

# scottish ensemble

## Scottish Ensemble collaborates with multi-instrumentalists Keyvan and Bijan Chemirani and Sokratis Sinopoulos for Continental Drift

Scotland's pioneering string orchestra, Scottish Ensemble, will collaborate with three virtuosic multi-instrumentalists for a celebration of the similarities and differences between musical traditions of countries across Europe and the Middle East



Images available to download [here](#)

**Continental Drift** is set to explore the connections between the music of Western Europe during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and the Eastern musical traditions of the same era.

Five SE string musicians and a harpsichordist will be joined on stage by **Keyvan Chemirani, Bijan Chemirani** and **Sokratis Sinopoulos** who will perform across multiple instruments, including the zarb, saz, santoor and lyra fiddle.

Works by **Purcell, Couperin, Rameau** and others from the Northern European Renaissance and Baroque periods will intertwine and interact with music from the same era from **Persia, Iran** and **the Balkans** to create a musical performance infused with spontaneity, creativity and life.

Keyvan, Bijan and Sokratis will perform some of their own compositions, which leave room for

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**improvisation**, continuing a musical element which has featured in Scottish Ensemble's previous collaborations with Gabriela Montero and Chris Stout, and aligning it this time with Eastern musical practices. Previously a valued and integral part of the Western world's concert experience - great performers from Bach to Beethoven would have been skilled practitioners in the art of improvisation - SE continues to explore a 21st-century perspective on this age-old tradition within classical music.

As well as the impressive mastery of multiple instruments at close quarters, audiences will experience a distinct sound-world full of melodic warmth, rhythmic verve, playful energy and exotic flair.

**Keyvan Chemirani** said: *"When I met with Jonathan Morton to discuss what this collaboration could be, he was very open-minded about what we might do together - which is always great. We're going to bring some of our own compositions, which have a lot of room for improvisation, which adds an extra element to simply playing Eastern classical music. We'll also explore some Baroque music together as well. I'm looking forward to seeing what happens!"*

**Key to this programme is the zarb.** Although over 500 years old (and counting – its exact origins are still up for debate), it's only in recent years that **Persia's national drum** went from being merely a means of keeping rhythm to becoming a respected solo instrument in its own right. As talented multi-instrumentalists, SE's three collaborators will also turn their hand to other instruments, including the santoor, bağlama (also referred to as the saz), and lyra fiddle.

**Scottish Ensemble has chosen venues for this tour which support its commitment to making classical music more accessible to a wider audience.** By performing in locations which might not regularly feature classical performers or music on their stages, and which will offer a relaxed backdrop to this intimate, intricate performance, is one way in which SE works towards sustaining the growth and vibrancy of the art form.

**Continental Drift** will be performed at Edinburgh's **Summerhall** (Sun 10 March, 3.30pm), Glasgow's **SWG3** (the Galvanisers Yard space, Wed 13 March, 7.30pm), the **HMS Unicorn** in Dundee (Thu 14 March, 7.30pm) and **Mareel** on Shetland (Fri 15 March, 7.30pm).

## ABOUT THIS COLLABORATION

For **Keyvan Chemirani**, the Paris-born, Provence-raised Persian percussion virtuoso, music is a family business. It was his father, the celebrated Iranian musician Djamchid Chemirani (currently in his mid-70s and still performing) who not only taught him to play the zarb, but provided a blueprint for his career. It was Djamchid who also showed his son how these skills could be combined with those of other musicians with very different training, an art that Chemirani will bring to *Continental Drift*.

"My father has always been open to playing with jazz and classical musicians as well as improvising with African musicians", explains Keyvan, and it's this open-minded attitude that has fed his own explorations

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into the parallels between the classical music of India, Turkey and Iran, and that of the chamber music which flowed from Western European palaces and salons through the last 400 years.

