

November 19, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall

The Riwaya Ensemble

Amer Hasan, clarinet

Shaleah Feinstein & Insia Malik, violin

Noémie Chemali, viola

Raffi Boden, cello

The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant Sea (2016/2017)

Kinan Azmeh

for clarinet and cello

(b. 1976)

- I. Prologue
- II. Ammonite
- III. Monologue
- IV. Dance
- V. Epilogue

Saffron Dusk for string quartet (2021)

Bushra El-Turk

(b. 1982)

Syriac Fugato 2 for violin and viola (2022)

Sami Seif

(b. 1998)

Palestinian Songs and Dances (2024)

Kareem Roustom

for clarinet, string quartet, and audio playback

(b. 1971)

- I. The Climbers – يا طالعين الجبال
- II. Blessed Are Your Wedding Garments – مبارك الملبوس
- III. Dance of the Mijwiz – رقص المجوز
- IV. Three Village Wedding Songs
 1. The chiming bracelet – رنت سيورة
 2. Register the bride's name, oh judge – سجّل يا قاضي سجّل
 3. God bless the henna painter – محنّي العريس يا

This concert is made possible thanks to grants from Humanities New York as well as the Baisley Powell Elebash Fund

Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Notes from the Composers

The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant Sea (2016/2017)

About his piece, **Kinan Azmeh** writes, “A fence, a rooftop and the distant sea were all present there facing my desk while I finished the piece in Beirut... These elements were a reminder of how near my home town of Damascus was yet how far it seemed after being away for five years. The piece is about random memories of individuals, more precisely it is about two characters searching for memories from home, and how they jump from one random memory to another while allowing themselves to drift away with their own thoughts, until they realize that the most powerful memories were the simplest, and they hold on to that endlessly.”

Saffron Dusk (2021)

About her piece, **Bushra El-Turk** writes, “This piece is dedicated to the victims and the families of those who lost their loved ones in the Beirut non-Atomic bomb explosion of 4th August 2020 where over 200 lives were lost and over 7,000 of those injured and lost their homes. My recent trip to Beirut in March 2021, seeing the ruins and destruction for myself and hearing the stories of those who had just survived it by seconds, brought those feelings back. After writing this piece, I preyed through the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, which has become a habit, to find the words that match the feelings of the grief I felt during that time in order to title this piece.”

Syriac Fugato 2 (2022)

Syriac Fugato 2 is a derivative work of *Syriac Fugato 1*. This series draws inspiration from Eugene O'Brien's *Black Fugatos*. What captures my imagination in O'Brien's work is the seemingly independent time-layers of the various instruments in the ensemble – this sort of beautiful, organized chaos fascinates me. In *Syriac Fugato*, I employ a totally different technique to that of O'Brien's controlled aleatory to achieve a comparable effect, all while crafting the work in my own aesthetic.

Palestinian Songs & Dances (2024)

I. *The Climbers* – يا طالعين الجبال

The first melody in this collection comes from a song that dates back to the period of the British occupation of Palestine (roughly, from the end of WWI to 1948). During this period, many Palestinian men were imprisoned for resistance, “with arms and words”. The women composed song and lyrics with encrypted messages for the prisoners. This was done by using ululation, and the repetition of the letter ‘L’, for instance, to obscure words and to confuse any British soldiers who might be listening in. The message embedded in the lyrics of “The Climbers” tells the prisoners:

Oh, you who are climbing the mountain, you who keep the fires burning
[meaning, those in prison],
I don't want a dress or a sash/ belt from you,
I only wish for your safety

The gazelles are coming for you who are imprisoned
[meaning, other fighters are coming to set you free]

II. *Blessed Are Your Wedding Garments* – مبارك الملبوس

The second movement is inspired by one of several folksongs in this work that are associated with weddings. What makes this melody unique is its intimacy; the setting that the lyrics describe is indoors, among family members where the groom walks, “almost naked between two lines of his closest relatives, each handing him a piece of the distinctive wedding attire to wear for the special night”.

Blessed are your garments, Muhammad (typical groom’s name);
Your mouth is chatting with us, but your eyes are all over the bride
Blessed is the “iqal” (traditional black wool double rings that hold the head dress), *put it on Muhammad, blessed is the ‘iqal*
Your mouth is chatting with us, but your eyes are on the doe (his bride”).

