

Tuesday, March 17, 2009, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Aswat
("Voices")



Celebrating the Golden Age of Arab Music & Cinema

starring

Ibrahim Azzam
Sonia M'barek
Khalil Abonula
Rima Khcheich

Simon Shaheen, *director*

*Presented in Association with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
and the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan.*

Cal Performances' 2008–2009 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank.

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PROGRAM

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Mohammad Abdel Wahhab (1907–1991) | Fakkaruni |
| Wadi' Al-Safi (b. 1921) | Jannat |
| Al-Safi | Weili Laou Yidrun |
| Wahhab | Sakana l-Layl |
| Zakariyya Ahmad (1896–1961) | Il Wardi Gamil |
| Assi Rahbani (1923–1986) & Mansour Rahbani (1925–2009) | Sahrit Hubb |

INTERMISSION

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Farid Al-Atrash (1915–1974) | Kahramana |
| Al-Atrash | Layalil Unsi Fi Vienna |
| Ahmad | Ana Fi Intidharak Malleit |
| Wahhab | Ya Wardi Min Yishtirik |
| Al-Atrash | Ma 'Alli w-'Ultillu |
| Wahhab | Ya Di n-Na'im |

Aswat Repertoire

Fakkaruni (“Remind Me”)

An instrumental arrangement of a vocal masterpiece composed in 1966 by Mohammad Abdel Wahhab and sung by Egyptian diva Um Kulthum. The song starts with a lengthy introduction and includes several interludes that link together to form a fantastic instrumental.

Jannat (“Gardens”)

A popular song composed by Lebanese composer and singer Wadi’ Al-Safi to lyrics by Abdel Jalil Wihbeh. It is a monologue extolling nature’s beauty in Lebanon, which is described as one majestic garden.

Wayli Laou Yidrun (“Woe, If My Folks Know”)

Another song by Al-Safi and Wihbeh, describing a man’s love and affection for a woman never approved of by his parents.

Sakana l-Layl (“Calm Night”)

The lyrics for this piece are taken from a poetic genre known as *qasida*. *Sakana l-Layl* was composed by Mohammad Abdel Wahhab with lyrics by Khalil Gibran, author of *The Prophet*.

Il Wardi Gamil (“Lovely Flowers”)

Sung by Um Kulthum in 1947, the song premiered in the film *Fatima*. It was written by poet Mahmoud Bayram Al-Tunisi and composed by Egyptian composer Zakariyya Ahmad. In this song, Um Kulthum sings to the lovely flowers as she collects them from the garden.

Sabrit Hubb (“An Evening of Love”)

A television musical sketch, composed and written by the Rahbani brothers and performed, in the mid-1960s, by Fairuz, Wadi’ Al-Safi and the chorus. The theme is based on a love story that takes place in a Lebanese village.

Kabramana

Composer Farid Al-Atrash produced many films as a vehicle for introducing his music. *Kabramana* is

an instrumental dance performed in his film *Afrita Hanim* (“Jinni”), produced in Egypt in 1949. It was composed for dancer and actress Samia Gamal, who played the main role next to Al-Atrash.

Layalil Unsi Fi Vienna (“Merry Nights in Vienna”)

Sung by Asmahan in the 1944 film *Gharam Wa Intiqam* (“Love and Revenge”), and composed by Asmahan’s brother, Farid Al-Atrash, with and lyrics by Ahmad Rami. The song is an invitation to rejoice in the beauty, music and presence of the ones you love, in Vienna.

Ana Fi Intidbarak Malleit (“I Am Tired of Waiting for You”)

Sung by Um Kulthum in 1943, this song was composed by Zakariyya Ahmad with lyrics by Mahmoud Bayram Al-Tunisi. The song describes a person who is fed up waiting for his beloved. He keeps the fire burning inside his ribs by counting the seconds during the absence of a love who never shows.

Ya Wardi Min Yishtirik (“The Flower Buyer”)

A monologue composed and performed in 1940 by Mohammad Abdel Wahhab and premiered in his film *Youm Said* (“A Happy Day”). The lyrics were written by Lebanese poet Bishara Al-Khoury.

Ma ‘Alli w-‘Ullillu

A popular song composed and performed by Farid Al-Atrash in his 1950 film, *Akbir Kithba* (“Last Lie”), with actress/dancer Samia Gamal. The lyrics, written by Abu al-Su’ud al-Abyari, address an envious group which tries to separate two lovers.

