



AMIR MAHYAR TAFRESHIPOUR
THE DOLL BEHIND THE CURTAIN
an opera in two acts

Jonathan von Schwanenflügel
Signe Sneh Durholm
Elenor Wiman
Jakob Bloch Jespersen

Athelas Sinfonietta
Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard



TAFRESHIPOUR, Amir Mahyar (b. 1974)

The Doll behind the Curtain (2015) *(Manuscript)*

A chamber opera in two acts.

Libretto by Dominic Power based on a short story of the same title by Sadeq Hedayat

Act I 35'29

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Opening | 1'02 |
| 2 | Scene 1. Mehrdad: <i>What is it she wants to tell me?</i> | 1'57 |
| 3 | Scene 2. Maître: <i>One of the pleasures of Le Havre</i> | 17'52 |
| 4 | Scene 3. Tombeau: <i>Giselle! You've sat there for an hour</i> | 11'09 |
| 5 | Scene 4. Mehrdad: <i>No woman I have ever seen</i> | 3'29 |

Act II 32'28

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 6 | Scene 1. Bitá: <i>Mehrdad, I call you beloved</i> | 7'25 |
| 7 | Scene 2. Bitá: <i>Now it is winter</i> | 0'51 |
| 8 | Scene 3. Mother: <i>Bitá, my dear, come</i> | 4'14 |
| 9 | Scene 4. Mehrdad: <i>Bitá - Bitá: Yes</i> | 0'55 |
| 10 | Scene 5. Father: <i>Ay, this weather</i> | 6'42 |
| 11 | Scene 6. Bitá: <i>Is this my rival?</i> | 2'52 |
| 12 | Scene 7. Maître: <i>Every city has its secrets</i> | 1'25 |
| 13 | Scene 8. Mehrdad: <i>Another night in the vortex</i> | 8'14 |

TT: 68'42

Mehrdad: Jonathan von Schwanenflügel *tenor*

Bita: Signe Sneh Durholm *soprano*

Mother: Elenor Wiman *mezzo-soprano*

Father: Jakob Bloch Jespersen *bass-baritone*

Maître: Per Bach Nissen *bass*

Tombeau: Thomas Storm *baritone*

Giselle: Marie Dreisig *soprano*

Athelas Sinfonietta

Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard *conductor*

Athelas Sinfonietta

Karolina Leedo *flute* · Liza Gibbs Fox *oboe*

Anna Klett *clarinet* · Niels Anders Vedsten Larsen *bassoon*

Thorbjørn B. Gram *horn* · Tine Rehling *harp*

Anne Søre *violin I* · Idinna Lützhøft *violin II*

Thea Jørgensen *viola* · Kim Bak Dinitzen *cello* · Astor Cortabarría *double bass*



Amir Mahyar Tafreshipour

The Doll behind the Curtain

The Doll behind the Curtain is based on the short story by the same name (*Arusake pošt-e pardeh* in Persian) by Sadeq Hedayat. Hedayat was Iran's first modernist writer, and the story explores alienation, the mysteries of human sexuality and the clash of cultures.

Synopsis

The setting is Le Havre and Tehran during the 1930s.

In Act I, Mehrdad, a shy, introverted Iranian student, has just completed his studies at a lycée in Le Havre. In the days before his return to Iran, he discovers a beautiful mannequin in a junk shop. Following a parting homily from the worldly head of the academy, Mehrdad yields to his obsession and buys the alabaster mannequin from the shop's enigmatic owner, Tombeau, and his granddaughter Giselle. Mehrdad believes that he has found a beauty that is flawless and unchanging – a passive object of adoration with which to share his secret life.

In Act II, Mehrdad has returned to the family home in Tehran, but he is alienated from his parents and his adoring fiancée, Bitā. Unbeknown to Bitā and his family, he keeps the Doll hidden in his room. His father attempts to advance the marriage with Bitā, offering worldly advice that echoes that given by the head of the lycée. For Mehrdad, the inanimate mannequin is no longer the passive recipient of his adoration, but a demanding mistress. Bitā secretly visits Mehrdad's room and discovers her rival. There she hatches a desperate plan to recapture Mehrdad's love. Mehrdad returns to his room, determined to destroy the Doll, an action that will have tragic consequences.

Amir Mahyar Tafreshipour (b. 1974) is a leading Iranian/Danish contemporary composer, working with a number of major ensembles, soloists and orchestras. He studied piano and composition at the Esbjerg Academy of Music, Trinity College of Music and Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and in 2016 he completed a PhD in composition at Brunel University, London. In 2003 he won first prize at the biennial composition competition for new music at Tehran University with his solo piano work *Images of Childhood*. The same year he was awarded a silver medal for outstanding achievement at Trinity College of Music. In 2005 the BBC commissioned a Harp Concerto from him which was premièred under the baton of Pascal Rophé and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. The opera *The Doll behind the Curtain* was premièred at the Tête à Tête Opera Festival at London's Kings Place in 2015 and performed at the Royal Danish Opera in 2020.

www.tafreshipour.com

Dominic Power (b. 1947) is a playwright, radio dramatist and librettist. He has been an associate director of 'Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory' in Bristol, editing performance texts for each of the company's Shakespeare productions, as well as writing original song lyrics for them, with composers Elizabeth Purnell and John Telfer. In 2017, a new version of Moliere's *Tartuffe*, written with Andrew Hilton, premièred at the Tobacco Factory Theatre. As a librettist Dominic Power has worked with the composer Peter Weigold, providing the libretto for his opera *Brief Encounter*.

One of the greatest Iranian writers of the 20th century, **Sadeq Hedayat** (1903–51) was educated in Tehran, before moving Belgium and France where he mixed with leading European intellectuals and began his literary career. A pioneering modernist writer, he was influenced by Dostoyevsky, Rilke, Chekhov, Poe and especially

Kafka, many of whose works he translated into Persian. Hedayat's most famous novel, *Būf-e Kūr* (*The Blind Owl*, 1937), a hallucinatory work of profound pessimism, was initially banned by the authorities, but is now recognized as a classic of modern Iranian literature. Hedayat explored the absurdity of human existence. Towards the end of his life he withdrew from his friends, and in 1951 he left Tehran for Paris, where he took his own life.

Jonathan von Schwanenflügel, tenor, graduated from the Danish National Academy of Music and Berlin Opera Academy in 2019. He has appeared in roles including Tamino and Don Ottavio and in 2020 he made his début at the Royal Danish Opera in Copenhagen as Mehrdad in *The Doll behind the Curtain*, a production that was nominated as 'Opera Performance of the Year' by the magazine *CPHCulture*.

