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**CELEBRATED COMPOSER AND *OUUD* PLAYER SIMON SHAHEEN BRINGS
ASWAT (VOICES)—*CELEBRATING THE GOLDEN AGE OF ARAB MUSIC*
TO ZELLERBACH HALL ON TUESDAY, MARCH 17 AT 8:00 P.M.**

BERKELEY, February 6, 2009—One of the world's finest Arab composers and instrumentalists, **Simon Shaheen** will recreate the golden age of Arab music in a multimedia production titled *Aswat (Voices)*—*Celebrating the Golden Age of Arab Music* hosted by Cal Performances at Zellerbach Hall on **Tuesday, March 17 at 8:00 p.m.** “What Mr. Shaheen has in spades is technique. His *oud* playing is remarkably composed, but fluid” (*The New York Times*). *Aswat* features four of today's top Arab singers—**Ibrahim Azzam** and **Khalil Abonula** of Palestine, **Sonia M'barek** of Tunisia and **Rima Khcheich** of Lebanon—along with a traditional Arab orchestra of virtuoso instrumentalists and a video installation projection screen showing images and film footage of famed Arab singers from the 1920s through 1950s. This period is considered the peak of cinematic and vocal artistry in the Arab world. Compositions by **Um Kulthoum** and **Mohammad Abdel Wahhab** from Egypt, **Farid** and **Asmahan Al-Atrash** from Syria and **Wadi' Al-Safi** and **Fairuz** from Lebanon all added to the canon of Arab music and are included in the program Shaheen has created honoring this rich musical moment in time. This event is presented in association with the Arab Cultural & Community Center.

The orchestra Shaheen has assembled for *Aswat* features musicians performing in the distinctive style of this period. Performers are: **Kamil Shajrawi**, **William Shaheen**, **Adeeb Refela**, and **Georges Lammam** (violins); **Thomas Ulrich** (cello); **Walid Zairi** (bass); **Jamal Sinno** (*qanun*, also known as the zither); **Bassam Saba** (*nay* flutes); **Michel Merhej** and **Dafer Tawil** (percussion); and **Najib Shaheen** (*oud*).

SIMON SHAHEEN

Simon Shaheen, “an artist who is in demand around the world” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), was born in 1955 in Tarshiha, Galilee. His childhood was steeped in music. His father, Hikmat Shaheen, was a music professor, composer and master *oud* player, and began teaching young

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Shaheen the traditional Middle Eastern stringed instrument at age five; at age six, Simon Shaheen began studying the violin at the Conservatory for Western Classical Music in Jerusalem. He graduated from the Academy of Music in Jerusalem in 1978 and moved to New York in 1980 to attend the Manhattan School of Music (studying performance) and Columbia University (studying performance and music education).

Shaheen formed his first group, the seven-member Near Eastern Music Ensemble, in 1982 in New York. The group dedicated itself to preserving and performing Near Eastern music through concerts, recordings, workshops and lectures. In the 1990s, Shaheen released four albums: *Saltanah* (Water Lily Acoustics), *Turath* (CMP), *Taqasim* (Lyrichord), and *Simon Shaheen: The Music of Mohammad Abdel Wahab* (Axiom). In 1992, the Library of Congress selected *Turath* as an outstanding traditional recording of the year. The Near Eastern Music Ensemble continues to perform and teach. In 1995, Shaheen formed another group, Qantara, dedicated to mixing and melding Arab music with other music forms. It last visited Zellerbach Hall in 2007.

Shaheen has performed in many of the world's great venues, including Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, the Cairo Opera House, and Belgium's *Palais des Arts* and at prestigious musical events, including Newport and Montreal Jazz Festivals and Yabous Festival in East Jerusalem. His compositions have been recognized and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Jerome Foundation and other arts organizations. Since 1994, Shaheen has produced the annual Arab Festival of the Arts in New York. Called *Mahrajan al-Fan*, the festival showcases Arab artists and presents the full range of Arab culture. He also founded the annual Arabic Music Retreat in 1997, a weeklong intensive program of Arabic music held at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts.

THE ARTISTS

Palestine-born **Ibrahim Azzam** comes from a musical family, his mother and father both being singers known for their command of the vast Arab traditional musical repertoire. Recognized as a child for both his singing and playing of the *oud*, Azzam studied with Hikmat Shaheen (Simon Shaheen's father) from age 10 to 18. In 1975 Azzam moved to England, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s he was mentored by one of the most prolific Arab singers and

composers in the world, Mohammad Abdel Wahhab. Azzam's unique and idiosyncratic singing voice has brought him to the world's most prestigious venues, including the Royal Albert Hall in London, England; opera houses in Geneva, Switzerland and Cairo, Egypt; the Royal Cultural Center in Amman, Jordan; the Cultural Palace in Ramallah in the West Bank; and the Lisner Auditorium at George Washington University. He has performed with Wadi' Al-Safi and the Lebanese diva Sabah, and worked with Egyptian composers Baligh Hamdi, Farouk Al Sahrnoubi, and Hilmi Baker.

