



AGA KHAN MUSIC
PROGRAMME

AGA KHAN MASTER MUSICIANS (AKMM)

Wu Man, *pipa*
Basel Rajoub, saxophone, *duclar*
Sirojiddin Juraev, *dutar*, *sato*
Feras Charestan, *qanun*
Abbos Kosimov, frame drums
Jasser Haj Youssef, viola d'amore

PROGRAM

1. Dance of the Yi People
Wu Man, *pipa*
Composed by Wang Huiran

A *pipa* classic composed by Wang Huiran (b. 1936) inspired by folk music of the Yi people of southern China. Wu Man's poignant interpretation of the piece evokes the vibrancy of Yi traditions.

2. Mehan
Sirojiddin Juraev, *dutar* and Abbas Kosimov, *doira*
Composed by Sirojiddin Juraev

"Mehan" displays the virtuosic potential of the two-stringed *dutar* in the hands of a master as well as the prominent role of *usul*, the metro-rhythmic cycle played on the frame drum (*doira*). "Mehan" juxtaposes two different *usuls*: the first in 4/4 and the second in 7/8, a meter rarely found in Western music but common in the traditional music of Tajikistan.

3. Ili
Basel Rajoub, saxophone; Jasser Haj Youssef, viola d'amore; Feras Charestan, *qanun*
Composed by Basel Rajoub



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“Ili,” which means “mine” in the Aleppo dialect of Arabic, is written in the scale of Maqam Hejaz. The composition exemplifies the inexhaustible resources of the traditional *maqam* system as a basis for composition and improvisation.

4. Teahouse

Wu Man, *pipa*, Feras Charestan, *qanun*, Abbos Kosimov, *doira*
Arranged by Wu Man from folk sources

“Teahouse” is an homage to the sound of the traditional silk and bamboo instruments played in teahouses in Wu Man’s hometown area of Zhejiang Province, in China’s southeast. Not long ago, Wu Man taught the quintessentially Chinese pentatonic melody of “Teahouse” to *qanun* player Feras Charestan, who embellished it with his own improvised counterpoint. The beautifully integrated sound of the two instruments seems so natural that a listener could be excused for thinking that *pipa* and *qanun* have always been played together – and indeed, in a sense, they have. The *pipa* traces its ancestry to the Persian *barbat*, the short-necked lute with a bent scroll that may well have also provided the prototype for the Middle Eastern oud, and the melded sound of lutes and zithers is at the very center of traditional music from Iran and the Arab lands.

5. Tashkent

Basel Rajoub, saxophone; Feras Charestan, *qanun*, Jasser Haj Youssef, viola d’amore
Composed by Basel Rajoub

“Tashkent” was inspired by Rajoub’s first visit to that city, which is the capital of Uzbekistan, where he found “sunshine, peace, and the smell of home.” Said Rajoub, “I walked your streets and found this sound. I salute you.”

6. Cadence

Composed and performed by Jasser Haj Youssef, viola d’amore

Jasser Haj Youssef said the following about his composition: “‘Cadence’ is a piece in an improvised form that draws inspiration both from the Arabic *maqam* and from Bach’s Sonata no. 1 for solo violin. Bach was a universal composer, and what I try to do in ‘Cadence’ is join his music to the spirit of *maqam*, which is to say, join two worlds: that of Middle Eastern classical music and that of European



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classical music.

7. Rose
Performed by AKMM
Arranged by Wu Man

This song comes from the repertoire of Wang Fandi (1933-2017), an influential *pipa* player and teacher known for creating “minority”-themed pieces that brought real or imagined exotic styles into the mainstream of modern Chinese music. Ostensibly based on a Uyghur folk melody, Wang’s piece, whose original title is “Send you a Rose” (*Song wo yizhi meigui hua*), is prominent in the repertoire of *pipa* players, including Wu Man, who learned it directly from Wang Fandi in the late 1980s.

8. Samai
Composed and performed by Feras Charestan

Samai (also transliterated *sama’i* or *sema’i*) is a venerable compositional form in Arabic and Ottoman classical music, typically in 6/8 meter. Performed both as secular art music and as part of the liturgical musical repertoire that accompanies the sacred dance of the Mevlevi Sufi order (“whirling dervishes”), *samai* continues to serve contemporary composer-performers, like Feras Charestan, as a vessel of tradition-based musical innovation.