Both the melody and the lyrics suggested to me an intimate scoring, with all string instruments in the low to middle register, while the clarinet keeps to the Chalumeau and throat tones registers. A soft dynamic prevails throughout.

III. *Dance of the Mijwiz* – رقصة المجوز

The *mijwiz* is a reed instrument, traditionally a ‘double clarinet’, consisting of two parallel bamboo pipes, with about five or six holes in each, that are fastened together with tar. The mouthpiece consists of two single reeds (one for each of the pipes), and is placed inside the mouth. The *mijwiz* has a “forceful and rasping tone”, and the player uses a technique called ‘circular breathing’ which gives the sound “an emotional intensity enhanced still further by the fact that the instrument can be played for hours on end without interruption” (ibid). Because the double pipes play the same melodies, the sound of the *mijwiz* can be said to have a ‘chorus’ effect. It is also quite loud and the style of playing is “florid, with fiorituras, arabesques and features of free improvisation in a nervous, rapid tempo” This is very much an outdoors instrument.

This movement is not based on a traditional melody, rather it is an original composition that was created after I made several detailed transcriptions of recorded *mijwiz* performances. I tried to capture the ‘chorused’ effect of the *mijwiz* by scoring a number of unison passages, expecting that they will be slightly out of tune in places. To imitate the ‘raspy’ sound of the *mijwiz* with this ensemble, I used several techniques including calling for a ‘tin foil mute’ to be attached to the bridge of the string instruments and to the bell of the clarinet. I also used a good deal of *sul ponticello* string bowing (“on/near the bridge”), in addition to a clarinet technique called ‘spectral glissando.’ Here the clarinetist loosens their embouchure to produce harsh sounding overtones, with a complex timbre, and strikingly like that of an overblown *mijwiz*. As the *mijwiz* is sometimes accompanied by hand drums in traditional settings, much of the percussive work falls on the viola and cello.

Lastly, to emulate the ‘nervous, rapid tempi’ and florid phrasing, this movement became something of a virtuoso showpiece for this ensemble. In doing so, I hope to show that a good *mijwiz* player can be as much of a virtuoso as anyone. A chromatic cadenza in the clarinet later in this movement adds to this frenetic feeling, and opens up the harmonic palette.

IV. *Three Village Wedding Songs*

1. *The chiming bracelet* – رنت سيورة

Surrounding the bride, her friends “dance around her, shaking their bracelets, and moving to their rhythm.”
The bracelets are ringing, how beautiful their sound is
Call on his (the groom’s) mother to see her gorgeous daughter-in-law!

2. *Register the bride’s name, oh judge* – سجّل يا قاضي سجّل

The lyrics of this song express the ‘condition’ of the bride as that of a ‘stranger’, or a ‘foreigner’ having moved out of her family home and married into another family. Historically, this was even the case if she married into another family in the same village. Hussni Mulataat, the Palestinian researcher/translator of comparative cultural studies, describes this song as a “tragic popular song”. The anxiety and anguish felt by the bride, and her family due to the loss of a beloved daughter, is expressed in the lyrics.

*Register my (the bride’s) name, oh judge
I’ve become a foreigner
My mother is in the house yelling
And my sister is crying, “oh, dear!”*

3. *God bless the henna painter* – يا محني العريس

On the evening before the wedding, there is a distinctly Palestinian tradition where the best man paints the hands of the groom with henna. In this song, which is typically sung in call-and-response manner, the best man, as well as a series of other male relatives, are wished the blessing of being married next.

*He who paints the groom with henna, may God bless his right hand.
We are painting henna for the groom, and may we paint henna for his best man/ for his brother/
for his cousin/ etc.*

Approaches to ‘re-imagining’ these songs:

When reinterpreting lyric based vocal music to an instrumental medium there is, inevitably, something that is lost. So, it is incumbent on the composer to go beyond merely ‘arranging’ these melodies. Rather, they need to be re-imagined, keeping close to heart the contexts in which they are traditionally sung. It is also vital that the composer understands not only what the lyrics mean but what they imply beyond their surface meanings, as well as the contexts in which they were written. Lastly, the composer must realize that this context changes over time, and these melodies can have new meanings attached to them as they are passed down to subsequent generations.

