**Nazemi, Abdollah (b. 18 October, 1937, Tehran, Iran—)**

**Summary**

Abdollah Nazemi founded the Pars National Ballet, a semi-private dance company, in 1966. It was the first known instance of a western-style modern dance group to be established in Iran by an Iranian. The National Radio and Television of Iran largely supported and funded the company, and most of the choreographies created by Nazemi and his colleagues were performed on television. Nazemi was trained in the Ministry of Culture and Art’s ballet program, a school of the National Ballet of Iran. He began his professional career in the National Ballet of Iran, eventually performing lead roles in many classical and Iranian themed choreographies. After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1980, which banned all dance performances, Nazemi emigrated to Los Angeles. He attempted to continue the Pars National Ballet, but was forced to operate in greatly reduced circumstances.

**Contributions to the Field and to Modernism**

Nazemi began his dance training in 1954 at the newly established government Iranian National Academy of Ballet, which was under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Art. During this period, dancers like William Dollar and Ivor Patterson from the American Ballet Theatre were engaged to teach in the fledgling ballet programme. During his career as a dancer with the Iranian National Ballet, Nazemi performed as a principal dancer in such productions as the *Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle* and *Sleeping Beauty*.

In 1966, Nazemi founded his own dance group, the Pars National Ballet. The company, although technically private, was attached to the Iranian National Radio and Television. Nazemi prepared the majority of performances and choreographies that were shown exclusively on Iranian National Television, which operated separately from the Ministry of Culture and Art. The Pars National Ballet also established a dance school whose students, after training, often became members of the dance company.

The repertoire for the Pars National Ballet reflected the open-minded creativity of the artists the company attracted. For instance, the company developed an eclectic repertoire that consisted of classical and modern ballet, western style modern dance, staged Iranian folk dance, and the genre developed by early Iranian Armenian dance instructors known as ‘*raqs-e melli*’ (national dance). In particular, Nazemi choreographed several works, which he characterized by the term ‘ballet’, but included modern dance, modern ballet, classical ballet, and folk dances. His work frequently utilized narratives derived from Iranian poetry and other Iranian themes, which he set to music composed by Iranian composers. He also created narrative modern dance works with music by such progressive composers as Karlheinz Stockhausen, Krzysztof Penderecki, Maurice Ravel, and Béla Bartók, who would otherwise have been virtually unknown in Iran during the period.

After fifteen years, with the coming of the 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic Iran, Nazemi, like all dance artists, was forced to close his company and go into exile. He settled in Los Angeles. Like so many Iranian artists, he attempted to reconstitute his company in his new home. Unfortunately, he could not find sufficient funding to establish a professional company with professional ballet-trained dancers. As a result, he so had to resort to using amateur performers, and therefore was unable to continue working at the level of technical proficiency as he had helped to establish at the Pars National Ballet. Nazemi then turned almost exclusively to the *raqs-e melli* genre for his new works, which were usually based on orientalist themes and sources.

Nazemi’s influence can be seen in the activities of his protégés. For instance, Azita Sahebjam, a former member of the Pars National Ballet, founded a company of the same name in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Like Nazemi, Sabebjam turned to the *raqs-e melli* genre to create works for her company.

**References and Further Reading**

‘Pars National Ballet’ Souvenir program. (n.d.) Tehran: Publications of the National Radio and Television of Iran. (This undated souvenir program contains several of the works that Nazemi choreographed for his company, which lists dancers and collaborators.)

**Paratextual Material**

There is a photograph of Nazemi on his website (http://www.nazemiparsart.com/founder.html)

Anthony Shay