



# Amir ElSaffar's Rivers of Sound Orchestra

Amir ElSaffar / *Trumpet and Santur*

Carlo De Rosa / *Acoustic Bass*

John Escreet / *Piano*

Dena ElSaffar / *Violin and Jowza*

Fabrizio Cassol / *Alto Saxophone*

George Ziadeh / *Oud and Vocals*

Jason Adasiewicz / *Vibraphone*

JD Parran / *Bass Saxophone and Clarinet*

Miles Okazaki / *Guitar*

Mohammed Saleh / *Oboe and English Horn*

Naseem AlAtrash / *Cello*

Nasheet Waits / *Drums*

Ole Mathisen / *Tenor and Soprano Saxophones*

Rajna Swaminathan / *Mridangam*

Tareq Abboushi / *Buzuq*

Tim Moore / *Percussion, Dumbek, and Frame Drum*

Zafer Tawil / *Percussion and Oud*

Wednesday Evening, October 18, 2017 at 7:30

Power Center

Ann Arbor

This evening's performance is funded in part by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Endowment Fund. In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

## **PROGRAM**

*Amir ElSaffar*

### **Rivers of Sound: Not Two**

Iftitah

Jourjina Over 3

Penny Explosion

Ya Ibni Ya Ibni

Hijaz Kar

Hijaz 21/8

B Half-Flat Fantasy

Bayat Declamation

*This evening's program is approximately 75 minutes in duration and will be performed without intermission.*

## RIVERS OF SOUND

Rivers of Sound is a large ensemble of instrumentalists from Western and Middle Eastern traditions, exploring the confluences of a musical language that transcends notions of tradition and style. In performing *Not Two*, an original composition by Amir ElSaffar, each musician interacts with the group through both improvised and composed material to create a novel composite sound.

Composer, trumpeter, santur player, and vocalist Amir ElSaffar, an expert in jazz and Iraqi maqam, has forged his novel approach to combining musical languages through his six-piece ensemble Two Rivers. Over the past eight years, the group has released three CDs on Pi Recordings. *Crisis*, the most recent, was a Newport Jazz Festival commission.

Rivers of Sound's *Not Two* is a continuation of the Two Rivers concept, but projected onto a wider canvas unprecedented in scope and imagination. Microtonal maqam melodies traverse a richly-textured bed of sound created by oud, buzuk, and santur, in combination with cello, violin, saxophones, English horn, and trumpet. Also at play are multilayered rhythmic patterns and harmonies performed by re-tuned vibraphone, piano, and guitar. The drum set, mridangam, dumbek, frame drums, and double-bass provide the rhythmic foundation and subdivisions of the multiple currents. Resonance across rhythmic, tonal, and timbral spectra, and across musical traditions, is the guiding principle.

Mr. ElSaffar's music is at once unique and engaging, and full of heart

and passion. Challenging notions of composition versus improvisation, tradition versus modernity, microtonality/modality versus harmony, his compositions bring to light the universality of music across cultures. Given the catastrophes befalling the people of the Middle Eastern and Arab lands, his music is both timely and urgent as he is preserving elements of these cultures by bringing them into context with contemporary musical forms.

Mr. ElSaffar received funding from the MAP Fund and Arab Fund for Arts and Culture to create Rivers of Sound. The 17 members came to New York City from as far away as Qatar, Palestine, and Brussels in April 2015 for three days of rehearsal, the premiere of *Not Two* at Lincoln Center, and an epic 14-hour day at Avatar Studios, where they recorded the 80-minute suite directly to tape. Mr. ElSaffar believes that the nature of this sound cannot be captured digitally and has committed to all analog, releasing a double LP in June 2017.

The highest ideal in maqam music is to reach a state of tarab, or “musical ecstasy,” which results from the melting away of borders between a notion of self and other, as performers and audience revel together in the music. As pitches and rhythms become fluid, so do cultural boundaries: elements that traditionally divide musicians and genre-specific modes are re-contextualized in a fresh transcultural soundscape.



