

Preview**Naseer Shamma & Al-Oyoun Ensemble
to visit Cleveland Museum of Art**

by Mike Telin



There is no one path that leads a musician to choose their instrument. But for Iraqi oud virtuoso Naseer Shamma it might have been predestination. “At five years old I asked my family to send me to a teacher to learn the oud,” Naseer Shamma told us by telephone from his hotel in New York. “They told me you are a child, the oud is for old people. You can play accordion or guitar. But I said no! I want to play the oud. I don’t know why.”

On Friday, March 15 beginning at 7:30pm in the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Gartner Auditorium, Naseer Shamma & Al-Oyoun Ensemble will make their Cleveland debut as part of the museum's VIVA! & Gala series. The concert is part of Shamma and his ensemble's first US tour in over a decade which includes stops in Washington DC, New York City and Columbus.

Shamma is happy to be touring the US again. “The tour is going very well, and I’m happy to do something that touches the people in a deep way. For me and the musicians this is very important.”

Born in 1963 in al-Kut, Iraq, Shamma earned his Diploma in Musical Art in 1987 at the Baghdad Academy of Music. Also a gifted composer, Shamma has written music for films, plays and television. As a result of the Gulf War, he was inspired to write an oud method book for one hand designed for injured children.

In 1993 Shamma left Iraq to take teaching position at the Higher Institute of Music in Cairo, where in 1999 he became Director of the Arab Centre for the Oud. His compositions are culturally unique.

As an instrument maker, he has constructed an eight-string oud by following the 9th century manuscript of al-Farabi. This new design (8 instead of 6 strings) thereby expanding the instrument's range.

Shamma’s musical interests range from the golden era of Arab music played at the courts of the Abbasid kings to Andalusian music. Since 1998 he has been director of House of the Oud at the Cairo Opera House.

Nasser Shamma also plays an important role in Iraqi society, and has been chosen to participate in TEDx Baghdad on two occasions. “I was very happy to see that a lot of Iraqi people cared about TEDx, and about communication with each other.”

Shamma says he was very pleased to see that young Iraqis have a new vision for their country. “I left Iraq in 1993 and I was always hearing bad news about my country. But when I went back and saw the [young] people I feel that we are better. Especially in TEDx [they all] speak very well and have a new mentality. [This is good] because we are all on the one planet. We eat the same food and breathe the same air.”

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