

**Hopkins Center  
for the Arts**  
at Dartmouth

presents

**Amir ElSaffar and the  
Rivers of Sound Orchestra**

**Tuesday, April 26, 7:30 pm**

Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College • 2022

---

*Generously supported by the Bob Gatzert 1951 Jazz Series Fund and the Lewis Pace Poag 1972 Fund*

# Credits

Amir ElSaffar, trumpet, sintur, vocals

Carlo DeRosa, bass

Ole Mathisen, tenor sax, soprano sax

Nasheet Waits, drums

Tareq Abboushi, buzuq

Dafer Tawil, oud, flute

John D Parran, clarinet, bass sax

Mohamed S.Ibrahim, oboe, English horn

George Ziadeh, oud, flute

Miles Okazaki, electric guitar

John Escreet, piano

Fabrizio Cassol, alto sax

Naseem Alatrash, cello

Rajna Swaminathan, mrudangam

Dena ElSaffar, violin

Tim Moore, dumbek

Yu-Han Su, vibraphone

Alison Loerke/ALIA Productions, tour manager

Richard Kelley Snodgrass, assistant tour manager

Matt Merewitz/Fully Altered Media, publicity

Maury Jensen/Maury Jensen Enterprises, sound engineer

# Program

Approximate duration: *75 minutes, no intermission*

Emergence, Parts I-VI

Lightning Flash

March

# Program Notes

## **Rivers of Sound**

I formed the Rivers of Sound Orchestra in 2015 as a musical, cultural and social project. The idea was to discover new ways of organizing sound without the hierarchy found in Western European art music (composer -> conductor -> players), without the burden of precedence found in non-Western folk or traditional forms (repetition of what has been done in the past), but still maintaining a sense of structure and cohesion. I was interested in blurring the spaces between improvisation and composition, between composer and players. The process relies on spontaneous group interaction, where each musician has agency as part of the creative process. The idea is to have multiple points of origin emanating simultaneously from the present.

The ensemble includes musicians from a broad spectrum of musical backgrounds and from different parts of the world. My desire is to expand beyond the notion of cultural boundaries, in the sense of one style of music “belonging” to a particular group of people or a society. Rivers of Sound proposes an alternative musical model by genuinely embracing a multitude of musical expressions and by focusing on the interactions between individual musicians. When we begin with an inherent sense of unity and interconnectedness, and musicians as individuals, not representatives of a culture, there is no need to “build bridges.”

All of the members of Rivers of Sound are extraordinary musicians with extensive biographies and experiences across a wide array of musical contexts. They are also very close friends of mine. Over the years, Rivers of Sound has become a family, making it one of the most joyful musical experiences of which I have ever been a part. It is my great pleasure to share that experience with the audience this evening.

## **Emergence**

The word Maqam in Arabic means the position of the feet, where one stands, a place. In music, Maqam refers to modes, or collections of pitches that unfold through melodies, invoking a particular mood or spirit. The pitches of the Maqam are microtonal and the distances between the pitches and the spaces are what define the character of the Maqam. And the Maqam creates a kind of standing wave that resonates throughout the space.

The work that we will perform tonight, *Emergence*, is about space. The musicians will not be on stage, but on the perimeter of the theater, far apart from one another and surrounding the audience.

Each performance of the work will be unique, due to the semi-improvised nature of the composition, as well as the particulars of each space. The hall’s dimensions, the materials it is made of, and the number of people in the room, among other factors, will contribute to a particular sound quality that will influence what the musicians play and how they interact each night.

Each audience member will have a unique experience, as will the musicians, depending on where they are in the hall and their proximity to the instruments.

As we perform this work, I invite the listener to find a place of quiet and calm, eyes open or closed, and direct their attention both inward and to the surrounding sound as it moves through the space. There is no need to look for or see the musicians; they will become visible during the course of the piece. The main activity that we will all be engaged in, musicians and audiences alike, is *listening*.

