

# *La porta d'Oriente*

## Musical traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean

Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723)	<i>Zenguleh pishrow - devr-é Kebir</i>
Didem Basar	<i>Devr-e Raksan</i>
Dimitrie Cantemir	<i>Buzurk pishrow - darbeyn-é cedit</i>
Charbel Rouhana / Kiya Tabassian	<i>Cheshmeh</i>
Kiya Tabassian	<i>Gozar</i>
Charbel Rouhana	<i>Clin d'oeil</i>
Kiya Tabassian	<i>Nour</i>
Charbel Rouhana	<i>Om Al Maradem</i>
Didem Basar	<i>Kervan (Caravan)</i>



## CONSTANTINOPLE

Kiya Tabassian, *setar & voice*  
Charbel Rouhana, *ud & voice*  
Pierre-Yves Martel, *viola da gamba*  
Neva Özgen, *kemençe*  
Didem Basar, *kanun*  
Ziya Tabassian, *percussion*

*Ambassadors' accounts*

*Artists' adventures*

*Musicians' musings*

*Travellers' tales*

*Scientific sources*

*Slaves' stories*

“I may certainly venture to say that the Turkish Music for metre and proportion of words is more perfect than any European, but withal so hard to be understand, that in the spacious court of Constantinople, where resides the greatest Court in the World, among so many Musicians and Lovers of Music, you will scarce find above three or four, who thoroughly understand the grounds of this Art...”

Dimitrie Cantemir, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, ca. 1700

The above observation which Dimitrie Cantemir – hostage to the Sublime Porte, composer, ethnographer, historian and polyglot - has left for posterity regarding Turkish music, exonerates us from having to make even a minimal attempt to explain this rich, esoteric and complex repertoire. We rely on today's musicians - all expert in the musical traditions of the eastern Mediterranean - to enlighten us with their own words, and above all, with their performance of the music itself. We offer instead, in the notes of this programme, some words on the charismatic figure of Dimitrie Cantemir, whose music opens our concert tonight, and then, a *taramosalat* of documentary and visual records left by travelers who visited the eastern Mediterranean, from early modern times until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will quote writings about music from accounts left by ambassadors, artists, Christian slaves employed in the Seraglio, musical theorists and intrepid travellers; we will reproduce images from travel books and compilations of engravings of the costumes of exotic lands. We found, with joy, a number of rare and valuable early modern travel books in our own library, collected lovingly by Bernard and Mary Berenson.

But as the programme notes for this concert slowly took shape, we realized that the documentation reproduced should not be limited to that from early modern times alone, for the sources held in the Biblioteca Berenson could offer a great deal more. So we have also drawn on accounts published in the last century by the intrepid travellers to the eastern Mediterranean of the Berensons' own times: Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, Rebecca West and Paddy Leigh Fermor. At least the last three were treasured friends and guests at I Tatti, so it is not surprising that there should be a great many of these authors' books in our library. Some have autograph dedications to the Berensons; some have annotations on the frontispiece that tell us when and where they were read; others were given to the library by Nicky Mariano. The serendipitous discovery of the whole entrancing treasure-trove of travel books during the preparation for today's concert has offered us yet another occasion to celebrate the splendid library compiled by Bernard and Mary Berenson, and in particular - within the context of this event - their close engagement with the cultures of the near-Eastern civilisations. It has proved fundamental for the compilation of the notes and the illustrations for today's concert (although, of course, we also needed to look elsewhere: above all, at the magnificent collection of early modern travel books in the Biblioteca Marciana, to whose staff we are deeply indebted for their assistance).

We take the greatest of pleasure in reproducing in this booklet some documentation about the great travellers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the Berenson Archives: a delightful photograph of Gertrude Bell, excerpts from letters from Freya Stark, Rebecca West and Paddy Leigh Fermor, and photographs of the Berenson on their travels in the Middle East. We conclude the *taramosalata* compiled for today's concert by citing Mary Berenson's *A modern pilgrimage*, an account of their tour in ..., which we consider the ideal conclusion for our celebrations of the intrepid travellers whose writings enlighten us today.

*Buon appetito!*

**Kathryn Bosi**



## CONSTANTINOPLE

ITINERANT MUSIC • ECLECTIC JOURNEYS • MYRIAD ENCOUNTERS

“As musician-inventors and musician-travellers, we endlessly replay our utopias, with Babel as backdrop. The territory to explore is infinite: cultures and memories whose lines we like to shift so that they finally converge. Furthermore, we make migration and the mixing of cultures our territory. Is it perhaps our early exile that led us to return to the source, to follow the tracks of our predecessors, to tirelessly search for creative allies? Whatever it is, this awareness of belonging to several space-times is as basic to us as respiration, as inspiration.”

**Constantinople** is the story of a musical ensemble that chose the journey as its cornerstone — geographical journeys, but also historical, cultural and inner — and to seek inspiration from all sources, to aim for distant horizons. Drawing inspiration the ancient city illuminating East and West, the ensemble, founded in 1998 in Montreal, was conceived as a forum for

Alongside tours in France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Holland, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Iran, Cyprus, Morocco, Canada, United States and Mexico, **Constantinople** presents every year a season of creations and revivals in Montreal, the visibility of which continues to grow. Over the past decade, **Constantinople** has developed over 35 new works which have been staged in almost 120 cities in 22 countries

Most of its creations have been recorded and broadcast by Radio-Canada, and some have been relayed to European audiences via the European Broadcasting Union. **Constantinople** has 13 albums to its credit on the labels Atma, Analekta & Harmonia Mundi. The ensemble is supported by the Conseil des Arts et des Lettres of Quebec, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Conseil des Arts de Montréal.