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BAC FOLK ARTS PRESENTS

بروكلين مقام

**BROOKLYN MAQAM**

ARAB MUSIC FESTIVAL

مهرجان الموسيقى العربية

Diverse Traditions: Arab Folk  
Music in Regional Expression

Saturday, March 29, 9-11pm

ALWAN FOR THE ARTS



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BAC FOLK ARTS PRESENTS:

BROOKLYN MAQAM  
ARAB MUSIC FESTIVAL

*Ahlan wa Sahlan!* Welcome to **Brooklyn Maqam Arab Music Festival** featuring local musicians, bands, and dancers presenting Arab musical traditions from Egypt, Yemen, Israel, Tunisia, Palestine, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, and Sudan. *Maqam* is the Arabic word referring to the patterns of musical notes, based on a quarter note system, that form the building blocks of traditional Arab music. Join **BAC Folk Arts** throughout March 2008 for **Brooklyn Maqam** concerts, symposia, and workshops featuring local musicians specializing in Arab folk traditions, classical forms, and contemporary arrangements. Entry to all events is FREE of charge and all events are open to the public.

**Saturday, March 29, 9-11pm**

**Alwan for the Arts**

***Diverse Traditions: Arab Folk Music in Regional Expressions***

This evening features Naji Youssef performing a repertoire Lebanese folklore, Ahmed Alrodini singing traditional Yemeni songs from the Red Sea Coast, and Abdel Rahim Boutat presenting songs of the Moroccan Berber traditions. This concluding weekend of Brooklyn Maqam highlights a range of traditional music styles, inviting New York urbanites to better understand the cultural richness of rural music forms which continue to be relevant to the city's Arab life.

**Program**

***Naji Youssef***

*Introduced by Alexandre Tannous*

Youssef is a master of the rural Lebanese song tradition. He opens the evening with genres of *jabali* songs including styles of *mawwal* such as *mijana* and *ataba*. Youssef will sing Lebanese folk songs made famous by "The Voice of Lebanon", Wadi el Safi and "the Father of Folklor" Zaki Nassif. The program will also include lively *dekbat*, such as *dalaouna* and *hawara* from Bilad ash-Sham.

*Maurice Chedid: Oud, vocals*

*Mohamed Abdullah: violin*

*Amir Naoum: Derbekki*

***Ahmed Alrodini***

Ahmed Alrodini and Isaac Gutwilik present traditional music from various regions of Yemen. Ahmed hails from the Red Sea Coast area where numerous distinct tempos and rhythms such as *Lahaji* originate. These are distinct from the more well-known songs and rhythms emanating from the region surrounding the nation's capitol, Sana'a. The majority of Yemenis in Brooklyn come from Sana'a. Ahmed and Isaac play the Sana'a material but they are to be commended for preserving and performing the much rarer Red Sea (Tehama) Coast repertoire.

*Ahmed Alrodini: vocals, oud*

*Isaac Gutwilik: percussion*

Order of performance:

- Sanaani Love & Longing Song Medley, Wasta tempo into fast Sarai Dance tempo
- Hindi Love Song
- Lahaji Dance Song
- Lahaji Drums
- Tehama Coast Drums, Madiff, Hajir, Marfa' and Mishkal rhythms
- Traditional song praising the beauty of Yemen, Sarai tempo

### **Abdel Rahim Boutat**

Boutat closes tonight's program with traditional Berber music from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Oral traditions are integral in the transmission and lyrical content of Berber music, which is also noted for particular modes and rhythmic patterns, including pentatonic scales and African rhythms. Even today, the tradition is maintained by traveling musicians who perform at weddings and other ceremonial and social events. Tonight, Boutat plays the stringed *loutar*, and is accompanied by the talented Metro-area Moroccan musicians Brahim Fribgane and Ahmed Sahel on *bendir*.

Abdel Rahim Boutat: vocals, loutar

Brahim Fribgane: bendir

Ahmel Sahel: bendir

## **Artists Biographies**

### **Mohamed Abdullah**

Abdullah graduated from the Institute of Classical Music, with a specialization in both Western and Arab violin, from his native city of Aleppo, Syria. Known for its listening community with scrupulous aesthetic standards for Arab music, Aleppo (*Halab*) produces a repertoire of *Halabi* and *Tarab* songs and singers such as Sabah El Fakhry. While in Syria, Abdullah played from this repertoire and in 1990 came to the US to stay, while on tour with the Halabi vocalist Shadi Jamil. Abdullah continues to play violin in the Syrian repertoire, particularly at Syrian Jewish music events in the Ocean Parkway corridor of Brooklyn. He is one of the few very talented local violinists to perform pan-Arab styles and songs at Arab nightclubs, concerts and parties in the Tristate area.