<https://schwanen-tenor.com/>

Signe Sneh Durholm, coloratura soprano, graduated from the Royal Danish Opera Academy in 2016. A recipient of various awards, she has performed as soloist with a number of orchestras and made numerous appearances on Danish national television, including during the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Queen Margrethe II. She has a wide repertoire in both opera and oratorio, appearing as a soloist across Denmark.

www.signesneh.com

Elenor Wiman, mezzo-soprano, studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. Accomplished on the opera stage, she has performed Rossweisse, Schwertleite, Waltraute and Flosshilde in Wagner's *Ring* in European theatres. Although Wagner is her passion, she is equally at home performing contemporary works and she also appears regularly as an oratorio soloist across Denmark.

Bass-baritone **Jakob Bloch Jespersen** made his stage début at the Royal Danish Opera in 2006, where he has since appeared in Carl Nielsen's *Maskarade* and Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*. Worth mentioning are also his numerous appearances in contemporary music theatre and opera. Bloch Jespersen is the recipient of the Aksel Schiøtz Prize (2014) and in 2020 the Music Prize of the Danish Composers' Society.
www.jakobbloch.com

Per Bach Nissen, bass, is an experienced performer with an international career spanning 20 years at opera houses such as the Danish National Opera, English National Opera and Oper Frankfurt. Per Bach Nissen received his musical education at the Royal Welsh College of Music and the Royal Danish Academy of Music and today his repertoire numbers more than fifty roles.

Thomas Storm, baritone, received his training at the Royal Danish Opera Academy in Copenhagen. While still a student he sang Schaunard in *La Bohème* at the Royal Danish Opera. In 2013 he was appointed Carl Nielsen Artist by the Odense Symphony Orchestra, which led to appearances with the orchestra and recitals of Nielsen's songs, broadcast on Danish Radio, as well as concerts in New York and Berlin.
<https://thomassstorm.info/>

Soprano **Marie Dreisig** studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. A versatile performer, she spans many different genres from early baroque operas by way of classical oratorios to modern opera. Equally at home in operetta and musical theatre, she has been in demand for appearances in different contexts since making her début.

www.mariedreisig.com

The **Athelas Sinfonietta** is a leading Danish ensemble in the field of new music. The ensemble performs in concerts and opera productions, at festivals and on international tours. Since its foundation in 1990, Athelas has performed some 700 works, many of which have been world premières. Athelas has collaborated with prominent soloists, conductors and composers, including Steve Reich, Per Nørgård, Heiner Goebbels, Poul Ruders, Arvo Pärt, David Lang, Christian Lindberg, Reinbert de Leeuw, Thomas Adès, Ilan Volkov, Paul Hillier, George Benjamin, Philippe Leroux, Barbara Hannigan and Pierre-André Valade, who is the ensemble's principal guest conductor. International collaborations are essential to Athelas, with appearances in recent years in England, Monaco, Germany, the USA, Iran, Egypt and France. Athelas returns annually as ensemble-in-residence at KLANG – the Copenhagen festival for contemporary music. The core of the ensemble consists of 15 musicians, but Athelas plays in any format from solo pieces to up to 25 musicians when needed.

<https://athelas.dk/>

Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard is a Norwegian conductor based in Copenhagen, where he is involved with the contemporary opera scene. He has premiered several chamber operas by Danish and international composers, including *The Doll behind the Curtain* by Amir Tafreshipour at the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, in December 2020, a production that was nominated as 'Opera Performance of the Year' by the magazine *CPHCulture*. Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard is an alumnus of the Norwegian Academy of Music and the Royal Danish Academy of Music, graduating with a début concert with the Aalborg Symphony Orchestra in 2020.

www.eho-musikk.com



Jonathan von Schwanenflügel



Signe Sneh Durholm

The Doll behind the Curtain (Die Puppe hinter dem Vorhang)

The Doll behind the Curtain basiert auf der gleichnamigen Kurzgeschichte (auf persisch: *Arusake pošt-e pardeh*) von Sadeq Hedayat. Hedayat war der erste modernistische Schriftsteller des Irans, und die Geschichte beschäftigt sich mit Entfremdung, den Mysterien menschlicher Sexualität und dem Zusammenstoß verschiedener Kulturen.

Synopsis/Zusammenfassung

Die Schauplätze sind Le Havre und Teheran in den 1930er Jahren.

Im ersten Akt hat Mehrdad, ein schüchterner, introvertierter iranischer Student, gerade sein Studium an einem Lycée in Le Havre abgeschlossen. Kurz vor seiner Rückreise in den Iran entdeckt er in einem Trödeladen eine wunderschöne Ankleidepuppe. Nach einer Abschiedspredigt des weltgewandten Direktors der Akademie gibt Mehrdad seiner Besessenheit nach und kauft die Alabasterpuppe bei dem mysteriösen Besitzer des Ladens, Tombeau, und seiner Enkelin Giselle. Mehrdad glaubt, er habe eine makellose und unveränderliche Schönheit gefunden – ein passives Anbetungsobjekt, mit dem er sein heimliches Leben teilen kann.

Im zweiten Akt ist Mehrdad in sein Elternhaus in Teheran zurückgekehrt, doch er hat sich von seinen Eltern und seiner ihn bewundernden Verlobten, Bitā, entfremdet. Ohne Wissen Bitas und seiner Familie versteckt er die Puppe in seinem Zimmer. Sein Vater versucht, die Hochzeit mit Bitā voranzutreiben, indem er weltgewandte Ratschläge von sich gibt, die denjenigen des Direktors des Lycées sehr ähneln. Für Mehrdad hat sich die leblose Kleiderpuppe von einer passiven Empfängerin seiner Anbetung in eine fordernde Mätresse verwandelt. Bitā betritt heimlich Mehrdads Zimmer und entdeckt ihre Rivalin. Dort heckt sie einen verzweifelten Plan aus, um Mehrdads Liebe wiederzuerlangen. Mehrdad kehrt in sein

Zimmer zurück, fest entschlossen, die Puppe zu zerstören – eine Handlung, die tragische Konsequenzen haben wird.

