



Visiting Artist Series presents
AMIR ELSAFFAR'S
Two Rivers Ensemble

March 3, 2017 . 7&9PM
KOGOD THEATRE
at The Clarice

ARTIST PARTNER PROGRAM

VAS
VISITING ARTIST SERIES

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**AMIR ELSAFFAR'S
Two Rivers Ensemble**

Amir ElSaffar, *trumpet/santur*

Francois Moutin, *bass*

Nasheet Waits, *drums*

Ole Mathisen, *tenor saxophone/soprano saxophone*

Tareq Abboushi, *buzuq*

Zafer Tawil, *percussion/oud*

*This performance will last approximately 1 hour 10 minutes
without intermission.*

The Two Rivers Ensemble is a sextet of jazz and Middle Eastern musicians that has made innovative strides in using the maqam modal system to transform the jazz idiom. Deeply rooted in musical forms of Iraq and the Middle East, the music still speaks the language of swing, improvisation, and group interaction, resulting in a sound that is distinct from other contemporary cross-cultural musical fusions. After more than a decade of extensive performing and touring and the release of three critically-acclaimed albums, the Two Rivers Ensemble has developed an instinctive ease with ElSaffar's innovative music, playing with a creativity in a style that is rooted in tradition, while venturing into an entirely novel aesthetic.

Tonight's program consists of Amir ElSaffar's composition entitled Crisis was commissioned by Newport Jazz Festival in 2013 and called by Downbeat Magazine, "certainly the first Middle Eastern-imbued jazz combo at Newport to win a standing ovation for its first song." The music was composed after Amir ElSaffar spent a year living in Egypt, where he witnessed the Arab Spring protests first-hand, and Lebanon, where he worked with Syrian musicians who were living through that country's harrowing civil war. The suite follows a narrative arc and is an emotional reaction to the recent tragic history of Iraq and the Middle East. Often based on the melodic modes of the maqam and folkloric rhythms, the music is full of emotion and heart, passionate and ecstatic.

ElSaffar's virtuoso trumpet playing is firmly rooted in the jazz tradition, yet he is capable of playing a taqsim (melodic improvisation) in an authentic Arab style, with a sound that is reminiscent of the nay (reed flute) along with the melisma and ornamentation of maqam singing. He has a unique approach to playing microtonally: using a standard, three-valve trumpet, ElSaffar has created new techniques that enables intonation characteristic to Arabic music. His sound is rich with overtones and burred texture: in one moment, bright and pushing to the sonic edge of the instrument and at another, a hushed whisper. His idiomatic maqam vocals sound at once prayer-like and an appeal for compassion, and his santur is full of tremolos and a long echo that is evocative of an ancient past.

Amir spoke in Lee Hinkle's class, *The Power of Music in Social Engagement* yesterday, talking about his creative process and the various forms he works with and what influences his musical writing. At noon he was interviewed by Bonnie Thornton Dill, Dean of the College of Arts & Humanities, at a family style lunch with students, presented in partnership with UMD's Arabic Flagship Program. We enjoyed Iraqi-influenced food and asked Amir questions about his background, his upbringing as an immigrant, and his views on the current political climate in the US and the world, especially relating to immigrants, refugees and Muslims.

Two Rivers Ensemble includes Nasheet Waits, one of the most dynamic drummers in jazz who is best known as a mainstay in Jason Moran's Bandwagon; Francois Moutin, one of today's most innovative and exciting bass players; Tareq Abboushi on buzuq (long-necked lute) whose CD *Mumtastic* contains his own blend of jazz and Arabic forms; multi-instrumentalist and virtuoso Zafer Tawil, who is one of the most in-demand Arab musician in New York; and tenor saxophonist Ole Mathisen, a master of microtonal playing who contributes beautifully controlled and technically dazzling playing, serving as the perfect foil to ElSaffar on the front line.

Trumpeter, santur player, vocalist, and composer **Amir ElSaffar** has distinguished himself with a mastery of diverse musical traditions and a singular approach to combining Middle Eastern musical languages with jazz and other styles of contemporary music. A recipient of the 2013 Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, ElSaffar has been described as "uniquely poised to reconcile jazz and Arabic music without doing either harm," (the Wire) and "one of the most promising figures in jazz today" (Chicago Tribune). ElSaffar is an expert trumpeter with a classical background, conversant not only in the language of contemporary jazz, but has created techniques to play microtones and ornaments idiomatic to Arabic music that are not typically heard on the trumpet. Additionally, he is a purveyor of the centuries old, now endangered, Iraqi maqam tradition, which he performs actively as a vocalist and santur player. As a composer, ElSaffar has used the microtones found in Iraqi maqam music to create an innovative approach to harmony and melody. Described as "an imaginative bandleader, expanding the vocabulary of the trumpet and at the same time the modern jazz ensemble," (All About Jazz), ElSaffar is an important voice in an age of cross-cultural music making.

A 2013 winner of the prestigious Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, ElSaffar continues to grow as an artist. He has worked extensively in Europe, collaborating with diverse musicians such as the Belgian group Aka Moon, Swedish composer C.C. Hennix, and a Berlin-based microtonal brass quintet. Fondation Royaumont in France commissioned ElSaffar for a piece for string quartet, voice, and santur, which premiered at the Festival d'Avignon and Festival d'Aix. They have since commissioned three more works that will be performed at festivals throughout France. In April 2015, ElSaffar assembled

an ensemble of 17 musicians to realize a new work *Rivers of Sound*, that made its premiere at Lincoln Center in New York City. The ensemble will release its double-LP *Not Two* on May 28, 2017 on New Amsterdam Records.

