

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 20 July 2024
3.00pm

African Concert Series Music from North Africa

Abdelkader Saadoun mandola, darbuka

Rebeca Omordia piano

Ubuntu Ensemble

André Swanepoel violin

Claudia Dehnke violin

Louise Lansdown viola

Elliott Bailey cello

Leon Bosch double bass

Nabil Benabdeljalil (b.1972)

Prélude II 'Mirage et lumière' (1999)

Nocturne No. 4 (2015)

Romance sans paroles (1993 revised 2013)

En attente du printemps (1993/2015)

Abdelkader Saadoun (b.1965)

Jazzarea

Traditional

Ya Galbi arranged by Abdelkader Saadoun

Gamal Abdel-Rahim (1924-1988)

Piano Trio (1986)

I. Ekhnaton's Prayer • II. Phoenician Dance

Ali Osman (1958-2017)

Afromood (2010)

Salim Dada (b.1975)

Miniatures Algériennes (2009-10) *UK première*

Aurore de Djurdjura • Danse Zaydan •

Crépuscule sur la baie d'Alger • Danse de la

jument • Soirée au Hoggar

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This afternoon's programme is a kaleidoscope from the main countries of North Africa, which – their geographical location, having close proximity to Europe – occasionally reveal aspects of Continental classical music, as if part of a two-way process, as Verdi's *Aida* and Saint-Saëns's 'Egyptian' Piano Concerto and *Suite algérienne* attest. This afternoon we have music by composers from Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Sudan, alongside traditional songs, instrumental and ensemble pieces.

Nabil Benabdeljalil (born 1972) is undoubtedly the most significant concert composer Morocco has produced. He has written music in various genres, principal among his output being a number of solo piano *Nocturnes*, admirably encapsulating his varied stylisations.

A graduate of the music colleges of Kyiv and Moscow, Benabdeljalil's output is largely founded upon traditional genres, where his musical language – part North African, part Southern European – has brought a unique compositional approach. Benabdeljalil's music is concerned principally with expressive communication, utilising traditional European structures often layered by melodies founded upon Arabic singing. His solo piano music presents a synthesis of such varied stylistic approaches.

We may identify this synthesis in his *Préludes*, the titles implying a continuing Impressionist influence – not wholly Gallic – as refracted through the higher bright sunlight of North Africa. The titles imply moods that the musical expressions undoubtedly invoke. As Benabdeljalil explains, 'The music reconciles atonal and Arabic touches, exploring a temporal and pictorial dimension, in which the "Reflection" of light through harmony has its say'. In the short *Mirage et lumière* the composer's approach is heard at its most Impressionistically brief. *Chanson sans paroles* equally demonstrates his exceptionally well-displayed gift for mood-painting and engagement with modern audiences – he further wrote, 'to rediscover the poetic essence of musical expression...My music may therefore occasionally reflect the essence of earlier periods, [yet is always] free from the constraints of a specific age or era'.

He writes of *Nocturne IV*: 'My first *Nocturne* was written in 1992, the second in 2012, and it was at that point that I planned a series of *Nocturnes*. The fourth *Nocturne* (2015) is characterised by an uninterrupted melodic line from beginning to end, with expressive implications of sweetness, tenderness and nostalgia. The melody – which is developed mainly in the Kurd fashion – was initially used in a setting of a poem by an Arab author from Muslim Andalusia before I used it definitively in this solo piano piece'.

Romance sans paroles is another original study in this vein, the French influence more from perhaps *Les Six* (particularly, Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud) rather than late Fauré or early Messiaen. Benabdeljalil continues: 'En attente du printemps began as one of my earliest compositions. First written in Kiev, it was reused in music for the Zakharif ensemble - including piano, saxophone, ûd and percussion. This concert version for solo piano was realized recently'.

Abdelkader Saadoun is a traditional musician, known as the master of rai music. He comes from Khemis Miliana in Algeria, not far from Wahran, the birth place of rai – a relatively modern music movement based on Algerian traditional songs and encompassing jazz, funk, rock, reggae, fusion and blues genres. In 1988, Saadoun moved to the United Kingdom and in 1994 he formed a second rai band in London. An accomplished singer and musician, the pieces he is to perform in today's programme are for voice and mandola, largely based upon his own arrangement of Algerian traditional songs.

Gamal Abdel-Rahim (1924-88) was a distinguished Egyptian classically-trained composer and professor of music. Born in Cairo to a musical father, he began playing the piano at an early age. His early studies were at the Musikhochschule of Heidelberg in West Germany, and he later studied composition with Harald Genzmer (a pupil of Hindemith) at the Hochschule für Musik, Freiburg. He was professor at the new Cairo Conservatory of Music (the first in the Arab world), which he founded in 1971. Abdel-Rahim's compositional style fuses traditional Egyptian musical elements with contemporary European elements, focusing on Egyptian materials in his later works more than in his earlier compositions. In his music, he uses Arab rhythms, melodies and *maqamat* (modes), including those with microtones. In applying Middle Eastern elements with Western composition techniques he has evolved a musical language which paved a way for subsequent generations of Arab composers. Abdel-Rahim's Piano Trio has just two movements. It was written in 1986 and is a uniquely colourful contribution to the existing 20th Century repertoire for the medium, in which the expressively lyrical *Ekhnaton's Prayer* prefaces the lively *Phoenician Dance*, impelled by an Arabic rhythmic pattern known as *masmoody* – occasional drumming on the body of the cello.

Sudanese composer **Ali Osman** (1958-2017) – a pupil of Gamal Abdel-Rahim – became a leading composer in many stylistic genres, exemplified best in his *Afromood* (for violin, piano and tambourine) of 2010 – imbued with African rhythms and subtle jazz influences.

The Algerian-born **Salim Dada**, born in the regional capital Laghouat in 1975, studied composition with the French composer and academic Jean-Luc Kuczynski in Saintes, Charente-Maritime; he has also studied medicine at the faculty of Medicine in Algiers. A staunch advocate of the humanities, Dada's music attempts to be a means by which a natural message of peace and dialogue may exist between the Arab-Muslim world and European civilisations.

His five *Miniatures Algériennes* – *Aurore de Djurdjura*; *Danse Zaydan*; *Crépuscule sur la baie d'Alger*; *Danse de la jument*; *Soirée au Hoggar* – were first composed in 2009-10 for string ensemble; today's performance is the UK première of the original version. The five movements create sound-pictures, fully displaying the composer's natural command of the modern-day post-Impressionist school.

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