While I’ve been involved in performing, transcribing, and arranging folk music from the Near East for many years, I struggled to find a different approach to working with these melodies.

Ultimately, it was the music of the Estonian composer, Veljo Tormis, that showed pointed to a path forward. Tormis, who spent decades collecting songs from Estonia, as well as other Baltic Finnish cultures, realized that in order preserve this repertoire, he had to imbue it with contemporary qualities. He felt that remaining completely faithful to traditional practices would make it difficult for contemporary listeners to connect with this music. Tormis said, “We need not actually return to [traditional interpretations] but rather we must go forward, with a full, contemporary understanding of it and with the feeling that it is ours”.

Tormis’ sensitivity for working with folk melodies was acute. He once said, “I do not use folk song, it is folk song that uses me”; a sentiment that resonates with me. Though Tormis often kept melodies intact, he used sparse, but highly imaginative accompanimental scoring, and he relied on various degrees of poly-tonality to imbue the music with a melancholic depth. These are some of the devices that I incorporated.

Another characteristic of these melodies is that they are often quite brief, as they were meant to be to learned easily. In a traditional setting, the variety, and fun, are found in the easily adaptable lyric structure, which can be customized to fit specific needs. The challenge for me was to keep this interest despite the absence of lyrics. This meant that, in some cases, I had to compose new sections to compliment the original melodies. In *The Climbers*, for instance, I composed an introduction and a coda, and as well as a new melodic B section that modulates to neighboring maqams (tonal centers).

God bless the henna painter is perhaps the simplest of all these melodies. Lasting only three bars the entire melody is comprised of only two pitches (E and F#). The simplicity of the foreground melody encouraged a certain freedom in creating the background texture. Here, I created an almost chaccone like harmonic progression that was varied at each repetition. While the melody stays constant, the scoring around it varies continually.

This final movement was inspired by audio from the 1987 wedding of the sister of a dear friend of mine, Dr. Kareem Azab, which took place in the village of ‘Āra, near Haifa. In this recording, his aunt can be heard leading the singing of the melody, while a circle of family and wedding guests respond. Off to the side can be heard Kareem’s older brothers chatting, and joking about the lyrics of the song. Finally, they say, “let’s go have dinner.” For a moment, we too are transported back to that joyous occasion.

Not far from all of this, and perhaps a common thread through each scoring decision, is the long and difficult history of the Palestinian people. I have known and befriended many Palestinians over the years, including some exceptionally accomplished musicians, scientists, writers, poets, publishers, and filmmakers, amongst others. Through hearing their stories, I’ve come to have a sense of their joys, struggles, and continued resilience. All of this can be heard in my treatment of these melodies. My primary goal in creating this work is to highlight our shared humanity. A humanity in which we are all bonded; in seeing and recognizing the humanity of others, we also affirm our own. The opposite is also true.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Azab and his family for granting me permission to use this audio. I am also grateful to the El-Funoun Palestinian Dance Troupe for their beautifully crafted recordings and interpretations of traditional songs. The recordings made by the late Palestinian singer, Reem Banna (1966 – 2018), as well as Dalal Abu Amneh (1983 -) have been profoundly inspiring to me during

the research for and the creation of this work. There are too many other musicians who have inspired me to name here but they should all know that they are very close to my heart.

About Riwaya Ensemble

Riwaya Ensemble is a New York-based contemporary music ensemble that celebrates the rich heritage and artistic innovation of contemporary Middle Eastern classical music. Our name, “Riwaya”, meaning “narration” or “story” in Arabic, embodies our mission as storytellers through music. We strive to be a catalyst for cultural exploration and understanding by showcasing the diverse voices of Middle Eastern composers and performers.

As dedicated contemporary-classical musicians, Riwaya Ensemble aims to bridge traditions and create a harmonious dialogue between past and present, fostering an environment of artistic excellence and cross-cultural exchange. As a composer-led ensemble, our featured composers play a pivotal role in driving the artistic and collaborative process in the preparation of their music.