Francois Moutin was born in Paris. His early interest in music was encouraged by his parents. At age 5, Francois began studying guitar, then piano by age 11. The acoustic bass became his most lasting passion as a teenager. Also studying mathematics and physics, Francois received a college degree in engineering and earned a doctorate in physics at the age of 24. Then he elected to become a professional musician. Three years later, as a member of the legendary Martial Solal's Trio, Francois was recognized as one of the finest young bass players in Europe. At 29, he began co-leading the Quintet Moutin with his twin brother Louis, a top echelon Jazz drummer. This project has evolved into the Moutin Reunion Quartet. In November 1997, Francois moved to New York where he has found steady work in live performance and studio sessions with the premier artists on the New York Jazz Scene. He is a familiar presence on the stages of such establishments as Sweet Rhythm, Jazz Standard, Birdland, Village Vanguard, Blue Note, Knitting Factory, Zinc Bar, Jazz Gallery, Tonic, Smoke, Lincoln Center, Town Hall, New York Symphony Space, Museum of Modern Art and has also appeared in nearly every major jazz festival around the world.

Zafer Tawil is New York based Palestinian-American and a virtuosic performer on the oud, violin, qanun and a full range of Arab percussion instruments. Tawil performs across the US and in the Middle East and holds workshops in oud technique and Arabic music theory. He was part of the Spirit of Fez U.S. Tour 2006 and has performed with numerous musicians ranging from Sting to Arab music greats such as Simone Shaheen, Chab Mami, and Bassam Saba to avant-garde composer and performer Elliot Sharpe, among others. Zafer has composed music for a number of films including two Jonathan Demme's films, Oscar-nominated *Rachel Getting Married* and *Zeitoun*, based on Dave Eggers' book about Abdulrahman Zeitoun's post-Hurricane Katrina odyssey.

Nasheet Waits is a drummer and music educator whose interest in playing the drums was encouraged by his father, legendary percussionist, Frederick Waits. Nasheet has been a member of Andrew Hill's various bands, Jason Moran's Bandwagon, and Fred Hersch's trio. As an originating member of pianist Jason Moran's Bandwagon, Jason, bassist Tarus Mateen, and Nasheet have been deemed, "the most exciting rhythm section in jazz" by JazzTimes. The 2001 recording *Black Stars* with the Bandwagon, featuring Sam Rivers was named the "Best CD of 2001" in Jazz Times. Nasheet's recording and performing discography is a veritable who's who in Jazz, boasting stints with jazz notables such as Geri Allen, Mario Bauza, Hamiett Bluiett, Abraham Burton, Ron Carter, Marc Cary, Steve Coleman, Stanley Cowell, Orrin Evans, Stefon Harris, Andrew Hill, Bill Lee, Jackie McLean, The Mingus Big Band, The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Greg Osby, Joshua Redman, Vanessa Rubin, Antoine Roney, Wallace Roney, Jacky Terrason, Bunky Green, and Mark Turner.

A critically acclaimed saxophonist, **Ole Mathisen** is an active performer on the New York and the international jazz scene. In addition, he steadily works as a studio musician, composer, arranger, and producer. Over the years he has been involved with classical, jazz, electronic, ethnic, and experimental music, and he draws heavily on his wealth of musical experience when composing. He is currently a member of the Jazz Studies Faculty at Columbia University. Ole has worked on more than 80 albums, composed several film and TV scores, and has performed and/ or recorded with: Paula Cole, Louie Vega, Omar Hakim, Darryl Jones, Hiram Bullock, William Kennedy, Tom Coster, Mark Egan, Steve Smith, Mino Cinelu, Peter Erskine, Eddie Gomez, Badal Roy, Rufus Reid, Ron Carter, Grady Tate, Claudio Roditi, Will Lee, LaVerne Baker, Abraham Laboriel. He is the leader of CHINESE HOROSCOPE, and a member of NYNDK, SYOTOS, Afromantra, and Mamak Khadem Ensemble.

Tareq Abboushi is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, and bandleader. Born and raised in Ramallah, Palestine, Tareq received his B.M in jazz piano from William Paterson University in New Jersey. He has played buzuq since 1997 and has performed with numerous bands throughout the U.S., Canada, and the Middle East. His past collaborations include such notable musicians as Simon Shaheen, Omar Farouk Tekbilek, and Dan Zanes. He has lectured and led

workshops on Arab music at Columbia University, N.Y.U., Juilliard, The National Conservatory of Music in Palestine, and the Music Conservatory in Norway. He has contributed to the award-winning film scores for *Encounter Point* (Best Musical Score, Bend Film Festival, 2006) and *Chicken Heads* (Best Short Film, Dubai Film Festival, 2010), as well as to Jonathan Demme's *Jimmy Carter: Man From Plains* and the Oscar-nominated *Rachel Getting Married*.



UMD Jazz Studies students and bassist Kris Funn during a jazz clinic with APP Visiting Artist Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah

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