Ya Di n-Na’im (“Living in Happiness”)

A dialogue composed by Mohammad Abdel Wahhab and performed with Layla Murad in his 1938 film, *Yabyal Hubb* (“Love Wins”). The lyrics, by Ahmad Rami, describe the reunion of two lovers after a long separation.

The Aswat Orchestra

This traditional Arab orchestra features virtuoso instrumentalists playing violins, *ouds*, double bass, cello, *nay*, *qanun* (zither) and percussion under the direction of maestro Simon Shaheen, recreating the sound of the Golden Age.

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| <i>Director, Violin</i> | Simon Shaheen |
| <i>Singers</i> | Ibrahim Azzam, Sonia M’barek, Khalil Abonula, Rima Khcheich |
| <i>Violin</i> | Kamil Shajrawi, William Shaheen, Adeeb Refela, Georges Lammam |
| <i>Cello</i> | Tomas Ulrich |
| <i>Double Bass</i> | Walid Zairi |
| <i>Qanun</i> | Jamal Sinno |
| <i>Nay, Flutes</i> | Bassam Saba |
| <i>Percussion</i> | Michel Merhej, Dafer Tawil |
| <i>Oud</i> | Najib Shaheen |

Acknowledgments

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| <i>Artistic & Musical Direction</i> | Simon Shaheen |
| <i>Sound Technician</i> | Luis Lozano |
| <i>Road Manager</i> | Walid Zairi |
| <i>Technical Assistance</i> | Sofiene Rais |
| <i>Tour Representation</i> | SRO Artists Inc. www.sroartists.com/artists/aswat |
| <i>Tour Coordination</i> | Steve Heath |
| <i>Film Production & Editing</i> | Izidore Musallam |
| <i>Special Thanks</i> | University Musical Society, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Tamizdat |

Aswat (“Voices”)

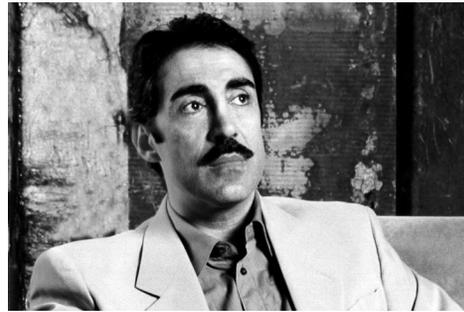
The period from the 1920s to the 1950s is considered the “golden age” of Egyptian cinema, but it was also a golden age of song in many parts of the Arab world—in particular, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Many of these country’s greatest singers and composers reached unprecedented heights of artistry and stardom during these years. The beloved diva Um Kulthoum and Mohammad Abdel Wahhab from Egypt, Syria’s Farid and Asmahan Al-Atrash and Lebanon’s Wadi’ Al-Safi and Fairuz, all represent the very best this era had to offer and add to the impressive canon of Arabic music.

Now, one of today’s leading Arab composers and multi-instrumentalists, Simon Shaheen, brings this era back to life with *Aswat (“Voices”): Celebrating the Golden Age of Arab Music & Cinema*. With a traditional Arab orchestra and special guest vocalists, Mr. Shaheen directs an evening of classic, unforgettable melodies, soul-stirring voices and lush orchestral arrangements, authentically recreating and interpreting the sights and sounds of this magical time.

Mr. Shaheen’s international search for the top Arab singers of today has yielded Ibrahim Azzam of Palestine, Sonia M’barek of Tunisia, Khalil Abonula of Palestine and Rima Khcheich of Lebanon. Brought together exclusively for the *Aswat* project, the vocalists render the most beloved Arabic songs of all time from such composers as Mohammad Abdel Wahhab, Farid Al-Atrash and the Rahbani Brothers. The virtuoso instrumentalists of the Aswat Orchestra provide a rich musical experience for Arab music devotees and initiates alike. As a backdrop to the live performance, preserved images and film footage of the great singers of the golden age are projected onto a large screen. The result is a multimedia experience of historical depth and lasting emotional impact.

Artistic Director

A virtuoso on the *oud* and the violin, **Simon Shaheen** is one of the most significant Arab musicians, performers, and composers of his generation and his work incorporates and reflects the deep



legacy of Arabic music. A graduate of the Academy of Music in Jerusalem and the Manhattan School of Music, Mr. Shaheen learned to play *oud* from his father, Hikmat Shaheen, a professor of music and a master *oud* player. Mr. Shaheen established and runs both the Annual Arab Festival of Arts, *Mabrajan al-Fan*, held in New York, and the Annual Arabic Music Retreat, held at Mount Holyoke College. He was presented with the prestigious National Heritage Award at the White House in 1994 and has received awards and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and many others. Mr. Shaheen has performed in many of the most prestigious concert halls in the world and he regularly gives workshops and lectures at leading institutions such as The Juilliard School and Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, Harvard and Yale universities.

