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## Afghan Children's Songbook is Celebrated with Performance on Opening Day of the U.S. Premiere of "Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul" at National Gallery of Art, May 25, 2008



Cover of English-translated Afghan Children's Songbook, 2008.

Washington, DC—On the occasion of the U.S. premiere of the exhibition **Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul** at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, a historic compilation of children's songs from Afghanistan will be published with lyrics translated into English. *Children's Songs from Afghanistan* (National Geographic Books), like the international exhibition of 228 stunning artifacts, is the result of extraordinary efforts by individuals and organizations— such as Ayenda Foundation: The Afghan Children Initiative and National Geographic—that are dedicated to preserving the culture and heritage of Afghanistan.

The National Gallery of Art will present a performance of the songs by Washington-area

Afghan American children at 4:00 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium on Sunday, May 25, 2008, the opening day of the exhibition. The children will be accompanied by traditional Afghan musicians, all under the direction of renowned Afghan composer and musician Vaheed Kaacemy, who now resides in Toronto, Canada. A book signing will immediately follow the performance. The musicians will also perform a program of traditional music in the Gallery's West Building, East Garden Court on the same day at 1:00 p.m.

The program will start with a short welcome by Shamim Jawad, wife of His Excellency Said T. Jawad, Afghanistan Ambassador to the United States. She will introduce Louise Pascale, who, as a United States Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan in the late 1960s, was deeply moved by the beauty of Afghan music and poetry. Later, during some 25 years of conflict and turmoil, much of Afghanistan's traditional culture, including children's songs, was abolished from public life.

The songbook project began in 1966 when Pascale, living in Kabul, was teaching English and music to elementary students. She worked with Afghan poets and musicians to create a children's songbook for distribution to the local schools in Kabul. In 1968, 3,000 copies of the songbook, which was illustrated by local children, were published and distributed throughout Afghanistan.

Almost four decades later, at the time of the international intervention in Afghanistan in late 2001, Pascale searched for and found a worn and faded copy of the songbook. Assuming correctly that most of the other songbooks had disappeared during the years of civil strife and dislocations, she made a commitment to return the songs to the children of Afghanistan.

When Shamim Jawad heard about the project, memories of earlier times flooded back. Ayenda, which she founded, provided Pascale with the funding necessary to further develop the songbook.

Pascale, by now a professor at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, partnered with Vaheed Kaacemy, who was moved to tears when he first saw the original songbook, having not thought about the precious compositions for decades.

After researching and arranging the songs, he rehearsed and recorded 16 of them in Dari, Pashtu, Uzbek, and Hazaragi with Afghan children in Toronto. Eight of the songs are from the original songbook, while the remaining were collected or composed by Kaacemy.

Arsalan Lutfi, an Afghan graphic designer and creative director of TriVision Studios headquartered in Chantilly, VA, with offices and a printing plant in Kabul, volunteered many hours of his time to design and coordinate the production of the songbook with lyrics printed in Dari.

National Geographic funding enabled Pascale to print the first 3,000 copies of the songbook in 2006. Through the efforts of Shamim Jawad and the United States Department of Defense, the songbooks were shipped in March 2007 to Afghanistan and distributed to schools, where they are being used both as musical texts and as tools to promote literacy. This year, 5,000 more copies were printed and are now being distributed across Afghanistan.

*Qu Qu Qu Barg-e-Chinaar: Children's Songs from Afghanistan* is a colorful 24-page songbook accompanied by a 60-minute CD. The songbook contains lyrics of all the songs printed in Dari, musical notation for each song, and delightful illustrations, including some of the children's drawings from the 1968 publication. For more information or to order the songbook with lyrics in Dari, visit the Folk Arts Web site, [www.facone.org](http://www.facone.org). To donate a songbook to children in Afghanistan, visit [www.nationalgeographic.com/afghanchildrensfund](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/afghanchildrensfund).

With the support of National Geographic, the lyrics for the songbook have been translated into English and will be available as a new edition when the exhibition opens at the National Gallery of Art in May 25, 2008. *Children's Songs from Afghanistan*, the expanded, 32-page songbook with English translations and transliterations of the lyrics, as well as the original Dari and the 60-minute CD, will be available from the Gallery Shops for \$17.95 (hardcover). To order, call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

During the development of the songbook, Shamim Jawad arranged for Pascale to

meet Afghanistan's Minister of Education, Mohammad Haneef Atmar, to discuss distribution of the songbook and future related endeavors. Kaacemy traveled to Afghanistan to meet Atmar and began collecting more songs he hopes will someday fill a second songbook. President Hamid Karzai gave his full support to the effort and thanked Kaacemy for using his talents to help Afghanistan's children.

## **U.S. Exhibition Tour Venues**

***Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul*** will premiere to U.S. audiences at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, May 25 through September 7, 2008. The exhibition will be on display at the Asian Art Museum San Francisco, October 24, 2008, through January 25, 2009; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, February 22 through May 17, 2009; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, June 23 through September 20, 2009.

## **Exhibition Credits**

The exhibition is organized by the National Geographic Society and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art

It is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities

At the National Gallery of Art the exhibition is made possible by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. It is also supported by The Charles Engelhard Foundation.

The works in the exhibition are the sole property of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

To learn more about the exhibition, visit

<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/afghanistaninfo.shtm>

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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