

## Babak-o-Doestan • Electronic Press Kit

ABOUT Babak-o-Doestan .....	2
Musicians .....	2
Short Bio .....	2
Long Bio .....	2
Discography .....	3
The story of how the musicians met.....	3
IMAGES .....	5
MUSIC.....	5
Links and album .....	5
Lyrics.....	6
PRESS REVIEWS.....	7
CONTACT & SOCIAL MEDIA .....	8



Photo: Lejo Duijvestijn

## ABOUT Babak-o-Doestan

### Musicians

Babak Amiri (IRN) – voice/guitar/composition

Bam Commijs (NLD) – piano

Murat Yatmaz (TUR) – bass guitar

Minze Koopman (NLD) – percussion

Heather Leslie (CAN) – cello

*They hypnotized us with their sound, the beautiful voice and guitar of Babak, dressed with the soothing sound of Heather's cello, spiced with Minze's rhythm and Murat's bass blend, and topped with Bam's piano play. Again we were in awe. A must hear!*

Acoustic Roots, Concertzender Radio

### Short Bio

*Babak Amiri and his band of musical omnivores perform modern chansons with elements of jazz, fado, rock ballads and funky bass guitar, all to a rhythm of inspiring poetic lyrics.*

### Long Bio

*Babak Amiri and his band of musical omnivores perform contemporary songs with elements of jazz, fado, rock ballads and funky bass guitar, all to a rhythm of inspiring poetic lyrics.*

Babak-o-Doestan is an Amsterdam based acoustic ensemble of 5 musicians from 3 continents led by singer-guitarist-composer Babak Amiri. With apparent ease they unite multiple styles and moods in their music, using an uncommon but effective combination of instruments. Catchy jazzy themes and Latin vibes are added to the mix of lush melodies and rare chord progressions, creating an open, sparkly sound that is appealing to diverse audiences.

Longing and melancholy, passion and excitement, and enthusiasm stirring an irresistible urge to dance are all characteristics of this ensemble's music. These elements have their roots in rich, timeless Persian poetry, with all its tributes to wine, universal wisdom and love that inspire the atmosphere and lyrics of each of the songs. The result is heartfelt 'Persian chansons' transmitted through the soulful quality of Amiri's voice.

*The evening unfolded like an intimate musical concert with friends: emotional, exuberant, then dreamy and unassuming.*

C. Verkerk, Het Parool

Babak-o-Doestan has played for enthusiastic audiences at such diverse venues as Paradiso/Amsterdam Roots Festival, Panama, Van Gogh Museum 'Friday Night', at Hessel's Groene Weide on Terschelling Island, and the Utrecht Stadsschouwburg. The band has made two recent appearances on Dutch national television, including one 30 minute special which included the performance of three pieces with interviews in between. Babak-o-Doestan also performs on radio programs such as OBA Live, Concertzender and NTR radio. Past collaborations with Mišo Petrović of Mostar Sevdah Reunion, musician and storyteller

Sahand Sahebdivani (NLD/IRN) and jazz pianist Avishai Darash (ISR/FRA) have enriched the band's performance and musical development. Babak-o-Doestan's latest album 'Restless' was listed in the 'Top 10 Albums of the Year' (world music) at Platomania/Concerto and garnered warm reviews from Dutch and German music critics.

## Discography

A Moment of Happiness (2005)

Restless (2013)

**Buy, borrow or steal it or put it  
on your wish list for Christmas!**

Insight World Music Magazine  
(about Restless album)

## The story of how the musicians met...

Singer-guitarist-composer Babak Amiri comes from Tehran. As a teenager he loved playing guitar and all kinds of (forbidden) music styles, although it was dangerous to go out



anywhere with his western instrument visible to authorities – At 18 he figured out he needed to leave, he crossed a mountain range and ended up studying and graduating from a prestigious Dutch art college (Rietveld Academy), while playing in fado bands, writing poetry and being involved in a whole range of musical projects.

In Babak-o-Doestan, Amiri sings poetic texts in Persian and composes the music, which the musicians in the band contribute to with arrangements and solos. He not only leads the band, he also does the cool album art.

Amiri met percussionist Minze Koopman around 2005, and introduced him to “world music”. Koopman had been previously playing for years in the rock, pop and country circuit in the Netherlands. (An interview with MK appears in Nov-Dec 2013 issue of Slagwerkkrant – Dutch percussion magazine, issue No. 178.) They got together for a one-off gig for a festival, played 3 songs at a big Amsterdam nightclub called Panama. Those songs had a

Iranian cajón beats with finger shakers!  
Slagwerkkrant

huge impact, so much so that the audience didn't care that they hadn't rehearsed more material, they demanded to hear the 3 songs all over again. This was a clear sign that they

shouldn't stop there, and they continued the musical collaboration...

Bam Commijs (piano) came along and brought with him the jazz, chansons and theater world influences as well as his improvisation and composition talents. Commijs is the master of musical storytelling, which is evident from his expressive piano solos.