Born in Tunisia in 1969, **Sonia M'Barek** grew up singing and first appeared before a large television audience at the age of 12. She attended the National Conservatory of Music in Tunis from 1977 to 1986, graduating with a diploma in Arabic music. She has sung in musical theatre productions and on film soundtracks, and in 1993–1994 presented more than 30 concerts of Arab classical music with Tunisian lute players Ali Sriti and Anouar Brahem that were collected onto a CD entitled *Tarab*. In 2005 she served as chair of the national festival of Tunisian music, and has received several national awards including a Diapason d'Or (France), Artist of the Year (Tunisia), and a prize for best interpretation at the Festival of Arab Song (Jordan). M'Barek has sung at festivals and on television and radio in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Her website is www.soniambarek.com.

Khalil Abonula grew up in Nazareth singing Byzantine hymns in church choir and listening to the masters of Arab classical music, particularly Wadi' Al-Safi. He learned music theory and was taught to play the *oud* by his mother, and learned singing from both of his parents. At the age of 12 he joined his father singing at community events and parties, and started a band, *Samah*, after graduating from high school. (The band took its name from a style of spiritual singing and dancing native to Syria.) Abonula has appeared at numerous international music festivals including the Folklore Festival in Athens, Greece; the Sofia Festival in Bulgaria; the Jarash Festival in Amman, Jordan; the Spring Festival in Paris, France; and the Al Madina Festival in Tunisia.

Rima Khcheich was born in Khiam, South Lebanon in 1974 and began singing Arab classical music at age nine. She studied at the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music in Beirut, where she learned many styles of Arab music including *Muwashahat* and *Adwar*. In the years since, Kcheich has developed an international following and mastered complex Arab classical forms

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including *Dor 'Emta El hawa'* and *Muwashah 'Anta al Mudallal'*. She teaches at the Lebanese Conservatory and at the annual Arabic Music Retreat at Mount Holyoke College. She appeared on Toufic Farroukh's album *Tooty* in 2006 and is part of a Dutch-Lebanese-Iraqi band called "Orient Express" that fuses Arab musical heritage with jazz. Khchieh released a solo album, *Yalalalli*, in 2006, featuring a mix of old and new compositions. Her website is www.rimakhcheich.com.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Simon Shaheen's *Aswat (Voices)—Celebrating the Golden Age of Arab Music*** on **Tuesday, March 17, 2009 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at \$30, \$40, and \$50. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.org; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens, other students and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$5 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988 or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperformances.org.

For select performances, Cal Performances offers UCB student, faculty and staff, senior and community rush tickets. Rush tickets are announced two hours prior to a performance and are available in person only at the Ticket Office beginning one hour before the performance; quantities may be limited. Rush ticket sales are limited to one ticket per person; all sales are cash only. Rush ticket prices are \$10 for UCB students; \$15 for UCB faculty and staff (UCB ID required) and seniors age 65 or older; and \$20 for all other community members. Information is available at (510) 642-9988, press 2 for the rush hotline, two hours prior to a performance only.

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Tuesday, March 17 at 8:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph Ave., Berkeley

World Stage

Aswat (Voices)—Celebrating the Golden Age of Arab Music

featuring **Simon Shaheen**, director and *oud*

with **Ibrahim Azzam**, vocals

Sonia M'barek, vocals

Khalil Abonula, vocals

Rima Khcheich, vocals

and **The Aswat Orchestra**

Kamil Shajrawi, William Shaheen, Adeeb Refela, and Georges Lammam, violin

Thomas Ulrich, cello

Walid Zairi, bass

Jamal Sinno, *qanun* (zither)

Bassam Saba, *nay* flutes

Michel Merhej and **Dafer Tawil**, percussion

Najib Shaheen, *oud*

Program:

Wahhab/ "Fakkaruni," "Sakana l-Layl," "Ya Wardi Min Yishtirik," "Ya Di n-Na'im"

Al-Safi/ "Jannat," "Weili Laou Yidrun"

Ahmad/ "Il Wardi Gamil," "Ana Fi Intidharak"

Rahbani Brothers/ "Sahrit Hubb"

Al-Atrash/ "Kahramana," "Layali l-'Uns," "Ma 'Alli w-'Ultillu"

Tickets: \$30, \$40, and \$50, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.org; and at the door.

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