Amir Mahyar Tafreshipour (geb. 1974) ist ein führender iranisch-dänischer Komponist, der mit einigen bekannten Ensembles, Solisten und Orchestern arbeitet. Er studierte Klavier und Komposition an der Esbjerg Academy of Music, am Trinity College of Music sowie der Guildhall School of Music and Drama, und 2016 promovierte er in Komposition an der Brunel University, London. 2003 gewann er mit seinem Klavierstück *Images of Childhood* den ersten Preis bei dem alle zwei Jahre stattfindenden Kompositionswettbewerb für Neue Musik in Teheran. Im gleichen Jahr erhielt er die Silbermedaille für herausragende Leistung am Trinity College of Music. 2005 gab die BBC ein Harfenkonzert in Auftrag bei ihm, das unter der Leitung von Pascal Rophé uraufgeführt und im BBC Radio 3 ausgestrahlt wurde. Die Oper *The Doll behind the Curtain* wurde 2015 beim Tête à Tête Opera Festival im Londoner Kings Place uraufgeführt und 2020 an der Königlichen Oper Kopenhagen aufgeführt.

www.tafreshipour.com

Dominic Power (geb. 1947) ist ein Bühnenautor, Radio-Dramatiker und Librettist. Er war Regieassistent bei „Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory“ in Bristol, wobei er die Texte für jede Shakespeare-Produktion des Ensembles editierte und Liedtexte für sie schrieb, gemeinsam mit den Komponisten Elizabeth Purnell und John Telfer. 2017 wurde eine neue Version von Molières *Tartuffe*, die er zusammen mit Andrew Hilton schrieb, am Tobacco Factory Theatre uraufgeführt. Als Librettist hat Dominic Power mit dem Komponisten Peter Weigold zusammengearbeitet, wobei er das Libretto für die Oper *Brief Encounter* lieferte.

Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51) war einer der größten iranischen Autoren. Er erhielt seine Ausbildung in Teheran, bevor er nach Belgien und Frankreich zog, dort mit führenden europäischen Intellektuellen in Kontakt kam und seine literarische Karriere begann. Als modernistischer Pionier wurde er geprägt von Dostojewskij, Rilke, Tschekow, Poe und besonders Kafka, von denen er viele Werke ins Persische übersetzte. Hedayats berühmtester Roman, *Būf-e Kūr* (*Die blinde Eule*, 1937), ein halluzinatorisches Werk von tiefem Pessimismus, wurde anfänglich von der Regierung verboten, gilt heute aber als ein Klassiker der modernen iranischen Literatur. Hedayat erforschte die Absurdität der menschlichen Existenz. Gegen Ende seines Lebens zog er sich von seinen Freunden zurück, und 1951 verließ er Teheran und nahm sich in Paris das Leben.

Jonathan von Schwanenflügel, Tenor, absolvierte die Danish National Academy sowie die Opern Akademie Berlin im Jahr 2019. Er ist in Rollen wie Tamino und Don Ottavio aufgetreten; 2020 debütierte er an der Königlichen Oper Kopenhagen als Mehrdad in *The Doll behind the Curtain*, eine Produktion, die als „Operninszenierung des Jahres“ vom Magazin *CPH-culture* nominiert wurde.

<https://schwanen-tenor.com/>

Signe Sneh Durholm, Koloratursopran, absolvierte 2016 die Royal Danish Opera Academy. Als mehrfache Preisträgerin ist sie mit einigen Orchestern aufgetreten und erschien vielfach im dänischen Fernsehen, darunter bei den Feierlichkeiten zum 40-jährigen Regierungsjubiläum von Königin Margrethe II. Sie hat ein breitgefächertes Repertoire in Oper und Oratorium und tritt in ganz Dänemark als Solistin auf.

www.signesneh.com

Elenor Wiman, Mezzosopran, studierte an der Royal Danish Academy of Music. Auf der Opernbühne hat sie Roßweiße, Schwertleite, Waltraute und Floßhilde in Wagners *Ring* in verschiedenen europäischen Theatern gesungen. Wagner ist ihre Passion; sie fühlt sich jedoch auch in der zeitgenössischen Musik heimisch und tritt regelmäßig in ganz Dänemark als Oratoriensolistin auf.

Bass-Bariton **Jakob Bloch Jespersen** absolvierte 2006 sein Bühnendebüt an der Königlichen Oper Kopenhagen, wo er seitdem in Carl Nielsens *Maskarade* und Henry Purcells *The Fairy Queen* aufgetreten ist. Erwähnenswert sind auch seine zahlreichen Auftritte in zeitgenössischem Musiktheater und Opern. Bloch Jespersen erhielt 2014 den Aksel Schiøtz-Preis und 2020 den Musikpreis der Dänischen Komponistengesellschaft.

www.jakobbloch.com

Per Bach Nissen, Bass, ist ein erfahrener Solist mit einer internationalen Karriere, die 20 Jahre an Opernhäusern wie der Dänischen Landesoper, English National Opera und Oper Frankfurt umfasst. Per Bach Nissen erhielt seine musikalische Ausbildung am Royal Welsh College of Music und an der Royal Danish Academy of Music. Sein heutiges Repertoire umfasst mehr als fünfzig Rollen.

Thomas Storm, Bariton, studierte an der Royal Danish Opera Academy in Kopenhagen. Schon während des Studiums sang er den Schaunard in *La Bohème* an der Königlichen Oper Kopenhagen. 2013 war er „Carl Nielsen“-Künstler beim Odense Symphony Orchestra, was zu Auftritten mit dem Orchester und zu Konzertabenden mit Nielsens Liedern führte, die vom Dänischen Rundfunk ausgestrahlt wurden, sowie zu Konzerten in New York und Berlin.

<https://thomasstorm.info/>

Die Sopranistin **Marie Dreisig** studierte an der Royal Danish Academy of Music. Als vielseitige Bühnenkünstlerin singt sie ganz verschiedene Genres, von Opern des Frühbarock über klassische Oratorien bis hin zu moderner Oper. Auch in der Operette und im Musiktheater fühlt sie sich zu Hause und ist so seit ihres Debüts gefragt für Auftritte in verschiedensten Kontexten.

www.mariedreisig.com

Die **Athelas Sinfonietta** ist auf dem Gebiet der Neuen Musik ein führendes dänisches Ensemble. Es tritt in Konzerten und Opernproduktionen, auf Festivals und internationalen Tourneen auf. Seit seiner Gründung 1990 hat Athelas etwa 700 Werke aufgeführt, darunter viele Welturaufführungen. Athelas hat mit bekannten Solisten, Dirigenten und Komponisten zusammengearbeitet, darunter Steve Reich, Per Nørgård, Heiner Goebbels, Poul Ruders, Arvo Pärt, David Lang, Christian Lindberg, Reinbert de Leeuw, Thomas Adès, Ilan Volkov, Paul Hillier, George Benjamin, Philippe Leroux, Barbara Hannigan und Pierre-André Valade, welcher der Erste Gastdirigent des Ensembles ist. Internationale Zusammenarbeit ist dem Ensemble sehr wichtig, sodass in den vergangenen Jahren Auftritte in England, Monaco, Deutschland, den USA, im Iran, Ägypten und Frankreich stattfanden. Athelas ist jedes Jahr Ensemble-in-residence bei KLANG – dem Kopenhagener Festival für zeitgenössische Musik. Der Kern des Ensembles besteht aus 15 Musikern, aber Athelas spielt in jedem Format von Solostücken bis hin zu 25 Musikern, je nach Besetzung.