9. Jul Dance
Performed by AKMM
Composed by Feras Charestan

Jul (pronounced Yule) Dance was inspired by folk music—specifically, the folk music of Sweden, where Feras Charestan now makes his home after leaving his native Syria. He wrote the piece as his contribution to a Christmas concert at the Swedish university where he was studying.

10. Taqsim
Composed and performed by Basel Rajoub



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A *taqsim* is an improvised prelude to a longer composition or suite in traditional Arabic and Turkish music, and is typically performed by a solo instrumentalist. In this *taqsim*, Basel Rajoub improvises on the *duclar*, a hybrid instrument that joins the single-reed mouthpiece of a clarinet to the body of the *duduk*—the Armenian double-reed woodwind instrument. The idea for the *duclar* came from an instrument-maker in Siberia.

11. Navruz

Performed by AKMM

Composed by Abbos Kosimov

Nawruz is the traditional Persian New Year, which coincides with the vernal equinox. Nowadays it is celebrated not only in Iran and Iranophone countries, but throughout Central Asia as well as in many Western countries as a sign of cultural inclusiveness and respect. Nawruz is a time of festivity and hopefulness for the year to come, as expressed in the lively melodies and rhythms of this piece composed by the Uzbek-American frame drum (*doira*) master Abbos Kosimov.

12. Asya

Performed by AKMM

Composed by Basel Rajoub

“Asya” (a female name) is of Hebrew and Greek origin and means “God favored me.” It is also the name of the composer’s sister, for whom he wrote the piece. “I wrote ‘Asya’ in 7/8 time,” said Basel Rajoub. “I really like 7/8, and I feel that it has my energy. It’s full of life and freedom.”

The Aga Khan Master Musicians create music inspired by their own deep roots in the cultures of the Middle East and Mediterranean Basin, South Asia, Central Asia, and China. Brought together by the Aga Khan Music Programme to explore how musical innovation can contribute to the revitalization of cultural heritage, the Master Musicians are venerated performers and composer-arrangers who appear on the world’s most prestigious stages while also serving as preeminent teachers, mentors, and curators. Each of these exceptional artists has achieved mastery within a rigorous musical tradition defined by canonical styles, repertoires, pedagogy, and performance techniques. At the same time, they share a belief that tradition can serve as an invaluable compass for an artistic search into new forms of creativity inspired, but not constrained, by the past. This search has led to a strikingly original body of work composed, arranged, and performed by the Master Musicians, often joined by distinguished guests.



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Recent concerts have featured Kronos Quartet, Malian *ngoni* virtuoso Bassekou Kouyaté, and the Lisbon-based Gulbenkian Orchestra.

Musician Bios

Wu Man is an acclaimed performer on the *pipa*, a four-stringed Chinese lute with ancient roots that, due in large part to her efforts, has become a leading instrument of contemporary music in both East and West. Wu Man performs both traditional and contemporary music on the *pipa*, and many new works have been commissioned specially for her. She was a founding member of the Silk Road Ensemble, and has played an active role in cross-cultural music making, in particular with members of China's Uyghur minority.

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. A winner of Radio Monte Carlo's Moyen-Orient Music Award, Basel Rajoub divides his time between performing, teaching, composing, and recording. Currently based in Geneva, Basel performs as a member of several ensembles, and is the founding member of the Soriana Project.

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. Sirojiddin is active as a composer and arranger, and has created a body of new virtuoso works for *dutar*, *tanbur*, and *sato*. He performs both as a soloist and as a member of several ensembles, including Soriana Project, the Academy of Maqom, and Tajikistan's State Shashmaqom Ensemble.

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, creating new music rooted in Middle Eastern traditions. Feras Charestan currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden.

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



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Percussion Instruments of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Kosimov established his own *doira* school in 1994 and his ensemble, “Abbos,” in 1998. Kosimov performs internationally with Zakir Hussain and Randy Gloss’s percussion group Hand’s OnSemble and recorded with Stevie Wonder.

Jasser Haj Youssef was born in Monastir, Tunisia and studied both classical European music and classical Arabic music (*maqām*) from an early age. His first instrument was the violin. Later he began playing the Baroque viola d’amore, which has sympathetic string that are not bowed, but create a rich, resonant sound. Haj Youssef’s professional career has merged his interests and talents in the improvisatory art of *maqām*, classical chamber and orchestral music, jazz, and world music.