

PROGRAM NOTES

Touching on themes of home and migration, our summer tour program showcases music interwoven across time and place. This concert features clarinetist Kinan Azmeh and pianist Dinuk Wijeratne, whose brilliant clarinet concerto is a poignant musical biography of Azmeh's emigration from Syria to the United States.

Kareem Roustom (b. 1971) :: *Dabke*

Kareem Roustom was born in Damascus to an American mother and Syrian father. When he was 13 the family relocated to the United States. It was an uprooting that Roustom sought to heal through music, exploring the creative heritage and melodic syntax of both cultures equally. Largely self-taught in his craft, Roustom has become one of the most sought-after composers of our time. Commissions and performances have included groups such as the Kronos Quartet, The Crossing choir, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and numerous others. Demonstrating remarkable flexibility, Roustom has also composed twenty film scores, including his Emmy Award winning score for the documentary *The Mosque in Morgantown*, and has worked on arrangements for artists such as Beyoncé, Wyclef Jean, Tina Turner, and Shakira. As an educator, Roustom currently holds the position of Professor of the Practice at Tufts University.

Kareem Roustom's program note for *Dabke* is as follows:

Dabke is a folk dance and a type line dance from Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, that is typically performed at joyous occasions. The leader of the dance line, called a *hawaash*, directs the movements of the dancers behind him. There are many variants of this dance that involve men and women and the rhythms that accompany it. This movement is based on a six beat *dabke* rhythm called *sudaasi*. *Dabke* is an arrangement of the third movement of Kareem Roustom's *A Voice Exclaiming*; a work for triple string quartet that was originally commissioned for the Kronos Quartet and Providence R.I. based Community MusicWorks.

Dabke has been performed by a wide number of ensembles ranging from professional orchestras such as the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Oregon Symphony Orchestra, the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen, the Staatstheater Kassel Orchestra (Germany), the Cyprus Symphony Orchestra as well as college and youth ensembles in the US and as far away as Malaysia, Morocco, Chile and elsewhere. *Dabke* was also recorded by the Philharmonia Orchestra in London's famed Abbey Road Studio One. It gives me great pleasure to see a work of mine continue to be performed almost ten years after it was written and reaching across both geographical and generational boundaries.

Kinan Azmeh (b. 1976) :: Ibn Arabi Postlude

When asked during an interview what is the role of art, Kinan Azmeh responded, “My personal philosophy is that you do art to experience emotions you don’t have the luxury of experiencing in real life.” That creative point of view expresses itself in what the New York Times has called the “intensely soulful” quality of Azmeh’s compositions. Born in Damascus, Syria, Azmeh’s ongoing music education brought him to New York’s Julliard School and on to the City University of New York where he earned a doctorate in 2013. In high demand as both a performer and a composer, Azmeh has been commissioned by ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, the Seattle Symphony, The Knights orchestra, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Brooklyn Rider string quartet, and many others. He performs with his own Arab-Jazz Quartet, CityBand, and his Hewar trio, and as a member of the Silkroad Ensemble since 2012. With Yo-Yo Ma and Silkroad, Azmeh received a Grammy Award for the 2016 album *Sing Me Home*, on which he appears as clarinetist and composer.

Kinan Azmeh’s program note for Ibn Arabi Postlude is as follows:

Ibn Arabi was an Arab Muslim mystic and philosopher, born in 1165 in Murcia and died in 1240 in Damascus. The piece is inspired by his life journey, his writings and also by a school of thought in which love and free thinking are as sacred as religious beliefs are.

This work, which can be best described as an obsessive ritualistic dance, enjoys a rather circular form while maneuvering between persistent ideas and rhythms, allowing for the improvised and the composed to work seamlessly together.

Ibn Arabi’s writings have inspired me for many years, and two of his most famous quotes became the springboard for this work:

"Hearing is the origin of existence... that every existent vibrates"

“السمع منشأ الوجود ، فإن كل موجود يهتز“

"every scene that does not project the multiple in one sight, cannot be relied upon...every love that comes with a request, cannot be relied upon...every longing that is calmed by an encounter.. cannot be relied upon.."

“كل مشهد لا يريك الكثرة في العين الواحدة، لا يعول عليه

طلب، لا يعول عليه معه يكون حب كل

كل شوق يسكن باللقاء لا يعول عليه“

While these lines are not sung in this piece, this work became the final movement of a three movements orchestral work “Ibn Arabi Suite” for singer, clarinet and symphony orchestra.

