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The Zafir Project

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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PROGRAM NOTES

Zafir (a gentle breath)

The first movement demonstrates the sound of unison played by varied combinations of wind instruments utilizing the *maqam* system with its microtonal intervals. In this movement, the concept of unison is not playing exactly the same notes and dynamics only, but also using heterophonic texture in which instrumentalists perform the same melody but give it different embellishments in addition to playing layers of leading melodies on the various instruments, with drones and ritornellos on others. This movement brings the sound of Upper Egypt winds playing the same melodies in combinations that produce new sonorities.

The second movement consists of two parts: the first is a dance-like theme that follows a lively simple meter called *Wahdah Basita* in a moderate tempo. The second part incorporates passages in which short improvisational solos alternate with precomposed ensemble refrains in a call-and-response fashion. In this part, each improvisational solo is based on a different metric pattern that reveals the intricacy of the inner subdivision found in rhythmic modes.

In the third movement, a folkloric melody originating in the Levant becomes the springboard for a theme and variations. Each of the variations is played by one of the five instruments accompanied by countermelodic lines and rhythmic figures. It is rather a harmonic sound in a linear progression.

—Simon Shaheen

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Imani Winds

Imani Winds has established itself as more than a wind quintet. Since 1997, the Grammy-nominated ensemble has taken a unique path, carving out a distinct presence in the classical music world with its dynamic playing, culturally poignant programming, genre-blurring collaborations, and inspirational outreach programs. With two member composers and a deep commitment to

commissioning new work, the group is enriching the traditional wind quintet repertoire while meaningfully bridging European, American, African, and Latin American traditions.

The group is in the midst of its Legacy Commissioning Project, an ambitious five-year endeavor launching Imani Winds into its second decade of music making. The ensemble is commissioning, premiering, and touring 10 new works for woodwind quintet written by established and emerging composers of various musical backgrounds. The select composers originate from different points of the globe, bringing experience not only in classical music but jazz, Middle Eastern, Latin, and harder-to-define sounds. The Legacy Project kicked off in 2008 with world premieres by Alvin Singleton and Roberto Sierra. The following season, Jason Moran’s *Cane* premiered at the Kimmel Center for the Arts in Philadelphia, followed by performances at Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall and Merkin Concert Hall. In 2009–10, the group collaborated with Stefon Harris, premiering and touring his *Anatomy of a Box (A Sonic Painting in Wood, Metal and Wind)*. The work premiered at the University of Iowa in September, with performances following at Penn State University, Cal Poly Arts, and San Francisco Performances.

The wide range of programs offered by Imani Winds demonstrates the group’s mission to expand the wind quintet repertoire and diversify sources of new music. From Mendelssohn, Jean Françaix, György Ligeti, and Luciano Berio to Astor Piazzolla, Elliott Carter, and John Harbison to the unexpected ranks of Paquito D’Rivera and Wayne Shorter, Imani Winds actively seeks to engage new music and new voices into the modern classical idiom. Imani members Valerie Coleman and Jeff Scott both regularly contribute compositions and arrangements to the ensemble’s expanding repertoire, bringing new sounds and textures to the traditional instrumentation.

Imani Winds performed the world premiere of *Terra Incognita*, the first-ever commission for classical artists by jazz composer, performer, and legend Wayne Shorter. In recent seasons, Imani Winds has performed extensively with Shorter, including a summer European tour of jazz festivals in Vienne

