

ADVENTURES IN MUSIC  
**scottish  
ensemble**  
WITH SCOTLAND'S PIONEERING STRING ORCHESTRA



# Continental Drift

with Keyvan Chemirani,  
Bijan Chemirani and  
Sokratis Sinopoulos

## Programme

**Sun 10 March**

Summerhall, Edinburgh

**Wed 13 March**

SWG3 Galvanisers Yard, Glasgow

**Thu 14 March**

HMS Unicorn, Dundee

**Fri 15 March**

Mareel, Shetland

## welcome to Continental Drift

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Rhythm, melody, harmony: the three intertwined trunks of the musical tree. **Continental Drift** is about exploring these three musical elements, both separately and in combination – and we are thrilled to welcome three phenomenal musicians who will guide us through these explorations.

Through their beautiful musicianship and instruments, Keyvan and Bijan Chemirani and Sokratis Sinopoulos will

connect us to ancient musical roots, re-imagined in the here and now. Whilst celebrating the distinctive individuality of many artistic voices spanning continents and centuries, we will also seek out common threads, echoes, resonances.

What can we expect on this journey? Let's find out together!

**Jonathan Morton**  
Artistic Director

## Performers

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### Guest soloists

*Indian santoor, zarb, frame drums*  
Keyvan Chemirani

*Zarb, saz, frame drums*  
Bijan Chemirani

*Lyra*  
Sokratis Sinopoulos

### Scottish Ensemble

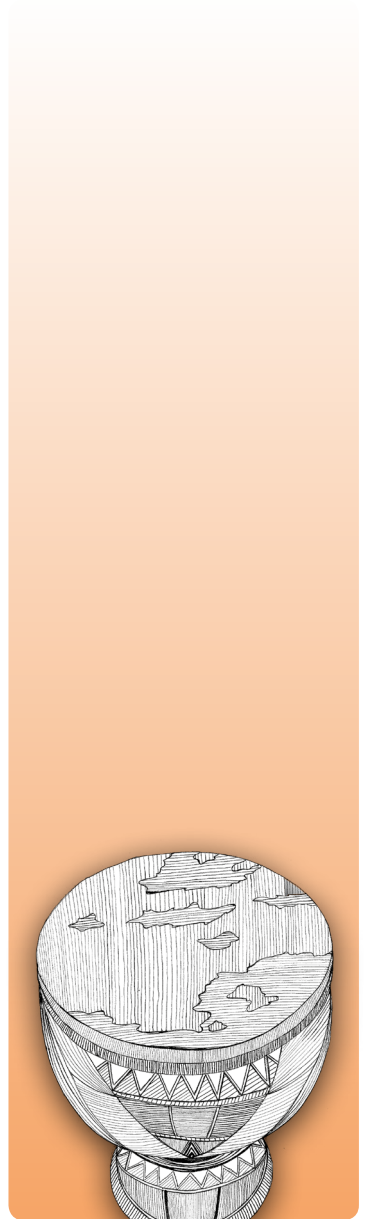
*Artistic Director and Violin*  
Jonathan Morton

*Violin*  
Daniel Pioro

*Viola*  
Jane Atkins

*Cello*  
Alison Lawrance

*Double Bass*  
James Manson



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# about the instruments

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## Zarb

Also known as a tombak, this goblet drum is made from a single block of wood, turned and hollowed out, and covered with a goat- or camel-skin head. 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 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, *Amouzesheh-e Tombak* (Tombak Rudiment). “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.”

In terms of crossing cultures and continents, 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’.

## Bağlama / 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 actually 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.

## Lyra

The lyra originated in the 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's 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!).

# Celebrating our differences

Journalist Keith Bruce speaks to lead collaborator Keyvan Chemirani about a career spent exploring different musical cultures

THE legacy of the visit of theatre-maker Peter Brook to Glasgow 30 years ago, with his epic staging of *The Mahabharata*, for which the Tramway venue was created in the run-up to the city's year as European Capital of Culture in 1990, resonates to this day.

Following the return appearance by dancer and choreographer Akram Khan, a member of the cast as a boy in 1988, to the city in summer 2018, alongside a residency by Brook's Theatre des Bouffes du Nord at the Edinburgh Festival, now, in 2019, Scottish Ensemble are working with another Paris-based artist whose family connections to Scotland date back to that memorable production.

The cross-cultural group that provided all the music for *The Mahabharata* included Keyvan and Bijan's father, the zarb virtuoso Djamchid Chemirani. Now in

his mid-70s and still performing, Djamchid toured the world with the Brook show, and also played on the film version.

But as Keyvan explains, his – and his family's – expertise goes to the source of the modern use of the instrument that they now play with musicians from cultures around the globe, as well as jazz and classical Baroque players.

“My father learned from a master of the zarb in Iran, Ostad Hossein Tehrani, who took the instrument from a supporting role to that of a soloist, with a whole range of different sounds and expression. My father was his best student and was often on television and radio in Iran.”

Keyvan explains that 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.”