Murat Yatmaz, a brilliant young jazz bass guitarist from Ankara who is continuing graduate studies at the Amsterdam Conservatory, joined the band next. Yatmaz brings to the band his fantastic funky bass guitar lines and continually surprises you with his cool grooves and inspired solos which are influenced by his mastery of jazz and other genres like fusion, contemporary, drum and bass, electronic, Latin.

I think we may call it '*Oriental jazz*'.

*Ad van den Berg, Prohow*

The final musician to join was cellist Heather Leslie. She plays a magical 100-year old gypsy cello, which is appropriate because she learned the most about music from playing with gypsies. The sevdah-like magic comes from the deep, warm tones of the instrument that emerge no matter what. She met Babak Amiri playing improv music at the enchanted Mezrab jam sessions that happened in the heart of Amsterdam's Jordaan neighbourhood on Saturday nights (from around 2005-2010). When music was made in this postage-stamp sized venue, the audience was totally engaged and captivated by the music emerging from instruments and players sitting directly next to them. The big instrument cases were piled up in the men's WC to free up more space in the venue for audience and musicians alike.

One of the unusual things about this band is the high level of collaboration on the stage, which audiences often mention that they admire to watch at the live performances. The musicians in Babak-o-Doestan are there to create the performance as a whole, they are not there just for themselves, which is clear in the way they support each other musically on stage. This is probably the reason that audiences get caught up not only in the music, but in the positive atmosphere that emerges at the gigs, allowing the melodies and the beats to flow into them all the more fluidly.

They seem to be more than just bandmates, they are a creative unity.

*Andreas Nöthen, Insight Worldmusic Magazine*

So after all, the name Babak-o-Doestan ('Babak and Friends') somehow quite suits this group, even though history is full of more straightforward and easy-to-remember band names.

## IMAGES

Images can be downloaded from [www.babakodoestan.com/press](http://www.babakodoestan.com/press)

Or from dropbox via this link:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/k61bqikoltgartu/AAAn5hWfj8X7g\\_ZKOeh8hhXoa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/k61bqikoltgartu/AAAn5hWfj8X7g_ZKOeh8hhXoa?dl=0)

Please contact [babakodoestan@gmail.com](mailto:babakodoestan@gmail.com) if you require additional images or assistance.

## MUSIC

### Links and album

Listen to Babak-o-Doestan tracks on the links below.

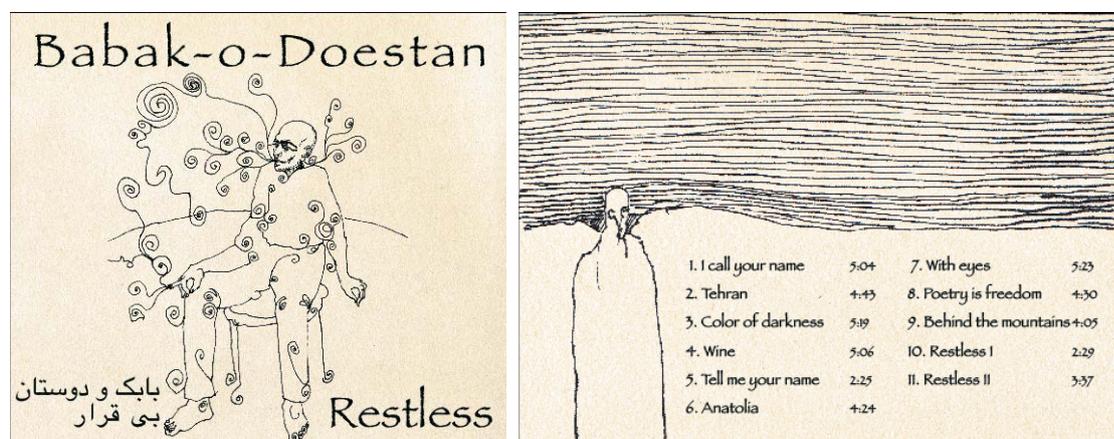
Poetry is Freedom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NetI2mPLr5A>

Behind the Mountains <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oilAe3ioGM4>

Things in Life [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCtfH\\_CA-8M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCtfH_CA-8M)

Babak-o-Doestan Sampler <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TblsqqWoGiw>

CD available by contacting +31-6-29 53 07 66 or [babakodoestan@gmail.com](mailto:babakodoestan@gmail.com).



## Lyrics

The lyrics to Babak-o-Doestan songs are based on Persian poetry. Selected English translations below (our own approximate translations) give a sense of the songs that Babak Amiri sings in the Persian language.