*Amir ElSaffar*

# About the Artists

**Amir ElSaffar** is a composer, trumpeter, santur player and vocalist who has been described as “uniquely poised to reconcile jazz and Arabic music,” (*The Wire*) and “one of the most promising figures in jazz today” (*Chicago Tribune*). A recipient of the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award and a 2018 US Artist Fellow, ElSaffar is an expert trumpeter with a classical background, conversant in the language of contemporary jazz, and an innovator in playing microtones and ornaments idiomatic to Arabic music that are not typically heard on the trumpet. He is a purveyor of the centuries old, now endangered, Iraqi maqam tradition, which he performs actively as a vocalist and santur player. He has received numerous commissions and leads several ensembles including Rivers of Sound and Two Rivers.

**Carlo de Rosa** is a veteran of the New York City jazz scene. De Rosa has performed with musical luminaries including Yo-Yo Ma, Ray Barretto, Arturo O’Farrill, Ravi Coltrane, Vijay Iyer and Ed Thigpen. De Rosa is currently writing the doctoral essay for his DMA at Frost School of Music, University of Miami. He was a Graduate Teaching Assistant and Henry Mancini Institute Fellow during his tenure at Frost. De Rosa is an integral part of the Miami music scene collaborating with Brian Lynch, Dafnis Prieto, John Hart, Sammy Figueroa, Martin Bejerano, Nestor Torres, Troy Roberts and Gonzalo Rubalcaba.

**Dena ElSaffar** is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, teacher and recording artist who has performed throughout the US as well as in Europe and the Middle East. Dena is the founder and leader of Salaam (SalaamBand.com), which focuses on music of the Arab World. Salaam has released nine albums, and was featured on NPR’s *All Things Considered*. Specializing in violin, viola, joza and ‘oud, she has a long list of recording projects and has toured and performed with countless ensembles. When she is not busy performing or teaching, Dena enjoys painting, reading, hiking in nature and spending time with her family.

**Fabrizio Cassol** is a Belgian saxophonist, composer and music director. He is a shape-shifting musician who never ceases to multiply exchanges with musicians from the four corners of the world, exploring improvised music, oral traditions and musics in order to better play and compose across genres. His particular interest in non-European music started after a trip to the Aka Pygmies in Central Africa in 1992 and expanded to Asia (especially India) and Africa. For 30 years, he has been the composer

and saxophonist of Aka Moon, he is the Artistic Director of Medinea at the Lyrical Festival d’Aix-En-Provence.

**George Ziadeh** is a Palestinian American vocalist/oudist/composer/educator residing in New York City. He started his career at age 12 singing and playing the oud. His expertise is on the 19th- and 20th-century maqam repertoires from Cairo, Aleppo and Baghdad. In addition to being a classical maqam performer, he collaborates with different artists in a range of genres: jazz, classical Indian traditions such as raga, flamenco and Afro Cuban music. He has performed with Amir ElSaffar, Aruan Ortiz, Hamid al Saadi and the National Arabic Orchestra among many others, and has performed widely in Europe, America and the Middle East.

**John Escreet** has a reputation as one of the most active and diverse pianist/composers working in jazz and improvised music. His prolific output includes eight diverse and critically acclaimed albums—the most recent being his 2018 release *Learn To Live*, named by *Downbeat* magazine as one of the best of 2018. Bursting on to the scene in 2008 with his debut album *Consequences*, *Downbeat* proclaimed, “John Escreet’s recent debut *Consequences* signals the jumpstart of a new voice in jazz.” Since then, John has worked with a who’s who of the New York jazz scene. He currently resides in Los Angeles, California.

**John D. Parran** plays all the saxophones as well as multiple clarinets and flutes. His virtuosity and mastery over a number of extended techniques for these instruments has made him a valued collaborator with Leroy Jenkins, Julius Hemphill, Anthony Braxton and others. Parran has appeared as a sideman on over 45 recordings with leading contemporary improvisers and composers (Douglas Ewart, Derek Bailey, James Jabbo Ware, Stevie Wonder and John Lennon). His recordings as a leader include *J.D. Parran & Spirit Stage* (2005), *Omegathorp: Living City* (2005) and *Window Spirits: Solo* (2010). Parran has taught at the Harlem School of the Arts, CUNY and the Greenwich House Music School.

