



Alwan for the Arts

مركز ألوان للفنون

Press Release

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*Alwan for the Arts and the Center for Traditional Music and Dance
present:*

Maqam Fest 2012

Featuring:

Zikrayat ~ Maeandros ~ Gaida

Safaafir ~ Shusmo ~ The Alwan Arab Music Ensemble

Friday, January 6, 2012 7:30-11:30pm

@ Alwan for the Arts

16 Beaver Street, New York, NY 10004

\$30 (\$25 advance) Seating is Limited.

www.alwanforthearts.org

www.ctmd.org

Maqam refers to a modal system that is foundational to musical styles from North Africa through the Northern Mediterranean into the Levant and farther east to Central and South Asian traditions. This age-old concept's transcendence of national and geographic borders aligns with the current trend toward cross-cultural dialogue and global exchange. The inaugural **Alwan Maqam Festival** features musical groups devoted to expanding the scope of *maqam* beyond its contiguous regional reach; the stage will be shared by ensembles performing centuries-old pieces from the classical repertoires of Baghdad, Aleppo, and Cairo as well as Greek music with roots in Turkey, Golden-Era Egyptian film music, and innovative compositions combining Arab music with Jazz and Latin elements.

Each of the ensembles reflects upon a different facet of the *maqam*, representing and elaborating upon their respective traditions. The line-up includes performances by New York's top Middle-Eastern vocalists, including **Gaida**, **George Ziadeh**, **Amir ElSaffar**, **Salma Habib**, **Salah Rajab**, **Ahmed Gamal** (who recently arrived from the Cairo Opera

House), and **Mavrothi Kontanis**. Composer **Tareq Abboushi** will lead his group **Shusmo** in performing original pieces blending traditional elements of the *maqam* with Jazz and Funk styles. Dancers **Mariyah**, **Dameshe**, **Sherine**, and **Layla Isis** will join **Zikrayat**, led by **Sami Abu Shumays**, on stage in musical performances from Hollywood-style Egyptian films.

Alwan for the Arts is a space for reflection, dialogue, and growth in the arts and cultures of the peoples of the greater Middle East, including but not limited to North Africa, the Levant, Central/South Asia, and their respective diasporic communities. Alwan serves as a gathering place for these communities and opens the space to the broader public by showcasing a range of cultural events, thereby enriching the cross-cultural and artistic encounter. Annually, it produces over 20 concerts apart from dance, literary, and cinematic events, offering one of the broadest scopes of regional representation in New York City. The six groups performing in **Maqam Fest** will represent the extensive range of programming featured throughout the Alwan concert season.

Co-producing the event is one of the nation's pioneering folk arts organizations, **The Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD)**, which will present three ensembles from its esteemed touring artist roster: **Zikrayat**, **Maeandros**, and **Gaida**. Ethel Raim, Artistic Director of CTMD, says "Maqam traditions represent a large percentage of the world's population, and we're hoping to shine a spotlight on this important heritage." Drawing attention to the long history of cross-cultural interaction among these traditions, Mavrothi Kontanis says of his own group, Maeandros: "Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Persian, Arabic, Jewish, Gypsy, and Assyrian cultural influences, among others, can be found in most of the music we perform. This is proof of how cosmopolitan the Aegean Region has been throughout history."

The Alwan Maqam Festival will feature (in order of appearance):

Zikrayat, inspired by the golden age of Egyptian Cinema (the 1930's-60's), presents music and dance from Egypt and the Arab world in dynamic stage productions. This performance will feature vocalists Salma Habib and Salah Rajab, as well as dancers Mariyah, Dameshe, Layla Isis, and Sherine.
www.zikrayatmusic.com

Maeandros is the Ancient Greek name of the river that "meanders" throughout Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Just as this ancient and mighty river winds through distinct regions, the Maeandros Ensemble, created by oud player, singer and songwriter Mavrothi Kontanis, transports their audiences through various genres of related musical traditions from Asia Minor and the Aegean Region: folk songs of the countryside, urban songs from the city centers, Ottoman court music, and regionally inspired original works—all effortlessly intertwined in performance. www.maeandros.com

Gaida, New York based Syrian vocalist and songwriter, whose "versatile voice with just the hint of a jazzy, smoky edge," performs innovative interpretations of

classical Levantine music and folk songs from Syria, as well as her originals and freestyle improvisations over Arabic grooves. www.gaidamusic.com

Safaafir performs the Iraqi Maqam, the classical vocal tradition of Iraq's urban centers, featuring a repertoire of semi-improvised, chant-like melodies set to Classical Arabic and colloquial Iraqi poetry, followed by lighthearted, rhythmic songs known as pestaat. Led by two American-born siblings of Iraqi descent, Amir and Dena ElSaffar, Safaafir is the only ensemble in the United States dedicated to performing and keeping alive this highly-refined, centuries-old tradition. <http://amirelsaffar.com/projects/safafir/>

Shusmo is a secret passageway that winds past all the barriers dividing Arabic maqam from down-and-dirty funk and Latin spark. Headed by Palestinian pianist and buzuq player Tareq Abboushi, the New-York-based quintet leads you to a little underground club where pensive classical forms meet dance floor-friendly vibes, where folk tunes open up into gritty jams. It is impossible to label the style, thus the name "*Shusmo*" which in Arabic means "Whatchamacallit." www.shusmo.com

The Alwan Arab Music Ensemble is comprised of six of the leading practitioners of Arab music in New York, all of whom sing and play a wide range of Arab musical styles on traditional instruments, including classical art and popular music from Cairo, Aleppo, and Baghdad. Highlighting vocalist George Ziadeh, this evening also features special guest vocalist Ahmed Gamal. www.wnyc.org/shows/newsounds/2011/nov/02/

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