<https://athelas.dk/>

Der norwegische Dirigent **Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard** lebt in Kopenhagen, wo er in der zeitgenössischen Opernszene tätig ist. Er hat mehrere Kammeropern von dänischen und internationalen Komponisten uraufgeführt, darunter *The Doll behind*

The Curtain von Amir Tafreshipour am Königlichen Theater Kopenhagen im Dezember 2020, eine Produktion, die als „Operninszenierung des Jahres“ vom Magazin *CPH-culture* nominiert wurde. Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard ist Absolvent der Norwegischen Musikakademie sowie der Royal Danish Academy of Music, an der er 2020 mit einem Debutkonzert mit dem Aalborg Symphony Orchestra graduierte.
www.eho-musikk.com



Sadeq Hedayat



Dominic Power

The Doll behind the Curtain [La Poupée derrière le rideau]

The Doll behind the Curtain repose sur une nouvelle du même nom (*Arusake pošte-pardeh* en persan) de Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51). Hedayat était le premier écrivain moderniste de l'Iran, et l'histoire explore l'aliénation, les mystères de la sexualité humaine et le choc des cultures.

Résumé

L'action se passe au Havre et à Téhéran dans les années 1930.

Dans le premier acte, Mehrdad, un étudiant iranien timide et introverti, vient juste de terminer ses études à un lycée au Havre. Les jours précédant son retour en Iran, il découvre un magnifique mannequin dans une brocante. Suite à une homélie d'adieu du directeur de l'académie, Mehrdad cède à son obsession et achète le mannequin d'albâtre de l'énigmatique propriétaire du magasin, Tombeau, et de sa petite-fille Giselle. Mehrdad croit avoir trouvé une beauté sans défaut et interchangeable – un objet passif d'adoration avec lequel partager sa vie secrète.

Dans le deuxième acte, Mehrdad est retourné dans sa famille à Téhéran mais il s'est détourné de ses parents et de Bitā, sa fiancée qui l'adore. À l'insu de Bitā et de sa famille, il garde la Poupée cachée dans sa chambre. Son père essaie de avancer le mariage avec Bitā, avec des conseils qui font écho à ceux donnés par le directeur du lycée. Pour Mehrdad, le mannequin inanimé n'est plus le récipient passif de son amour fervent, mais une maîtresse exigeante. Bitā entre secrètement dans sa chambre et découvre sa rivale. Elle élabore un plan pour reconquérir l'amour de Mehrdad. Mehrdad retourne à sa chambre, déterminé à détruire la Poupée, une action qui aura des conséquences tragiques.

Amir Mahyar Tafreshipour (né en 1974) est un compositeur contemporain iranien/danois de premier plan qui travaille avec plusieurs ensembles, solistes et orchestres importants. Il a étudié le piano et la composition à l'Académie de musique d'Esbjerg, au Trinity College of Music, à la Guildhall School de musique et d'art dramatique et, en 2016, il termina un doctorat en composition à la Brunel University à Londres. En 2003, il gagna le premier prix au concours biennal de composition pour musique nouvelle à l'université de Téhéran avec l'œuvre pour piano solo *Images of Childhood*. La même année, il reçut une médaille d'argent pour réalisations exceptionnelles au Trinity College of Music. En 2005, la BBC lui commanda un concerto pour harpe qui fut créé sous la direction de Pascal Rophé et diffusé sur BBC Radio 3. L'opéra *The Doll behind the Curtain* fut monté en première au festival d'opéra Tête à Tête au Kings Place de Londres en 2015 et joué à l'Opéra royal du Danemark en 2020.

www.tafreshipour.com

Né en 1947, **Dominic Power** est dramaturge de théâtre et de radio et librettiste. Il a été directeur associé de « Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory » à Bristol, éditant les textes de chaque production de Shakespeare de la compagnie ainsi qu'écrivant les paroles de leurs chansons, en collaboration avec les compositeurs Elizabeth Prunell et John Telfer. En 2017, une nouvelle version du *Tartuffe* de Molière, écrite avec Andrew Hilton, vit sa première au Tobacco Factory Theatre. En tant que librettiste, Dominic Power a travaillé avec le compositeur Peter Weigold, fournissant le livret pour son opéra *Brief Encounter*.

Un des plus grands écrivains iraniens du 20^e siècle, **Sadeq Hedayat** (1903–1951) fit ses études à Téhéran avant d'aller vivre en Belgique et en France où il fréquenta des intellectuels européens et entreprit sa carrière littéraire. Un écrivain moderniste

pionnier, il fut influencé par Dostoïevski, Rilke, Chekhov, Poe et surtout Kafka dont il traduisit plusieurs des œuvres en persan. Le plus célèbre roman de Hedayat, *Būf-e Kūr (Le Hibou aveugle, 1937)*, une œuvre hallucinatoire au profond pessimisme, fut d'abord bannie par les autorités mais est maintenant reconnue comme un classique de la littérature iranienne moderne. Hedayat explora l'absurdité de l'existence humaine. Vers la fin de sa vie, il s'éloigna de ses amis et, en 1951, il quitta Téhéran pour Paris où il se suicida.

Le ténor **Jonathan von Schwanenflügel** a obtenu son diplôme à l'Académie nationale danoise de musique et à l'Académie d'opéra de Berlin en 2019. Il a chanté plusieurs rôles dont Tamino et Don Ottavio et, en 2020, il fit ses débuts à l'Opéra Royal du Danemark à Copenhague comme Mehrdad dans *The Doll behind the Curtain*, une production désignée comme « Opera Performance of the Year » par le magazine *CPH-culture*.