**Miles Okazaki** is a New York City-based guitarist originally from Washington State. His sideman experience over the last two decades includes work with Kenny Barron, John Zorn, Stanley Turrentine, Dan Weiss, Steve Coleman, Matt Mitchell, Jonathan Finlayson, Jane Monheit, Amir ElSaffar,

Darcy James Argue and many others. As a leader, Okazaki has released eight albums of original compositions, a six-album recording of the complete compositions of Thelonious Monk, and a published book, *Fundamentals of Guitar*. He taught guitar and rhythmic theory at the University of Michigan from 2013-21, joined the faculty at Princeton University in 2021, and holds degrees from Harvard University, Manhattan School of Music and the Juilliard School.

**Mohamed Ibrahim** started his oboe studies at age 12 and won his first solo position in The Cairo Opera Orchestra at age 17. During his conservatory studies, he won first prize at The Egyptian Ministry of Culture Oboe Competition (1994) and first prize at the Satellite Musical competition for Woodwinds (1995). Throughout his career, Mo has performed with numerous professional orchestras and has appeared as soloist with internationally known ensembles, including the Cairo Opera Orchestra, Philharmonic of The Nations and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, where he was a founding member under Maestro Daniel Barenboim. Mo is currently a member of the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra and Rivers of Sound ensemble.

**Naseem Alatrash** is a Palestinian cellist and composer. His performances mix improvisation and traditional Arabic melodies, and jazz. Alatrash was awarded a first prize fellowship in composition from the Mass Cultural Council in 2021, and he has twice won the first prize from The National Music Competition of Palestine. Alatrash performs with the Turtle Island Quartet, Danilo Perez's Global Messengers, and with Amir ElSaffar's Rivers of Sound ensemble. He is an assistant professor of Cello and Ensembles at Berklee College of Music, directs the Arab Music Ensemble at Tufts University and also the Folk Traditions ensemble at Longy School of Music.

**Nasheet Waits** is a native New Yorker who grew up in the vibrant Westbeth artist's community in Manhattan. Son of legendary drummer Freddie Waits, Nasheet began playing the drums at an early age, and determined in college to pursue a career in music after majoring in psychology and history. He studied with Michael Carvin, and soon joined Max Roach's percussion ensemble M'Boom. He has performed with a stellar galaxy of musicians ranging from Fred Hersch and David Murray to Geri Allen, Antonio Hart and Jason Moran. Waits is also a professor on the faculty at New England Conservatory.

**Ole Mathisen**, saxophonist and composer, is the Director of the Louis Armstrong Jazz Performance Program at Columbia University. In 2009 he was awarded Chamber Music America's New Jazz Works Grant, which resulted in *Mirage*, a multi-movement chamber jazz piece based on illusive rhythmic layers. *Mirage* premiered at Miller Theatre in New York City.

His recordings as a leader or co-leader are: *Floating Points*, 2018; *7 Seconds to Sundown*, 2015; *Trapezoid*, 2013 (Alessa); *Mirage*, 2012 (Jazzheads); *Elastics*, 2011 (Losen); *Periodic Table*, 2010 (Jazzheads); *Chinese Horoscope*, 2007 (Jazzheads).

**Rajna Swaminathan** is an acclaimed *mrudangam* artist and composer whose creative voice blossomed through a search for resonance among various musical forms and aesthetic worlds. She leads the ensemble RAJAS, which has been described as "unlike any other on the scene" (*New York Times*). As a composer, she has been commissioned by the LA Phil, Chamber Music America, and Bang On A Can Marathon. Rajna holds a PhD in Music (Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry) from Harvard University, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Music (Integrated Composition, Improvisation, and Technology) at UC Irvine.

