

GREETINGS from SIMON FRYER



We close our 126th season of *MitA* concerts with the rebirth of a program originally planned for 2021 but derailed by the pandemic. It is a particular joy therefore to present soprano Joyce El-Khoury with pianist Serouj Kradjian. Joyce and Serouj have originated a program inspired by the journey Joyce has taken from her birthplace of Lebanon to her adopted homeland, Canada. Music from the Western canon represented by Liszt, Bizet, Fauré, and others, is interspersed with *Mélodies Libanaises*

to describe this dramatic cultural voyage. A programmatic tour de force for these performers to involve us in their background as well as exhibit their current superb artistry and a fabulous conclusion to another magical season.

-Simon Fryer, WMCT Artistic Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping loop on the left side.

WMCT

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May 2nd, 2024, concert

Joyce El-Khoury and Serouj Kradjian

Concert Sponsor
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The WMCT also gratefully acknowledges
Dianne Henderson
for her support of the Student Outreach Program

*Tuning Your Mind Lecture:
2024-25 Music in the Afternoon Season Presentation
Simon Fryer, WMCT Artistic Director*

Please join us in the Boyd Neel room for a post-concert reception to
celebrate the finale of our 2023-24 season.

As a courtesy to others, please refrain from wearing perfume or other scents.
Please turn off cell phones and other noise-making devices.
No photography or recordings of any type during the performance.

Visit the artists' websites:

<https://joyceelkhoury.com/>
<https://www.serouj.com/>

PROGRAM for MAY 2, 2024

<i>La ricordanza</i>	Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835)
<i>Per pietà, bell'idol mio</i>	Vincenzo Bellini
<i>Pace non trovo</i>	Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
<i>Les roses d'Ispahan</i>	Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)
<i>Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe</i>	Georges Bizet (1838-1875)
<i>Les filles de Cadix</i>	Léo Delibes (1836-1891)

INTERMISSION

LEBANESE SONG COLLECTION

<i>Tre vocalizzi</i>	Boghos Gelalian (1927-2011)
<i>Aatini al naya wa ghanni</i>	Najib Hankash (1899-1977)
<i>Ya aashikata al wardi</i>	Zaki Nassif (1918-2004)
<i>Wa Habibi</i> (adapted)	Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736)
<i>Oushoudat al Salam</i>	Zaki Nassif

TANGO

<i>Ya zahratan fi khayali</i>	Farid El Atrache (1910-1974)
<i>Youkali</i>	Kurt Weill (1900-1950)
<i>Tcheknagh Yeraz</i>	Arno Babadjanian (1921-1983)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JOYCE EL-KHOURY, soprano SEROUJ KRADJIAN, piano

Born in Lebanon and raised in Canada, soprano Joyce El-Khoury has performed over 30 leading roles in major opera houses around the world.

Ms. El-Khoury's 2023/2024 season begins with Liszt's *Sardanapalo* at LisztFest in Budapest. Joyce makes two Verdian role debuts this season, including Elisabetta in *Don Carlo* in a new production at Opéra de Monte-Carlo followed by Amelia in *Simon Boccanegra* at The Finnish National Opera. Further on the opera stage this season, Joyce returns to Canada for performances of *La Reine Garçon* at Opéra de Montréal, returns to the Birgit Nilsson Days Festival for Amelia in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, and debuts with the New National Theatre Tokyo for performances of Puccini's *Tosca*. On the concert stage, she joins the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester in Berlin for their *Italian Opera Gala*, will be the soprano soloist in Verdi's Requiem with both the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and will reunite with Serouj Kradjian for a *Music in the Afternoon* recital in Toronto, inspired by Joyce's Lebanese heritage. Future seasons include international operatic & concert engagements in Paris, Vienna, Dallas, Rouen, and Montpellier, among others.

Canadian pianist and composer Serouj Kradjian has established himself as a versatile artist whose readiness to break new boundaries and explore different styles has made him an exciting voice on the international music scene.

The New York Times has described Juno-award-winning and Grammy-nominated Kradjian's playing as a "persuasive balance between elegance and spirit," while the *Frankfurter Allegemeine* noted that he has "a fiery temperament and elegant sound" with "technique to burn." Mr. Kradjian has appeared with the Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Madrid and Göttingen Symphonies, the Russian National Orchestra, the Armenian Philharmonic and the Thailand Philharmonic.

Solo, chamber music recitals and premieres of his compositions have taken Mr. Kradjian from all major Canadian cities, via the U.S – New York (Carnegie Hall), Boston (Jordan Hall), San Francisco, Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles – to European concert halls in Paris, Munich, Salzburg, Trondheim, Lausanne, Geneva, Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao and to the Far East in China and Japan. He is regularly invited to the Ottawa, Bergen, Savannah, Colmar and Cortona music festivals.