## ARTISTS

**Amir ElSaffar** (*trumpet, santur*) has distinguished himself with a mastery of disparate musical styles and a singular approach to combining aspects of Middle Eastern music with American jazz, extending the boundaries of each tradition. A skilled jazz trumpeter with a classical background, Mr. ElSaffar has created new techniques to play microtones and ornaments that are idiomatic to Arabic music but are not typically heard on the trumpet. Additionally, he is an acknowledged performer of the classical Iraqi maqam tradition, and performs actively in the US and internationally as a vocalist and santur player. As a composer, Mr. ElSaffar has used the microtones found in maqam music to create a unique approach to harmony and melody. He currently leads four critically-acclaimed ensembles: Two Rivers, which combines the musical languages and instrumentation of Iraqi maqam and contemporary jazz; the Amir ElSaffar Quintet, performing ElSaffar's microtonal compositions with standard jazz instrumentation; Safaafir, the only ensemble in the US performing and preserving the Iraqi maqam in its traditional format; and The Alwan Ensemble. In addition, he has worked with jazz legend Cecil Taylor, and prominent jazz musicians such as Mark Dresser, Gerry Hemingway, Marc Ribot, Henry Grimes, and Oliver Lake. Mr. ElSaffar has appeared on numerous recordings, and has released six under his own name: *Maqams of Baghdad* (2005), *Two Rivers* (2007), *Radif Suite* (2010), *Inana* (2011), *Alchemy* (2013), and *Crisis* (2015).

**Tareq Abboushi** (*buzuq*) is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, and bandleader. Born and raised in Ramallah, Palestine, Mr. Abboushi received his BM in jazz piano from William Paterson University in New

Jersey. He has played buzuq since 1997 and has performed with numerous bands throughout the US, Canada, and the Middle East. His past collaborations include such notable musicians as Simon Shaheen, Omar Farouk Tekbilek, and Dan Zanes. He has lectured and led workshops on Arab music at Columbia University, NYU, Juilliard, The National Conservatory of Music in Palestine, and the Music Conservatory in Norway. He has contributed to the award-winning film scores for *Encounter Point* ("Best Musical Score," Bend Film Festival, 2006) and *Chicken Heads* ("Best Short Film," Dubai Film Festival, 2010), as well as to Jonathan Demme's *Jimmy Carter: Man From Plains* and the Oscar-nominated *Rachel Getting Married*.

**Jason Adasiewicz** (*vibraphone*) is a vibraphonist, drummer, and composer. He is an integral member of Chicago's jazz and improvised music scene, bringing his aggressive yet lyrical style to over 10 working Chicago groups, including Rob Mazurek's Starlicker and Exploding Star Orchestra, Mike Reed's Loose Assembly, Peter Brotzmann, Jason Adasiewicz Duo, Josh Berman and His Gang, Ingebrigt Häker Flaten Chicago Sextet, James Falzone's Klang, and Ken Vandermark's Topology and Midwest School. Mr. Adasiewicz performs frequently in Europe and is a member of groups lead by Peter Brotzmann, Mats Gustafsson, and Stefano Bollani. He won the 2011 *Downbeat* Annual Critic's Poll in the "Rising Star Vibes" category, and for the last five years has placed in the "Vibes" category. His quintet Rolldown, with Josh Berman, Aram Shelton, Jason Roebke, and Frank Rosaly formed in 2004 and has released two records, *Rolldown* (482 Music, 2008) and *Varmint* (Cuneiform Records, 2009). Starlicker's (with Rob Mazurek and

John Herndon) *Double Demon* (Delmark 2011) was named by the *New York Times* as a “Top 10 Pop and Jazz Record of 2011” and the *Los Angeles Times* as a “Top 10 Jazz Record of 2011.”