**Tareq Abboushi** is a Palestinian composer, multi-instrumentalist, bandleader, and educator. An honors graduate from William Paterson University, he decided to pursue the *Buzuq* as a means to delve into Arabic music. He collaborates with such notable musicians as Simon Shaheen, Omar Farouk Tekbilek, Souad Massi, Abeer Nehme and Lotfi Bouchnak. An award-winning composer, his diverse background can be heard across multiple genres ranging from classical Arab, Jazz, Electronic, film scoring, dance projects, radio, television, as well as commissioned soundscape design for art projects. Abboushi's discography includes two albums with his band SHUSMO, and five albums with Amir ElSaffar, among others.

**Tim Moore** had his first professional performance at the age of 12. In the ensuing decades, he's played thousands of shows, providing the backbeat for countless bands. In 1993, he left his computer "day job" in order to fully devote his time to music. Around this time, he began learning Middle Eastern rhythms and techniques, using these skills

## About the Artists *continued*

in Salaam, and other ensembles, such as Safaafir and Rivers of Sound. Tim is a multi-instrumentalist, recording artist and composer. He is married to Dena El Saffar, and enjoys spending his free time with their two children, Jamil and Layla.

**Yu-Han Su** is a recent nominee for the DownBeat Critics Poll category “Rising Star” on Vibraphone. Yuhan’s three records as a leader include *City Animals* (2018, Sunnyside Records), *A Room of One’s Own* (2015, Inner Circle Music) and *Flying Alone* (2012, Inner Circle Music). These recordings received numerous awards and nominations, including ‘Best Jazz Album of the Year’, ‘Best New Artist’, ‘Best Jazz Single’, ‘Best Instrumentalist Award’ (Golden Indie Music Award), ‘Best Composer Award’ (Golden Melody Award in Taiwan), and “Best Release of the Year”

(All About Jazz and Downbeat). Yu-han has performed with Big Heart Machine, Munit, Awakening Orchestra, and Jason Yeager Septet.

**Zafer Tawil** is an accomplished Palestinian musician based in New York City. Zafer is a virtuoso on oud, violin and qanoun, and is a master of Arabic percussion. He has performed and recorded with numerous musicians, ranging from the pop star Sting to avant-garde composer/performer Elliot Sharpe to masters of Arabic music and jazz such as Amir ElSaffar, Simon Shaheen, Cheb Mami and Bassam Saba among many others. Zafer has composed music for a number of film soundtracks, most recently Jonathan Demme’s *My Favorite American* (not yet released), *Rachel Getting Married* and the documentary *Until When*.

# Connecting Artists to the Community

During his time on campus, Amir ElSaffar will conduct class visits in the Music Department. He will also take part in a public conversation following the performance, moderated by Coast Director Taylor Ho Bynum.

## Hopkins Center Board of Advisors

**Jim Bildner '75**  
**Anne Fleischli Blackburn '91 P'23**  
**Daniel Bryant '91 P'23**  
**Kenneth L. Burns H'93**  
**Rebecca Byrne P'20 P'22**  
**Les Chao '78 P'20**  
**Barbara J. Couch**  
**Kim Lessow Crockett '92**  
**Rachel Dratch '88**

**Claire Foerster P'18 P'21**  
**Lizanne Fontaine '77 P'04 P'09**  
**Kelly Fowler Hunter '83 Tu'88 P'13 P'15 P'19**  
**Nini Meyer P'22**  
**Hilary Spaulding Richards '92**  
**Laurel J. Richie '81**, Chair of the Board  
**Dan Rush '92**  
**Peter S. Vossall '92**  
**Sharon Washington '81**

## Hopkins Center Directorate

**Mary Lou Aleskie**, Howard L. Gilman '44 Director  
**Michael Bodel**, Director of External Affairs  
**Joshua Price Kol '93**, Managing Director/Executive Producer  
**Jan Sillery**, Director of Financial and Administrative Operations  
**Sydney Stowe**, Director of Hopkins Center Film