At the same time there are significant differences, but Keyvan sees these as only enhancing the opportunities that arise whilst collaborating. “Eastern music is modal, which is very different from Western classical harmony, but it’s still possible to find common ground whilst also celebrating the differences. You have to not be afraid to work with the legacy and traditions you have – it shouldn’t necessarily be smooth and gentle!”

This collaboration, along with immersion in another new genre of improvisation, challenges and enhances the practice of the players of the Scottish Ensemble. Their willingness to test themselves as musicians and throw themselves into new musical territories continues to make them one of the most dynamic and innovative orchestras in the world today.

## Notes for editors

### Instrumentation used in *Continental Drift*

#### The zarb

Key to this programme is the zarb. Although over 500 years old (and counting – its exact origins are still up for debate), it’s only in recent years that Persia’s national drum went from being merely a means of keeping rhythm to becoming a respected solo instrument in its own right.

Its history is now intrinsically entangled with that of the musician Hossein Tehrani (1912-1973) who, in the 1950s, completely changed the fate of this unassuming goblet drum, which is struck with the fingers and palm to create two or three contrasting types of sound. “When I started playing the zarb, the instrument had fallen into disrepute”, states Tehrani in his book, *Amouzesh-e-Tombak*. “The zarb player was considered a low-level musician, a joke; no one dared to want to play zarb. To do so was to give up all prestige, all respect as a musician. Nonetheless, I began to play it. Love for the instrument outweighed the derision and scorn. At this time, I decided that I should change this negative view in any way possible. To this end, I practiced the zarb incessantly.”

It was at Tehrani’s virtuosic elbow that Keyvan and Bijan’s father, Djamchid Chemirani learnt his craft, duly passed on to his sons across more than a decade; as Keyvan explains, the Eastern way of learning an instrument is to spend ten or fifteen years in the close company of a master, learning all his techniques by ear. “After that you start to fly and find your own way.”

The first known inclusion of a goblet drum in Western classical music was in Berlioz’s epic opera *Les Troyens* which, amongst its lengthy list of instruments, called for a ‘tarbuka’.

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As talented multi-instrumentalists, SE's three collaborators will also turn their hand to other instruments, including the santoor, bağlama (also referred to as the saz), and lyra fiddle.

## **Bağlama or saz**

The bağlama is a stringed instrument from Turkey, with the word bağlama deriving from the Turkish word *bağlamak*, meaning 'to tie'.

With a deep, round back and a long neck, and played either with a plectrum or with the fingers (this style is known as *şelpe*), it is similar to the Western lute.

The bağlama is sometimes referred to as a **saz** (a Persian word), which refers to a family of long-necked lutes used in Middle Eastern music from various countries.

## **Santoor**

Originating in Mesopotamia, the santoor is a version of the hammered dulcimer – a stringed percussion instrument played by striking the strings with small hammers, and played today in Iran, Iraq and India. With an impressive 100 strings set over 25 wooden bridges, it's played sitting down (with the santoor either on your lap or a table).

Despite its size, the santoor is a very delicate, sensitive instrument, with its strings responding to the lightest of glides and taps. The strokes are played always on the strings either closer to the bridges or a little away from bridges. Both styles result in different tones. Sometimes strokes by one hand can be muffled by the other hand by using the face of the palm just to create variety.

The word dulcimer in fact derives from the Latin *dulcis* (sweet), and the Greek *melos* (song).

## **Lyra**

The lyra originated in Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Empire, with versions of it still played in Greece, Crete, Turkey and other former Byzantine lands. With three to five strings, it is played upright, with a bow (so, in terms of its Western equivalents, somewhere between a bowed lute, a medieval fiddle and a very small cello!)

## **Sokratis Sinopoulos**

[www.sokratissinopoulos.com](http://www.sokratissinopoulos.com)

Born in Athens in 1974, Sokratis began his musical education studying the Constantinopolitan lyre and the lute and has since become a contemporary master of both, with a distinctive style forged by his training in diverse musical traditions.

