

SARA ZALTASH

# Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose) آبی (در مسیر یک گل رز)

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SARA ZALTASH

## Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose) آبی (در مسیر یک گل رز)

Sara Zaltash (1985) is a British-Iranian live performance artist enacting bold ideas that evolve aesthetic, political and spiritual reality. A talented young performer, singer, academic and project manager with twelve years professional creative experience, Sara is a Fellow of the Schumacher Institute and holds BA Drama (Bristol, 2008), PGCert Persian Literature (Tehran, 2010), MA Performance (Leeds, 2011) and a Graduate Diploma in Law (BPP, 2013).

*Zaltash is electrifying... See her if you can.* - Adrian Searle, The Guardian, 2015.

I admit to a deep-rooted conviction that performance is perhaps the only necessary condition for existence.

### Objectives

- to build extraordinary bridges across worlds of understanding through art practice;
- to promote live performance art as an art form most relevant to our time;
- to live as an artwork in service, bringing divine encounters of beauty, justice and harmony to life.

Wind challenges Sun to a contest of strength.

“Whosoever can remove the coats from the travellers on the road below,” howls Wind,  
“shall be strongest.”

Wind blows with the force of a thousand hurricanes, and the travellers draw their coats  
ever tighter around their bodies.

Then Sun shines, bright and round, and the travellers take off their coats with relief.

Sun with warmth won the day; let us be Sun.

### Current and previous support for Sara’s work

British Council, Arts Council England, Schumacher Institute, Live Art Development Agency, Arts Admin, Watershed Bristol, Bristol City Council, Bristol Green Capital Partnership, Glasgow City Council, Centre for Alternative Technology Wales, Brahma Kumaris, Owl Barn Residency.



**Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose)** is a live performance action, to be undertaken by Sara Zaltash from 21st March 2017 – 15th October 2018.

During this time, Sara will walk from the source of the River Thames along the waterways of Europe and the Caucasus to Tehran, in order to deliver her one true love to her last surviving grandparent. The sound of the journey will be broadcast live online and on radio continuously by 24/7 audio signal. Sara offers an open invitation for people to join her walking and listening as she treads a sacred path to her ancestors, in search of true love.

The project is kindly supported by British Council, Arts Council England, Schumacher Institute (UK), Live Art Development Agency (UK), Arts Admin (UK), Connexions Capital, Watershed (Bristol, UK), The Island (Bristol, UK), The Owl Barn Residency (Gloucestershire, UK), ]performance s p a c e [ (Folkstone, UK). Translocal Institute for Contemporary Art (Budapest, Hungary), Trafo Cultural Centre (Budapest, Hungary), BucharestAiR (Romania), Port Cetate Artist Residency (Cetate, Romania), Cultural Management Lab (Tbilisi, Georgia), Sasan Pirouz (Tehran, Iran).  
Further support pending.

Read about the story so far in an interview with the artist by performingborders:  
<https://performingborders.wordpress.com/2016/09/14/sara-zaltash-september-2016/>

Departing ceremoniously from Kemble, UK, as dawn breaks on the first day of Spring, the Persian New Year 1396, Sara will carry her sonic ambulation alongside the waterways of the Thames, the English Channel, the Rhine, the Main, the Danube, the Black Sea, the Rioni, the Mtkvari, the Caspian Sea and the rivers of the Alborz mountains. The journey will conclude on at the Filtering Garden Festival in the Golestan Palace, celebrating the UN's Hydrocity Project which addresses the looming water crisis by re-opening Iran's ancient underground *qanaat* aqueduct network. Undertaking a contemporary pilgrimage of over 5000 miles in 573 days, broadcasting over thirteen-thousand hours of sound to listeners 24-hours a day, Sara's arrival will add an ephemeral monument to the stuff of legend.

"water began to flow again in the gardens here, babajaan... and then, a woman arrived... she had walked all the way from England, looking for her one true love..."

*Ah-Be* provides a romantic pseudo-archetypal hook on which to peg the intersecting creative and socio-political themes of climate change, environment, water, rivers, migration, exile, Middle Eastern and specifically Iranian diaspora, Islam, pilgrimage, walking, the freedom of women and the future of humanity. Creative expression through digital technology becomes an analog to devotional expression in spiritual practice.

