



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Music Initiative

Aga Khan Ensemble in Portugal: New music with deep roots

Aga Khan Ensemble to perform Navruz concerts at Portuguese Parliament, Serralves Foundation, Gulbenkian Museum and Lisbon Ismaili Centre



AGA KHAN
ENSEMBLE

Leading artists on the roster of the Aga Khan Music Initiative will come together to perform a programme devoted to celebration of richness and cultural diversity, honouring Navruz, the Welcoming of the Spring. The Aga Khan Ensemble will be performing a unique repertoire to audiences at:

The Serralves Foundation	20 March, 18:50
The Parliament of Portugal	21 March, 17:50
Caluste Gulbenkian Museum	22 March, 13:00
The Ismaili Centre Lisbon	23 March, 21:45
Lisbon City Hall	24 March, 18:00

This series of performances will present a newly-created repertoire and also include education sessions and master classes by the artists of the Ensemble. The Aga Khan Ensemble is a collective of master musicians who create new music inspired by their own deep roots in the cultural heritage of the Middle East and Mediterranean Basin, South Asia, Central Asia, West Africa, and China. These 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. Linking countries and continents, and present and past through explorations of diverse forms of classical, folk, jazz, and contemporary concert music, the ensemble contributes strongly to the Music Initiative's mission to invigorate cultural and intellectual pluralism in the nations it serves. In forging this contribution, the Aga Khan Ensemble brings to life a new body of artistic work that is at once seamless, surprising, and exuberantly original.

“It is a great pleasure and privilege to present the Aga Khan Ensemble to audiences in Portugal,” said Fairouz Nishanova, director of the Aga Khan Music Initiative. “It is especially meaningful to do so as part of the Portuguese Parliament’s celebration of Navruz, the traditional Persian New Year celebration, which symbolises Portugal’s steadfast commitment to cultural pluralism.”

“Performing in the AKMI Ensemble has been a life-changing experience,” said Sirojiddin Juraev, a master musician from Tajikistan and long-time collaborator with the Aga Khan Music Initiative. “By working with musicians from historically-related traditions along the Silk Route, I’ve come to a deeper understanding of my own cultural heritage and its place in the contemporary world.”

The line-up of the Aga Khan Ensemble for the concert series in Portugal includes:



Homayoun Sakhi, a master performer on the 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. Sakhi performs Afghan folk and popular music as well as North

Indian classical music (raga). His composer credits include “Rainbow,” for Afghan rubab, Indian and Central Asian percussion, and string quartet.



Sirojiddin Juraev comes from a lineage of dutar players in his native region of northern Tajikistan. He studied at the Music College in Khujand and at Khujand University, and after that, at the Academy of Maqam, in Dushanbe, with ustad, Abduvali Abdurashidov. He now teaches dutar in the National Conservatory in Dushanbe, and is a Fullbright Scholar from the Harvard School of Music.



Basel Rajoub, a saxophonist and composer improviser whose inspirations include traditional Middle Eastern rhythms and melodies as well as jazz. Born in Aleppo, Syria, Rajoub 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. A winner of Radio Monte Carlo’s Moyen-Orient Music Award, Rajoub divides his time between performing,

teaching, composing, and recording



Salar Nader, the master tabla player who was born in Hamburg, Germany, to Afghan parents forced to flee their home during the Russian-Afghan war. As a child, Nader moved to San Francisco, where, at age seven he began studying with the legendary tabla virtuoso Ustad Zakir Hussain. Nader has performed in an eclectic range of ensembles and international music projects. He has also been active as a teacher of tabla, both in the United States and in Afghanistan, where he has helped to revive and revitalise

indigenous musical traditions.



Andrea Piccioni, a native of Rome, who is a master performer on frame drums—single-headed drums, sometimes with jingles, played with the hands rather than with sticks. After mastering the Southern Italian tamburello, Piccioni studied frame drum rhythms and performance techniques from the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. Piccioni is an experienced teacher as well as the artistic director of Frame Drums Italia International Festival.



Feras Charestan, who 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 that are creating new music rooted in Middle Eastern traditions.

AKDN Portugal and AKMI debuted a collaboration in 2012 with a series of curated concerts at the Evora Festival of Sacred Music and continued in 2013, the first such major celebration of Nowruz at the Parliament of Portugal, and for musical performances at the Monastery of Jerónimos and at the São Jorge Castle, which was part of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture's programme. In 2015, AKDN Portugal and AKMI partnered to present concerts and master-classes by the Alim Qasimov Ensemble, a leading artistic collective on AKMI's roster. The Ensemble's music performances and education sessions, presented at the Lisbon Museum of Electricity, the Ismaili Centre Lisbon, and other venues, featured the *mugham*, the transnational tradition of urban classical or court music that flourished in the great cultural centres of North Africa, the Middle East, West Asia, and Central Asia beginning more than a millennium ago.

For more information about the Aga Khan Music Initiative, please contact: akmi@akdn.org or info@akdn.org

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The *Aga Khan Music Initiative* (AKMI) is an interregional music and arts education programme launched by His Highness the Aga Khan to support talented musicians and music educators working to preserve, transmit, and further develop their musical heritage in contemporary forms. The Music Initiative is a programme of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which serves as the cultural development agency of the Aga Khan Development Network. The Music Initiative began its work in Central Asia, with projects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and subsequently expanded to include artists and audiences in the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and West Africa.

The Music Initiative works with a global partnership network of arts presenters, cultural organisations, and academic institutions to curate concerts, festivals, artist-in-residence programmes, and workshops featuring musicians in the Music Initiative's artist roster and new work developed by them. These performance events present artists who have distinguished themselves as musical innovators, whether working within the framework of traditional repertoires and styles, contemporized expressions of traditional material, or intercultural collaboration. Education is at the centre of the Music Initiative's activities, and education projects have ranged from operating talent-support centres and organising intercultural creative laboratories to developing new teaching and learning methodologies and materials.

The *Aga Khan Foundation* (AKF) is part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a group of private development agencies working to empower communities and individuals to improve their living conditions and opportunities, especially in Central and South Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. AKDN institutions have been assisting India's development for over 100 years.

The Aga Khan Foundation's mission is to develop and promote creative, community driven solutions to the long-term problems of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and ill health. Its programmes span education, health and rural and urban development and cutting across all of its work is a strong commitment to community participation, empowerment of women, pluralism and social inclusion, and human resource development.

AKF has been working in India since 1973 and is currently active in seven states. To date, its support for community-led programmes has helped 1.2 million children learn to read and enabled over 10,000 community-based organisations to reach out and improve the quality of life of 1.3 million of India's poorest.

Read online at: <http://www.akdn.org/press-release/aga-khan-ensemble-portugal-new-music-deep-roots>