<https://schwanen-tenor.com/>

La soprano colorature **Signe Sneh Durholm** est diplômée de l'Académie Royale danoise d'opéra depuis 2016. Récipiendaire de plusieurs prix, elle s'est produite comme soliste avec plusieurs orchestres et elle a fait de nombreuses apparitions à la télévision nationale du Danemark dont au cours des célébrations du 40^e anniversaire de la reine Margrethe II. Elle possède un vaste répertoire d'opéras et oratorios et paraît comme soliste dans tout le Danemark.

www.signesneh.com

Elenor Wiman, mezzo-soprano, a étudié à l'Académie de musique royale du Danemark. Accomplie sur la scène d'opéra, elle a chanté Rossweisse, Schwertleite, Waltraute et Flosshilde dans l'*Anneau* de Wagner dans des théâtres européens.

Quoique Wagner soit sa passion, elle est aussi à l'aise dans des œuvres contemporaines et apparaît aussi régulièrement comme soliste d'oratorio à travers le Danemark.

Le baryton-basse **Jakob Bloch Jespersen** fit ses débuts d'opéra à l'Opéra royal du Danemark en 2006 où il participa aussi à *Mascarade* de Carl Nielsen et *The Fairy Queen* de Henry Purcell. Ses nombreuses apparitions en musique contemporaine au théâtre et à l'opéra sont aussi dignes de mention. Bloch-Jespersen a reçu le Prix Aksel Schiøtz (2014) et le Prix de Musique de la Société des compositeurs danois en 2020.

www.jakobbloch.com

Per Bach Nissen, basse, est un chanteur expérimenté dont la carrière internationale couvre 20 ans à des maisons d'opéra telles l'Opéra national du Danemark, l'English National Opera et Opern Frankfurt. Per Bach Nissen a fait ses études au Collège royal de musique du Pays de Galles ainsi qu'à l'Académie de musique royale du Danemark ; son répertoire aujourd'hui compte plus de 50 rôles.

Thomas Storm, baryton, a étudié à l'Académie royale d'opéra du Danemark à Copenhague. Encore aux études, il chanta Schaunard dans *La Bohème* à l'Opéra royal du Danemark. En 2013, il fut nommé « Carl Nielsen Artist » par l'Orchestre symphonique d'Odense, ce qui lui apporta des concerts avec l'orchestre et des récitals des chansons de Nielsen, diffusés à la Radio danoise, ainsi que des concerts à New York et Berlin.

<https://thomasstorm.info/>

La soprano **Marie Dreisig** a étudié à l'Académie royale de musique du Danemark. Une interprète aux multiples facettes, elle couvre plusieurs genres différents, des opéras du jeune baroque en passant par les oratorios classiques, à l'opéra moderne. Aussi à l'aise dans l'opérette qu'au théâtre musical, elle a été demandée depuis ses débuts pour chanter dans divers contextes.

www.mariedreisig.com

L'**Athelas Sinfonietta** est un ensemble important dans le domaine de la musique nouvelle. La formation donne des concerts et des productions d'opéra, joue à des festivals et fait des tournées internationales. Depuis sa fondation en 1990, Athelas a interprété environ 700 œuvres dont plusieurs ont été des créations mondiales. Athelas a collaboré avec d'éminents solistes, chefs d'orchestre et compositeurs dont Steve Reich, Per Nørgård, Heiner Goebbels, Poul Ruders, Arvo Pärt, David Lang, Christian Lindberg, Reinbert de Leeuw, Thomas Adès, Ilan Volkov, Paul Hillier, George Benjamin, Philippe Leroux, Barbara Hannigan et Pierre-André Valade qui est le principal chef invité de l'ensemble. Les collaborations internationales sont essentielles à Athelas qui s'est produite en Angleterre, Monaco, Allemagne, aux États-Unis, Iran, Egypte et France. Athelas retourne annuellement comme ensemble en résidence à KLANG – le festival de Copenhague pour musique contemporaine. Quinze musiciens forment l'essentiel de l'ensemble mais Athelas peut jouer des pièces solos et d'autres demandant jusqu'à 25 participants au besoin.

<https://athelas.dk/>

Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard est un chef d'orchestre norvégien basé à Copenhague où il œuvre surtout sur la scène de l'opéra contemporain. Il a créé plusieurs opéras de chambre de compositeurs danois et internationaux dont *The Doll behind the Curtain* d'Amir Tafreshipour au Théâtre royal de Copenhague en décembre 2020,

une production nommée « Opera Performance of the Year » par le magazine *CPH-culture*. Eirik Haukaas Ødegaard est un ancien élève de l'Académie de musique de la Norvège et de l'Académie de musique royale ; il a obtenu son diplôme lors d'un concert de débuts avec l'Orchestre symphonique d'Aalborg au Danemark en 2020.

www.eho-musikk.com

The Doll behind the Curtain

Act I

1 *A MANNEQUIN wearing a green silk dress stands on the stage. MEHRDAD stands some way off, gazing at it.*

2 Scene 1

MEHRDAD What is it she wants to tell me?
And why do I return to this window?
One-two-one Rue Séverin.
I could believe those eyes,
Opaque, made of alabaster,
See into my soul
And she knows me
As I am.

*An old man (TOMBEAU) stands beside the doll.
MEHRDAD moves quickly away. Blackout*

Lights-up: A room in the Lycée. MEHRDAD alone on stage, reading a letter. At the back of the stage sit a group comprising MEHRDAD'S MOTHER, FATHER, and fiancée BITA, who is singing.

3 Scene 2

The Principal of the Lycée (MAÎTRE) enters.

MAÎTRE One of the pleasures of Le Havre,
Is the aroma of the harbour,
That drifts up from the lower town,
Making us alive to journeys
As yet to be undertaken –

But that's by the bye.
Mehrdad, you are to leave us.

MEHRDAD Yes I am, sir,
In accordance with my family's wishes.

MAÎTRE I can say I've had the pleasure
To see your mind and conscience grow.
At our Lycée, you have flourished.
Here we have a genial custom,
A glass of wine by way of parting –
Call it a farewell ceremony.

MEHRDAD Thank you, no. I have foresworn
all liquor –

MAÎTRE In accordance with your family's
wishes,
Just so, just so.
I have a letter from your father,
That explains your departure,
And the family's business calls you home.
On your return
You are to be married.

MEHRDAD My cousin.
The engagement was made before I came here
As my mother and my father wished it.

MAÎTRE I understand – a wise arrangement.
Now, sir, allow me if you will
This once to play Polonius.
You have been a model pupil,
Reserved, careful, studious.

