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Supermassive black hole

Astronomers have detected an impressive supermassive black hole devouring a star – and they've nicknamed it «Scary Barbie,» in part because of its terrifying power. Scientists called it one of the «most luminous, energetic, long-lasting transient objects» found lurking in a forgotten corner of the night sky.

Bil Gardani, a 2,000-year-old ritual in Markazi Province



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AHMAD BELBASI/IRIB NEWS

Iranica Desk

Bil Gardani is a 2,000-year-old ceremony held in the city of Nimvar, in the central province of Markazi every year. It was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2010.

A ritual which has its roots in people's beliefs, Bil Gardani means the turning of the shovel. It is tied to farming, which has been the main occupation of local people since ancient times. Head of the city's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department, Mehdi La'bar, told ISNA that the ritual is not only a demonstration of power to ill-wishers, but also a thanksgiving festival. In ad-

dition, people pray to God for more rain in the next cultivation season.

He noted that the ceremony is held after the dredging of the main river of Nimvar. Based on old customs, each farmer dredges the river based on the size of his farm.

"After the end of the dredging operation, farmers gather in the city's main square and tie seven shovels together with goat hair, in two groups of three and four," he continued.

La'bar noted they use a special method to rotate the shovels above their heads, which requires skill and power.

He said there have been various beliefs among the peo-

ple about the reason behind the use of seven shovels in the ceremony. The number seven is somehow sacred for many Iranians. It also represents the seven heavens, from which rain is sent to their farmlands.

He noted that in the past, the river bottom was made of soil, and up to 120 people used to go for dredging it, but since it has been cemented, the number of farmers taking part in the process has decreased. He noted that in the past, dredging was carried out in mid-March, but presently it is done at the end of April.

Each bunch of shovels could weigh approximately 30 kilograms. Athletes can turn the shovels from five to 30

times around their heads, in opposite directions.

During this time people begin to pray for rain, the heavenly blessing. This involves the wish for the seven skies to start moving around and allow rain to fall upon the area in which they live. They want divine mercy in the form of rain, for their lives depend on the crops they harvest each year.

In addition to praying for the heavenly blessing, they take the opportunity to show their physical strength to their enemies so that they could remain in peace without any outside threat to their peaceful lives.

There are several other rain ceremonies held in various parts of Iran.

Street music: An ode to daily lives of pedestrians

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is a country steeped in culture and art, and among the diverse range of artistic and cultural events that take place in the country is street music. While street music in Iran faces challenges due to political and social restrictions, it remains an important part of people's daily lives. Mehrdad Mehdi, a seasoned musician, has spent over two decades performing in the streets and has seen the evolution of street music firsthand.

His journey as a street musician is punctuated by three distinct snapshots. The earliest of these snapshots dates back to 2002 when he and his friends would convene in the vicinity of Tehran's Laleh Park in downtown to strum their guitars. At the time, Mehdi would practice his craft in a secluded corner of the park, hoping to attract the attention of passersby. It was during one such session that he had an impromptu jam session with a group of Afghan laborers, a moment that stayed with him for years to come.

As Mehdi developed a more serious interest in music, he embarked on an academic pursuit that eventually led him to the piano. However, he

ern and movie music. The ensemble comprised a limited range of instruments, including the violin, acoustic guitar, harmonica, and Mehdi's trusty accordion. This era, marked by the group's growth and evolution, constitutes the second snapshot of Mehdi's journey as a street musician.

In the third epoch, Mehdi developed a craving to acquire a comprehensive and sophisticated knowledge of accordion, comparable to that taught in European countries. Thus, he voyaged to Armenia, as at that juncture, there were no avenues for academic instruction of accordion in Iran. Throughout that phase, they conducted copious interviews, recorded videos, and imparted knowledge in the form of workshops on street music. Gradually, the street music scene shed its previous guise, and musicians no longer felt ashamed to engage in it. The third era came into being as musicians from all walks of life took to playing street music with consummate skill. These developments occurred so suddenly that, in just two years between 2012 and 2014, the number of groups in Tehran swelled by over 100.

Despite the challenges faced by street musicians in Iran, the presence of



yearned to collaborate with fellow musicians in the city. Despite financial constraints, he procured an accordion, a ubiquitous symbol of street music. The allure of this medium remained strong, despite the negative perceptions associated with it. Mehdi delves deeper into his foray into street music, elaborating on his transition from an observer to an active participant. His efforts to construct a second image involved him taking to the streets, assuming the appearance of an individual from the middle echelons of society. He chose to play music from popular movies like 'Papillon,' a piece that he associates with the second snapshot of his journey.

Following a hiatus of a year or two, Mehdi was joined by a group of musicians, primarily guitarists with a penchant for rock and blues. Their presence elicited a warm reception from the public, who identified with their musicality, a marked contrast from the first snapshot of his journey, which was characterized by an air of monotony. The ensemble expanded, resulting in a group of ten musicians, of whom eight were guitarists and one a violinist.

From 2009 to 2012, the group established a regular performance spot around Vanak Square in northern Tehran, playing a diverse repertoire that ranged from classical to west-

street music adds to the charm of the cityscape and intersects with the daily lives of pedestrians. Mehdi believes that the only disparity between street music in Iran and its global counterpart is the degree of cultural tolerance. In leading cultural and artistic metropolises worldwide, there is greater acceptance and comprehension of street music, and macro policies align with the provision of space and opportunities, fostering cultural freedom and facilitating society's cultural advancement.

While some street musicians in Iran engage in street music to earn a living, others are passionate about culture and art and follow a set of principles. Regardless of their motivations, street music adds to cultural roots and should be a part of people's everyday lives. Mehdi regards the idea of organizing street music as meaningless and impractical as street music should be a spontaneous and integral part of people's daily lives.

He believes that the message conveyed in a street performance is more effective when people come across it in their daily lives, rather than having purchased tickets for it. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate street performances into people's lives and enable them to interact with and be affected by the message conveyed by such performances.

Iran's Sa'di sculpture unveiled in Tehran

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's largest bronze sculpture of the 13th century poet Sa'di was unveiled in Tehran on Monday.

Organized by Iran's Landscape Organization and City Council of Tehran, the sculpture was revealed in a ceremony attended by Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili, Chairman of the City Council of Tehran Mehdi Chamran, and Academy of Persian Language and Literature director Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, according to IRNA news agency.

Renowned Iranian sculptor Dehghan Mohammadi made the sculpture, which is installed at Sa'di Square, at the intersection of Sa'di Avenue and

Jomhuriye Eslami Avenue.

During the ceremony, Minister Esmaeili announced that the next luminary whose sculpture will be installed in Tehran is the Iranian poet Nizami.

He also stated that sculptures of other prominent figures will be unveiled and installed in other provinces to preserve Iran's identity and civilization.

Commenting on Sa'di's legacy, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel said that the poet is an eternal instructor of the Persian language and a teacher for those who have learned the language both in Iran and around the world.

This is why the organization responsible for teaching and promoting the Persian language worldwide is called the Sa'di Foundation, he concluded.

