



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Music Initiative in Central Asia

The Music of Central Asia concert series in Italy and France offers a panoramic presentation of the Music of Central Asia in two concert cycles designed to be complementary. Taken together, they present a broad perspective on the richness and diversity of the artistic traditions of the region. In both locations, the concerts are divided into two evenings: the first presents a glimpse of the musical world of nomads; and the second focuses on the music of sedentary dwellers.

The performances will take place on:

24-25 November, Teatro Palladium, Rome, Italy. For more information, please see the Teatro Palladium website.

27-28 November, Cité de la Musique, Paris, France. For more information, please see the Cité de la Musique website.

Introduction

The Silk Road serves as an enduring symbol of humanity joined together by trade and cultural exchange. Yet in the very center of the Silk Road lands, amid the vast steppe and great oasis cities of Central Asia, two very different civilizations – nomadic and sedentary – preserve their own distinctive patterns of culture despite millennia of contact and coexistence. Nowhere are the distinctions between nomadic and sedentary cultures more apparent than in the domain of music. This cycle of concerts is divided into two evenings: the first presents a glimpse of the musical world of nomads, and the second focuses on the music of sedentary dwellers. The two concerts are designed as a complementary pair that, taken together, offers a panoramic perspective on Central Asian music.

The first concert, *Musiques des steppes* features a constellation of talented young artists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia who represent the contemporary face of their nomadic heritage. From Mongolia, Byambajargal Gombodorj brings her mastery of long song (*urtyu duu*) – an extraordinary form of acoustic legerdemain whose name does not signify that the songs are long, but that each syllable of text is extended for a long duration. Kazakh singers Ulzhan Baibussynova and Ardak Issataeva illustrate the venerable tradition of the bards – solo performers of oral poetry who typically accompany themselves on a strummed lute with silk or gut strings. Female bards were once rare, but Ulzhan and Ardak are in the vanguard of a generation of young women who are challenging traditional gender boundaries in nomadic music.

Nomadic cultures have also produced virtuosic instrumental repertoires, and these are the specialty of Tengir-Too, a Kyrgyz collective that seamlessly combines tradition and innovation in their laconic arrangements of Kyrgyz melodies for a variety of small ensembles. Tengir-Too takes its name from the Tien Shan mountain range that towers over the high alpine passes linking Kyrgyzstan and China. Using powerful voices, flutes, jaw harps, *komuz* (lute), and *kil kiyak* (fiddle – a distant ancestor of the cello and violin), Tengir-Too transmits the vibrant rhythms of nomadism and the serene atmosphere of the Kyrgyz mountains in a musical language as contemporary as it is ancient. Kyrgyz music was traditionally a solo art, but Tengir-Too's artistic director, Nurlanbek Nyshanov, is an innovator whose arrangements preserve older musical forms and genres while offering new textures and timbral colours. Unlike Soviet-era folk orchestras and consorts, however, Tengir-Too performs on traditional Kyrgyz instruments and works within the boundaries of conventional



Kyrgyz musical forms and genres.

Presenting a vivid contrast to the musical world of nomads, the second evening's concert, *Musiques de cour et des royaumes de Boukhara, de Khiva, et de Kokand* is infused with an urban sensibility that encompasses the entire spectrum of civic life, from devotion and prayer to festivity and celebration. Sedentary Central Asia has long enjoyed a highly developed tradition of spiritual poetry and song-writing that was cultivated both among literate, aristocratic connoisseurs and as a form of widely disseminated popular culture.

The concert's three vocalists, Farhad Davlatov, Nodira Pirmatova, and Mahmudjon Tojibaev – all from Uzbekistan – are among the leading contemporary interpreters of this repertoire, which might be described as “traditional popular classics.” Nodira Pirmatova studied both traditional music and opera singing in the rigorous conservatory-style educational system that developed in Central Asia during the Soviet era to merge Eastern and Western musical approaches. Accompanying herself on the *dutar*, Nodira brings exquisite vocal control and intensity to the performance of classical songs. Mahmudjon Tojibaev is an accomplished performer of *katta ashula*, a genre of *a cappella* music whose origins are linked to Sufi litanies. Farhad Davlatov represents the musical traditions of Khorezm, an autonomous cultural region in northwest Uzbekistan whose vibrant music and dance display strong links to the neighboring Turkmens as well as to Azerbaijan, across the Caspian Sea. The well-known songs of longing and devotion performed by all three singers evoke the allegorical power of Sufi-inspired texts that speak at once of human and Divine love. Performing both *a cappella* and with austere accompaniment on frame drum (*daira*), fiddle (*ghijak*), and long-necked lutes (*dutar*, *tanbur*, *tar*), their lyrical vocal lines ascend inexorably toward a musical and metaphorical zenith, where singers and listeners alike may experience the invisible face of the Beloved, the Friend, Truth.

These concerts are presented in collaboration with the Aga Khan Music Initiative in Central Asia, a programme of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. The Music Initiative was launched in 2000 to respond to a critical social need in post-Soviet Central Asia: the lack of resources and knowledge to develop indigenous artistic traditions in a direction that validates local identities and cultural heritage while also forging an internationally recognized Central Asian artistic modernity. The Music Initiative's mission is to identify and support exceptionally talented musical creators and teachers, disseminate their music, stimulate creative collaborations that expand traditional artistic languages, and educate audiences both locally and internationally about music and culture in the Islamic world.

Artists:

Musiques des steppes

Byambajargal Gombodorj, vocal (Mongolia)
Ulzhan Baibussynova, vocal, *dombra* (Kazakhstan)
Ardak Issataeva, vocal, *dombra* (Kazakhstan)
Raushan Orozbaeva, *qyl-qobyz* (Kazakhstan)

Ensemble Tengir-Too: (Kyrgyzstan)

Nurlanbek Nyshanov, direction artistique, *choor*, *chopo choor*, guimbardes



Gulbara Baigashkaeva, *komuz*, guimbardes
Ruslan Jumabaev, *komuz*
Rysbek Jumabaev, récitant *manaschi*
Kenjegul Kubatova, vocal, *komuz*

Musiques de cour et des royaumes de Boukhara, de Khiva, et de Kokand

Farhod Davletov, vocal, *tar (Uzbekistan)*
Nodira Pirmatova, vocal, *dutar (Uzbekistan)*
Mahmudjon Tojibaev, vocal, *sato (Uzbekistan)*
Dilbarjan Bekturdyeva, vocal, *qayrak*, accordion (*Uzbekistan*)
Sirojiddin Juraev, *dutar (Tajikistan)*
Abbos Kosimov, *doyra (Uzbekistan / USA)*
Habibulla Kurambaev, *doyra (Uzbekistan)*
Ikram Matanov, *koshnai (Uzbekistan)*

Theatre Addresses:

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