Founded in October 2023, Riwaya Ensemble has performed at esteemed venues such as the CUNY Graduate Center, DiMenna Center for Classical Music, and the Palestine Museum US. In addition to our concert performances, we have proudly supported humanitarian efforts, performing benefit concerts for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and SEAL (Social and Economic Action for Lebanon) in collaboration with Egyptian-American Neo-Soul artist Felukah. Through our music, we aim to inspire connection, dialogue, and a deeper appreciation for the richness of Middle Eastern culture.

Riwaya Ensemble is grateful for generous support from Chamber Music America, the CUNY Graduate Center, and Humanities New York.

To support Riwaya Ensemble, please visit:



About the Composers

Lebanese composer and music theorist **Sami Seif** (b. 1998) has been praised as “a distinctive compositional voice” who creates “intoxicating and fascinating soundworld[s]” (Carla Rees, *Pan Journal of the British Flute Society*). Described as “very tasteful and flavorful” with “beautiful, sensitive writing!” (Webster University Young Composers Competition), his music is inspired by the aesthetics, philosophies, paradigms and poetry of his Middle-Eastern heritage. His latest musical concerns center around the phenomenology of time and of differing degrees of focus.

A passionate and enthusiastic collaborator, Seif has worked with numerous renowned musicians. Previous and upcoming collaborators include Mary Kay Fink and Stanley Konopka of The Cleveland Orchestra, Carla Rees, Josh Modney, ETHEL, Vinay Parameswaran, Marcelo Lehniger, the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, the Odin Quartet, TEMPO Ensemble, Earplay, Ensemble 126, Ensemble Metamorphosis, Juan Riveros, Drew Hosler, Dustin White, and Lana Stafford, among others. Seif’s music has been recognized internationally by various institutions such as ASCAP, SOCAN, the Society for New Music, the RED NOTE New Music Festival, the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra of New York, the New York Composers Circle, the Stamford Music and Arts Academy, the Foundation for Modern Music, the Ohio Federation of Music Clubs, the Cleveland Composer’s Guild, among others. Additionally, he was selected as a finalist for the 2019 Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra call for scores from a pool of more than 2200 applicants from more than 90 countries. In 2020, he was selected again from a larger pool of almost 8000 applicants.

Originally from the small town of Ashkout in Mount Lebanon, he was born to a non-musical family in Abu Dhabi and he is fluent in Arabic, French and English. He started out at the age of twelve as a self-taught musician, composing and playing on microtonal keyboards, specially designed for Arabic music. Not having had access to formal music education, Seif taught himself how to read and write music by reading theory textbooks. He later formally studied piano, composition, audio engineering, and sound synthesis.

Seif completed his undergraduate studies in composition and music theory at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where, he was honored with the Donald Erb prize in composition and the Beth Pearce Nelson award in music theory upon graduation. He is currently a doctoral fellow at the CUNY Graduate Center, studying with Suzanne Farrin, Yayoi Uno Everett, Jason Eckardt, Bruce Saylor, and David Schober. His former teachers include Julia Victorivna Podsekaeva (composition and piano), Roger Bergs (composition), Alan Reese (music theory), and Gerardo Teissonnière (piano).

Born in London, **Bushra El-Turk** has written over 60 works for the concert hall, the stage, film, TV and live art performance. Her work is often defined by the integration of musics and musicians from different cultural traditions, and the compulsion to highlight and challenge socio-cultural issues. Her works blur written and improvisational elements, forbearing the influence of her Lebanese roots all the while leaning towards the theatrical, creating works that are ‘...ironic...’, ‘...arresting...’ (*The Guardian*) and of ‘limitless imagination’. Selected by the BBC as one of the most inspiring 100 Women of today, her pieces have been performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Proms, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Opera House, London Sinfonietta, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG), Manchester Camerata, Opera Holland Park, National Opera Studio, OrchestUtopica (Portugal), Athelas

Sinfonietta (Denmark) Hermes Ensemble (Belgium), Orchestre National de Lorraine (France), Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, Latvian Radio Choir, Ensemble Saraband (Germany), Atlas Ensemble, Ensemble Zerafin, Orkest de ereprijs (Holland), Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra, Wallis Giunta and Wissam

Boustany. Performances have been at venues including the Lincoln Centre (New York), Porgy and Bess (Vienna) Wiener Konzerthaus (Vienna), Deutsche Oper Haus (Berlin), Montpellier Opera House, Théâtre du Châtelet (Paris), Bridgewater Hall (Manchester), Birmingham Symphony Hall, Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall, the Southbank and the Barbican (London).

