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Diary from Iran

English Translation of article for [BBC Persia](#)

I was recently privileged to visit Iran; a country culturally and politically poles apart from Britain. From the 24th to the 27th of October, during 'Japan Culture Week' in Iran, I was given the opportunity to play three concerts, concerts made possible by His Excellency Ambassador Koji Haneda and his team at the Japanese Embassy in Iran and by the Japan Foundation, London. The Iranian and British embassies remain closed, diplomatic relations are strained, to say the least, and media coverage presents an image which creates fear and apprehension in the west.

I must confess that before my trip I had no idea what kind of place I was going to, but I had a positive feeling about it. My intuition that all would be well was borne out as soon as I reached the boarding gate for Tehran, a gate thronged by fashionable and beautiful Iranian lady passengers. Now that my trip is over I can say that my overriding memory of the people is their genuine warmth and true hospitality. Everyone smiles in a polite manner (I originally come from a country of politeness, so, I know what I am talking about). They are always calm, graceful and welcoming and they show their gratitude and appreciation readily. How could I have known nothing about these wonderful Iranian people, so highly cultured and fiercely proud of their poets, artists and musicians?

Day One. Rehearsals and Opening Ceremony.

My first day in Iran started with a rehearsal with the Tehran Philharmonic Orchestra. The piece we worked on was piano concerto no.9, K.271 'Jeunehomme' by Mozart. The instant we began I knew that the conductor, Arash Gooran, and the Tehran Philharmonic were serious and proper musicians. Their obvious determination to make beautiful music immediately made me sit up straight at the piano, eager to begin. In the afternoon, the opening ceremony of Japan Culture Week took place at the Niavaran Culture Centre. After the speeches, and an impressive performance of Traditional Iranian music, it was my turn to play an hour-long piano recital, my debut concert in Iran. The concert was filled with 500 enthusiastic people with standing room only. Although I had attempted to wear the 'hijab' (the scarf that Iranian women cover their heads with), properly, I was constantly worried the scarf might slip off my head during the performance.

Day Two. Recital at Ehsan Hall.

I started my journey to Shiraz first thing in the morning. The recital was at Ehsan Hall, in a complex devoted to education and the arts. The invited audience, as many as 500, were all involved in music in one way or another. My hijab stayed on my head better this time because Mrs. Haneda told me how to wear the scarf properly and I was grateful and relieved. After the full recital, performed in front of a passionate, appreciative audience, we flew back to Tehran that same evening. We arrived at the Ambassador's Residence at 2 o'clock in the morning, tired but elated.

Day Three. Concert with the Tehran Philharmonic Orchestra.

The Morning Dress Rehearsal was followed by an interview. Time then for a quick look around exciting and lively central Tehran before I got to the piano in the afternoon. I spent two and a half hours at the Boesendorfer Imperial Concert Grand before the concert where I really got to know this superb instrument. At 9pm, the concert started at Vahdat Hall and I was thrilled to see that it was a full house. The Mozart concert was performed for 900 appreciative and cultured people. After the lively first movement, the serious second movement started. It was during this movement, on the platform, that something amazing happened. Through the serious and subdued melody in C minor, Maestro Gooran, the orchestra, and I started to communicate on the very deepest level, communing heart to heart. We fully trusted each other with a deep and heartfelt understanding. Had I ever experienced anything like that in my life? I can honestly answer no to that. Even now, I can clearly recall how that deep and moving connection transcended everything else. It was a highly emotional moment, a miraculous and unique experience. As the violins responded to the piano they sounded as if they were weeping. The singing tone of the violins was heavenly and it made me feel we were side by side, genuinely in unison. We were celebrating our true friendship through the music; going beyond differences in culture, politics, or religion. In that perfect moment, music transcended borders and boundaries bringing human beings together in celebration of what we truly have in common. I am grateful to have been part of it.

For me, travelling from one country to another is an everyday affair. I usually focus on the next destination as soon as one concert tour comes to an end. Usually, but this time was different. After the tour in Iran, I could not put it behind me. As the aircraft took off, I tried to listen to the repertoire I was preparing for the next tour but to no avail. 'Jeunehomme' went round and round in my head as tears flowed freely from my eyes. All I could do was sit back, sink down into my seat and relive the beautiful memories of my very special trip to Iran.