**Naseem AlAtrash** (*cello*) is a globally acclaimed Palestinian cellist and a classically trained musician and improviser in diverse styles. Mr. AlAtrash has earned a reputation for fearlessly broadening the horizons of the cello on the world stage. Following his studies at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Ramallah, Mr. AlAtrash was awarded a full scholarship to attend the Berklee College of Music in Boston. He went on to achieve the highest honors in cello performance. He has appeared with respected Arab singers such as Tunisian singer Sonya M’barek, Lofi Bouchnaq, Lebanese singer Rima Khcheich, and Palestinian singers such as Ibrahim Azzam, Dalal Abu Amneh, and Mohammed Assaf. The twice-awarded “String Player of the Year” from The National Music Competition of Palestine, Mr. AlAtrash continues to be a voice for Palestinian culture and advocate of its music through his global string quartet The Four Corners Quartet.

Mostly known as saxophonist and band leader of Aka Moon, one of Belgium’s most prominent jazz bands, **Fabrizio Cassol** (*alto saxophone*) is also active as a composer, with collaborations and projects in the fields of contemporary music, dance, theater, hip-hop, and film music. As a performer, after specializing with François Danneels, Steve Coleman, Joe Lovano, and Evan Parker, he devoted his efforts to the groups Trio Bravo, Nasa Na, La GrandeFormation, and in 1993 started the group Aka Moon, with which he toured worldwide and has recorded 15 CDs so

far. As a composer he wrote for La Grande Formation, Musiques Nouvelles, and soloists such as Bernard Foccroulle. In his most recent works (*VSPRS, Passion*), written in close collaboration with choreographer Alain Platel, he revisited the masterpieces of Monteverdi and Bach, in a setting open to extra European and non-notated, improvised music.

Since moving to New York, **Carlo De Rosa** (*acoustic bass*) has had the opportunity to work with many great artists in the jazz and Latin world. This has led to diverse musical and cultural experiences and has allowed him to work with a wide variety of artists such as Ray Barretto, Ravi Coltrane, Dave Valentin, John Faddis, Yo-Yo Ma, Jack DeJohnette, Hilton Ruiz, Steve Turre, Bruce Barth, John Scofield, Chico O’Farrill Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra, William Cepeda, Bobby Watson, Ed Thigpen, Nick Brignola, Mickey Roker, Warren Bernhardt, Candido Camero, Miguel Zenon, Jason Moran, Bobby Sanabria, Jean Toussaint, Papo Vasquez, and New York City Ballet. He collaborates and performs with many other great artists including Vijay Iyer, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Amir ElSaffar, Arturo O’Farrill, Nasheet Waits, Mark Shim, Ingrid Jensen, Cristina Pato, Tyshawn Sorey, Sam Newsome, Donny McCaslin, Brad Shepik, Ralph Alessi, Luis Perdomo, Greg Tardy, Dave Allen, Orrin Evans, Chembo Corniel, Eric McPherson, Lucian Ban, Dan Weiss, Andrea Brachfeld, Ralph LaLama, Dave Gilmore, and Steve Slagle.

**Dena ElSaffar** (*violin, jowza*) is of Iraqi and American heritage, and was exposed to Arabic music in the suburbs of Chicago, where she grew up attending Iraqi gatherings with her family. At age 17, completely engaged in classical music, she accompanied her father to Baghdad and became enchanted by the music of

Iraq and the Middle East. In 1993, while obtaining a classical music degree from Indiana University, she founded the group Salaam, a Middle Eastern music ensemble which has performed throughout the US. She has studied with Hamid Al-Saadi, Munis Sharifov, Mohammed Gomar, and Anwar Abudragh, and has performed with the Master Musicians of Jajouka and Youssou N'Dour. Ms. ElSaffar plays the viola, violin, jowza, and kamancheh, and has also performed with Central Eurasian ensembles, salsa groups, bluegrass, blues, and rock bands.

