

Asia Society and The Aga Khan Music Initiative
Present

Sound: The Encounter

New Music from Iran and Syria



Sound: The Encounter. (Sebastian Schutyser/Aga Khan Music)

Saturday, December 7, 8:00 P.M.

Asia Society
725 Park Avenue at 70th Street
New York City

Preceded by a Lecture by
Theodore Levin,
Arthur A. Virgin Professor of Music,
Dartmouth College at 7:00 PM



AGA KHAN TRUST FOR CULTURE

Music Initiative

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Present

Sound: The Encounter **New Music from Iran and Syria**

FEATURING

Saeid Shanbehzadeh, *neyanbân, neydjofti, boogh*, vocals, dance

Basel Rajoub, saxophones, *duclar*

Naghieb Shanbehzadeh, percussion (*tombak/zarb, darbuka*)

with guest artist **Kenan Adnawi**, *oud*

PRE-PERFORMANCE LECTURE

“*Genesis of a Transcultural Music*” by **Theodore Levin**
Arthur A. Virgin Professor of Music, Dartmouth College

The lecture will explore the various cultural strands—both historical and contemporary—that led to the creation of “Sound: The Encounter.”

Theodore Levin is a longtime student of music, expressive culture, and traditional spirituality in Central Asia and Siberia. His two books, *The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York)* and *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond*, are both published by Indiana University Press. As an advocate for music and musicians from other cultures, he has produced recordings, curated concerts and festivals, and contributed to international arts initiatives. During an extended leave from Dartmouth, he served as the first executive director of the Silk Road Project, founded by cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Currently he serves as Senior Project Consultant to the Aga Khan Music Initiative.

CONCERT PROGRAM

Welcome: Rachel Cooper, Director, Global Performing Arts and Special Cultural Initiatives, Asia Society

Short Documentary Film: “Sound: the Encounter,” directed by Carlos Casas

1) *Somraya*

Music and text: Traditional, arranged by Saeid Shanbehzadeh, Basel Rajoub, and Naghib Shanbehzadeh

A feast and celebration of the triumph of love directed at once toward an earthly and a divine beloved.

*“My love, I came for you from a very far place
I came for your lips
I came for your nice heart
The road was so difficult, but I came for you.”*

2) *Ey Shaame (Candle)*

Music and text: Traditional, arranged by Basel Rajoub

A song about the essence of love and the experience of reaching it.

*“Do not burn candles,
There’s a long night ahead.
Bedtime is now,
Go away, my sadness,
My love story continues.”*

3) *Choupi*

Music and text: Traditional, arranged by Saeid Shanbehzadeh, Basel Rajoub, Naghib Shanbehzadeh

A piece inspired by the music performed at *zar* (healing) ceremonies that is at once purifying, invigorating, and enchanting.

4) *The Encounter*

Composed by Basel Rajoub and arranged by Saeid Shanbehzadeh, Basel Rajoub, and Naghib Shanbehzadeh

The Encounter celebrates the gathering of artists from different countries who revive their historical connections and present a contemporary expression of their musical heritage.

5) *Mina*

Composed and arranged by Saeid Shanbehzadeh, Basel Rajoub, and Naghib Shanbehzadeh

“Mina” is the Arab word for “harbor” (Persian: *bandar*). This piece is music for *Bandari*—literally “of the port, or harbor”—a form of exuberant group dance that developed in the coastal region of southern Iran and whose hand gestures are understood to represent the movements of fishermen.

*“Tell God, talk to the Almighty,
Say Mash’allah,
Ask God to help.”*

6) *Mawlana*

Text: Attributed to Rumi

Music and arrangement: Saeid Shanbehzadeh

*“I drink the wine of celebration,
I dance around my beloved,
Let drunkards do the talking,
But I am very conscious.”*

7) *Eshgh Bazi (neyanbân solo)*

Music and text: Traditional

Arrangement: Saeid Shanbehzadeh

8) *T’abiyat (Nature)*

Music: Naghib Shanbehzadeh

A percussion solo inspired by the sounds of nature and the surrounding environment, and by all sounds of the universe, both ancient and contemporary.

9) *Bida’ya (Start)*

Music: Basel Rajoub

Arranged by Basel Rajoub and Kinan Adnawi

Though principally known for their work in a range of contemporary musical idioms, Basel Rajoub and Kinan Adnawi—both originally from Syria—engage in a conversation between *duduk* and *oud* in a traditional style that pays homage to the country and cultural heritage they left behind. As composer Basel Rajoub put it, “This music offers both gratitude and a gift to a homeland left behind.”