### **Abdel Rahim Boutat**

A Moroccan Berber from the town of Khenifra in the Middle Atlas Mountains, Boutat began playing the *loutar* as young boy in middle school. The *loutar*, a four stringed skin-faced lute, is among the diverse instrumentation found in Berber music, which also includes bagpipes and oboe. Boutat began playing at local social events and weddings in Morocco before migrating to Canada, and later settling in New York. He has played in concerts presented by prestigious cultural organizations such as Le Festival du Monde Arabe de Montréal and World Music Institute.

### **Maurice Chedid**

Maurice Chedid honed his 'oud playing at the Lebanese Conservatory of Middle Eastern Music, but comes from a family of musicians. His father was a highly esteemed cantor in the Maronite Church in Lebanon, and his sister, a renowned vocalist. Chedid performed a variety of Arab song traditions including Syrian and Andalusian Muwashahat, regional songs (khaligi and Lebanese) and Egyptian classics in nightclubs and a variety of venues throughout Lebanon. As a member of the National Lebanese Folkloric Group, he toured internationally for four years specializing in Lebanese folksongs or "beladi" traditions, including djebeli, and the repertoire of Lebanon's national beloved singers Fairouz and Wadi es-Safi. In 1988, the proprietor of Cedars of Lebanon, Tony Hosri, invited Chedid to play at the NYC based restaurant-nightclub, where Chedid played regularly until its closing in 2001. Chedid currently plays at Arab social celebrations and venues throughout the metro area.

### **Brahim Fribgane**

Born and raised in Morocco, Fribgane grew up surrounded by North African, Gnawa, Berber, Arab and Andalusian music. By 16 he was playing guitar at weddings and parties in Casablanca, where he contributed significantly to the development of a new style of Moroccan pop that took hold in the early 80s. After immigrating to New York, Fribgane began playing the *dumbek* (goblet drum), which he has modified to express the rhythmic complexities of a drum set with this single instrument. He performs regularly with fellow Moroccan and Brooklyn Maqam artist Malika Zarra at BOOM in the West Village. [www.brahimfribgane.com/index.html](http://www.brahimfribgane.com/index.html)

### **Isaac Gutwilik**

Canadian-born Gutwilik's interest in music began at a young age when his aunt gave him a Perez Prado album and his own transistor radio. School offered him an immersion into the world of traditional Jewish and Hebrew chanting. While living in Jerusalem, Gutwilik began serious conga studies and became a member of the percussion ensemble at the Rubin Academy of Music. At the same time (1978-80), Isaac became a percussionist for Yemeni choreographer/singer Yitzhak Levy-Awami, with whom he performed Yemeni folk music. Since moving to New York in 1989, Gutwilik has specialized in the traditional Jewish folk music of Yemen. He performs regularly with fellow *Brooklyn Maqam* artist Ahmed Alrodini, a locally-based expert in music from Yemen's Red Sea coast.

### **Naji Youssef**

The Lebanese-American tenor Naji Youssef was born in the El-Shouf region of Lebanon and immigrated in 1988 to Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, where he is cantor for the Catholic Melkite Church of the Virgin Mary. The Melkite music tradition includes characteristics such as the ancient *Psaltiqua* mode of notation and Arab *maqamat*. Youssef is also a member of Simon Shaheen's Near Eastern Music Ensemble. Known for his expressive vocal ornamentation, he is a featured singer at local *hafflat* (parties). Youssef's voice is reminiscent of the Lebanese *jabali* (mountain) style exemplified by such masters as Wadi' Assafi. He has mastered many repertoires besides the Melkite hymns, including old poetic singing styles such as mijana, 'ataba, shruqi and zajal.

## **Arab Music in its Rural Expressions**

*Musician and educator Taoufiq Ben Amor has provided the following article on rural Arab music traditions, such as those featured in tonight's program, and their evolution.*

It is my belief that city-Arab music generally is far behind Arab peasant music with regard to animation and originality. The urban music generally sounds stilted, affected and artificial; the peasant music, on the other hand, gives the impression of being a far more spontaneous and vivid manifestation despite its primitiveness.