In 2017, she completed an AHRC funded PhD in Musical Composition at the University of Birmingham under the supervision of Michael Zev Gordon where she explored the integration of Middle-Eastern and Western art music.

2019 saw the world premiere of Tmesis for Symphony Orchestra, performed by the BBCSO at the Dubai Opera House at the BBC Proms Opening night and was excited to be commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra again to perform Tuqus for multi ability orchestra conducted by Sir Simon Rattle which was shortlisted for an Ivor Composer Award in 2020, a London Sinfonietta commission and a piece for Studio Dan, commissioned by the MusikProtokol festival in Gratz.

Bushra has two operas under her belt - both with women's stories at the centre - Silk Moth (2015) about 'honour' killings and Woman at Point Zero Opera (2021/22), commissioned by LOD Musiktheater and premiered at Aix en Provence Opera Festival in July 2022, touring Belgium's cities in April 2023 as part of All Arias Festival, Luxembourg, Valencia, and London's Royal Opera House in June 2023. Woman at Point Zero won the Fedora Prize for Opera Innovation in 2020 as well as the Music Theatre Now Prize 2023. Next performances are at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) where Bushra will be one of the featured composers at Akademie Zweite Moderne with a performance by Klangforum Wien in June.

In 2020/21, while working on Woman at Point Zero, Bushra was co-commissioned by Orchestre de Chambre de Paris and Opéra Orchestre National Montpelier to write a concertino for Taegum and orchestra, performed by Hyelim Kim. Later in 2021, she was commissioned by YCAT (Young Concert Artists Trust) and Cosman-Keller Art and Music Trust to write for string quartet (Adelphi Quartet), two pieces for the Aldeburgh Festival (Percussion concerto and string quartet) Her residency as a composer at LOD continues with a major new work exploring grief, in partnership with Manchester Camerata and the Mozart scholar Simon O'Keefe (University of Sheffield) using Mozart's unfinished Requiem as found material. Bushra was one of the main featured composers for the Aldeburgh Festival in June 2022.

2023 saw a world premiere of Rostan, Rastan and Rast-Kara in May 2023 for Faraz Eshghi on Kamanche and string quartet co-commissioned by Solem Quartet and Norwich and Norfolk Festival and is working on another string quartet for the Amsterdam-based Dudok Quartet to give its world premiere as part of String Quartet Biennial Amsterdam. 2024 sees a project with Denmark's Equinox Festival of Music and Dance, collaborating with choreographer Eukene Sagues and a large-scale work for the Dutch National Opera's Opera Forward Festival in March 2025 (to be announced!)

Bushra enjoys teaching composition at all levels. Research areas include contemporary composition, cross-arts and cross cultural collaborations and the integration of composition and improvisation.

She currently teaches at Royal College of Music Junior Department. She has also mentored on young composer schemes including Tŷ Cerdd (Wales), National Concert Hall Ireland Creative Lab Programme and NonClassical Associate Composers Scheme (London) and is co-director of The Alternative Conservatoire.

Bushra's services to music have included being an adjudicator for the British Composer Awards (now Ivor Composer Awards), and adjudicator for the Commonwealth Young Composer Awards and, also, member of the board of directors at the Independent Society of Musicians (2018-2021). She is now on the board of trustees for Arts Canteen Foundation and for the ISM Trust.

Bushra's music is published by Composers Edition and is artistic director of Ensemble Zar.

Hailed by critics and audiences alike, winner of Opus Klassik award in 2019 clarinetist and composer **Kinan Azmeh** has gained international recognition for his distinctive voice across diverse musical genres.

Originally from Damascus, Syria, Kinan Azmeh brings his music to all corners of the world as a soloist, composer and improviser. Notable appearances include the Opera Bastille, Paris; Tchaikovsky Grand Hall, Moscow; Carnegie Hall and the UN General Assembly, New York; the Royal Albert Hall, London; Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires; Philharmonie, Berlin; the Library of Congress, the Kennedy Center, Washington DC; the Mozarteum, Salzburg, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie; and in his native Syria at the opening concert of the Damascus Opera House.