Having been awarded the Melina Mercouri Award for Young Artists in 1999, Sokratis went on to join Labyrinthos and to play on recordings spanning many musical genres, from traditional Greek to jazz,

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Byzantine, Ottoman and rebetiko. Working with musicians from across the world, his collaborations cross boundaries between musical genres, encompassing jazz and classical as well as his roots, the folk traditions of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 2010, he formed the Sokratis Sinopoulos Quartet with pianist Yann Keerim, bassist Dimitris Tsekouras, and drummer Dimitris Emmanouil. Their debut album, *Eight Winds*, was released on ECM records to excellent reviews.

## **Bijan Chemirani**

[www.bijanchemirani.com](http://www.bijanchemirani.com)

Bijan Chemirani began his musical explorations on the kamanche (a bowed string instrument), the piano and the accordion before returning to the zarb, studying alongside Keyvan under the hand of his father, and sharing the same reputation for proficient virtuosity as his brother Keyvan.

Living in Marseille, Bijan's musical practice is infused with both Occitan and Mediterranean traditions, but his open-minded, exploratory approach to music is reflected in the varied list of collaborators to date – from saxophonist Jean-Marc Padovani to flamenco guitarist Juan Carmona. Having released several solo recordings, Bijan also plays in many different groups including Oneira, Trio Chemirani, the Lopez-Petrakis-Chemirani trio and the Forabandit project.

## **Keyvan Chemirani**

Multi-instrumentalist Keyvan Chemirani studied at the hand of his father, the zarb virtuoso Djamchid Chemirani - but in fact graduated with a masters degree in mathematics, before returning to music and becoming a professional musician, performing across percussive instruments including the daq, udu, bendir and riqq.

Interested in the merging of cultures and traditions, and finding a common language amongst them, through his numerous collaborations Keyvan has worked with musicians from jazz, flamenco, Arab-Andalusian, Carnatic and classical genres and, as one third of the Trio Chemirani, alongside his father and brother Bijan, specifically explores the myriad possibilities of Persian percussion.

## **Scottish Ensemble**

Scottish Ensemble (SE) is the UK's leading string orchestra; a core of outstanding string players who perform together under Artistic Director Jonathan Morton. Based in Glasgow, Scotland, SE inspires audiences in the UK and beyond with vibrant performances which are powerful, challenging and rewarding experiences, crossing genres, styles, musical periods and artistic forms to offer fresh perspectives on classical music.

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SE regularly collaborates with high-profile guest artists, from trumpeter Alison Balsom and mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly to cellist Pieter Wispelwey and violinists Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Nicola Benedetti. SE is also becoming increasingly known for its international collaborations with artists from other disciplines, from dance and theatre companies to visual artists. Starting in 2014, their series of annual cross-artform collaborations has so far included immersive projects with visual artist Toby Paterson; Swedish contemporary dance company Andersson Dance; electronic-classical crossover composer Anna Meredith and visual artist Eleanor Meredith; and, Scottish theatre company Vanishing Point.

Alongside performances across Scotland, SE presents concerts across the UK, London and the globe. Recent invitations to tour abroad have resulted in engagements in Taiwan, China, Brazil, the USA and across Europe, performing at prestigious venues from the Shanghai Concert Hall (China) and the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts (USA) as well as festivals including the Edinburgh International, Edinburgh Fringe and Thuringia Bach Festivals.

SE is also committed to expanding the string repertoire, with recent commissions including new works from John Tavener, James MacMillan, Sally Beamish, Martin Suckling and Anna Meredith.

## Listings

Sun 10 March at 3.30pm

Summerhall, Edinburgh

[Book tickets online](#)

Call 0131 560 1580

Wed 13 March at 7.30pm

SWG3 Galvanisers Yard, Glasgow

[Book tickets online](#)

Call 0141 353 8000

Thu 14 March at 7.30pm

HMS Unicorn, Dundee

[Book tickets online](#)

Call 01382 434 940

Fri 15 March at 7.30pm

Mareel, Shetland

[Book tickets online](#)

Call 01595 745 500