SOUND: THE ENCOUNTER

Like many cross-cultural musical explorations, “Sound: The Encounter” began with a chance meeting. This one took place in China, where, in 2011, Iranian bagpipe player and singer Saeid Shanbehzadeh and Syrian saxophonist Basel Rajoub were both performing at the Shanghai World Music Festival. “We were there with different bands,” Basel recounted, “I went to Saeid’s concert, and was surprised to discover that in Bushehr, the part of southwestern Iran where Saeid is from, they play a kind of music that’s similar to the music of the *badu*—the bedouins—who live in the Middle East. There are many songs that have the same melody, but different lyrics. And of course the lyrics are in different languages: the *badu* sing in Arabic, whereas the Bushehri sing in Persian. I liked what I heard, and I said to Saeid, ‘Let’s try to do something together.’ Around a year after that, we met again, by complete chance, on a street in Paris. I was rehearsing with another project, and Saied came over with his bagpipes. After listening for around 10 minutes, he pumped up his bagpipes, and literally took over the rehearsal space. We started working to see how to mix the saxophone with his instruments. Saeid’s son, Naghib, joined us on Iranian percussion. We started by just jamming, and trying to play solos and melodies. After that we started to work on the hard things: how to put the saxophones with the bagpipes; how to change the rhythm. We met five or six times to rehearse—in Paris, and later in Istanbul and Lisbon. There were a lot of conversations in between, though we don’t share a spoken language. Our lingua franca became music.” Saeid added, “We didn’t restrict ourselves to playing just Iranian and Syrian music. We’ve been inspired by a lot of traditional motifs and melodies from the Persian Gulf as well as by jazz. We’re three artists with three different mindsets, and what’s important is to understand what we can do together with our musical knowledge.”

For their performances in the United States, Saeid, Naghib, and Basel, are delighted to welcome another fellow expatriate, Syrian *oud* master Kenan Adnawi. Kenan and Basel first met a decade ago, while attending the Damascus High Institute of Music. In that context, they knew one another as performers of classical music, both Western and Middle Eastern, and it took some time before each recognized in the other an interest in folk music, and in contemporary approaches to improvisation. Currently a resident of Philadelphia, Kenan rehearsed the concert program with Europe-based Saied, Basel, and Naghib via Skype and Viber. The present tour marks their debut as a physically united foursome.

The ongoing musical conversation among Saeid and Naghib Shanbehzadeh, Basel Rajoub, and Kenan Adnawi has been nurtured by the Aga Khan Music Initiative, which brought “Sound: The Encounter” to Asia Society (a brief description of the Music Initiative appears at the end of this program). Part of the Music Initiative’s mandate is to support musicians from the Muslim world who are striving to reassemble diverse expressions of a shared musical heritage in contemporary forms. “There’s very little interaction now between Iranian and Syrian musicians,” notes Fairouz Nishanova, director of the Music Initiative. “Through ‘Sound: The Encounter,’ we’re trying to reconnect not only musicians, but communities. Music turns out to be a good way to do that. Musicians can tell stories to one another, and to listeners, through their instruments. In the case of Saeid and Basel, you have two people who don’t share a

spoken language and had never played together, but their musical conversation flows naturally, and has continued to evolve. Both of them, it turns out, are resourceful storytellers.”

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Saeid Shanbezadeh was born in Bushehr, a seaport city on the Persian Gulf coast of southwestern Iran, but traces his ancestry to Zanzibar, in East Africa. A virtuoso performer on Iranian bagpipes (*neyanbân*) and percussion as well as a singer and dancer, he is also recognized as an authority on the folk music of the Persian Gulf Region. In addition to leading the Shanbehzadeh Ensemble, which he founded in 1990, Saeid Shanbezadeh has composed film scores and acted in Iranian films. Since 2002, he has made his home in Paris.

Basel Rajoub is well known as a saxophonist and composer-improviser who merges jazz with Middle Eastern rhythms and melodic modes. Born in Aleppo, Syria, he graduated from the Damascus High Institute of Music and is a winner of Radio Monte Carlo's Moyen-Orient Music Award. He has been active in a variety of contemporary music groups that bring together musicians from different parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and West Asia, and is the founder and leader of the Basel Rajoub Quartet. He lives in Geneva, Switzerland.

