



AGA KHAN MUSIC AWARDS

Iranians Receive Aga Khan Music Awards for Enduring Contributions to Music

Lisbon, Portugal, 21 March 2019 – Both **Mohammad Reza Shajarian** -- widely considered the foremost living exponent of Persian classical music (*dastgah*) in Iran and worldwide -- and **Dariush Talai** -- the Iranian *tar* and *setar* player, musicologist, composer, and educator who has become internationally recognised for his many contributions to the world of Persian art music -- have been announced as laureates of the Aga Khan Music Awards. His Highness the Aga Khan, will present the Awards in a ceremony in Lisbon, Portugal, on 31 March.



Mohammad Reza Shajarian received the **Patron's Award**, which is given at the discretion of the Award's patron, His Highness the Aga Khan. A vocalist of extraordinary power and finesse who embodies both the musical and moral qualities of a traditional master, or *ostad*, Mohammad Reza Shajarian was born in 1940 in Mashhad, Iran, and began learning Qur'an recitation from his father at the age of five. At the age of 12 he started studying the melodic corpus (*radif*) of Persian classical music while simultaneously learning to play the *santur* (struck *zither*) in order to gain a deeper understanding of the traditional repertoire.

Ostad Shajarian began his career as a singer in 1959 at Radio Khorasan and rose to prominence in the 1960s with his distinct vocal style shaped by great singers of earlier generations, in particular, Qamar, Eqbal Soltan, Taher-zade and Esma'il Mehrtash. From these masters, *Ostad* Shajarian gained a deep understanding of *avaz*, the classical style of unmeasured singing in the melodic modes of the classical *dastgah* system that has become his hallmark, as well as a broad knowledge of Persian poetry. In his multifaceted career, *Ostad* Shajarian has been a prolific recording artist, and taught in Tehran University's Department of Fine Arts. He is also a fine calligrapher, and has done humanitarian work, including the organisation of a benefit concert and aid project for the ancient city of Bam in South Iran when it was hit with a devastating earthquake in 2003. *Ostad* Shajarian has won numerous awards in Iran and abroad, including the French National Order of Chevalier des Arts and UNESCO's Picasso Medal. He exemplifies the mission of the Aga Khan Music Awards to ensure the historical continuity of musical heritage while contributing to its revitalisation and renewal.



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Dariush Talai received the Aga Khan Music Award in the category of “Enduring Contributions to Music”. Born in 1953, he began his studies of traditional Persian music with masters of *radif*, the canonical corpus of melodic models that constitute the core of the Persian classical *dastgah* repertory. He began his formal music education studying the *tar* with master musician Ali Akbar Shahnazi for over a decade, and later went on to learn from other renowned musicians including Nur Ali Borumand and

Abdollah Davami. Though his personal style is classical at its core, he is the only musician known to be able to play and improvise on the *tar* in styles that range from those of the oldest recordings of traditional Persian music to those of the most contemporary performances. He has also experimented with new genres and applications of music through his musical collaborations with, among others, French jazz musician Michel Portal, Hindustani classical musician Koshal Das, French-Swiss choreographer and opera director Maurice Bejart and French-American choreographer and poet Carolyn Carlson. Talai has become an internationally acclaimed author and an educator, teaching at the University of Tehran, the Sorbonne, and the University of Washington in Seattle.

The Aga Khan Music Awards at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (29-31 March) bring together a constellation of the world’s leading musical talents from the Muslim world. Established by His Highness the Aga Khan to recognise exceptional creativity, promise, and enterprise in music in societies across the world in which Muslims have a significant presence, the Aga Khan Music Award recipients share a prize fund of USD \$500,000, as well as opportunities for professional development.

These opportunities include commissions for the creation of new works, contracts for recordings and artist management, support for pilot education initiatives, and technical or curatorial consultancies for music archiving, preservation, and dissemination projects.

Two concerts bookend the festival weekend. On Friday evening, 29 March, the Gulbenkian Orchestra, led by maestro Pedro Neves, will perform new works composed by master musicians of the Aga Khan Music Initiative from Tajikistan, Syria, and Afghanistan. These lively works, arranged for orchestra by the renowned Uzbekistani composer Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky, showcase virtuosic performers on the Afghan *rubab*, Tajik *dutar*, Uzbek *doira*, and Middle Eastern *qanun* and *duclar*.

On Sunday evening, 31 March, a concert featuring short performances by the laureates of the 2019 Aga Khan Music Awards will precede the awarding of prizes. The Awards Master Jury will select the laureate in the Performance category from a field of 14 finalists who will perform before a live audience on Saturday, 30 March.



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For press enquiries, please contact:

Sam Pickens
info@akdn.org

NOTE

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>).

Aga Khan Music Initiative (AKMI) management

Fairouz Nishanova, Director
Theodore Levin, Senior Consultant