professional theatrical form who have made the greatest impact; among these are several companies from Russia, particularly the Moiseyev, the large folklore companies from Mexico and the Philippines.

Few of us had any idea that Persia was as rich in folklore material, except that Fokine was said to have gone into a great deal of research when he created *Scheherazade*; whether he actually went to Persia is rather uncertain but it is certain that he never went in to such exhaustive research as has Robert de Warren in his tours to Iran's remoter areas. As can be gathered from his preceding talk, he has journeyed far and wide gathering material for the Mahalli Dancers of Iran who gave their first performances outside their native country during a fortnight at Sadler's Wells, 6-18 November last.

In two programmes, the second of which was by far the better and more

The Mahalli Dancers in London

seen by PETER WILLIAMS

THE ASSEMBLAGE of ethnic dance material as an acceptable spectacle in the theatre provides a bit of a poser. If it is totally authentic, as happens with most Indian soloists and groups, then the result, though fascinating for the connoisseur, can often be boring for the average spectator who would obviously get much more out of it when seen in the right geo-

graphical surroundings. It was La Argentina who first got the idea of bringing the many forms of Spanish dance into a theatrical form, and since those days many other countries have followed her example. If the folklore of any country is to get out to the wide world, it is obvious that certain concessions have to be made so that it becomes something more

is called 'terre à terre' dancing since nobody concerned ever leaves the earth.

A number called *Percussion in Iranian Tradition* makes an attempt at recreating some of those dances that must have been performed in the courts of Shahs through the centuries. The women and men dance separately to very complex rhythms from percussion (drums and tambourines) with camel bells; the footwork patterns are as intricate as the detail in a Persian miniature. In the women's dances this footwork is combined with charming hand movements, upper-body undulations and backbends. The men are more concerned with wrestling, flailing whips and stick dances. Other court dances from the Safavid Dynasty also have intricate steps but with more jumps and dancers revolving round each other, sometimes to hand clapping which may well have been inherited from the path of flamenco on its way from India through Asia, across North Africa to Spain.

Each programme ended with *Festival in Kurdistan* and in the six different items, typical of those given in a village during festive occasions, it was possible to see a certain similarity to those of the Balkans—the semi-circle 'kolo' formations, the use of the handkerchief and the gradually mounting rhythm.

Great care has been taken in presenting each of the numbers with the indication of arts and crafts of the particular region as well as having the authentic music and instruments. With regard to the latter the musicians were quite outstanding, particularly a trio—Mahammad Heidari on the Santur, M Ismaili on the Zarb and O Zariff on the Kamancheh, also an enchanting Turkoman singer, Gazakh Pang who appeared to be giving a mating call—'eh eh-eh eh'.

All this has been very well assembled but the production as a whole needs a great deal of tightening up with no long intervals between scenes. Too many of the numbers end in a rather casual man-

ner and, at the first performance, quite a number of things did not appear to be going according to plan; at the second programme this was greatly improved. But I think we have learned from the best of the aforementioned folklore companies that they succeed or they don't according to the discipline in the company. Possibly owing to Persian temperament the dancers, attractive as they were, did not always seem to be together. Too often a dancer would look to his neighbour to see whether he or she was starting with the right foot or whether an arm was

moving in the right direction. These things can all be put right with time, and doubtless will be, but it cannot be stressed enough how vital strict discipline is to the success of companies like this, especially when shown outside their own territory. Robert de Warren and his wife Jacqueline have done a splendid excavation job in showing Persia that there is a rich hoard of dance wealth within the country. It just needs that extra polish to performance and production to make the Mahalli Dancers the most important folklore group in the Middle East. □



PERCUSSION IN IRANIAN TRADITION: Right, one of the principal women dancers in a dance based on those traditionally given in the courts and at other ceremonies. Below, principal male dancers of the company in the masculine dances expressing more virile pursuits and all given to the sound of percussive instruments

ANTHONY CRICKMAY

