

THE ST. OLAF COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

presents in

GUEST ARTIST RECITAL

The Issam Rafea and Gao Hong Duo

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2019 • URNESS RECITAL HALL • 7 P.M.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

“The Blending of Ancient Souls from Syria and China”

Pipa master Gao Hong and oud master Issam Rafea met in 2017 at Carleton College while Gao Hong was teaching there and Issam Rafea was a residency artist. They bonded when first met and immediately committed to recording and performing together. Once in the recording studio, they began improvising music that was so cohesive it seemed as if they had worked together for years. Both Issam and Gao Hong are wonderful composers, and this helps each anticipate what the other will do in their improvisations. Since they only play improvisations, no two performances are ever exactly the same, and the duo often creates instantaneous site- and audience-specific pieces to describe their immediate feelings and honor their audiences. Their music sounds both ancient and strikingly modern at the same time. They bring the instruments together for the kind of compelling duets that earned them two nominations for the 2019 Independent Music Awards. Songlines called their collaboration “consistently engaging, deeply contemplative, and culturally resonant.”

Issam Rafea is one of Syria’s elite musicians, and winner of the 2010 “Best Composer Award” in the Dubai International Film Festival (Muhr Arab). Rafea was the Chair of the Arabic Music Department at High Institute of Music in Damascus and the principal conductor of Syrian National Orchestra for Arabic Music from 2003–2013. In Syria, Rafea has been an active composer and arranger for TV and Theater since the 90s. In addition to several solo appearances with the Syrian National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Solhi Al Wadi, Rafea has performed internationally in France, Spain, Germany, Holland, Italy, Morocco, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Kuwait, and the United States. He has participated in numerous festivals including the Mediterranean Festival in Algeria; the World Universal Expo in Seville, Spain; the Spiritual Music Festival in Marseille, France; the Arabic Music Conferences in Cairo; and Babel Festival in Iraq. He has performed with guitar virtuoso Fareed Haque in cross-cultural collaborations and, with his Syrian orchestra, led a groundbreaking collaboration with Damien Albarn of the British rock bands Blur and Gorillaz. In March of 2013 Rafea was invited to the United States to direct the Middle Eastern Music Ensemble at Northern Illinois University School of Music.

Gao Hong graduated from Beijing’s elite Central Conservatory of Music. Since coming to the United States, she has performed at the Lincoln Center Festival, Carnegie Hall, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, and at international festivals in Paris, Caen, Milan, and Perth. She has presented concerti for pipa with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Heidelberg Philharmonic, the Buenos Aires Philharmonic, the China National Traditional Orchestra, Louisville Orchestra, Hawaii Symphony, and the Women’s Philharmonic (San Francisco), among others. Her many awards include a 2018 Sally Award from the Ordway, fellowships from the McKnight and Bush Foundations, numerous grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, a Sorel Organization Medallion (NYC), First Prize in the Hebei Professional Young Music Performers Competition, an International Art Cup (Beijing), and many others. In 2017, she became the first Chinese musician to play our national anthem at a Minnesota Timberwolves basketball game in Minneapolis.

As a composer, Gao has received commissions from the American Composers Forum, Walker Art Center, the Jerome Foundation, Zeitgeist, Ragamala Dance Theater, Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, Theater Mu, IFTPA, and Twin Cities Public Television. Her composition for solo pipa, “Flying Dragon”, won the 2012 Global Music Award - Award of Excellence Solo Instrumental (Gold Medal). She is also a member of the American Composers Forum Board of Directors. She teaches Chinese musical instruments and directs the Carleton Chinese Music Ensemble and the Global Music Ensemble at Carleton College in Minnesota. She is also Guest Professor at the Central Conservatory of Music, China Conservatory of Music, Tianjin Conservatory of Music, and Hebei Provincial School for the Arts in China.

http://www.chinesepipa.com/Issam_Gao.html
www.facebook.com/IssamandGao

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