MEHRDAD I have sought to understand,
The customs and culture of your country.

MAÎTRE In our care you have become
Wise but not worldly. If I may suggest,
A little levity may be permitted
Before the duties that await you.

MEHRDAD My studies leave me little leisure,
To enjoy those pleasures
That divert my fellow students.

MAÎTRE Then let me add a word of caution.
Yesterday evening, as is my custom,
I took my stroll down to the harbour.
There I saw you quite alone, lost in thought.
You turned into Rue Séverin.
Every city has its secrets,
Pockets of ill-repute to tempt and trap the innocent.
A young man alone, unworldly and inexperienced
Would be well advised to keep away.

MEHRDAD My presence there was innocent,
Curiosity, nothing more.
Nothing that I did would bring
A moment of shame to my family.

MAÎTRE I do not doubt it. Yet may I suggest
As a reward for your diligence, you might finish
your education,
With a round of harmless gaiety. But in the light
And with companions of your own age.
You sail – when – A week from now?
Just enough time to have a taste
Of Le Havre in the season.
Be exuberant for once.
Use your money for enjoyment.

MEHRDAD Sir, this does not sound like Polonius,
‘Never a borrower or a lender be’?

MAÎTRE Polonius was a Dane,
were he French like me
He would speak as I do.
Enjoyment and duty co-exist in the
harmonious soul.
Your bride at home will welcome a certain
savoir-faire
In her new groom. The Casino, so I hear,
Is delightful.
Well, Mehrdad, I mustn’t keep you.
A week of leisure in our city – Time to taste
a little freedom.
No harm in that, no harm at all.
I’m glad we talked. Goodbye my boy.

MEHRDAD Goodbye, sir, and thank you.

MAÎTRE exits.

‘Enjoyment and duty co-exist in the
harmonious soul’.
How facile is the conversation of this
pompous petit-maitre.

*MEHRDAD resumes his letter. MOTHER, FATHER
and BITA stand at the back of the stage.*

MOTHER Your loving mother sends you greetings
From your loving Bitá. In time you’ll find
That her love will equal mine
When you return.

BITA Your Bitá sends you her devotion
And knows that you will do your duty
And be the husband
Your family hope you will become
When you return.

MEHRDAD In a week's time you will all have me
But until then I have the freedom
To nurse the thought that lurks inside me
Like an anarchist with a bomb.
What is it she wants to tell me?
And why will I return this evening
To stand and watch her through the window?
One-two-one Rue Séverin.
I could believe those eyes,
Opaque, made of alabaster,
See into my soul
And she knows me as I am.

4 Scene 3

Lights up. The stage has been transformed into a curiosity shop, littered with bric-a-brac. In the window is a MANNEQUIN wearing a green silk evening dress. In the centre of the room a teenage girl (GISELLE) sits reading a book. An elderly man (TOMBEAU) bustles round the shop, arranging and dusting various curiosities.

TOMBEAU Giselle!
You've sat there for an hour,
Still as a statue and as silent.
Dust is settling on my treasures
But you never lift a finger
To help an old man keep things tidy.

GISELLE Yes, Grandfather.

MEHRDAD appears outside the window. He stops transfixed by the MANNEQUIN in the shop.

TOMBEAU Back again, our little Hamlet,
Like last night and all the nights before.
His eyes are burning through the glass.

What is it that you want from us?
Do you even know yourself?
Well-cut suit, a watch from Cartier,
There is money there, no doubt about it.

A PROSTITUTE appears at MEHRDAD'S side and silently propositions him. MEHRDAD walks away rapidly. TOMBEAU waves the PROSTITUTE away. She laughs and moves off. TOMBEAU adjusts the dress on the MANNEQUIN.

No? Not for him, a vice too vulgar
For our little gentleman. But he will be back
Tonight – I feel it. In the eyes I see the hunger.
He's like an addict, craving morphine.
Giselle, if we have a customer
Make him welcome.

GISELLE Yes, Grandfather.

TOMBEAU Yes, Grandfather, no, Grandfather,
You never lift a finger to help an old man.

MEHRDAD enters the shop, and approaches GISELLE

GISELLE Yes.

MEHRDAD I saw something in your... window –

GISELLE Grandfather!

TOMBEAU materialises from the back of the shop.

TOMBEAU Monsieur, how can we help you?
Giselle! Don't let the gentleman stand,
A chair, a chair, girl – fetch him a chair!

MEHRDAD That is not necessary, I won't be long.

TOMBEAU Welcome to my little kingdom,
A landmark on Rue Séverin.
We have much to please the curious,

Objects gathered from all quarters:
Here's a poster of the great Max Linder
Or if you hanker for a sensation
Here's Fantômas. No?
Perhaps Monsieur has tastes more cultured.
If your bent is literary, this chair, so it is rumoured,
Once belonged to Baudelaire.

MEHRDAD In your window, I chanced to notice
The tailor's model on display.

TOMBEAU Ah, monsieur has the eye.
Exquisite taste if I may say so.
Three hundred and fifty francs.
It's for a girl of your acquaintance?
Your fiancée? She will be delighted.

MEHRDAD I do not understand your meaning.

TOMBEAU At three-fifty it's a bargain.
For the stitching alone
It would be cheap at twice the price.
It might help Monsieur to decide
If he could see a demonstration
Perhaps my granddaughter
Might model it for him. Giselle!

MEHRDAD You're mistaken,
It is not the dress I wish to buy –

TOMBEAU Not buy the dress?

MEHRDAD No. The model that wears the dress.

TOMBEAU Monsieur wishes to buy the
Mannequin?
That is quite a different story.
It would be hard to put a value
On such a skilled depiction
Of the female form. So lifelike, so alive.

MEHRDAD Is it for sale?

TOMBEAU She came from Paris,
From the showroom of Les Galeries Lafayette
Made by Le Crux, the master craftsman.
He has such art that one could swear
She blushes beneath the alabaster.
You may call me sentimental,
I have become accustomed to her.

MEHRDAD I need her for my work.
In my country I am a dressmaker.

TOMBEAU I understand you, such complexion,
Such a form would inspire the finest couture.
Giselle, I have decided – This young man is a
worthy owner,
So serious and full of purpose. It's a sacrifice,
But for – shall we say twenty-two hundred francs
I'll let her go.

MEHRDAD That is all the money I have –

TOMBEAU For that price, I'll include the dress.
Consider, Sir, with such a model,
So compliant and so subtle
You would create for the ideal woman.

