

The Conference of the Birds



JUNE 22

A new musical work by Fahad Siadat

Libretto : Sholeh Wolpé

Choreography: André Megerdichian

About the Performance

- The Conference of the Birds is an evening-length and semi-staged oratorio for a cappella choir and soloists written by composer/vocalist **Fahad Siadat**. This setting will include both the original Persian and a new English translation by the acclaimed Iranian poet/translator **Sholeh Wolpé**, and will be choreographed by Fahad's long-time collaborator **André Megerdichian**.
- The epic poem utilizes a form found in medieval Islamic literature, the embedded narrative, whereby a series of smaller tales and parables nestle within a larger narrative that illustrates and distills the core tenets of the Sufi spiritual path and philosophy, a tradition often considered the mystical branch of Islam. Our hope for this piece is to create an entry point for audiences to share in this spiritual tradition in a format that shows, rather than tells.
- Rather than using instruments for additional symphonic and timbral color as is typical for an oratorio, the a cappella choir will both narratively act as the birds on the journey as well as musically function as the 'orchestra' to support arias and recitatives, utilizing a collection of alternative vocal techniques not typically found in choral music.
- The choir will move through the performance space with a language of gestures, physically embodying the journey of the birds. The movement phrases and gestures will visceralize the states of being; physically and vocally creating a narrative driven, abstract landscape. As the choir seeks the sovereign, they will be accompanied by a dancer – the physical manifestation of the idea being sought.

***Preview performance dates March 2021,
Locations: Greater Los Angeles, San Diego, Northern CA
World premiere is targeted for Fall 2021 in Los Angeles.***

About the Book

- The Conference of the Birds is an epic poem by 12th century Iranian Sufi mystic, Attar. It is considered a masterpiece of Iranian literature.
- Using birds as a metaphor for those on the Sufi path, the story follows the birds of the world who embark on a journey to find their sovereign, the Simorgh, a divine, mythical creature. Traveling through Seven Valleys, the birds follow the spiritual trials of the Sufi path as they journey to the Simorgh's door. Each story cuts through the dogmatic teachings of religion, exposing the broader pitfalls and yearnings of the spiritual journey while emphasizing the shared values between spiritual traditions.
- We are the birds in the story. All of us have our own ideas and ideals, our own fears and anxieties, as we hold on to our own version of the truth. Like the birds of this story, we may take flight together, but the journey itself will be different for each of us. Attar tells us that truth is not static, and that we each tread a path according to our own capacity. It evolves as we evolve.
- The Conference of the Birds is a deeply meaningful and spiritual work that is delightfully packed with lively banter, pathos, clever hyperbole, cheeky humor, poetic imagination, and surprises. It will change your life.

***Attar traveled through all the seven cities of love
While I am only at the bend of the first alley. —Rumi***

Collaborating Artists



Fahad Siadat is an advocate of innovative and adventurous music and approaches this advocacy as a performer, composer, conductor and entrepreneur. He has performed as soloist with LA's groundbreaking opera company The Industry, PARTCH, and the Twilight Orchestra. As a composer, his music has been performed in Europe, China, and across the United States. Fahad is artistic director of HEX Vocal Ensemble and is co-artistic director of The Resonance Collective. He has conducted choirs at Columbia University, CalArts, and Chaffey College. In 2012, he founded See-A-Dot Music Publishing, a company devoted to the advocacy of adventurous choral music. www.fahadsiadat.com



Sholeh Wolpé is a poet and playwright. Her literary work numbers over twelve books and several plays and she is presently the Author-in-Residence at UCI. Her most recent book is *The Conference of the Birds* (W. W. Norton.) Sholeh has performed her literary work with musicians in Singapore, India, U.S., Bali and Australia. Her awards include a PEN Heim, Midwest Book Award, and Lois Roth Persian Translation prize; and her plays have been finalists or semi-finalists at Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, Centenary Stage Women Playwrights, and Ashland New Plays Festival.



André Megerdichian has worked with such companies as the Limón Dance Company, Dance Kaleidoscope, The Mary Anthony Dance Theatre, and Janis Brenner and Dancers, among others. He has served as a faculty member at The Limón Institute (NYC), the Duncan Center Conservatory in Prague Czech Republic, created choreography and taught master classes and workshops, throughout the United States, Europe, and China. An assistant Professor at the University of South Carolina and Co-Artistic Director of The Resonance Collective, his work is rooted in the humanistic, highly physical, explorations of modern dance traditions while exploring the diverse tensions and curiosities of today.

Samples of other collaborations:



[Saharava: A Ritualized Dance-Opera](#) is the telling of the hero's journey as portrayed in the Major Arcana of the Tarot. It is the journey of The Fool, as narrated by The Magician, from ignorance to understanding.



[The Moon Has Made Us Brothers](#) is a show that deals with issues of loneliness, self-acceptance, and self-actualization. It follows the story of Pierrot, the sweet, forlorn, comically tragic, deeply introverted, and wildly imaginative clown, as he deals with ridicule and rejection from his community and seems to reinvent himself.



Prepared by: Hilda Tourians

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Note: Please reach out to me for more information.