Sara will draw on her skills as a performer, vocalist, DJ and public speaker to communicate the experience of the journey through interpersonal encounter, performance, poetry and song, via the universal audio stream, and by creating visual art, photography and ephemera for performances, workshops, talks, exhibitions, dining events and DJ sets.



## Why this? Why Sara? Why now?

- Heroic acts inspire courage in others to take the bold steps that are needed to deal with the intersecting challenges facing humanity;
- As a young, female dual-citizen British-Iranian artist and academic, Sara is uniquely positioned to contribute to the global cultural landscape by enacting this project;
- Promotion of the Iran's improved cultural relations will stimulate support for national development projects that address urgent environmental and social changes.



## Ambition

- to create an heroic art work in the context of migration and environmental shift that promotes Iran's increasingly hospitable international relations;
- to make *Ah-Be* accessible and credible to the broadest public audiences by having adequate resources for high production values in design, production and safety.

## Method

- a live performance art action that presents a new reality to audiences, with heightened attention given to the communication of aesthetics, narrative, mythos and principle;
- by safely and convincingly enacting an extraordinary answer to the question, "when will the children of Iran return to their *vatan*?", *Ah-Be* will widen the spectrum of hope and inspiration for Iranians and humans across the world.

## Outcome

- raising awareness of Iranian culture and history through direct encounters across Europe and the Caucasus, and throughout the world by promotional and media activity;
- high quality aesthetic and design will embed the material legacy of *Ah-Be* among the highest valued of contemporary art works.

Resources contributed to **Ah-Be (in the direction of a rose)** will support the essential infrastructure of the project, ensure the success of its creative and diplomatic objectives, and provide for Sara and her team's safety in delivering an inspirational story of courage and hope.

## TIMELINE

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| PHASE 1 | <b>Gathering Inspiration &amp; Support</b><br><i>Oct 2015 - Jan 2016</i>                        | Discovering UN Hydrocity; discussions with production companies and mentors; conceptual development; support from Schumacher Institute.   |
| PHASE 2 | <b>Preparation: Creative Development &amp; Stakeholder Engagement</b><br><i>Jan - June 2016</i> | Establishing partnerships with Watershed, the Island, British Council, Arts Council England, Julie's Bicycle, Live Art Development Agency, Arts Admin, In Between Time, Kaleider; developing connections in Tehran, Tbilisi and Budapest; meetings with BBC & Resonance FM; scouting project personnel; conceptual development.   |
| PHASE 3 | <b>Preparation: Promotion &amp; Fundraising</b><br><i>June - Aug 2016</i>                       | Successful receipt of Arts Council funding for research trip to Tehran, Tbilisi and Budapest; developing crowdfunding campaign; developing funding proposals for grants and private donors; public gallery installation in Bristol; engaging publishers for book rights; preparing documentary pitch.   |
| PHASE 4 | <b>Preparation: Creative &amp; Logistical</b><br><i>Sep 2016 - Mar 2017</i>                     | Seeding period; funded research trip to Tehran, Tbilisi and Budapest; undertaking performance training in London, Brighton and Gloucestershire; launch and promotion of crowdfunding campaign; securing partnerships with cultural organisations en route; gaining sponsorship; promoting project through launch events, press and media; developing detailed logistical plans. |
| PHASE 5 | <b>Walking</b><br><i>21 Mar 2017 - 15 Oct 2018</i>  | Launch event; being hosted by cultural organisations en route; performing, giving talks and producing exhibitions; walking and broadcasting live audio.   |
| PHASE 6 | <b>Arrival &amp; Exhibition</b><br><i>Oct - Nov 2018</i>  | Residency and exhibition in Tehran.   |
| PHASE 7 | <b>Post-production</b><br><i>Nov 2018 - Apr 2019</i>  | Review of project; writing towards literary publication; planning the legacy of the project; rest.  |

## OFFER TO THEATRES, GALLERIES AND OTHER CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

As Sara travels across Europe and the Caucasus (see detailed trajectory below), the *Ah-Be* Production Team are seeking **support** and **creative opportunities** from cultural institutions to provide for the best implementation of the project.