MEHRDAD Here, take it.

*MEHRDAD thrusts banknotes
into TOMBEAU'S hand.*

TOMBEAU You have made the right decision.
I shake your hand – there, she's yours.
I'll fetch you a cloth to wrap her in,
Hide her from the covetous eyes.

GISELLE ...from the covetous eyes. (*Laughs*)

TOMBEAU I see you are happy with your purchase.

TOMBEAU exits. GISELLE follows. At the back of the stage, TOMBEAU gestures that she should observe. GISELLE lingers, unseen by MEHRDAD

5 Scene 4

MEHRDAD No woman I have ever seen
Can compare with your perfection.
My shyness melts away before you.
We'll never quarrel, and you will never
Grow old, your face will never line
Nor your body thicken.
If I caress you, you will never
Turn away or mock my weakness.
In the days and months that follow
You will know me as I am.

MEHRDAD touches the cheek of the MANNEQUIN. As GISELLE watches, the MANNEQUIN gives a barely perceptible shiver and inclines her head into his hand.

Act II

6 Scene 1

MEHRDAD'S family home in Tehran. At the far end of the stage is MEHRDAD'S room. There is a chair, a couch, and an alcove with a drawn curtain. MEHRDAD is sprawled on a couch, a bottle and a glass beside him. He is dishevelled. He is holding a revolver in his hand. Downstage, BITA stands alone. There is a couch. At the other end of the stage stand MEHRDAD'S MOTHER and FATHER.

BITA Mehrdad,
I call you beloved,
You do not hear me. It is five years now,
Since we were betrothed
And you went from me.
And each hour of each day
Of each year I say your name,
Mehrdad.

MOTHER Mehrdad, my son,
Since you have returned
We have lost you.

FATHER Outwardly dutiful, respectful, quiet
But a stranger. Cold as the snow that shrouds
Tehran.

MEHRDAD draws the curtain. The MANNEQUIN stands, still wearing the green silk dress. Her pose has altered slightly since we first saw her in the shop in Rue Séverin. Lipstick has been carefully applied to her face, giving the illusion of a mouth. He takes a revolver from his pocket.

BITA and GISELLE sing

MEHRDAD I cannot leave you,
and you will not free me.
The odds are six to one. If fate wills it,
My existence ends here.

MOTHER Mehrdad, my hope,
what is become of you?

FATHER Mehrdad, my son, can you not hear me?

The voice of GISELLE

*MEHRDAD puts a single bullet
into the revolver's chamber.*

BITA I was fourteen when we were betrothed.
I called you beloved.

It was spring outside my window.
The blossom shook and in my being,
Your name stirred and I held you,
Dreaming, seeing you beside me.

MEHRDAD What do you see, when you see me?
A drunkard? A fool? It was not so, when I saw you.
A vision standing in the window,
one-to-one Rue Séverin.
You know my shame, yet you cannot judge me.
Without a name or soul. You are alabaster,
White as the snow that falls in the garden
Outside the window.

MEHRDAD spins the chamber of the revolver.

[7] Scene 2

GISELLE and MOTHER sing

BITA Now it is winter, and snow covers our city.
And you are here...

GISELLE Different

MOTHER indifferent

BITA Cold as snow.

*MEHRDAD raises the gun to his temple.
He squeezes his eyes shut, hesitates,
then pulls the trigger. The pistol clicks.*

MEHRDAD May God forgive me.

*MEHRDAD sinks to his knees in front of the
MANNEQUIN. The curtain in the alcove closes,
hiding them both from the audience. MOTHER
enters. She sits on the couch and beckons BITA
to sit beside her.*

[8] Scene 3

MOTHER Bita, my dear, come – here beside me.
Do not give in. This will pass
And all will be well.

BITA Have you seen him?

MOTHER In his room for two days now.
The door is locked, I dare not enter.

BITA Then I must leave.
He stays there because he cannot bear to see me.
I have become hateful to him, though once, I think
He truly loved me.
I was a child then.

MOTHER You read too much into his silence.
His time away, his sudden return
Has confused him, think of him
As a passenger in a storm,
Afraid – afraid to leave his cabin.
A week more, he will return to us.

BITA It is too late
When I meet his eyes he turns away.
I know he thinks of someone else.

MOTHER Bita, you must not think it.
I know my child, he would
Never disobey his parents' wishes so.
He knows that we desire this marriage.
Since infancy he was ever quiet,
Obedient, serious. It is in his nature.

BITA He has changed –
To me he has changed.

MOTHER This morning his father
Will make him see reason. They are to speak.
More than a mother, a father can teach
His son to be happy.

BITA I am afraid.

MOTHER Be patient. A week at most,
he will return.

9 Scene 4

At the far end of the stage, MEHRDAD is in his shirtsleeves, splashing water from a bowl on his face. He dries off vigorously, puts on a jacket, dabs on cologne. He is once more the neat, respectable, hesitant MEHRDAD from Act I. MEHRDAD crosses the stage. He passes BITA. They pause in front of each other. BITA lowers her eyes. MEHRDAD bows.

MEHRDAD Bita –

BITA Yes

MEHRDAD I wish...

BITA What do you wish?

MEHRDAD I wish you to be happy.

BITA I must leave tomorrow.
To stay is painful for us both.

MEHRDAD As you wish.

BITA Is that all you have to say?

MEHRDAD No. Stay.
I must go now – My father waits.

10 Scene 5

Lights go up on FATHER'S study. MEHRDAD stands by a chair. FATHER enters. He wears an expensive coat with a fur collar, speckled with snow. He brushes the coat vigorously and hangs it up and sits down as he sings. MEHRDAD remains standing.

FATHER Ay, this weather,
The streets are impassable
Like a skating rink – impossible to do business
When the city is freezing.
In Sepah Square I saw a mullah
Fall on his face. A mullah, mind you.
Sit, Mehrdad, sit.

MEHRDAD sits down on the chair.

Now that you are home, we must seem strange –
Old-fashioned even. We sent you away a boy,
You have returned a man. I have always held
a little worldliness
Would do you good. Would you agree?

MEHRDAD Yes, father.

FATHER You have kept, I see, your reserve,
Well, that is good too.
Now, there are matters we must speak of.
When you left for France there was an
understanding.
You are betrothed to your cousin Bita.

MEHRDAD I was young when it was done.
So was she, no more than a child.

FATHER Bita has become a woman.
Of great beauty, I may add.

MEHRDAD To marry now, after all this time,
Would be a duty, an obligation.