As a collaborative artist, Kradjian has appeared in concert with sopranos Dawn Upshaw, Isabel Bayrakdarian, baritone Russell Braun, tenor Michael Schade, violinists Lara St. John, Jonathan Crow and Ara Malikian, violist Kim Kashkashian and the Pacifica, Cecilia and Arthur LeBlanc String Quartets.

Serouj is the co-artistic director and pianist of Canada's acclaimed Juno winning Amici Chamber Ensemble, responsible for innovative programming, promotion, and performance of over fifty concerts, including an annual educational outreach program with the students of Claude Watson School for the Performing Arts at Earl Haig Secondary School in Toronto, Canada.

NOTES for MAY 2, 2024

Lebanese-Canadian soprano Joyce El-Khoury is coming back to Toronto—and this time, it's personal. Fresh off of a run as Maria/Amelia in Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra* at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, she will take to the concert stage for a recital with longtime collaborator and friend, pianist Serouj Kradjian.

There's something special about programming and performing recitals, says El-Khoury. "Recitals, in my mind, are an opportunity for artists to express themselves outside the confines of an opera. They are a great creative outlet—an opportunity for human expression." Her May 2 performance at the Women's Musical Club of Toronto (WMCT) will be no exception.

El-Khoury and Kradjian have created a program that combines bel canto favourites with a collection of the Lebanese songs she grew up listening to. These are pieces that "grandfather sang—songs from my village," she says, which have been reimagined

by Kradjian. This repertoire will be completely new to Toronto audiences.

“Promoting the culture of Lebanon” is one of El-Khoury’s artistic missions. “Because of recent and historic events, when people think of Lebanon they think of war, of destruction and bombs.” She wants to show the concert-going public another side of her beautiful country. “It’s so culturally rich—the food, the music, the hospitality—you can’t go to Lebanon and not have a good time. You don’t see that in the news.” She hopes to highlight this rich culture in her recital, giving voice to a wealth of music that has not been presented in the West.

The resulting program is what El-Khoury describes as a “collection of remembrance items,” belonging to both her and Kradjian, who left Lebanon when he was 12. Together with a series of Armenian tango pieces, and the starting lineup of works by Bellini, Liszt, Fauré, Bizet and Delibes, it offers a blend of the “things that I am known for,” as she puts it, “and the things that I am made of.”

“Putting together a recital is like a game of Tetris, but the best part is singing it.” In each piece, El-Khoury aims to communicate something unique, intimate, and relevant to her audience. “Every song has a life, a story. It’s an adventure,” she says with a smile. She delights in colouring “every piece with personal experiences, and connecting each song to an image.”

As her operatic career takes her all over the world, El-Khoury looks forward to sharing this musical afternoon with the WMCT audience. “It is such a blessing to sing at home, performing for faces you recognize,” says the soprano. “It does a lot of good for my soul, to be in Canada.”

- Eva Stone-Barney

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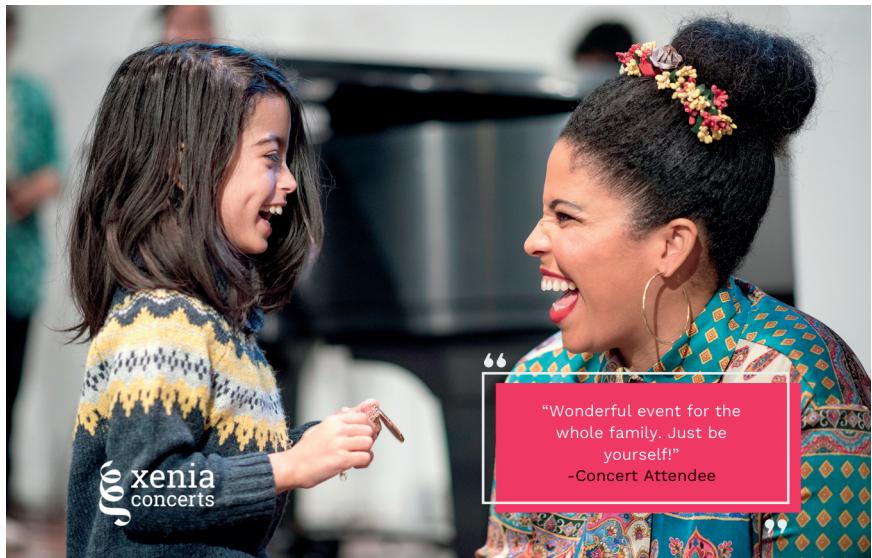
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