Dinuk Wijeratne (b.1978) :: Clarinet Concerto

In interviews Wijeratne has described his artistic journey as a path to try and reconcile his identity, reflecting, “It was interesting growing up because I had this sense of multiple identities or no identity, it was like these two things were two sides of the same coin. And after a while I just thought well, embrace this paradox.” Wijeratne was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Dubai at the age of four where he lived until departing to study at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England. After being invited directly by composer John Corigliano to join his studio, Wijeratne continued his studies at the graduate level at The Juilliard School. He then went on to study conducting at Mannes College of Music, and later earned his doctorate studying with Christos Hatzis at the University of Toronto. Wijeratne’s multifaceted career has won him multiple awards including a JUNO. Collaborations with artists and ensembles have included Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, Zakir Hussain, DJ Skratch Bastid, hip-hop artist Buck 65, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and numerous other symphony orchestras across Canada and the United States.

Dinuk Wijeratne’s program note for his Clarinet Concerto is as follows:

This concerto for clarinet is part autobiographical immigrant story, part response to the Syrian conflict, and part exploration of the notion of ‘home.’

Kinan Azmeh and I have been close friends and musical travelers since our student days at both the Juilliard School and International House, New York City. Our ‘Art of the Duo’ project – a recital of original music for clarinet and piano – continues to take us to concert venues around the world. For me personally, our 2009 Middle East tour left an indelible impression. Particularly memorable were the two concerts in Kinan’s native Syria, in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo.

It seemed natural to me that this piece would become my response to what has transpired in Syria since that time. At the time of writing, the Syrian conflict has claimed 400,000 lives. Since the uprising began in 2011, over five million have fled their country as refugees, the Canadian government having resettled over 40,000 Syrians. At the heart of this music is the question of how one might define – or be forced to redefine – the meaning of ‘home’.

The solo clarinet represents ‘the traveler,’ an individual in turns either in line or at odds with his/her environment(s). The concerto has an approximate duration of 27 minutes, comprising six episodes which are designed to run into each other without interruption:

Part I – ‘Prologue: Foretelling’ is a dark musical dream-sequence. The clarinet, beginning offstage, is heard in an anguished premonition of things to come.

Part II – ‘The Dance of Ancestral Ties’ celebrates a carefree childhood, with its essence deeply rooted ‘at home’ both geographically and socially.

Part III – ‘Flux’ destabilizes the traveler’s sense of security. There is a sense of dislocation.

Part IV – ‘Exile: The salt of bread and rhythm’ is a desolate response to the essay ‘Reflections on Exile’ by Edward Said, in which he quotes the poet Mahmoud Darwish. In Said’s words: “[Exile] is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.”

Part V – In ‘Cadenza: Solitary Traveler,’ the clarinet is left alone to play a cadenza, or solo passage.

Part VI – In ‘Epilogue: Home in Motion,’ the traveler learns to be ‘at home’ everywhere.

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) :: *Idyll*

Many years before joining Bedřich *Smetana* and Antonín *Dvořák* as one of the three most famous Czech composers in history, Leoš Janáček was an eleven-year-old being taken by his parents nearly 100 miles from his hometown of Hukvaldy to live at the Augustinian Abbey in Brno. He had been accepted there as a choral scholar (nicknamed “Bluebirds” for their light-blue uniforms) and would receive both a solid academic education and musical training, as well as relieve the financial strain on his large family. Coming from a family of teachers, Janáček eventually followed the same path and completed teacher training at age eighteen. Soon after, he launched into a life and career that was continuously split between teaching and music making. Incredibly industrious, he found pockets of time between obligations to study at the Prague Organ School, the Leipzig Conservatory, and the Vienna Conservatory. Ultimately, he would return to spend most of his life in Brno, where he made an indelible contribution to the cultural life of the town.

The year 1877 proved to be a momentous one. Janáček and *Dvořák* had become friends and decided to spend the summer on a walking tour of Bohemia. Janáček was twenty-three years old and just starting out, while *Dvořák* was thirty-six and on the very cusp of launching into a new phase in his career that would result in world-wide fame. Both were organists, and both would play critical roles in championing Czech independence by finding inspiration in the folk music traditions maintained in rural communities. It was also the year Janáček wrote his *Suite for String Orchestra*, one of his first attempts at writing a larger scale instrumental piece. Up to that point, his works had been exclusively for chorus or organ, penned during his days at the Abbey for his fellow choristers.

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gorgeous, shimmering, piece of late romanticism. Up to that point, Janáček's works had been exclusively for chorus or organ, penned during his days at the Abbey for his fellow choristers. The decision to write for a string ensemble was likely influenced by Dvořák's recent Serenade for Strings (1875), which provided both inspiration and a model to follow.