TOGETHER Obligations come with...

FATHER ...manhood.
I dreamed of your return. A man at last,
Ready to become the head of our family,
Carrying the values of your forefathers forward.

MEHRDAD At work, do I not do my duty?

FATHER With icy precision
But not with joy. Am I to understand
You do not mean to honour
The promise made to your cousin?

MEHRDAD I may honour it, or I may not be able
To marry honourably.

FATHER I understand a young man's doubts.
The purity of your cousin may inhibit.
This is to be expected.
Arrangements can be made,
Unconventional, perhaps, yet practical—
for the best.

Passion is not best confined
Solely to the marital bed.
I speak to you from my experience.

MEHRDAD Forgive me, father, but I fear
The role of a boulevardier does not fit you.
You want me to be an honourable man and you
want me to be a rake—
Forgive me, father. Which is it to be?
I am obedient to your wishes.

FATHER Go, Mehrdad,
Make up your own mind.
I have no more advice to give you.

MEHRDAD I am always your dutiful son.

The FATHER exits. MEHRDAD takes the revolver out of his pocket, spins the chamber, puts it in his mouth and pulls the trigger. The hammer clicks on an empty chamber.

11 Scene 6

Lights up on the other side of the stage. BITA moves into the bedroom space. She walks hesitantly around the room as if afraid of discovery. She stops in front of the curtain, she pulls it open. At first sight of the MANNEQUIN, she stumbles back, frightened. Then she moves hesitantly towards her. She stands in front of the MANNEQUIN, touches her hair and the green dress.

BITA Is this my rival?
A thing of straw and alabaster.
When he sees me, does he long
For your sightless eyes?
Does he pine for your cold breast?

*BITA pushes the MANNEQUIN;
it totters but does not fall.*

If I could, I would destroy you, kill you
To bring him back.

*BITA approaches the MANNEQUIN, touches her
face, then withdraws her hand with a shudder.
Plucking up her courage she touches the
MANNEQUIN again, feeling her hair, tracing the
outline of her face and examining the dress.*

What does he see when he sees you?
Does he whisper secrets
That you cannot hear
When you and he are together?

*BITA starts to raise the blonde wig from the
MANNEQUIN'S head. BLACKOUT.*

[12] Scene 7

*Lights go up. MEHRDAD is sprawled on the
couch. The revolver and a bottle of whiskey are
on the table beside him. In the background
TOMBEAU and GISELLE appear. The
MANNEQUIN is beside them.
MAÎTRE appears beside TOMBEAU and
GISELLE and the MANNEQUIN*

MAÎTRE Every city has its secrets,
Pockets of ill-repute
To tempt and trap the innocent.
A young man alone,
Unworldly and inexperienced
Would be well advised to...

GISELLE She came from Paris,
From the showroom of les Galeries Lafayette

Made by Le Crux, the master craftsman.
He has such art that one could swear
She blushes beneath the alabaster.

TOMBEAU It would be hard to put a value
On such a skilled depiction
Of the female form
So lifelike, so alive –

MOTHER He knows that we,
he knows that we desire
this marriage since infancy.

FATHER I dreamed of your...

GISELLE Is he asleep, Grandpa?

TOMBEAU He thinks he is,
He thinks we do not know.

MAÎTRE & TOMBEAU Still dressed in black,
our little Hamlet.

GISELLE laughs

[13] Scene 8

MEHRDAD wakes up, looking around him.

MEHRDAD Another night in the vortex
I spiral down, no one to catch me.

He picks up the revolver from the table.

A single bullet through the temple
Then everything will cease.
When they find her
Behind the curtain
Will they guess? Or think it madness?

*He pulls the trigger. The hammer falls on an empty
chamber. He drops the revolver onto the table.*

You shall not trouble me tonight
The curtain shall be closed.
Hidden from view you have no power.
You have no name, yet you have ruined me.
God forgive me
Bita, we were once betrothed.
We were happy then.

MEHRDAD turns away from the alcove

When I see her she forgives me,
Even as she turns away.
I have betrayed her.

(With others:) Bita, we were once... happy then.

(Alone:) I have betrayed her for an illusion.

May God forgive me.
When I see her she forgives me...
Bita, you were once beloved.

(With others:) You loved me then.

(Alone:) Tonight my thoughts
Will be with you.

GISELLE, MOTHER Bita, come and
heal my body.
I am afraid now.

MEHRDAD Bita, oh, I am afraid now.
She waits for me behind the curtain
The death of every cherished hope.
She holds me still
Yet in that calm, unmoving face
I sense her scorn. This is madness –
Sometimes in the night I hear you moving
Around the room when you think I am asleep,
An incubus in alabaster.
May God forgive me –

I shrink from you
But cannot leave you.
A vision standing in the window.
One-two-one Rue Séverin.
I loathe the thing that once I loved,
I destroy you, reduce you to dust,
I shall seek out Bita
And beg forgiveness.
The spell is broken.

MEHRDAD walks to the alcove and pulls the curtain back. A FIGURE identical to the MANNEQUIN, wearing the green dress and blonde wig is there in the shadows. MEHRDAD instinctively turns away.

MEHRDAD It is over.
I shall forget you.

MEHRDAD walks back to the couch and picks the revolver off the table beside it.

MEHRDAD I'll chance my life one final time.
If, if I am spared I shall destroy you.
I'll get a stake and drive it through
The cavity where your heart should be.
I wonder in the final instant.
As the bullet leaves the chamber
If there is one single moment
Of joy before infinity?

MEHRDAD turns to the alcove, raises the gun to his head and pulls the trigger. As the hammer clicks on an empty chamber, the FIGURE shrieks and runs towards MEHRDAD, arms outstretched.

FIGURE Mehrdad...

Terrified MEHRDAD points the revolver at the moving statue and pulls the trigger. A pistol shot and the FIGURE crumples and falls into his arms. As they sink to the floor, the blonde wig falls off. It is BITA

BITA Mehr – dad –

BITA'S body goes limp.

MEHRDAD Bitā –

MEHRDAD gets up. Moving like a sleepwalker, he goes into the alcove. There is another curtain drawn across. He pulls it open. The MANNEQUIN stands naked. Her mouth opens and an inchoate sound emerges that mingles with MEHRDAD'S despairing cry.

CURTAIN

Dedicated to Hormoz Farhat (1928–2021)



Recording Data

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MEHRDAD: What do you see, when you see me?
A drunkard? A fool? (Act II)