Naghieb Shanbehzadeh, the son of Saeid Shanbehzadeh, began playing percussion at an early age, and is a disciple of master percussionist Mahmoud Farahmand. From his base in Paris, Naghib tours widely with the Shanbehzadeh Ensemble and participates in artistic collaborations worldwide.

Kenan Adnawi was born in Latakia, Syria, and began studying the *oud* from an early age. He graduated from the High Institute for Music in Damascus and has been an innovator in bringing together the worlds of traditional Middle Eastern music and Western classical music, for example, by performing works for *oud* and piano. He has toured widely with Lebanese music monarch Marcel Khalife, and also leads his own quartet. He presently lives in Philadelphia.

ABOUT THE INSTRUMENTS

Neyanbân (or *ney anbân*): Bagpipe indigenous to the south of Iran. Bagpipes have an ancient history in the Middle East and West Asia. Like some other bagpipes from the region, *neyanbân* has only a chanter (actually, a double chanter, consisting of two separate but identical pipes) that is fingered to play a melody. By contrast, most bagpipes have not only a chanter but at least one drone pipe, which sounds a steady pitch.

Neydjofti: Single-reed wind instrument consisting of two identical pipes with six holes that are played and fingered simultaneously. Such instruments have ancient roots, e.g., the *aulos* of ancient Greece, and exist in a variety of contemporary forms, for example, the Uzbek *qoshnay*, Syrian *mijwiz*, and Yemeni *mizmâr*.

Duclar: A hybrid instrument that joins the body of an Armenian *duduk*, a cylindrical, double-reed woodwind instrument, with a clarinet mouthpiece, thus transforming it from a double-reed to a single-reed woodwind.

Boogh: A folk instrument made from the horn of a goat.

Darbouka, tombek/zarb: Arabic and Persian goblet drums.

Oud: fretless short-necked lute widely used throughout the Middle East and North Africa for the performance of classical, folk, and popular music.

ABOUT THE AGA KHAN MUSIC INITIATIVE

The Aga Khan Music Initiative (AKMI) is an interregional music and arts education program with worldwide performance, outreach, mentoring, and artistic production activities. The Initiative was 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 began its work in Central Asia and subsequently expanded its cultural development activities to include artistic communities and audiences in the Middle East and North Africa, West Asia, South Asia, and West Africa. The Initiative designs and implements a country-specific set of activities for each country into which it invests and works to promote revitalization 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. In North America and Europe, the Music Initiative's work focuses on performance, outreach, and arts education. Multidisciplinary artist-in-residence programs provide a unique opportunity for students to experience the creative challenges of intercultural music making.

AKMI Tour Credits:

Director: Fairouz Nishanova

Senior Project Consultant: Theodore Levin

Tour Logistics and Management: Rebecca Guillaume and John E. Pendleton

Documentary Film: Carlos Casas

About Performing Arts at Asia Society

The Asia Society Performing Arts program has been a pioneer in the presentation of traditional and contemporary Asian performing arts in the United States since 1957. It has introduced American audiences to the work of performing artists ranging from some of the greatest figures of traditional music such as sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar, to seminal contemporary dance companies like Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan, and American artists influenced by Asian cultures such as Philip Glass. The Society has commissioned new works such as *Empty Traditions/City of Peonies* with choreographer Yin Mei, *Wenji: Eighteen Songs of a Nomad Flute*, a bilingual (Chinese-English) chamber opera by Macau-born composer Bun-Ching Lam, *In What Language? A Song Cycle of Lives in Transit*, composer Vijay Iyer, *Kinsmen* with Rudresh Mahanthappa and Chen Shi-Zheng's *Forgiveness*. Current major projects include *Creative Voices of Muslim Asia*, and an exciting season of performing artists from China, Japan, Cambodia and Myanmar. For more information, please visit asiasociety.org

Asia Society Staff

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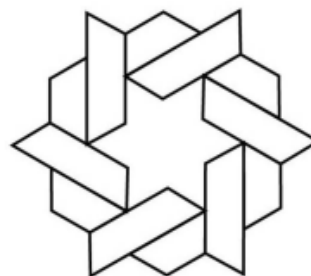
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This concert is presented in collaboration with the Aga Khan Music Initiative, a program of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture

Support for *Iran Modern* programming is provided by the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, WLS Spencer Foundation and the American Institute of Iranian Studies. This program is part of the Asia Society's ongoing initiative, *Creative Voices of Muslim Asia*, made possible by the support of the Doris Duke Foundation For Islamic Art.

In conjunction with the exhibition, *Iran Modern*, on view September 6, 2013 through January 5, 2014.



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