

# Shadi Toloui-Wallace



**C**reativity is a “family affair” for singer-songwriter Shadi Toloui-Wallace. She and her mom, Shidan, sing on each other’s records. Her father, Paul, and brother, Josh, write songs for her. Her sister, Hoda, sings the harmonies on her songs.

Shadi was born near Sydney, Australia, to an Iranian mother and an Australian father. Her family moved to Haifa, Israel, when she was two, then moved back to Australia when she was nine. There, she faced bullying and other difficulties. Shadi turned to music for comfort. Over time, it called to her as a career.

Inspired by the Bahá’í Faith, Shadi has created three albums combining prayers and writings with contemporary melodies. Her music has taken her around the world, and one of her “proudest moments” was performing at the dedication of the Bahá’í House of Worship in Chile in 2016. She formed a band called Tiny Havoc with four friends, and they just released their first album. Shadi and her husband, Jason Bienia, live in Vancouver, Canada.

**Q: What’s your favorite childhood memory?**

**A:** Walking with my mom to the Shrine of the Báb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. And she would always sing . . . “Alláh-u-Abhá”\* as we were walking . . .

**Q: What was the most challenging experience for you as a kid, and how did you handle it?**

**A:** Adjusting into Australian life after spending my childhood in the Bahá’í World Centre . . . I was really bullied as a kid [in] Australia, so I struggled. How did I handle it? . . . A lot of patience and . . . also creativity . . . I found a creative outlet, which is music, and . . . drawing and hand crafts, which kind of occupied my time and helped me find a place.



**Left:** Shadi, age 6, started school in Haifa, Israel, while her dad was serving at the Bahá’í World Centre. **Right:** Shadi, age 19, performs at the 2009 Sydney Bahá’í Conference. She began performing at Bahá’í events in Australia at age 15.

**Q: What advice do you have for kids who want a career as a singer or musician?**

**A:** Learn how to work with other people and to collaborate . . . you have to learn how to consult early on, otherwise you’re not going to be able to do it. Learn how to be generous with your time . . . giving enough time for yourself to practice, but also to offer . . . your service to others. [You need] . . . a lot of perseverance and also just [to explore] different types of art, just because that’s where you’ll find your true calling . . . Be open to the world of creativity and to how diverse it is.

Questions and  
Answers with an  
Inspirational Bahá'í



The Toloui-Wallace family enjoys a laugh at Jericho Beach in Vancouver in 2015. Left to right: brother Josh, Shadi, mom Shidan, sister Hoda, dad Paul.

**Q: What inspired you to become a singer-songwriter?**

A: I started playing violin in grade four, and I was really bad at it and I didn't enjoy it, so I didn't bother to get good at it. I had a teacher . . . [who said] "You don't need to play an instrument . . . you can use your voice." Then she formed this little vocal group in grade six and we did . . . beautiful, uplifting songs, and that's when I realized that I had this musical gift, and not everyone had this gift.

**Q: Do you ever feel creatively stuck, and if so, how do you get inspired?**

A: I pray. And I find going out into nature and being alone and undistracted is really helpful. And I have a few places where I kind of retreat to. Sometimes just for a couple hours, sometimes it's for a day, or sometimes it's for a week. But I have different places that I know I can be creative in. But I have to set goals. If I don't have goals, nothing happens.



Shadi's bandmates in Tiny Havoc (left to right): Justin Gorrie, James Higgins, Arthur Smith, and Toga D'Hoore. Their debut album is called "Pluto + Nick."



**Q: What is one of your favorite experiences in your career so far?**

A: Traveling and . . . meeting other Bahá'í communities . . . You go and enter a community and there's like hundreds of people there welcoming you and wanting to support you, and I think that's been very humbling and very motivating . . . I also developed some cool workshops . . . to empower other people to . . . contribute in a musical way to the progress of their communities . . .

**Q: This issue of *Brilliant Star* is about creativity. What is important for kids to know about expressing their creativity?**

A: Try everything, and once they find something they like . . . to not give up. And to find ways that it serves a purpose beyond . . . yourself . . . People are being inspired creatively to serve in really unique ways . . . I love my podcast\*\* because I love to highlight . . . how somebody's creativity was able to contribute to the unification of the neighborhood.

**Q: If you had one wish for *Brilliant Star's* readers, what would it be?**

A: I hope they are able to develop their powers of expression and strive for excellence, but with the mindset of serving the community and serving others—however that may be. It could be through textile art . . . gardening . . . building skyscrapers . . . helping people with their hygiene, whatever. Develop your power of expression with excellence so that you can serve others with it, and then I think [you] will be really happy.

\*\*Cloud9 by Bahá'iTeachings.org  
Family by Shahriar Erfanian; Tiny Havoc by Lucas James, art direction by Ciele Beau