(France), Lubeck (Germany), Kongsberg (Norway), Copenhagen (Denmark), Limerick (Ireland), and the North Sea Jazz Festival (Netherlands), as well as in North America at venues such as Carnegie Hall and Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Through commissions and performance the quintet regularly collaborates with other artists. *Josephine Baker: A Life of Le Jazz Hot!*, a collaboration with chanteuse René Marie and choreographer Christopher Huggins, has been performed in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, among other cities, to great acclaim. The ensemble has shared the stage with Yo-Yo Ma for a rousing performance of Jeff Scott’s arrangement of Piazzolla’s “Libertango” and collaborated with bassist/trombonist Chris Brubeck of the famed Brubeck family for a performance and recording of music written especially for wind quintet and jazz quartet (released by Koch in 2008). The group’s Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center residency culminated in a recital in New York’s Alice Tully Hall with renowned clarinetist/saxophonist/composer Paquito D’Rivera. The ensemble has also worked with luminaries such as bandoneonist Daniel Binelli, saxophonist Steve Coleman, clarinetist David Shifrin, and pianists Gilbert Kalish and Shai Wosner. Future collaborators include Stefon Harris and David Krakauer.

Imani Winds’ excellence and influences have been recognized with numerous awards, including the 2007 ASCAP Award and 2002 CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, as well as the CMA/WQXR Award for the group’s debut and self-released CD, *Umoja*. At the 2001 Concert Artists Guild International Competition, Imani Winds was selected as the first-ever Educational Residency Ensemble, in recognition of its tremendous musical abilities and innovative programming.

Imani Winds has four releases on Koch International Classics, now known as E1 Music, including the 2006 Grammy Award–nominated recording *The Classical Underground*. The group’s most recent release, *This Christmas*, found its way onto many holiday “best of” lists upon its release in 2008.

Imani Winds is represented by Alliance Artist Management, (p) 212-304-3538, www.allianceartistmanagement.com.

Simon Shaheen

Simon Shaheen is one of the most significant Arab musicians, performers, and composers of his generation. His work incorporates and reflects a legacy of Arabic music while it forges ahead to new frontiers, embracing many different styles in the process. This unique contribution to the world of arts was recognized in 1994 when Shaheen was honored with the prestigious National Heritage Award at the White House.

In the 1990s he released four albums of his own: *Saltanah* (Water Lily Acoustics), *Turath* (CMP), *Taqasim* (Lyrichord), and *Simon Shaheen: The Music of Mohamed Abdel Wahab* (Axiom), while also contributing cuts to producer Bill Laswell’s fusion collective, *Hallucination Engine* (Island). He contributed selections to soundtracks for *The Sheltering Sky* and *Malcolm X*, among others, and composed the entire soundtrack for the United Nations–sponsored documentary *For Everyone Everywhere*. Broadcast globally in December 1998, this film celebrated the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Human Rights Charter. But perhaps Shaheen’s greatest success came with *Blue Flame* (ARK21, 2001), where he led his group Qantara on a labyrinthian journey through the world of fusion music to discover the heart of the Middle East. The album was nominated for 11 Grammy Awards, and the band’s performances have been called “glorious.”

A Palestinian, born in the village of Tarshiha in the Galilee, Shaheen was steeped in music during his childhood. His father, Hikmat Shaheen, was a professor of music and a master oud player. “Learning to play on the oud from my father was the most powerful influence in my musical life,” Shaheen recalls. He began playing on the oud at the age of five and a year later started studying violin at the Conservatory for Western Classical Music in Jerusalem. “When I held and played these instruments, they felt like an extension of my arms.”

After graduating from the Academy of Music in Jerusalem in 1978, Shaheen was appointed its instructor of Arabic music, performance, and theory. Two years later he moved to New York City to complete his graduate studies in performance at the Manhattan School of Music, and later in performance and music education at Columbia University.

In 1982, Shaheen formed the Near Eastern Music Ensemble in New York, establishing a group that would perform the highest standard of traditional Arabic music. This time also marked the beginning of Shaheen’s workshops and lecture/demonstrations in schools, colleges, and universities to educate the younger generation. As a champion and guardian of Arabic music, Shaheen still devotes almost 50 percent of his time to working with schools and universities, including Juilliard, Columbia, Princeton, Brown, Harvard, Yale, University of California in San Diego, University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and many others.

