

## NY fundraiser for Tahrir field hospital

Ati Metwaly, Thursday 1 Dec 2011

## Alwan Arab Music Ensemble to perform in New York to raise money for the Tahrir field hospital



Alwan for the Arts is an institution located in New York's lower Manhattan, providing a base for a variety of artistic activities creating a dialogue between the Arab community and a broader public. Since 1998, Alwan for the Arts has housed a number of film festivals, art exhibitions, discussion panels serving to educate and engage the community in a cross-cultural dialogue, between Arab and other cultures. The centre creates platform of expression for people from the Middle East and North Africa and supports them in showcasing their cultures and opening debates.

“We are part of a socially and politically engaged community of Egyptians, other Arabs, and non-Arabs alike who have been active as a Diaspora community in fundraising for, raising awareness of, and protesting for the revolution and the revolutionaries,” Mariam Bazeed, who is giving logistical support to the event, explained to Ahram Online.

Among dozens of events, over the past months, Alwan for the Arts has screened movies by Egyptian filmmakers such as Mohamed Diab's Cairo 678 and Ahmad Abdalla's

Heliopolis among many others; held conferences and concerts celebrating the future of Egypt, and hosted many renowned Egyptian artists and intellectuals.

On Sunday 4 December, Alwan for the Arts gave their space to the Alwan Arab Music Ensemble aiming to raise funds for the field hospital in Tahrir Square. “We only offer space and logistical support yet the initiative is being led by the musicians in support of those injured in Tahrir Square,” Bazeed underlines.

It is not the first time the institution has hosted a fundraising event. Last March, musicians from the Alwan Arab Music Ensemble performed concert for Egypt with music showcasing revolutionary songs from the Arab music repertory. Benefits from this event were directed to charities in Egypt.

The Alwan Arab Music Ensemble consists of leading practitioners of Arab music in New York, who sing and play a wide range of Arab musical styles on traditional instruments: George Ziadeh (‘oud, vocals), Tareq Abboushi (buzuq, vocals), Sami Shumays (violin, vocals), Johnny Farraj (riqq, vocals), Zafer Tawil (qanun, violin, vocals) and Amir El-Saffar (santur, vocals).

“The Alwan Arab Music Ensemble mostly performs art music traditions with roots in Cairo, Aleppo, and Baghdad - three important Arab cities with great legacies in art and culture. Each of these cities has a unique repertoire with distinct characteristics, rules, and aesthetics: the dawr and qasida of Cairo, the muwashshahat andalusiyya of Aleppo, and al-maqam al-iraqi of Baghdad. Each of these forms adheres to the maqam – a system of seven-note modes. Also, all of these forms place great importance on poetry and the vocal melody, which is sung either by a soloist or chorus and accompanied by ensembles of traditional instruments, including ‘oud, qanun, nay, violin, santur (hammered-dulcimer), riqq, and table,” Amir El-Saffar, music curator at Alwan for the Arts and musician himself, told Ahram Online.

All funds collected during the event will be transferred to Egypt for the benefit of Tahrir field hospitals. “Due to the reported cases of fraud, if we feel insecure making a financial contribution, we will arrange to purchase medical supplies and donate those instead as an in-kind donation.” Bazeed stresses however that the institution had created a strong network with people directly involved in helping Tahrir hospitals and will coordinate with them for the best way to deliver support.

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Musicians from the Alwan Arab Music Ensemble carry different cultural backgrounds:

Iraqi-American Amir El-Saffar is a jazz and classical trumpeter. El-Saffar immersed himself in the music of his father's ancestral past, the Iraqi maqam. He has also created new techniques for the trumpet that enable microtones and ornaments that are characteristic to Arabic music but are not typically heard on a trumpet.

Considered an authority in maqam and Arab classical repertoire, George Ziadeh was born and raised in Birzeit, Palestine, and studied the 'oud in the US.

Arabic violinist Sami Abu Shumays was born in the US of mixed Palestinian and American descent. He began studying Arabic violin and seeking a deeper immersion in Arab musical culture, Abu Shumays studied in Cairo, Aleppo and Syria.

Palestinian musician based in New York City, Zafer Tawil is a virtuoso on 'oud, violin, qanun, and is a master of Arabic percussion.

Tareq Abboushi studied jazz piano performance then the buzuq at the National Conservatory of Music in Palestine.

Johnny Farraj studied the riq (Egyptian tambourine) and frame drum, oud and classical Arabic singing.

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The event will take place on Sunday 4 December at 8pm

Alwan for the Arts, 16 Beaver Street, 4th Floor, New York

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/28187.aspx>