Over the course of his career, **John Escreet** (*piano*) has earned a reputation as one of the most active and diverse pianist/composers working in jazz and improvised music. His prolific output is reflected over the course of seven diverse and critically acclaimed albums — the most recent being *The Unknown* with his working trio (with John Hébert on bass and Tyshawn Sorey on drums). Bursting on to the scene with his 2008 debut album *Consequences*, Mr. Escreet quickly earned a reputation as one of the most exciting new pianist/composers to have emerged in recent years, with *Downbeat* magazine proclaiming “John Escreet’s recent debut *Consequences* signals the jumpstart of a new voice in jazz.” As well as being a leader of prolific output, Mr. Escreet is also a much sought-after sideman. He has toured extensively with Antonio Sanchez’s Migration band. He continues to forge ahead with multiple projects and recordings, ranging from his trio, to his quintet, a recent collaboration with British free-jazz icon Evan Parker, as well as his recent forays into writing extended works for strings.

Critically acclaimed saxophonist  
**Ole Mathisen** (*tenor, soprano saxophones*)

is an active performer on the New York and the international jazz scene, and also works as a studio musician, composer, arranger, and producer. Over the years he has been involved with classical, jazz, electronic, ethnic, and experimental music, and he draws heavily on his wealth of musical experience when composing. He is currently a member of the jazz studies faculty at Columbia University. Mr. Mathisen has worked on more than 80 albums, composed several film and TV scores, and has performed and/or recorded with Paula Cole, Louie Vega, Omar Hakim, Darryl Jones, Hiram Bullock, William Kennedy, Tom Coster, Mark Egan, Steve Smith, Mino Cinelu, Peter Erskine, Eddie Gomez, Badal Roy, Rufus Reid, Ron Carter, Grady Tate, Claudio Roditi, Will Lee, LaVerne Baker, and Abraham Laboriel. He is the leader of CHINESE HOROSCOPE, and a member of NYNDK, SYOTOS, Afromantra, and Mamak Khadem Ensemble.

**Tim Moore** (*percussion, dumbek, frame drum*) grew up in the Midwest, and began playing drums at the age of 11. A natural percussionist, he began performing with different groups early on, gaining experience in a variety of genres including jazz, blues, salsa, and rock. After earning a computer science degree from Indiana University in 1989, he worked on the east and west coasts as a computer programmer, but in 1993 he left that world in order to devote himself to music. In his quest to become a better, more diverse musician, he began learning rhythms and instruments from around the world, eventually bringing his focus to Middle Eastern percussion. He has studied Arabic percussion with Wessam Ayoub, Sattar Al Saadi, Lateef Al 'Abeedi, N. Scott Robinson, and Mohammed Khalil Salih. Mr. Moore plays the dumbek, riqq, naqqarat, bendir, tabl, and zanbur, as well as drum set, bass, and guitar.





**Miles Okazaki** (*guitar*) is known for his technical command of the guitar, his rhythmic approach to improvisation and composition, and his work in contemporary music theory. His teacher on guitar was Rodney Jones, who recommended him for his first gig with Stanley Turrentine. Mr. Okazaki spent four years on the road with vocalist Jane Monheit, while also writing and rehearsing the music for his first album, *Mirror*, which was released independently. The album received a “Critics Pick” in the *New York Times*, calling it “a work of sustained collectivity as well as deep intricacy.” This idea was taken to a higher level on his second album, *Generations*, described by pianist Vijay Iyer as “the sonic equivalent of Escher or Borges, but with real emotional heft,” and his third album, *Figurations*, was selected as one of the *New York Times*’ top 10 albums of 2012, described by Ben Ratliff as “slowly evolving puzzles of brilliant jazz logic.” As a sideman, Mr. Okazaki works in many areas, ranging from standard repertoire to experimental music. His most recent recordings and tours include Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Kenny Barron, Jonathan Finlayson, and Dan Weiss.

