



AGA KHAN MUSIC AWARDS

Press release

For immediate release

**Gulbenkian Orchestra and Master Musicians
celebrate diversity in 2019 Aga Khan Music Awards concert**

Three-day event inaugurates Aga Khan Music Awards



Lisbon, Portugal, 29 March 2019 – For the first time, the Gulbenkian Orchestra, conducted by Pedro Neves, performed with Master Musicians of the Aga Khan Music Initiative in a concert featuring original music pieces composed or arranged by the Master Musicians and specially orchestrated by Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky.

The concert was attended by His Highness the Aga Khan, 49th hereditary Imam (Spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and members of his family. Also attending were Portugal’s Minister for Culture, Graça Fonseca, Minister for Justice Francisca Van Dunem, as well as Minister for Work, Solidarity and Social Security José António Vieira da Silva.

“At a time when strengthening tolerance and pluralism has become an acute worldwide priority, music is one of the arts which offers a medium for reaching, involving and uniting global audiences by engendering emotions which we all share as human beings,” said Prince Aynn addressing the audience at the concert. “It is our hope and aspiration that the Aga Khan Music Awards should serve as a catalyst for many future projects that draw on the rich tapestry of Muslim musical heritage while reaching across boundaries of time, place, and culture.”

Concerts and affiliated activities launching the inaugural Aga Khan Music Awards are being hosted by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, Portugal from 29-31 March. The concert on Friday 29 March - produced specifically for this occasion - showcased works composed by the Master Musicians, a collective of artists who create new music inspired by their deep rooting in the cultural heritages of the Middle East, the Mediterranean Basin, as well as South and Central Asia.

“This is a time of great pressure,” explained Dr Isabel Mota, President of the Gulbenkian Foundation. “Once again in the history of humanity, we see religious and cultural identities being manipulated in order to foment violence and intolerance towards others and their cultural heritage. We need a world in which different identities and cultures are respected and where we can share an idea of common good.”

“The concert was an incredible fusion of East and West, of artists from both the Gulbenkian Orchestra and the Aga Khan Music Initiative,” said Fairouz Nishanova, Director of the Aga Khan Music Awards “Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky took on the challenge of orchestrating a collection of pieces originally conceived for soloists and small ensembles and transforming these into pieces that truly connect and inspire every one of us.”

A stamp to commemorate the Aga Khan Music Awards was unveiled earlier in the evening by the Portuguese Postal Service.

On 21 March, the Master Jury of the Aga Khan Music Awards announced laureates and finalists for the Award's inaugural cycle. Domains included music Creation; Education; Preservation, Revitalisation and Dissemination; Social Inclusion, and Distinguished and Enduring Contributions to Music. A special Patron's Award was also announced.

On Saturday 30 March, finalists for the Award in Performance will perform for a live audience and the Award's Master Jury, following which the laureate in the "Performance" category will be selected. On Sunday 31 March, a final concert will bring together nine laureates and 14 performance finalists from 13 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and North America.

The **Gulbenkian Orchestra** traces its roots to 1962 when the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation decided to establish a permanent orchestra. Consisting originally of 12 players, the orchestra has grown over the past six decades to include 60 musicians. **Pedro Neves**, who conducted Friday evening's concert, is a regular guest conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra, the Porto Symphony Orchestra of the Casa da Música, the Portuguese National Symphony, and others.

The **Master Musicians are the Aga Khan Music Initiative's** leading artistic collaborators—venerated performers and composer-arrangers who appear on the world's most prestigious stages while also serving as teachers, mentors and curators who enrich the Music Initiative's interregional network of education programmes.

Homayoun Sakhi is a master performer on Afghan rubab as well as a composer who brings together Eastern and Western musical languages and instruments. Born in Kabul into one of Afghanistan's leading musical families, Sakhi is the heir to a musical lineage that began in the 1860s, when the ruler of Kabul, Amir Sher Ali Khan, brought classically trained musicians from India to perform at his court.

Sirojiddin Juraev is a master performer on long-necked lutes from Central Asia. Born and raised near the ancient city of Khujand, in northern Tajikistan, Sirojiddin learned to play the two-stringed dutar as a child and later studied with the great Uzbek master Turgun Alimatov. As a student at the Dushanbe Academy of Maqom, created by the Aga Khan Music Initiative in 2003, Sirojiddin also studied tanbur and sato (bowed tanbur) with ustad Abduvali Abdurashidov.

Basel Rajoub is a saxophonist and composer-improviser whose inspirations include traditional Middle Eastern rhythms and melodies as well as jazz. Born in Aleppo, Syria, he graduated from the Damascus High Institute of Music and creates new music that brings together musicians from the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Abbos Kosimov was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, into a musical family. A disciple of the honored Uzbek doira player Tuychi Inogomov and winner of the Competition of Percussion Instruments of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Kosimov established his own doira school in 1994 and his ensemble, "Abbos," in 1998.

Feras Charestan is from the city of Al-Hasakeh, in the northeast of Syria, and studied qanun at the High Institute of Music in Damascus. He has performed as a qanun soloist with symphony orchestras and has been a member of popular bands as well as contemporary music ensembles, such as the Master Musicians of the Aga Khan Music Initiative, creating new music rooted in Middle Eastern traditions.

Siar Hashimi was born in 1981 in Kabul, Afghanistan and has lived in Germany since 1990. He studied tabla with Ustad Wali, learning both the tala system of Indian classical raga and the rhythms of Afghan folk music. After moving to Germany, he studied tabla with Pandit Swapan Battacharya, of the Delhi Gharana, and has taken lessons from master tabla players Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pandit Anindo Chatterjee, and Kumar Bose.

The Music Awards were established by His Highness the Aga Khan to recognise exceptional creativity, promise, and enterprise in music performance, creation, education, preservation and revitalisation in societies across the world in which Muslims have a significant presence. Laureates share a USD 500,000 prize fund, and will also collaborate with the Music Awards to expand the impact of their work and develop their careers.

For more information, please see the press release of [21 March 2019](#) and the Aga Khan Music Awards [brochure](#).

For press enquiries, please contact:

Sam Pickens
info@akdn.org

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The *Aga Khan Music Awards* (AKMA) emerged from the Aga Khan Music Initiative (AKMI), an interregional music and arts education programme with worldwide performance, outreach, mentoring and artistic production activities. Launched to support talented musicians and music educators working to preserve, transmit, and further develop their musical heritage in contemporary forms, the Music Initiative began its work in Central Asia, subsequently expanding its cultural development activities to include artistic communities and audiences in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia.

The Initiative promotes the revitalisation of cultural heritage both as a source of livelihood for musicians and as a means to strengthen pluralism in nations where it is challenged by social, political, and economic constraints. Its projects have included publication of a comprehensive textbook, *The Music of Central Asia* (Indiana University Press, 2016), a 10-volume CD-DVD anthology, *Music of Central Asia*, co-produced with Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, a worldwide performance and outreach program that nurtures “East-East” as well as “East-West” musical collaborations, and a network of music schools and centres that develop innovative music curricula and curriculum materials in the Music Initiative’s regions of activity. (<https://www.akdn.org/akmi>).

Read online: <https://www.akdn.org/press-release/gulbenkian-orchestra-and-master-musicians-celebrate-diversity-2019-aga-khan-music>