### Colour of Darkness

*In this unrelentingly lonely time  
in which the lips are depicted with the colour of  
darkness  
a voice is calling me from a distance, but  
my feet are cemented in the asphalt of the night*

*No light to distinguish walls from doors  
if a shadow is cast on the ground anyway  
then that is a peculiar image  
of a freed thought*

Sorab Seperhi (1928 – 1980)

### Restless

*Your feeling of unhappiness  
comes from chasing happiness*

Rumi (1207 – 1273)

### With Eyes

*With eyes, amazed by this  
misplaced morning  
dried out by a skylight of square sun  
in the dark white of this heavily pregnant morning  
I free my hands of the chains of sleep*

*I said, nonsense, nonsense, nonsense people  
Are you intoxicated or daft  
or are you playing the hypocrite  
The night is not yet over  
If you are a honest pure muslim  
you don't need a predecessor for prayers  
Every badmouthed cow turns into  
a volcano of fury  
See the fool who asks us the reason  
for sunshine*

*I, with pain in my veins  
aches in my legs  
something like a fire in my soul  
I, felt the shattering of my entire body....*

Ahmad Shamlou (1925 – 2000)

### I Call Your Name

*In the dark  
I called your name  
it was the silence  
and the breeze that lifted the curtain  
in the sorrowful heaven  
a star shone brightly  
in the sorrowful heaven  
I called your name  
I called your name  
and held my existence tightly as a  
bowl of milk in my hands  
There  
in my heart someone sighed  
from the pain  
someone stood up  
someone longed for you  
my small seedling was in love with the wind  
which means home for the wind  
which means home*

Forough Farrokhzad (1935 – 1967)

### Poetry is Freedom

*Poetry is liberation, rescue and freedom  
It is a doubt that eventually become certainty  
It is the freedom bullet  
It's a comforting sigh  
It's the resolve of a stool  
That slips under your feet  
So the body falls under  
The weight of itself  
If this is the only road to freedom.....  
Poetry is freedom.*

Ahmad Shamlou (1925 – 2000)

### Wine

*Eagle of love  
fly from high misty faraway mountains  
to the somber desert of my life  
and bring me  
to where wine will not bring me*

Fereydoun Moshiri (1927 – 2000)

## PRESS REVIEWS

Open sparkling music, sung freshly by Amiri in which he easily touches the heart of the music. Compositions full of inventive chord progressions and original instrument combinations, all arranged with charming affection.

***Mattie Poels, Musicframes***

This very special set of musicians performs a very special kind of music. [*Babak-o-Doestan's album*] Restless combines elements that clearly bear the handwriting of the artists involved. Fado elements blend together with jazzy harmonies or oriental sounds. All this makes the music of Babak-o-Doestan unique – relaxed, exotic but still familiar – chamber music of a quality, your ears only rarely come across. And so it is no surprise that the album Restless is in the Netherlands much applauded. And they deserve even more.

***Andreas Nöthen, Insight Worldmusic Magazine***

Poetry set to music, about love and longing, oriental melodies that melted seamlessly into jazzy themes and Latin rhythms... The evening unfolded like an intimate musical concert with friends: emotional, exuberant, then dreamy and unassuming. A memorable musical evening, inspired by – as the musicians claimed – ‘sun, wind, longing, homesickness, coffee and cigarettes’. It almost makes you want to light one up.

***Corrie Verkerk, Het Parool***

They hypnotized us with their sound, the beautiful voice and guitar of Babak, dressed with the soothing sound of Heather's cello, spiced with Minze's rhythm and Murat's bass blend, and topped with Bam's piano play. Again we were in awe. A must hear!

***Acoustic Roots, Concertzender Radio***

One of the unusual things about this band is the high level of collaboration on the stage, which audiences often mention that they admire to watch at the live performances. They seem to be more than just bandmates, they are a creative unity.

***Andreas Nöthen, Insight Worldmusic Magazine***

Iranian cajón beats with finger shakers! The Amsterdammer Minze Koopman, percussionist of the group, leads us into the world of the 5/4, 7/8, 13/8 and 15/8 time signatures on the cajón and poetic Persian song. From finger technique, to brushes, rod and finger shakers, the cajón beats that shape and support the unique Babak-o-Doestan sound.

***Slagwerkrant (Issue No.178)***

Babak-o-Doestan's album 'Restless' makes it to the **TOP 10 albums** of 2013 (worldmusic).

***Platomania/Concerto*** <http://www.platomania.eu/etalage/list/id/2050>

*Press Reviews continued.*

These five very experienced musicians always play together in this combination - and that's something you can hear. And the combination is special. The instrumentation is: Spanish guitar, cello, cajón, bass guitar and piano.

The lead singer of this ensemble, Babak Amiri came from Tehran and sings in Persian. He does this both very convincingly and in a relaxed manner, an attractive combination. That Dutch audiences generally do not speak Persian is absolutely not a problem. It adds something mystical, and the melancholy and passion and longing come across anyway.

With carefully played and dosed guitar parts, Amiri confirms the dynamics and the arrangements. And in between songs he jokes with the audience in Dutch. And wow, what a great bass! Murat Yatmaz played a fantastic five string Fodera. A bass to absolutely treasure, all the more because of how exceptionally well he can play it. Super accompaniment *and* solos. Heather Leslie played beautifully on the cello, and the supporting and solo parts were elegantly knit into the arrangements.

Resumé: a very good ensemble. I think we may call it '*Oriental jazz*'. Go see them, buy their album. I was too late, because the cd's sold out in no time after the show.

***Ad van den Berg, Prohow***

## CONTACT & SOCIAL MEDIA

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

[facebook](#) Babak-o-doestan (band facebook page)

[youtube](#) Babakodoestan channel

[twitter](#) @Babakodoestan