**JD Parran** (*bass saxophone and clarinet*) plays a wide range of clarinets from soprano to contralto, as well as soprano, bass, and tenor saxophone; flute; and other instruments. He has recorded with Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins, Hamiett Bluiett, John Lindberg, Peter Brötzmann, and the group Company (which included Derek Bailey, Jon Corbett, Hugh Davies, Jamie Muir, Evan Parker, Vinko Globokar, and Joelle Leandre). He can also be heard on three recordings: *Cliff*, *Traction*, and *Digging It Harder from Afar*, made during the late 1980s and 1990s

by the New Winds trio, also featuring Ned Rothenberg and Robert Dick. His own releases during the 2000s have included *JD Parran & Spirit Stage*, *Omegathorp: Living City* (co-led by banzatar and sitar player Mark Deutsch), and *Window Spirits*, a solo performance recorded live in 2009. He can also be heard on reissued discs by Jenkins, Bluiett, Hemphill, and others.

**Mohamed Ibrahim Saleh** (*oboe, English horn*) received his BM from the Cairo Conservatory and continued his studies at Roosevelt University of Chicago in the US, where he studied under Alex Klein and received his master’s in oboe performance and orchestral studies in 2004. Other studies followed in Rostock College of Music and Theatre in Rostock, Germany, where he received his Artist Diploma (Konzert Examen) in oboe performance, orchestral, and chamber music studies in 2006. While in Germany, Mr. Saleh performed with numerous professional German orchestras including the Heidelberg Sinfoniker and Philharmonic of The Nations, and he appeared as soloist with the Rostock Philharmonic Orchestra and Bayerischer Rundfunk (Radio Orchestra of Munich). Since 1999, he has maintained his position as principal oboist with the West-Eastern Divan Symphony Orchestra under Maestro Daniel Barenboim, and he has appeared as a soloist with the orchestra.

**Rajna Swaminathan** (*mridangam*) is an accomplished artist in the field of South Indian classical percussion called mridangam. She is a disciple and protégé of mridangam maestro Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman, and she is one of only a handful of female mridangam artists in the world. She has performed with several

Photo (previous spread): Amir ElSaffar’s Rivers of Sound Orchestra; photographer: White Cube.

renowned Indian classical musicians and dancers, touring widely in North America and India. She has performed in several prestigious venues and festivals including the Smithsonian (DC), Kennedy Center (DC), Asia Society (New York), Walker Art Center (MN), American Dance Festival (NC), Krannert Center (IL), Lied Center (KS), Music Academy (Chennai), Shanmukhananda Hall (Mumbai), Edinburgh Fringe Festival (UK), and The Esplanade (Singapore). She also regularly gives workshops on the South Indian rhythmic perspective, most notably at the Banff International Jazz and Creative Music Workshop, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, and the KOSA International Percussion Camp. She holds degrees in anthropology and French from the University of Maryland, College Park, and is currently pursuing a PhD in music at Harvard University.

**Zafer Tawil** (*percussion, oud*) is New York-based, Palestinian-American, and a virtuosic performer on the oud, violin, qanun, and a full range of Arab percussion instruments. Mr. Tawil performs across the US and in the Middle East and holds workshops in oud technique and Arabic music theory. He was part of the Spirit of Fez US Tour 2006 and has performed with numerous musicians ranging from Sting to Arab music greats such as Simon Shaheen, Chab Mami, and Bassam Saba, to avant-garde composer and performer Elliot Sharpe. He has composed music for a number of films including two Jonathan Demme's films, Oscar-nominated *Rachel Getting Married*, and *Zeitoun*, based on Dave Eggers' book about Abdulrahman Zeitoun's post-Hurricane Katrina odyssey.

**Nasheet Waits** (*drums*) is a drummer and music educator whose interest in playing the drums was encouraged by his father, legendary percussionist Frederick Waits.