Djamchid left Iran before the revolution in 1979 to further his studies of mathematics in France, but also continued as a musician, and that path has been followed step by step by his son.

Born in Paris, and brought up in Provence, Keyvan has a degree in mathematics while his father has been his master in the study of the zarb, alongside which Keyvan also plays the North Indian santoor, an instrument like a cimbalom or hammered dulcimer, whose origins are also lost in antiquity.

“They are both very ancient. It's very difficult to say, but they're at least 500 years old, and could be older – and the zarb is still the most popular Persian instrument.”

Few play it with the facility of Keyvan Chemirani, however, who says that the disciplines of mathematics and “digital percussion” – that is, percussion instruments played only with the fingers, rather than beaters or hammers – are closely related. Although his father was his only teacher of Iranian percussion, Keyvan then pursued his studies in India, adding to his techniques from the huge repertory of music there.

It was Djamchid, however, who had already shown his son how those skills could be combined with those of other musicians with very different training: “He has been open to

playing with jazz and classical musicians as well as improvising with African musicians.”

Keyvan sees many parallels between the classical music of India, Turkey and Iran and Western Baroque music. “They were all created to be played for princes and kings and to a small audience. The music is spiritual and deep and designed for a small room – chamber music. The sound of the instruments is not very powerful, but warm and delicate, and part of the art is to develop skill in ornamentation, often to support the voice of a singer and the lyrics.”

At the same time, there are significant differences, but he sees these as only as enhancing the opportunities in collaboration. “Eastern music is modal, which is very different from Baroque harmony, but it is still possible to find common ground, while celebrating the differences. You have to use the legacy you have. It should not be smooth and gentle!”

Learning to improvise, he says, is integral to the process of tuition with an Eastern master, and acquired at the same time as technique – something that is still not always such an essential part of training to those in the Western classical tradition.

“That is changing now. A lot of classical musicians know how to play jazz and improvise, but I think it’s quite new. And the opposite is also true; there are now

Eastern musicians who read music well, and that’s also a new thing.”

Keyvan’s own practice now knows no boundaries. The family Trio Chemirani continues, where he and his father are joined by brother Bijan and sometimes accompany his sister Maryam, singing ancient Persian poetry whose rhythms are integral to the music of the tradition.

In another trio, Keyvan works with French harpsichord player Jean Rondeau and Paris-based lutenist Thomas Dunford, and when the new director of the British Museum, Hartwig Fischer, animated his galleries with *A Symphony of Cultures* in April, he was a member of the Montreal-based international group, Ensemble Constantinople. He has recorded for the jazz and classical label ECM with French clarinetist Louis Sclavis and appeared at Glasgow’s Celtic Connections in the *Projekt*

Bassist Renaud Garcia Fons, Irish traditional musician Donal Lunny and Scottish harpist Savourna Stevenson have all shared stages with him around the world, and it was in Adelaide that he met his wife Laube when she was a backing singer with Congolese musician Papa Wemba.

As for **Continental Drift**, from their first conversations, both Keyvan and Jonathan Morton were united in a desire to approach the collaboration without any preconceptions.

“When I met with Jonathan, he was very open-minded about what we might do. All three of the trio – myself, my brother and Sokratis – are looking forward to bringing our own compositions, with room for a lot of improvisation, so it will be exciting to find out where it takes us.”





### Keyvan Chemirani

Born in Paris, multi-instrumentalist **Keyvan Chemirani** studied the zarb from a young age at the hand of his virtuoso father, Djamchid - but in fact went on to graduate with a masters degree in mathematics before returning to his musical roots, performing across percussive instruments including the daq, udu, bendir and riqq.

Keyvan's interests lie in finding a common language between traditions and cultures, working with musicians from jazz, flamenco, Arab-Andalusian, Carnatic and classical genres.

As one third of the Trio Chemirani, alongside his father and brother Bijan, together they explore the myriad possibilities of Persian percussion.



### Bijan Chemirani

**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 and today sharing the same reputation for proficient virtuosity.

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 to Sting (on his *If On A Winter Night* album). 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.

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



### Sokratis Sinopoulos

Born in Athens in 1974, **Sokratis Sinopoulos** 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. Working with musicians from across the world, his collaborations cross boundaries between musical genres, encompassing jazz, classical and rebetiko (a Greek genre broadly meaning 'urban popular song') as well as the folk traditions of Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2010, he formed the Sokratis Sinopoulos Quartet whose debut album, *Eight Winds*, was released on ECM records to excellent reviews. In March 2019, the Quartet returned with new album *Metamodal*, also produced by Manfred Eicher and released by ECM Records.

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



## Scottish Ensemble

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with high-profile classical artists – from trumpeter **Alison Balsom** to violinists **Patricia Kopatchinskaja** and **Nicola Benedetti** – SE also collaborates with artists from other disciplines and art forms, from theatre company **Vanishing Point** to Swedish contemporary dance company **Andersson Dance**.

[scottishensemble.co.uk](http://scottishensemble.co.uk)

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