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Jazz Meets Maqam on December 1 -- A Celebration of Arab Culture in America

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Arabic music does not often come to America, and when it does, it is usually in the form of pop songs that have little appeal to the casual American listener. Yet Arab music is a perfect tool to build bridges of understanding and appreciation. As someone who has taught Arabic in the States, I have had my fair share of students who were drawn into Arabic because of the music and its unique flavors. Since I too enjoy Arabic music, and dedicate a lot of time to keep up with the newest, I was delighted to find out about a musical event that's coming to Washington, DC.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), whose mission is in part to preserve Arab identity in the United States, is putting on their second annual Turaath (or heritage) event at the historic landmark Lincoln Theatre on DC's U Street. This Saturday, December 1, 2012 at 7:30 p.m., a number of musical acts will come together to take us on a journey to explore the wonders and rich history of Arabic music. U Street has a storied history of jazz music, and now Jazz comes back to its birthplace fused with Arabic music.

This year's program features NYC virtuoso and composer Amir ElSaffar, Iraqi-American trumpeter, santur player, vocalist and composer with the Alwan Arab Music Ensemble, and the Two Rivers Arab Jazz Ensemble in a celebration of Arab culture in America, with traditional and modern music from throughout the Arab world. Amir ElSaffar, who has managed to create fresh and intense music by blending the Iraqi maqam with jazz, will bring his show to DC, allowing his listeners to take a walk down the ancient yet glorious and tragic past and present of the land of Iraq.

Aside from music, a folkloric dance company will perform dances that most Arab Americans learned growing up. The Turaath event last year delivered a number of acts and performances by Arab Americans who combined the musical originality of the region with the innovation of America. I am certain the event this year will not disappoint! In a city where the term "Arab" is heavily politicized, it's refreshing to attend an event where simple things like music and traditional dances do more to bring people together than a seasoned politician can muster.

This is a fun, high energy, meaningful event that attracts a diverse audience, brought together by curiosity and an appetite for learning about each other. This event has been orchestrated by the ADC Women's Initiative, a group that seeks to revive community mobilization through cultural events and female empowerment. As we celebrate life, despite what seems to drive us apart, what brings us together is much more lasting.

For tickets call (202) 244-2990 or visit turaath.adc.org

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