Featured Singers



Highly influenced and inspired by his very musical family, **Ibrahim Azzam** showed exceptional

talent by the age of five, with both his singing and instrumental skills on the *oud*. Born in Palestine, his father and mother were singers known for their vast command of the Arab traditional musical repertoire. At the age of 10, Mr. Azzam studied for a period of eight years with professor, Hikmat Shaheen, a leading Palestinian composer and *oud* performer. In 1975, Mr. Azzam moved to England and made his new home in London. Since then, he has established himself as one of the leading Arab vocalists in Europe and the Middle East. Mr. Azzam has performed in some of the most prestigious venues in the world, including the Royal Albert Hall in London, the Opera House in Geneva, the Opera House in Cairo, the Royal Cultural Centre in Amman, the Cultural Palace in Ramallah, the Village Gate in New York City and Lisner Auditorium at George Washington University. One of Mr. Azzam’s most distinguishable traits is his unique and idiosyncratic voice, which has been compared to that of the prolific Arab singer-composer, Mohammad Abdel Wahhab. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Mr. Azzam was taken under the wing of his newly found mentor, and he became one of the finest performers of Abdel Wahhab’s vocal repertoire. Mr. Azzam has also performed with the likes of Wadi’ Al-Safi and the Lebanese diva Sabah. He has also worked with established Egyptian composers Baligh Hamdi, Farouk Al-Sahrnoubi and Hilmi Baker.



Sonia M’barek was born in 1969 in Sfax, Tunisia. She performed for the first time in public at the age of nine, and at 12 she was introduced to a large TV audience. From 1977 to 1986, she attended the national conservatory of music in Tunis, graduating with a diploma of Arabic music. Since then, she has sung for musical theater productions like *Asker Ellil*, *Eté 61*, *Taht Essour*, *Didon*, and on film sound

tracks for *Abulkacem Echebbi* (“The Dance of Fire”). Ms. M’barek has worked successfully with Tunisian lute players Ali Sriti and Anouar Brahem, with whom she presented more than 30 concerts of classical Arabian music, entitled *Tarab* (1993–1994), leading to the CD recording *Tarab*. In 1999, her recording *Takht* was distributed all over Europe, the United States and Japan on the German label, World Network. She has participated in numerous conferences, workshops and master-classes on Arabic singing in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Egypt, Tunisia and Lebanon. In 2005, she was nominated by the ministry of culture to serve as the chair of national festival of the Tunisian music. She has received countless awards for performance and artistry from prestigious organizations around world from the Middle East, Europe and North America.



Khalil Abonula is a Palestinian who was born in the city of Nazareth into a musical family. His father and mother were singers and both played on the *oud*. His mother taught him to play *oud* and introduced him to

theory in Arabic music. Since his early childhood, Mr. Abonula participated in school’s special events as a solo singer and joined the church choir where he learned many of the Byzantine hymns. Also, he grew up listening to the masters of Arab classical music particularly the Egyptians, Sayyed Darwish, Saleh Abdel Hay, Mohammad Abdel Wahhab and the Lebanese Wadi’ Al-Safi, whose voice and style of singing caught Mr. Abonula’s attention in particular. At the age of 12, Mr. Abonula joined with his father as a singer in community events and parties. After graduating from high school, Mr. Abonula started his first music band, Samah, named after a spiritual style of singing and dancing in Syria. Over the last 20 years, he has performed at distinguished venues and festivals throughout the Arab world as well as in Greece, Bulgaria and France.

About the Artists



Rima Khcheich

is an instructor of classical Arabic singing at the Lebanese National Superior Conservatory of Music in Beirut. She started singing at the age of seven, and two years later she became a member of the Arab

orchestra and chorale in Beirut under the direction of Salim Sahhab. At the age of 11, she became a soloist with Sahhab's group, singing the most difficult repertoire in Arabic vocal music. A graduate of the Lebanese National Conservatory of Music and the Lebanese American University, Ms. Khcheich has performed in live performances throughout the Middle East, Europe and the United States. She specializes in Arab-Andalusian *muwashshahat* form and 19th- and 20th-century Arabic traditional vocal repertoires. Since 1999, Ms. Khcheich has been a faculty member of the Annual Arabic Music Retreat at Mount Holyoke College.