



Early Iranian dance history has been shaped thanks to the endeavors of a few profiles, among whom there are three Armenian-Iranians. Their influence to this art form became the fundamentals of what was later going to be called the Iranian ballet. Their achievements put Iran on the international map of contemporary ballet history during the 20th century. They are *Madame Corneli*, *Serkis Janbazian* and *Madame Yelena*.

*Madame Yelena Avedisian* was born on January 25, 1910 in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey in the wealthy family of Mkrtych and Azniv Kanteghian. The Kanteghian family escaped the genocide and immigrated first to Bulgaria later Russia, settling in the city of Odessa.

Yelena's natural love and talent for dance flourished at the Odessa Ballet Institute, where she started to receive professional training at the age of five. She later moved to Armenia where she continued her education, mastering her talent for the stage and appearing for the first time as an actress, fifteen years old. With her beautiful voice, she took part in numerous opera productions in Armenia, finally landing the coveted lead role in the *Opera of Anoush*.

In Armenia she married *Hacop Avedisian* and shortly thereafter, in 1927, moved to Iran to settle in the city of Tabriz.



In the 1920's the community and cultural life in Tabriz was vibrant with its schools, choirs, theater groups, musicians and artists. Noted artists and actors would frequently travel to Tabriz from Armenia and, by joining local performers, organize outstanding productions. At the time, Yelena took part in the theatrical productions, while simultaneously establishing her own school of dance.

At the end of the World War II, the Avedisian family moved to Tehran in 1945. Hacop established a publishing company and Yelena started her new school of dance, which became recognized by the country's *Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts*, thus contributing to the enhancement of Iranian and Armenian cultural life.

She later realized her life-long dream and in 1962 established the Armenian-Iranian "*Song and Dance Ensemble*" composed of more than 150 of her students.

Madame Yelena embarked on a flourishing career, by presenting Armenian and Iranian national performing arts in high-quality professional productions. She was invited to perform for the Royal Family during many of their official events and also in many different cities which brought her unsurpassed fame and popularity.

These varied performances included Madame Yelena's own original creations, drawn from Armenian and Persian poems, stories and folklore. Here are some of these multi-faceted artistic creations:

*Rose of Shiraz*, an Iranian ballet in three acts

*Song of the Canary*, an Iranian play in two acts

*My Story*, inspired by Loris Tjeknavorian's Music

*Gulnara*, Iranian ballet inspired by the writings of Armenian poet *G. Sarian*

*Portrait of a Patriotic Girl*,

*Victory at Babylon*,

*Fire Dance*,

*Death of the Eagle*,

*Dance of Little Mothers*,

*Fountains at the Ferdowsi Square*,

A large number of graduates of Madame Yelena's Schools of Dance followed in her footsteps by teaching dance at various Armenian and Iranian schools. At the same time, several other graduates established their own dance schools in Tehran, such as Arous Sarkisian and Louiza Avedisian.



Some of her other students still continue Madame Yelena's legacy in other countries. *Sonya Carapetian Brambila* in Los Angeles, *Stella Saghian* and *Armaghan Mostafai* in Europe and *Jenik Hovaguimian* in Australia. One of her students, remembers her days at the school of Madame Yelena:

*"I recall the lady who was simply called Madame Yelena functioning as the caring mother of so many girls and boys. How she effected our lives by her natural grace and encouraging attention, that prepared us for our future artistic careers".*

The performances by the Armenian-Iranian *"Song and Dance Ensemble"* not only gained great popularity, but also attracted the attention of many influential and noted members of the arts community, resulting in numerous medals, awards, and accolades for Madame Yelena. *"Portrait of a Patriotic Girl"* and *"Fountains at the Ferdowsi Square"* earned Madame Yelena Royal and national medals of honor.

Madame Yelena was bestowed the coveted *St. Mesrob Mashtots medal* by His Holiness Khoren I, Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia and the *St. Nercess Shnorhali cultural medal* from the rector of Haigashen, the Rev. Nercess Tosounian.

Madame Yelena Avedisian is unequivocally the best and brightest representative of the Armenian people in her field in the 20th century.

There is no doubt about the fact that the history of Iranian dance never would have been shaped and developed in the way it did, if it was not for her endeavor and contribution.

It is with the utmost respect that I would admit that there are many fields in the Iranian arts that owe their continuity and development to the concern and devotedness of the Iranian minorities like the Armenian society of Iran.

Madame Yelena is a perfect example of one of those strong personalities to whom the coming generations of Iranian dance artists will remain eternally grateful.

She is considered as one of the most important dance teachers in Iran and has trained more than 30,000 dancers during her unbelievable 65 years of teaching career. Although not all of them became professional dancers, it is thanks to her that so many young individuals have come to know about the wonderful language of dance and how to understand and enjoy this artistic expression.

Madame Yelena has since her departure from Iran been residing in California, USA. On January 24, 1999 and on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday anniversary, a tribute gala was arranged by the Armenian Society of Los Angeles, with the participation of some of her previous successful students, honoring Madame Yelena and her life-long achievements.

The beautiful Jubilee book which was published on the same occasion, has been the main resource for the production of this special page in her name. This is the reflection of my deepest respect and gratitude towards the Armenian-Iranian Grand Lady, who enriched the culture of my country during so many years and decades. Madame Yelena Avedisian passed away on July 2, 2000 in Glendale, Los Angeles. May her soul rest in peace... Read the [condolence message](#) to her funeral ceremony.