In exchange for **accommodation, amenity provision, local marketing and PR support, production assistance and a negotiable fee** or other suitable means, the artist offers a combination of the following creative outputs:

- **Talk:** about the project as a whole, and/or Sara's art practice;
- **Performance:** using contemporary devising techniques influenced by Viewpoints, and training that she has undertaken with Karen Christopher (formerly Goat Island) and Rocio Boliver, Sara will create unique performances using phrases, motifs, songs, ephemera and actions from the journey. These performances are **Ah-Be's key creative output** and have been commissioned by ]performance space [ (UK), Trafo (HU) and Porte Cetate (RO). For examples of Sara's devised work, see Tuul, The Growing Act, Freaking London and My Long Dark Coat.
- **Listening Post:** a tablet device, with headphones, connected to the live online broadcast, situated for visitors to the cultural institution to listen to the remaining duration of the project, with attendant information about the *Ah-Be's* aims and themes;
- **Exhibition:** Sara will produce one single watercolour painting each day of the walk, using native river water. Originals and reproductions of these paintings to be exhibited and sold, in addition to sculptural ephemera and visual media collected en route;
- **Song:** Sara will write an historicising anthem song while she walks, to be performed solo or with accompaniment. Single or multiple performances of Sara's critically acclaimed performance of the Islamic call-to-prayer (see below) are also offered;
- **DJ:** Playing sophisticated guilty pleasures with a psychedelic Persian flavour, Sara can DJ at openings, parties and festivals. Sara's DJ experience includes sets at Glastonbury, Nowhere and Shambala Festivals and her own radio show;
- **Workshop:** Sara is an experienced performance workshop facilitator, and offers **3-hour, 1-day or 2-day** workshops on the performative relationship between **sound and pilgrimage**;
- **Pop-Up Persia Dining Experience:** Sara has moonlighted as an Iranian chef for three years for her pop-up dining events and private parties. Traditional Persian recipes with a contemporary organic twist, Sara can cater for 6 to 50 people.

Sara is open to collaborating with local artists and networks in a group exhibition or festival programme. Duration of performances, exhibitions, workshops and talks are negotiable.

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## THEMES

As the global media witnesses a swelling tide of migration rushing away from the darkening East, Sara's return to Iran presents a hopeful alternative narrative to the stereotypical portrayal of the migrant's tale, showing that a willing return is possible even after a generation of geo-political upheaval. Spanning the cultural, spiritual and physical distance from the United Kingdom to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sara will enact and explore a nexus of creative, environmental and political concerns:

- **Waterways**
  - natural and manmade;
  - passage along water;
  - the significance of water for historical, contemporary and future civilisations;
  - the effects and mitigations of the water crisis;
- **Shifted hierarchies of sound** production as an exemplar of the paradigm shift from the post-modern to the post-normal era;
- The journey, narrative and mythology of “**one true love**” and the **hetero-normative binary archetype**;
- Emergent **digital-spirituality**
  - The healing romance of **pilgrimage**;
  - **The im/possibility of "return"**, philosophically and historically, psychologically and emotionally;
  - **Journey** as dialogue between the individual and global Other;
  - Willing bodies going against **the tide of migration**;
  - **Family**; deliverance and ancestry and progeny; bloodlines;
  - **Kinship**, friendship, companionship;
  - **Changing landscapes** natural, linguistic, sonic and social.

## PROJECT PRODUCTION TEAM

**Xavier de Sousa – International Producer:** London-based independent producer. [xavierdesousa.co.uk](http://xavierdesousa.co.uk)

**Luke Emery - Logistical Producer:** Bristol-based independent Arts producer, [lukeemery.co.uk](http://lukeemery.co.uk)

**Sam Slater - Sound & Web Designer:** Berlin-based sound artist. [samslater.antibang.com](http://samslater.antibang.com)

**Amber Parsons - Documentary Maker:** double Bafta-nominated documentary film producer. [linkedin.com/in/ambervictoriaparsons](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ambervictoriaparsons)

**The Schumacher Institute - Partner Organisation:** Bristol-based non-profit think tank. [schumacherinstitute.org.uk](http://schumacherinstitute.org.uk)



## TRAJECTORY

Walking up to 15 miles each day, Sara will pass through many settlements. She will camp, and also offer the opportunity for people to host her pilgrimage. Major known towns and cities on her route include:

**Thames:** Kemble – Cirencester - Cricklade - Oxford - Reading - Henley on Thames - Windsor - Runnymede - Richmond - Greenwich - Southbank - Canary Wharf -- Gravesend - Sheerness - Whitstable - Margate - Ramsgate - Folkstone

**West coast of Europe:** Calais (FR) - Dunkirk - Ostend (BE) - Antwerp

**Rhine:** Rotterdam (NE) - Dordrecht - Utrecht - Nijmegen - Duisborg (DE) - Dusseldorf - Cologne - Bonn - Koblenz - Mainz

**Main:** Frankfurt - Wurzburg

**Regnitz:** Erlangen - Nuremburg

**Danube:** Regensburg - Straubing - Deggendorf - Passau - Linz (AU) - Krems - Tulln - Vienna - Bratislava (SL) - Komarno - Sturovo - Mosonmagyaróvár ( HU) - Győr - Komárom - Esztergom - Visegrád - Vác - Szentendre - Dunakeszi - Budapest - Szigetszentmiklós - Százhalombatta - Ráckeve - Adony - Dunaújváros - Dunaföldvár - Paks - Kalocsa - Baja - Mohács - Vukovar (HR) - Ilok - Apatin (RS) - Bačka Palanka - Futog - Veternik - Novi Sad - Sremski Karlovci - Zemun - Belgrade - Pančevo - Smederevo - Kovin - Veliko Gradište - Golubac - Donji Milanovac - Kladovo

The Danube then forms the border between Romania and Bulgaria.

Bulgarian: Vidin - Lom - Kozloduy - Oryahovo - Nikopol - Belene - Svishtov - Ruse - Tutrakan -

Romanian: Moldova Nouă - Orșova - Drobeta-Turnu Severin - Calafat - Bechet - Dăbuleni - Corabia - Turnu Măgurele - Zimnicea - Giurgiu - Oltenița - Călărași - Fetești - Cernavodă - Hârșova - Brăila - Galați (cross into Ukraine) - Reni (UA) - Izmail - Kiliya - Vylkove

**Black Sea Coast of Ukraine:** Danube Biosphere Reserve - Prymors-ke - Tuzly Lagoons National Nature Park - Kurortne - Zatoka - Chornomorsk/Ilyichevsk

Ferry crossing to Poti, Georgia.

**Rioni:** Poti (GE) - Samtredia

**Mtkvari:** Khashuri - Gori - Borjomi - Tbilisi - Rustavi - Mingacevir (AZ) - ZARBAB - Sabirabad - Neftcala

**Caspian Sea Coast:** Lankaran - Rasht (IR) - Ramsar - Chalus - Mahmudabad

**Haraz:** Amol - Sang Chal - through the Alborz Mountains - Tehran.



## Sara's Previous and Ongoing Key Projects

*The Call (2015)*: Sacred performance of Islamic call to prayer.

“a radical act of worship” - New York Times.

“Provocative but heartfelt, Zaltash’s performance epitomises the intersections of cultures and traditions” - A-N News.

2016: adapted for Southbank Centre, Attenborough Arts Centre, Lewisham Arts House, Centre for Alternative Technology, Brahma Kumaris Centre.

*one day : Day One - Resilience (2015)*: Bristol Green Capital 2015 participatory artwork about the future. Role: Lead Artist and Project Manager. 30 locations, 1872 audience videos made, 10000+ engagement. Funded by: Bristol 2015, Schumacher Institute, Bristol City Council, University of Bristol.

*Sink or Sing (2013)*: 100-day live art action, culminating in my swimming to the Isle of Wight whilst singing a 100-verse self-written English-Farsi ballad about fate. Press: ITV News, BBC News, local and regional press and radio in Berkshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, featured in Journal of Wild Culture.

*Tuul (2011-)*: annually repeating trilogy, durational performance, exploring British-Iranian womanhood. Hosted by Basement Arts Project, East Street Arts, Anatomy, Something Human, Owl Barn Residency, Residence, Month of Performance Art Berlin, Creature Festival Lithuania, The Island, Glastonbury Festival.

Other notable performances: Barbican Centre, Battersea Arts Centre, Theatre Delicatessen, IPA Bucharest, Stockholm Independent Art Fair, British Touring Shakespeare, Summerhall (Edinburgh), The Arches (Glasgow), Mayfest (Bristol), Junction (Cambridge).