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Brooklyn Arts Council Presents
Brooklyn Maqam Arab Music Festival
Local Arab Music Legends and Legacies
March 2 – 30, 2008
FREE

BROOKLYN, NY – (January 22, 2008) *Ahlan wa Sahlan!* Welcome! Brooklyn Arts Council is pleased to present **Brooklyn Maqam Arab Music Festival**, a groundbreaking celebration of Brooklyn's Arab music traditions. *Maqam* is the Arabic word referring to patterns of notes that form the building blocks of traditional Arab music. In a series of concerts, symposia, and workshops throughout March 2008, Brooklyn Maqam will feature 100 musicians and groups representing music traditions from Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and Lebanon performing at venues in Manhattan and Brooklyn, including Alwan for the Arts, BAM Café, PowerHouse Arena, Joe's Pub, and others. A full program is available at <http://www.brooklynartscouncil.org/documents/64>

Curated by BAC's Folk Arts, Brooklyn Maqam features local musicians, including the world-renowned oudist and violinist **Simon Shaheen** and the ever-popular Arab wedding singer **Fahim Dandan**, and highlights folk traditions, classical forms, popular contemporary arrangements, and fusion pieces. Since September 11th the Arab music scene has struggled to survive in New York and throughout the U.S. It is central to the work of Brooklyn Maqam to assist the revival of the borough's Arab music traditions by celebrating them in live performances. Many of the concerts are arranged thematically: ceremonial and religious music, women's traditions, and solo improvisations.

Brooklyn Maqam musicians are versed in a range of Arab forms and styles including Yemen Red Coast *lahji*, Moroccan *gnawa*, Middle-Eastern-American “Mediterranean” hybrids, Lebanese *djbeli* and Syrian-Jewish *pizmonim*, to name a few. Arab-world singing is stunning in its range and beauty and includes hundreds of genres from *muwashsha* to *maqam al-iraqi*. Instrumentation features experts in strings, including *oud* and the zither-like *qanun*; drums including the goblet-shaped *dumbek* and the frame-drum called *dof*; the tambourine called *riq*; and the *ney*, a single-reed flute.

Music is integral to Arab life in Brooklyn and Brooklyn Maqam brings that music to public attention. Arab cultures have been evolving in Brooklyn for well over 100 years; by 1895 there were 30 Syrian families in South Ferry and by the 1920s the area was a self-sufficient ethnic neighborhood that continued to grow as Lebanese, Yemenis, and others arrived in the 1940s and 50s. Today, Atlantic Avenue’s Arab commercial strip testifies to a continuing Arab presence and more recently, Bay Ridge has become home to Egyptians, Palestinians, and Moroccans. In the first half of the 20th century, musical expression was localized in family *haflat* (parties), wedding celebrations, and in some religious settings. After WWII, nightclubs in Manhattan erupted: Club Ibis, Cedars, Dervish and others have become hot spots for live music, primarily of Lebanese, Syrian, and Egyptian vintage blended with Greek, Turkish, and other hyphenated American sounds. In Brooklyn, live Arabic music was hot with renowned local singers appearing at *mahrajanat* (festivals), house parties, and at wedding parties at the St. George Hotel and the old Bossert Hotel in Brooklyn Heights. Smaller clubs and restaurants featuring live music began to thrive farther south in Brooklyn in the 1980s and 1990s. Widdi Hall in Sunset Park became—and still is—the center for weddings celebrations, music and dance. Also Arab-influenced singing in Lebanese churches and Syrian synagogues and koranic vocalizations such as recitation and call to prayer in Brooklyn mosques continue to preserve traditional forms. But after September 11th Arab cultural businesses suffered a decline. Today, a few coffee shops and restaurants such as Tarboosh and Le Sajj in Bay Ridge run live music shows and community centers such as the Arab American Association in Brooklyn produce cultural events that help keep Arab music alive in New York, but Brooklyn Maqam’s month-long celebration of the music will draw dramatic and sustained attention to artists who deserve a wider audience.

For more information, tickets, artist bios and full program schedule of performances, symposia and workshops, please call 718-625-0080 or visit www.brooklynartscouncil.org

ABOUT BAC

Brooklyn Arts Council (BAC), an arts and services organization founded in 1966, is the umbrella for Brooklyn’s range of cultural groups and individual artists working in the visual, performing,

media, and literary arts. BAC helps Brooklyn's artist population—from the experimental to those preserving and evolving traditions of cultural heritage—create and present their work. BAC ensures that thousands of people throughout Brooklyn have access to a variety of free arts programming each year. Our programs are essential to the livelihoods of thousands of artists, creative professionals, and arts organizations across the borough.

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Brooklyn Maqam Arab Music Festival is made possible with major support from American Express, Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, The Mary Duke Biddle Foundation, New York State Music Fund established by the New York Attorney General at Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, and National Endowment for the Arts. BAC Folk Arts is sponsored by Con Edison.

Use the American Express® Card at Brooklyn Maqam venues.

Additional support is provided by New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York City Council and its Brooklyn Delegation.