



PRESS RELEASE

»SALĀM SYRIA« / 16–18 MARCH

ELBPHILHARMONIE FESTIVAL INVITES YOU TO EXPERIENCE SYRIAN MUSIC

Hamburg, 14 March 2017: Until the outbreak of the civil war, Syria – always a melting pot of different religions and cultures – possessed a lively and varied music scene. But in the meantime over four million people have abandoned the country, fleeing from the terror and destruction. The festival »SALĀM SYRIA«, playing in the Elbphilharmonie from 16–18 March, attempts to recreate at least a few facets of Syria’s rich musical heritage some 4,000 kilometres to the north-west, in Hamburg. Artists from both Syria and Hamburg will be taking part, and among the audience will be more than 400 people who have taken refuge here for the time being. On stage will be the first big band of the Orient, the first orchestra made up of Syrian musicians in exile, and a German-Syrian choir specially founded for this festival. International clarinettist and composer Kinan Azmeh, who made his first appearance at the Elbphilharmonie in January alongside world-famous cellist Yo-Yo Ma, can be heard in several concerts, including one with his trio Hewar, an ensemble that combines Arabic music, jazz and western classical music. The entire festival is already sold out, but the concert with Hewar and guests on 18 March will be broadcast live at www.elbphilharmonie.com.

MUSIC AS A PIECE OF HOME

»When I sing about my homeland, it’s the only thing left that no-one can take away from me. Syria as I know it no longer exists. But it lives on in music.« Hana Alkourbah from Homs, who now lives in Geesthacht, to the east of Hamburg, has been singing together with Hamburg locals in the »SALĀM SYRIA« festival’s project choir since October 2016; she speaks for many of her fellow Syrians in her wish to preserve her lost homeland in music. Traditional Syrian music is first and foremost Arabic in origin; but the north-east of the country in particular has always been a melting pot, as much influenced by Armenians and Kurds as by Assyrian and early Christian culture, by the music of the Bedouins and the religious songs of the Yazidis. At the end of the 20th century, pop and jazz were added to the mix. The festival »SALĀM SYRIA« sees itself as an invitation to experience this precious and highly varied musical landscape. And it is also aimed expressly at refugees living in Hamburg. The Elbphilharmonie team has been sponsoring free concert tickets for refugees in cooperation with numerous organisations for some time now, and has invited more than 400 refugees to attend concerts being given at the festival.

ENCOUNTERS AT EYE LEVEL

»SALĀM SYRIA« opens on 16 March with a concert given by the **NDR Bigband** and soloists of the **Syrian Big Band**. When Western and Oriental musicians play together, people often ask whether the Oriental »Maqam« system is compatible with the diatonic system used in Western music. The answer is a clear yes: the musicians succeed where politics so often fails, with the exchange as a source of mutual inspiration and a basis for creating something new. This works particularly well in the realm of jazz, where an open mind is indispensable. The Syrian Big Band was founded in Damascus in 2004 by Hannibal Saad, who had lived in the USA for a number of years. The band soon achieved considerable popularity, but the outbreak of war in 2011 brought things to an abrupt end. The Syrian ensemble first made contact with the NDR Big Band back in 2009 at the Morgenland Festival in Osnabrück. For their first joint concert in the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg-based musician and composer **Wolf Kerschek**, who is familiar with many of the world’s musical styles, has written a **suite of eight Syrian pieces**.



KINAN AZMEH: ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

The second concert will be put on by **Kinan Azmeh**, who as **Artist in Residence** can be heard several times at the festival – as both clarinetist and composer. Azmeh, one of the best artists in his field, studied in New York. He has appeared with classical symphony orchestras, has played in various jazz formations, and has travelled around the world together with Yo-Yo Ma's acclaimed Silk Road Ensemble. Only once Azmeh arrived in New York did he really discover Arabic music; since then, the culture of his native Syria, which he hasn't been back to for four years now, is becoming more and more important to him. His art is also an answer to what has happened, and continues to happen, in Syria. His work **»Home Within«**, accompanied by **live paintings** by **Kevork Mourad**, gives us an insight into his emotional life. The music and the pictures blend into a vivid reflection of the Syrian revolution and its aftermath. **»Home Within«** has already toured North America and Europe, with the aim to draw attention to the plight of the refugees. At the same time the title provides an answer to the question of where home is: home is within.

For the final concert of the festival, Kinan Azmeh brings his trio **Hewar** to Hamburg. Hewar is the Arab word for dialogue. The three musicians **Kinan Azmeh** (clarinet), **Dima Orsho** (voice) and **Issam Rafea** (oud, voice) overcome effortlessly the boundaries between traditional Arab music, jazz and classical music, between improvisation and composition, old and new. They have invited two guests to join them: Armenian duduk virtuoso **Jivan Gasparyan**, who is something of a living legend, and the experienced French tuba player **Michel Godard**, who also entices the most daring improvisations from the serpent, a horn shaped like a snake. The concert will be offered as a **live stream** at www.elbphilharmonie.com, and afterwards **DJ Ipek**, one of the hottest figures in the **Berlin club scene**, will play her own selection of Syrian music, traditional and modern, in the foyer of the Recital Hall.

THE VOICE OF THE ANCIENT SYRIA

The Syrian-Armenian singer and multi-instrumentalist **Ibrahim Keivo** is an outstanding interpreter of **Mesopotamian vocal music**. He grew up in an area of great cultural diversity, and he speaks **seven languages** and sings in five: Arabic, Kurdish, Aramaic, Assyrian and Armenian. He has been collecting the songs of his native region for years, and he now performs them at the festival.

The second half of this double concert features **classical Arabic music** performed by a trio of graduates and teachers from the Higher Institute of Music in Damascus. Ney player Moslem Rahal, accompanied by his colleagues Feras Charestan on the Oriental zither and Firas Hassan on the percussion instruments riqq and darbuka, presents a variety of compositions, including some of Keivo's own.

SYRIA MEETS HAMBURG

The motto of the middle day of the festival is **»Hamburg meets Syria«**: the musicians of the **Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra** (SEPO) all come from Syria, and most of them are refugees. Double-bass player Raed Jazbeh set up the orchestra from Bremen, and its members are spread across Germany and other parts of Europe. Their 2015 debut was followed by appearances in Sweden and Berlin, where they played alongside the Berlin Philharmonic. In Hamburg, the SEPO performs works by Syrian composers together with **local Hamburg musicians** and the **international »SALĀM SYRIA« project choir**, which was set up in 2016 by the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg in cooperation with the **Morgenland Festival in Osnabrück**. The singer **Dima Orsho** is also involved, contributing not only her voice, but also several of her own compositions to the festival programme. In addition to playing in the concerts, many members of the SEPO and the project choir also participated in the project



»**Heimatbilder**« (Pictures of Home): they contributed photos of their favourite places in Syria and short commentaries to an album that is available to the public as a free brochure.

Finding like-minded people and testing one's artistic ability is also the focus of the »**Salām Syria**« **Kreativ Camp**, a cooperation with K3 - Zentrum für Choreographie | Tanzplan Hamburg. The camp, which is already fully booked, is aimed mainly at young people from Hamburg, Syria and the rest of the world. The results will be presented at a **final concert** in Kaistudio 1.

Further **information and the festival calender** at www.elbphilharmonie.com
Press information and images at www.elbphilharmonie.de/en/press

Press Contact Elbphilharmonie

Tom R. Schulz, Elena Wätjen and Julia Mahns
Public Relations
phone: +49 40 357 666 258 / -249 / -245;
presse@elbphilharmonie.de