

Joseph Tawadros AM – The Art of the Oud

High Commissioner Series

Australia House, London

Presented by

The Tait Memorial Trust & Melbourne Digital Concert Hall

Tuesday July 28th 2020 | 8.30pm AEST & 8.30pm BST

An exciting program of original music by composer and Oud virtuoso Joseph Tawadros AM.

His works take inspiration from the Arabic modal system (maqam) and blend them seamlessly with elements of western classical, jazz, world, folk and even metal and bluegrass.

From thrilling and furiously paced numbers to beautifully introspective and tranquil tracks, it is woven together by Joseph's trademark lyricism and striking contemporary musicality of his Oud.

Dreaming Hermit

A lively melody which starts in free time, before moving into a 4/4 rhythm. It is on the mixolydian scale and is in a bluesy country style, taking in some Middle Eastern elements of improvisation and ornaments.

Work Is Love Made Visible

This solo piece is inspired by the poem *On Work* by Kahlil Gibran, from his book *The Prophet*, which he wrote in 1923. It begins on solo Oud with a melancholic, slow and tender improvisation in the mode Kord (Phrygian on A) before gaining pace and stating the opening theme, The piece is mostly in 5/4 but then moves into 4/4 for improvisatory interplay. After the taqasim (improvisation) the Oud returns to the opening melody, finishing on the 4/4 ostinato.

Constellation

This contemporary piece for solo Oud uses techniques from different instruments, which I wanted to combine in one piece: the slide Guitar, Japanese Koto, the African Kora, and Banjo. It's in a call-and-response style, where slide phrases are met with melodic passages played on harmonics. There are bends like the Koto, flurries like the Kora, multiple chordal voices like the Banjo and sliding, well, like a slide Guitar. The third section has a talking Drum quality to it. Although these techniques were inspired by other instruments, it is important that the oud maintains its integrity in tone and timbre.

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Permission to Evaporate

This piece is from an album I wrote for my late parents of the same title.

Each section is melodically linked in progression with some odd rhythmic twists here and there. Essentially it's a very melancholic piece where I imagine spreading my arms and being lost in a breeze. After losing my Mother in 2012 and my Father a year later, I wanted to escape the familiar for space and clarity.

This piece has seen many formations, Solo, trio, quartet but most special was in the 2017 BBC Proms in Dubai where it was played in a Symphonic arrangement by Jules Buckley and featured on my current album *Live at the Sydney Opera House*.

Gare De L'est

From my *Hour of Separation* album which I recorded with John Abercrombie, John Patitucci and Jack DeJohnette. Quite a jazzy/bluesy piece which combines three scales, the blues scale, the mixolydian scale and the Arabic scale Nikriz. I wrote it in reference to the train station in Paris and the opening has very much of a locomotive rhythm. There's an improvisation after the third section where the Oud tries to play two roles, holding the rhythm and soloing over the top. That then winds down before entering a very rigorous and fast last section, increasing in tempo and coming to a grand crescendo and finish.

Reason and Passion

Inspired by Kahlil Gibran's poem by the same title.

"Reason and Passion are the rudder and sails of your seafaring soul"

Melancholic and tender, starting in the lower register, ornamentation quite mournful possessing a vocal quality. There is a simple melody in lower register which is repeated an octave higher as the piece progresses. There is then a short improvisation (taqasim) before returning to the original melody.

Give or Take

Originally written as a duet for Oud and Double Bass, for the great American bassist John Patitucci, it comes from my album *The Hour of Separation*. The idea was to try and push a double bassist to the limit and Patitucci was up to the task. It features call and response passages primarily in 6/8 but alternating into 7/8 in parts. As a solo Oud work both parts will be played.

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Second Movement

This is the second movement of my Oud concerto which I premiered with the MSO in 2017 and is featured on my latest album *Live at the Sydney Opera House*. It is not exactly like the recording but it has a slower chordal theme which implements certain modern plucking Oud techniques to achieve. The structure follows ABABCA for and is mostly in 4/4, before a faster C section which features odd time signatures of 7/8 and 9/8.

Bluegrass Nikriz

Bluegrass Nikriz combines the blues scale (C, E-flat, F, G-flat, G, B-flat, C) with the Arabic maqam Nikriz (C, D, E-flat, F-sharp, G, A, B-flat, C). In writing the piece, I found that I could switch easily between the two, yet change the mood instantly, the blues scale being quite Western and Nikriz quite Arabic – a genre I jokingly call Country and Eastern. This also happens in the time signature of the piece, with sections switching between 4/4 and 7/8, something that is uncommon or even non-existent in bluegrass or country music.

This piece was originally recorded as a quintet on my *Permission to Evaporate* album with me on Oud, Mike Stern on Electric Guitar, Christian McBride on Double Bass, Matt McMahon on piano and James Tawadros on Riqq. It was inspired by Béla Fleck, the great Banjo player whom I had the pleasure of working with on my album *Chameleons of the White Shadow*. Watching him undertake his craft inspired me to seek out banjo-flavoured phrases on the oud, and this piece is a result of that experimentation.

Encore - Forbidden Fruit

The Finale of *The Hour of Separation* album, this piece is on the Arabic Maqam Hijaz Kar (C, Db, E, F, G, Ab, B, C). The piece starts on a free improvisation on this scale before entering a 6/8 ostinato pattern which dominates the drive of the piece. This is played and also with some variations before the main melody and entering the opening riff for a rhythmic improvisation. The improvisation and piece increases in pace before returning to the original melody.