Mr. Waits has been a member of Andrew Hill's various bands, Jason Moran's Bandwagon, and Fred Hersch's trio. As an originating member of pianist Jason Moran's Bandwagon, Jason, bassist Tarus Mateen, and Nasheet have been deemed "the most exciting rhythm section in jazz" by *JazzTimes*. The 2001 recording *Black Stars* with the Bandwagon featuring Sam Rivers was named the "Best CD of 2001" in *Jazz Times*. His recording and performing discography is a veritable "who's who" in jazz, boasting stints with jazz notables such as Geri Allen, Mario Bauza, Hamiett Bluiett, Abraham Burton, Ron Carter, Marc Cary, Steve Coleman, Stanley Cowell, Orrin Evans, Stefon Harris, Andrew Hill, Bill Lee, Jackie McLean, The Mingus Big Band, The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Greg Osby, Joshua Redman, Vanessa Rubin, Antoine Roney, Wallace Roney, Jacky Terrason, Bunky Green, and Mark Turner.

**George Ziadeh** (*oud, vocals*) was born in Palestine, and pursued music from a young age. In 1986 he moved to the US, where he has studied oud with Simon Shaheen and classical singing and voice with Youssef Kassab. From 1995–97 he taught at the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music in Ramallah and at Birzeit University. Upon his return to the US he has performed and lectured with such ensembles and institutions as the University of Chicago's Middle East Music Ensemble with Issa Boulos, the University of Colorado, at the United Nations by invitation of Kofi Annan, and annually at the Columbia University department of ethnomusicology. In 2008, Mr. Ziadeh was a featured solo and ensemble performer in the Brooklyn Maqam Festival of Arab Music. He is considered an authority in maqam theory and Arab classical repertoire.

## UMS ARCHIVES

This evening's performance marks **Amir ElSaffar's** third performance under UMS auspices following his UMS debut in April 2010 as part of Danilo Perez's "21st-Century Dizzy" concert at Hill Auditorium. Tonight marks the second UMS performances by **Carlo De Rosa, Ole Mathisen, and Zafer Tawil**, following their UMS debuts in March 2013 at Hill Auditorium with Amir ElSaffar's *Two Rivers*. UMS welcomes the remaining members of the Rivers of Sound Orchestra as they make their UMS debuts this evening. Amir ElSaffar will perform his score for *Written in Water* live with Ragamala Dance Company this week on Friday, October 20 at the Power Center.

## LOBBY INSTALLATION

*Six Yards of Memory: A Photographic Retrospective*

Printed on and named after the length of a sari, this installation depicts the history and repertoire of Ragamala Dance Company. The piece was created to commemorate the company's 25th anniversary season.

## **ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...**

- 10/20 UMS 101: Ragamala Dance Company  
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 6:00 pm)  
*Paid registration required; please visit [bit.ly/UMSClasses](http://bit.ly/UMSClasses) to register.*
- 10/20 Post-Performance Q&A: Ragamala Dance Company  
(Power Center, 121 Fletcher Street)  
*Must have a ticket to that evening's performance to attend.*
- 10/21 You Can Dance: Ragamala Dance Company  
(Ann Arbor Y, 400 W. Washington Street, 2–3:30 pm)
- 11/1 UMS 101: Zakir Hussain and Dave Holland  
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 5:30 pm)  
*Paid registration required; please visit [bit.ly/UMSClasses](http://bit.ly/UMSClasses) to register.*
- 11/18 UMS 101: New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert  
(Pioneer High School, 601 W. Stadium Boulevard, 12 noon)  
*Paid registration required; please visit [bit.ly/UMSClasses](http://bit.ly/UMSClasses) to register.*

*Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.*

TONIGHT'S VICTOR FOR UMS:



# Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Endowment Fund

*Supporter of this evening's performance by Amir ElSaffar's Rivers  
of Sound Orchestra.*

## MAY WE ALSO RECOMMEND...

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 10/20 | Ragamala Dance Company: <i>Written in Water</i> |
| 11/1  | Zakir Hussain and Dave Holland                  |
| 11/7  | China NCPA Orchestra                            |

*Tickets available at [www.ums.org](http://www.ums.org).*