He has appeared as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Dusseldorf Symphony, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, The Azerbaijan State Symphony, Winnipeg Symphony, Symphony Nova Scotia, Toronto Symphony, A Far Cry, The Knights Orchestra, Calgary philharmonic, Qatar Philharmonic and the Syrian Symphony Orchestra among others, and has shared the stage with such musical luminaries as Yo-Yo Ma, Daniel Barenboim, Marcel Khalife, John McLaughlin, Francois Rabbath, Aynur and Jivan Gasparian.

Kinan's compositions include several works for solo, chamber, and orchestral music, as well as music for film, live illustration, and electronics. His recent works were commissioned by The New York Philharmonic, The Seattle Symphony, The Knights Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Elbphilharmonie, Apple Hill string quartet, Quatuor Voce, Brooklyn Rider, Cello Octet Amsterdam, Aizuri Quartet and Bob Wilson.

An advocate for new music, several concertos were dedicated to him by composers such as Kareem Roustom, Dia Succari, Dinuk Wijeratne, Zaid Jabri, Saad Haddad and Guss Janssen, in addition to a large number of chamber music works.

In addition to his own Arab-Jazz Quartet CityBand and his Hewar trio, he has also been playing with the Silkroad Ensemble since 2012, whose 2017 Grammy Award-winning album "Sing Me Home" features Kinan as a clarinetist and composer. Kinan Azmeh is a graduate of New York's Juilliard School as a student of Charles Neidich, and of both the Damascus High Institute of Music where he studied with Shukry Sahwki, Nicolay Viovanof and Anatoly Moratof, and Damascus University's School of Electrical Engineering. Kinan earned his doctorate degree in music from the

City University of New York in 2013. His first opera “Songs for Days to Come” which is fully sung in Arabic, was recently premiered in Osnabruck, Germany in June 2022 to a great acclaim. He has recently been appointed to the National Council for the Arts on a nomination by President Joe Biden.

Syrian-American **Kareem Roustom** is a composer whose genre crossing collaborations include music commissioned by conductor Daniel Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, the Kronos Quartet, arrangements for pop icons Shakira and Tina Turner, as well as a recent collaboration with acclaimed British choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh. Roustom has been composer-in-residence at the Grant Park Music Festival in Chicago, the Grand Teton Music Festival in Wyoming, and with the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen in Germany and the Mannheim Philharmonic. A musically bi-lingual composer, Roustom is rooted in the music of the Arab near-east but his music often expresses beyond the confines of tradition. The themes of a number of his works often touch issues of those affected by war and instability.

Roustom’s music has been performed by ensembles that include the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Minnesota Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Boulez Ensemble, Oregon Symphony, Orchestre Symphonique de Mulhouse, The Crossing choir, Lorelei Ensemble, A Far Cry, and at renowned festivals and halls such as the BBC Proms, the Salzburg Festival, the Lucerne Festival, Carnegie Hall, the Verbier Festival, the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin, the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, and others. Roustom has been composer-in-residence with the

Grand Teton Music Festival, the Grant Park Music Festival, the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen, and the Mannheim Philharmonic.

Roustom has received commissions from the Malmö Symphony Orchestra (Sweden), the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Grand Teton Music Festival (2018 & 2023 seasons), the Grant Park Music Festival, the Daniel Barenboim Stiftung (2013, 2015, & 2017), the Pierre Boulez Saal, the Royal Philharmonic Society & Sadler’s Wells Theatre (U.K.), A Far Cry & Lorelei Ensemble and others. Roustom’s music has also been recorded by the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester (Berlin), and the Philharmonia Orchestra (London).

The Chicago Tribune wrote that Roustom is “a gifted and accomplished artist, one of the most prominent active Arab-American composers,” BBC Radio3 described Roustom’s music as “among the most distinctive to have emerged from the Middle East”, and The New York Times described it as “propulsive, colorful and immediately appealing.” The Guardian (London) wrote that Roustom’s music is “arrestingly quirky and postmodern...music with lots of personality.” Roustom holds the position of Professor of the Practice at Tufts University’s Department of Music in Boston. Roustom’s awards include an Emmy nomination and an Aaron Copland House Residency Award.