Bela Bartok (1881-1945, Hungarian composer, pianist and ethnomusicologist)

Despite Bartok's, and many other European ethnomusicologists of his time, static notion of "tradition" and his "frenzy" to preserve the "primitive" and "authentic" in the face of rampant modernity, he is accurate in describing rural Arab music as lively. This liveliness is due to many factors: the communal and celebratory nature of this music, its projecting instruments—like the *zurna* or *mizmar* (reed horn), *mizwij* (bagpipe) and the *tabl* (two-sided drum)—built to be played in large open spaces, and the strong tie this music has with dance. This music also has very strong and old ties to poetry, and its lyrics are often full of folk histories and wisdom. After the independence of many Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s, rural forms of music have become threatened on several fronts.

Most emerging governments, with their Arab nationalist agendas, favored urban expressions of music, which they saw as older and more cultivated. Forms such as the Andalusian *Muwashah* in North Africa, the *Sawt* in the Arabian Peninsula, or the *maqam Baghdadi* in Iraq, became the official music of the state run television stations, radios and recording companies. Two decades later, the same governments started showing interest in “preservation” in the sense Bartok and other European scholars expressed. Rural and folk forms of music, however, had to undergo the process of *tahdhib*, refinement, before they would make their way to the official media. *Tahdhib* implied polishing lyrics that were often considered vulgar or too regional and changing the instrumentation following the Egyptian small orchestra model. Many popular folk songs will become very well known in their new versions. This tendency was not always official, but often part of the predominant canon, such as in the case of many Egyptian musicals or the theatrical work of the Lebanese Rahbani brothers where the *fallah*, peasant, was treated as a stereotype and portrayed either as a caricature or a romanticized figure.

Another major threat to rural Arab music was the constant urbanization that occurred especially in the decades following independence. More than 50% of the 350 million Arabs now live in cities whose population is growing at the fast rate of 9% a year. Many of the migrant communities assimilate urban forms of music often quickly and certainly by the time the first generation is born into the new environment. Some forms have resisted this tendency to assimilate and some others, such as Algerian Rai music, evolved to become predominantly urban traditions.

Arab rural music is an artistic expression dependent on occasions such as weddings, births, deaths, circumcisions, saint processions, etc. The changes in such rituals and the advent of new sound technologies and performance practices affect rural music genres a great deal. Today most weddings prefer to hire smaller groups using synthesizers and drum machines and sometimes even DJs and saint processions have either disappeared or been co-opted by the state. Rural music, which has to conform to new performance practices, is now reduced to TV shows, music archives, a few festivals, and packaged for tourist resorts.

Fortunately this is not true of all Arab countries to the same degree, and some remain strongholds for this genre of music. The current revival of such music as part of the notion of *turath* (heritage) is unfortunately not free of Bartok’s European notions of “tradition” and “preservation”. Tradition is always reinvented, and perhaps in evolving, these forms of music will survive not only in the Arab world, but also in the Diaspora.

### **Notes on Dabkeh Dance and Jabali Music**

*Ethnomusicologist and composer Alexandre Tannous has provided the following basic introduction to some of the dance and music forms in tonight’s program.*

#### ***The Dabkeh***

The dabkeh (also, transliterated as dabke, debke and dabka which all mean "stomping of the feet") is the traditional line dance of the mountains villages and towns (*reef*) of Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Jordan (the Levant region). It, also, exists in Iraq under the name *chube*. The dabkeh is danced by women, men, or both and resembles to a certain extent other folkloric line dances of Armenia, Turkey, Greece (the *Hassapiko*), and several countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

What distinguishes the dabkeh from other line dances is the energetic rhythmic stomping produced by the dancers' feet on the ground in rhythm or counter-rhythm with the *iqā'* (the musical rhythmic mode heard in the tune). The leader of the line who dances at the start of the line is called the *raas* (head) or *lawweeh* (waver). He or she twirls a handkerchief or a worry-bead while improvising on the dance-steps with virtuosic and syncopated jumps, kicks, stomps, and squats while the others

maintain the rhythm and the steps along with vocalizations that communicate the liveliness and the energy of the rhythm and dance-steps.

