

Mohammed Fairouz

Composer

Mohammed Fairouz, born in 1985, is one of the most frequently performed, commissioned, and recorded composers working today. Hailed by The New York Times as “an important new artistic voice” and by BBC World News as “one of the most talented composers of his generation,” his large-scale works engage major geopolitical and philosophical themes with persuasive craft and a marked seriousness of purpose. Fairouz’s cosmopolitan outlook reflects his transatlantic upbringing and extensive travels. By his early teens, the Arab-American composer had journeyed across five continents, immersing himself in the musical life of his surroundings. His catalog encompasses virtually every genre, including opera, symphonies, vocal and choral settings, chamber and solo works.

As an artist involved with major social issues, Fairouz seeks to promote cultural communication and understanding. His “grandly ambitious” (Opera News) third symphony, *Poems and Prayers for mezzo-soprano, baritone, chorus, and orchestra*, interweaves texts of Arab poets Fadwa Tuqan and Mahmoud Darwish, the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, and prayers such as the Aramaic Kaddish. “Fairouz’s quest is clearly for something universal,” Opera News continues, “and he achieves exactly that by showing that these diverse strands can be woven into a coherent, original, and quite moving musical tapestry.”

His fourth symphony, *In the Shadow of No Towers* for wind ensemble is inspired by Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novelist Art Spiegelman’s book of the same title about American life in the aftermath of 9/11. The work, which premiered in March 2013 in Carnegie Hall’s Stern Auditorium and is now available on a Naxos recording, was described by Steve Smith of The New York Times as “technically impressive, consistently imaginative and in its finest stretches deeply moving.”

Fairouz recently became the youngest composer in the 115-year history of the Deutsche Grammophon label to have an album dedicated to his works with the spring 2015 release of *Follow, Poet*. The album, which launched the label’s Return to Language series, includes two works that exalt the transformative power of language: his elegiac song cycle *Audenesque* and the ballet *Sadat*. The album has met with broad critical acclaim – praised as “captivating” by the New York Times and receiving “highbrow and brilliant” distinctions in New York magazine’s taste-making Approval Matrix.

Since childhood, Fairouz has found musical inspiration in literary and philosophical sources. His first attempt at composition, at age seven, was an Oscar Wilde setting; since then, he has composed an opera, an oratorio, fifteen song cycles, and hundreds of art songs. A composer who describes himself “obsessed with text,” with a deep respect for the power of the human voice, he has been recognized by New Yorker magazine as an “expert in vocal writing” and described by Gramophone as “a post-millennial Schubert.” He has collaborated directly with distinguished poets such as

Mahmoud Darwish, Wayne Koestenbaum, Paul Muldoon and Nobel Prize-winner Seamus Heaney, and with writers Mohammed Hanif, David Ignatius and Najla Saïd. Among the eminent singers that have performed his vocal music are Kate Lindsey, Sasha Cooke, Isabel Leonard, Nathan Gunn, Anthony Roth Costanzo, D'Anna Fortunato, and Mellissa Hughes.

Prominent advocates of his instrumental music include the cellist Maya Beiser, the Borromeo, Del Sol and Lydian String Quartets, The Imani Winds, violinists Rachel Barton Pine and Chloë Hanslip, flutist Claire Chase and clarinetist David Krakauer, The Knights Chamber Orchestra, International Contemporary Ensemble, Ensemble LPR, Metropolis Ensemble, and conductors Leonard Slatkin, Gunther Schuller, Evan Rogister, Mark Shapiro, Fawzi Haimor, and Yoon Jae Lee.

Commissions have come from the Detroit and Alabama Symphony Orchestras, the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir and Indianapolis Symphony, Beth Morrison Projects, Dutch National Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Aspen Festival, New York Festival of Song, Da Capo Chamber Players, New Juilliard Ensemble, Cantus, Cygnus Ensemble, Counter)induction, Musicians for Harmony, Seattle Chamber Players, Cantori New York, Back Bay Chorale, and many others.

His music has been performed at major venues around the country including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Boston's Symphony Hall and The Kennedy Center, and throughout the United States, the Middle East, Europe, and Australia. Recordings are available on the Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, Bridge, Dorian Sono Luminus, Albany, GM/Living Archive, and GPR labels.

Fairouz's first opera, Sumeida's Song, is based on the play Song of Death by the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim. The opera follows the protagonist Alwan's attempts to bring modernity to darkness and break a never-ending cycle of violence, with grave consequences for Alwan. Sumeida's Song – available on Bridge Records – has been performed at the Prototype Festival, the Pittsburgh Opera and the Boston Opera Collaborative. Anthony Tommasini of The New York Times called Sumeida's Song “an intensely dramatic 60-minute four-character opera with a searing score...The Arabic elements of his style – microtonal modes, spiraling dance rhythms, plaintive melodic writing – give fresh, distinctive jolts to the Western elements.”

Mohammed Fairouz was chosen by the BBC to be a featured artist for the television series Collaboration Culture, which aired globally on BBC World Service TV (viewership approximately 70 million). As part of the program, which includes an in-depth profile of the composer, Fairouz developed and unveiled an entirely new dance work, Hindustani Dabkeh, featuring David Krakauer, the American String Quartet and Bollywood star Shakti Mohan.

Fairouz has been seen and heard on the BBC World Service, NPR's All Things Considered, BBC/PRI's The World, and The Bob Edwards Show. He has been profiled by the Wall Street Journal, Agence France Presse, Los Angeles Times, Symphony Magazine, Strings Magazine, New Music Box, and the Houston Chronicle, and been regularly featured on New York's WQXR and

Sirius-XM's Symphony Hall channel. Fairouz regularly blogs about the intersection of arts and international affairs for the Huffington Post.

His principal teachers in composition have included György Ligeti, Gunther Schuller, and Richard Danielpour, with studies at the Curtis Institute and New England Conservatory. Fairouz has been invited to lecture and lead residencies across the country at the Festival of New American Music and at institutions such as Columbia University, Brown University, New York University, University of California at Los Angeles, Chestnut Hill College, and Grinnell College. He has served on the faculty at Northeastern University in Boston and several summer festivals, including SongFest and the Imani Winds Chamber Music Festival.

Fairouz's works are published by Peermusic Classical. He lives in New York City.