Since 1994, Shaheen has produced the annual Arab Festival of Arts, called “Mahrajan al-Fan.” Held in New York, the festival showcases the work of the finest Arab artists while presenting the scope, depth, and quality of Arab culture. To continue this exposure to Arabic music and culture, Shaheen founded the Annual Arabic Music Retreat in 1997. Held each summer at Mount Holyoke College, this weeklong intensive program of Arabic music studies draws participants from the US and abroad.

For the past six years, though, Shaheen has focused much of his energy on Qantara. The band, whose name means “arch” in Arabic, brings to life Shaheen’s vision for the unbridled fusion of Arab, jazz, Western classical, and Latin American music, a perfect alchemy for music to transcend the boundaries of genre and geography. “I want to create a world music exceptionally satisfying to the ear and for the soul,” says Shaheen. “This is why I selected members for Qantara who are all virtuosos in their own musical forms, and whose expertise and knowledge can raise the music and the group’s performance to spectacular levels.”

Qantara made its first live recording debut on Mondo Melodia/ARK21’s *Historic Live Recording of the Two Tenors & Qantara*, featuring tenors Wadi al-Safi and Sabah Fakhri. The disc featured two instrumental cuts by Shaheen and Qantara that only begin to show the band’s range and capabilities. Shaheen and Qantara made their full recording debut with *Blue Flame*. Compositions of “Al-Qantara” and “Dance Mediterranea” sparkle like jewels, while the opening track, “Blue Flame,” is a bravura exhibition of Shaheen’s—and the band’s—virtuosity. The *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed the record “stunning,” National Public Radio called it “a staggering tour-de-force of technique and passion,” CMJ called it “a new benchmark in Arab-Western fusion,” and the *Washington Post* termed it “eminently cosmopolitan.”

The band toured during 2003 and 2004, playing concerts and festivals like WOMAD USA, WOMAD Sicily, the prestigious Newport Jazz Festival, and Montreal Jazz Festival. Traveling throughout Europe and the Middle East, Qantara’s appearances have included Beiteddine Festival in Lebanon; New York’s Central Park SummerStage; Stern Grove International Festival in San Francisco; Chicago World Music Festival; Royce Hall in Los Angeles; University Musical Society in Ann Arbor; Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis; International Souk Ukaz at the historic citadel in Amman, Jordan; and Yabous Festival in the historical Tombs of Kings in East Jerusalem, among others. In Palestine, Shaheen conducts an annual weeklong music workshop designed for gifted children.

In addition to performing with Qantara and the Near Eastern Music Ensemble, Shaheen tours as a solo artist internationally and as a lecturer throughout the academic world promoting awareness of Arabic music through lectures and workshop presentations.

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Dr. Susan A. Cole, President
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Peak Performances @ Montclair presents:

Imani Winds

The Zafir Project

featuring

Valerie Coleman, flute
Toyin Spellman-Diaz, oboe
Mariam Adam, clarinet
Jeff Scott, French horn
Monica Ellis, bassoon

with special guest
Simon Shaheen, composer, oud, and violin

Dafer Tawil, percussion

PROGRAM

“Far Away” from Quintet No. 2	Miguel del Águila (b. 1957)
“Casablanca”	Valerie Coleman (b. 1970)
“Andaluza”	Manuel de Falla (1876–1946) (arr. Wayne Peterson)
“The Lotus Pond”	Gamal Abdel-Rahim (1924–1988) (arr. Adam Lesnick)
Wanderings i. Gift of Life ii. Two Songs from Nandom	Derek Bermel (b. 1967)

~~ Intermission ~~

World Premiere! Zafir	Simon Shaheen (b. 1955)
“Dance Mediterranea”	Simon Shaheen

Zafir was co-commissioned by Peak Performances @ Montclair State (NJ), the University of Notre Dame’s DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, and the Chamber Music America Commissioning Program, with funding generously provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and the Chamber Music America Endowment Fund.

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes, including one 15-minute intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted inside the theater.

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February 6, 2011 • 3:00 pm
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