The dabkeh could be danced to a song with vocals, or to an instrumental. It is accompanied by a *tabl* (a large, shoulder-strung, double-headed drum played with two sticks), a *mijwiz* (a double clarinet-like instrument), a *mizmar* (shawm), a *buzuq* (a long-necked, metal string instrument), a *nay* (a reed instrument), and a *darbukkah* (a goblet-shaped hand drum).

While a six-beat meter is often used in dabkeh tunes, other meters and rhythmic feels are used such as the *mtanniye* (a double-feel), *mtallate* (a triple-feel), *arjah* (a leaning, skip-feel), and to standard tunes such as the *nadda*, *zayno*, *huwwara*, *dalaounah*, *haykalo*, etc.

According to the famous musicologist, composer and singer Zaki Nassif the dabkeh's origin goes back to old days when tree branches, topped with tightly compacted dirt and mud, were used in the construction of the flat roofing of village houses. Due to the rain, sun, and the changes in the temperature and humidity during the change of seasons, the roof suffered cracks that allowed water to leak in. To repair it the owner of the house would call on friends and neighbors to help. They would then gather on the roof walk while stomping their feet to compact the dirt which then sealed the cracks. Musical instruments and singing were added later as a way to entertain the helpers while performing their deed. The help was known as *al-Aouneh* (the aiding), and the term became later on *Aladalaouna*--a standard dabkeh song (the term is Aramaic in its origin). The dabkeh became the favorite dance in weddings and celebrations.

The founding of the Baalbek Festival of Lebanon in 1957 in the three impressive Roman temples' historical site area helped in popularizing, and modernizing the dabkeh dance which enormously contributed to preserving the dance throughout the Levant. Some of the masters who helped in this preservation are composers Assi and Mansour Rahbani and Zaki Nassif, and singers Wadi al-Safi, Sabah, Nasri Shamseddeen, and the famous Fairuz, as well as master dancers Alain Meraeb, Kigham, and the Caracalla Dance Troupe to name only few.

### ***Jabali Musical Style***

The Jabali (from the mountains) style, which of course originated in the countryside, is characterized by ethereal melodies, and a sense of rich simplicity. The lyrics are often about innocent and naive romance and love, the beauty and the charm of the Lebanese countryside, provoking a sense of return or a yearning to the millions of people who have immigrated at different periods and bringing warm memories of days gone by many immigrants linking them to their homeland. To summarize, these topics evoked a sense of pride and love of the country, and the simplicity and the purity of innocent love.

Some of the most famous genres of the Jabali style are the *ataba*, the *mijanah*, the *mawwal*, the *errede*, the *layali*, *abu-el-zelof*, and the *shruqi*.

The same composers and musicians who helped preserve and popularize the dabkeh also have done the same with the jabali style. But most of the credit would go to the Rahbani brothers and Wadi al-Safi. The numerous operettas and songs that these masters have composed included many of the jabali elements. But the extraordinary feat was the extent to which they were able to make the countryside music a part of the cosmopolitan and urban mainstream, but also throughout the Arab world. Such a historic urbanization of Lebanese folk music is phenomenon very rarely experienced in the world.

Singers such as Najwa Karam and Assi el-Hellani still carry this torch in the contemporary Lebanese music scene.

### **Music of Yemen: Laheji style**

*The following notes on Yemeni music has been provided by collector and community scholar of Yemeni dance and music.*

The country of Yemen is located on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. There are various dance and musical styles and traditions. The “Sana’ani” style (named after the capital Sana’a) is the most widely known and publicized of Yemeni music.

Tonight you will hear the little-known “Laheji” style. Lahej is located in the Tihama, Yemen’s south-western coastal area. Sometimes called the “Afro-Arabian crossroads”, this is where Africa meets Arabia. The resulting Sudani, Ethiopian, Somali and Arabian hybrid culture is attractive and rich.

The music in this area can be divided into several categories. Depending on its content, setting and the social status of the musician, songs may accompany routine activities such as planting, harvesting, fishing and building. There are also religious and secular poetry composed and sung to melodies identifiable as “Tihami” or “Lahji”.

Depending on the occasion, various musical instruments are used. There are four types of drums that are central to the ensemble. Each drum has a distinct voice with its designated interlocking rhythmic patterns against one another. For example, the rapid pulses of the high-pitched, stick beaten marfa’ against the rhythms of the hand-beaten table.

### **ABOUT BROOKLYN ARTS COUNCIL (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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