

Artist Biographies & Liner Notes
"Zabur"
Indianapolis Symphonic Choir

Mohammed Fairouz: An Appreciation
by Rick Schultz

Zabur is Mohammed Fairouz's first oratorio, a genre for large orchestra, choir and soloists going back centuries. Such rich musical soil allows Fairouz to create a sacred dialogue -- a dialogue not just between characters, but also between the artist and his listeners.

From its powerful choral opening, *Zabur* doesn't let up, placing us directly into a theater of war where a city is under siege. Like one of his literary predecessors, English poet William Blake, Fairouz rages against those "who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War."

Fairouz, an Emirati-American composer, once characterized himself as a "creature of the desert," referring to his deep Middle Eastern roots. Dry desert winds often drift across his emotionally resonant musical landscapes. But Fairouz, one of our country's most essential storytellers, isn't out to lecture anyone. His mission, if he has one, is to beautify the world -- to create art as a counterforce to dehumanization, as a bridge to our universal past.

One of Fairouz's most aching and ravishing scores, *Zabur* conjures a timeless world in song settings of epic grandeur and shattering intimacy. Like his Symphony No. 3 ("Poems and Prayers"), *Zabur* becomes an enticement to feel. By revealing our shared emotions and experiences, Fairouz allows us to recharge our humanity amid a surfeit of numbing images of disaster and atrocity.

At the conclusion of "Poems and Prayers," Fairouz sets Yehuda Amichai's poem "Memorial Day for the War Dead," in which the poet hopes that behind so much sorrow, "some great happiness is hiding." Paradoxically, what makes *Zabur* such a compelling war requiem is its optimism. Happiness can be found, Fairouz seems to be saying, if only we would stop, look and listen.

(Schultz writes about music for the Los Angeles Times, Jewish Journal and Musical America.)

From the Composer:

The premise for my latest oratorio, *Zabur*, is really very simple. A young poet, blogger and writer named Dawoūd (David) is stuck in a shelter with a group of men, women and children and also with his companion Jibreel (Gabriel) while the din of artillery surrounds them and their city. As a way of focusing his mind away from the unbearable sounds and endless grief Dawoūd takes to his writing. With parts of the city on generator power Dawoūd writes by candlelight but also has no way of sharing his writing with the world. The usual avenue of just publishing his words online is not available. The terror of daily life has become mundane. Dawoūd can only write music and poetry now: “songs of sorrow and sadness but also of praise and wonder”. The music and poetry cut to the core. They capture so immediately and acutely what the journalistic need to chronicle every last detail cannot seem to capture.

Not able to publish his creations online, Dawoūd is inspired to share them with the men, women and children of the shelter by his companion and muse Jibreel. Their voices rise in song.

Starting with this premise, Najla Saïd was able to construct a moving libretto that resurrects the legendary Middle Eastern figures of David and Gabriel into the contemporary Middle East. She humanizes Dawoūd and his psalms of sorrow, praise and wonder. The psalms are no longer relics but living human documents.

Zabur is the Arabic word for the Psalms and by setting the texts in Arabic we chose to return the Psalms to one of the original ancient languages of the Middle East.

Zabur is also a sort of war requiem, and documents the tragedy of war and how war touches all human beings and, most notably, the children. The oratorio begins with a flash forward of the terrible outcry in the last moments of the people in the shelter as they meet a violent fate. But by the time that this premonition returns as the actual moment of destruction in Part II, they’ve been working and creating for some time so that when the bombs finally come and destroy the shelter, all the pages of their collective labor are left and a full final hymn has been created. *Zabur* ends with them all “rising up” to sing their last song together and Dawoūd’s eternal, resonating final lines. These lines allow the people to move beyond their confused, disastrous present and touch something timeless and eternal:

“Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days;
your years go on through all generations.
In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.
But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.

The children of your servants will live in your presence;
their descendants will be established before you.”

About the Commission:

The Indianapolis Symphonic Choir commissioned this new musical work through a city-wide project that brought together leaders from the arts, education, faith and philanthropic communities of Indianapolis, Indiana. It was the vision of this body to realize a work for chorus and orchestra that speaks not to our differences and what tears us apart, but of our shared values that unite us as humankind.

Text and translation

Chorus and Children's Chorus: Ah!

Ps. 2

لِمَاذَا اَزْجَحَّتْ اَلْاُمَمُ، وَتَفَكَّرَ الشُّعُوبُ فِي الْبَاطِلِ؟¹

1 Why do the nations conspire

and the peoples plot in vain?

Daoud:

There is no power here.
The electricity has departed
the light has turned black
Even the silence is muted,
And those who sleep
are still awake.

There is still the hum
of a something-
I don't know what it is.

Is it
the song of a city
ancient and regal
modern and plain?

There is an occasional crackle
far, far away
There is an infant's cry
every so often
and a whiff of jasmine and magnolia
peppered with gas.

and still the hum of that something
murmurs to me
telling me something
something
has passed.

I came here with songs
but found I could only write
the truth of what I was seeing
the horror, the unspeakable pain
the nightmares that have become the mundane
the hunger and fear
the anguish,
the cold fear and longing,
the darkness that gives way
only
to more darkness
and the lone crackle of the something
that blends with the hum.

But now I find words have escaped me
The horrors are too real,
the descriptives are useless
because they paint a picture so vivid and clear
that it is horror to even imagine hurting
those on the outside
who will have to suffer along
silently
and also without power.

Perhaps they shouldn't know.

And so now what seemed so urgent before-
the need to chronicle every last detail
has left me completely
and I'm left with the music
again

in my ears

Because only a melody
can render
such fears.

Psalm 2

(sung by David and Chorus in Arabic)

1 Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?

1
لِمَاذَا اِرْتَجَّتِ الْأُمَمُ، وَتَفَكَّرَ الشُّعُوبُ فِي الْبَاطِلِ؟

2
قَامَ مُلُوكُ الْأَرْضِ، وَتَأَمَّرَ الرُّؤَسَاءُ مَعًا عَلَى الرَّبِّ وَعَلَى مَسِيحِهِ، قَائِلِينَ:

2 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed,
saying,

3
«لِنَقْطَعَ قُبُودَهُمَا، وَلِنَطْرُخَ عَنَّا زُبُطَهُمَا».

4
السَّاكِنِينَ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ يَضْحَكُونَ. الرَّبُّ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ.

3 “Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”

5
حِينَئِذٍ يَتَكَلَّمُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِغَضَبِهِ، وَيَرْجِفُهُمْ بِعِظِهِ.

6
«أَمَّا أَنَا فَقَدْ مَسَحْتُ مَلِكِي عَلَى صِهْيُونَ جَبَلِ قُدْسِي».

4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.

7
إِلَيَّ أُخْبِرُ مِنْ جِهَةِ قَضَاءِ الرَّبِّ: قَالَ لِي: «أَنْتَ ابْنِي، أَنَا الْيَوْمَ وَلَدْتُكَ».

8
اسْأَلْنِي فَأَعْطِيكَ الْأُمَّمَ مِيرَاثًا لَكَ، وَأَقَاصِي الْأَرْضِ مُلْكًا لَكَ.

5 He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,

9
«حُطِّمْتُهُمْ بِغَضَبِي مِنْ حَدِيدٍ. مِثْلَ إِنَاءٍ خَرَّافٍ تُكْسِرُهُمْ».

6 “I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”

10
فَالآنَ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُلُوكُ تَعَمَّلُوا.
تَأَذَّبُوا يَا قُضَاةَ الْأَرْضِ.

7 I will proclaim the Lord’s decree:
He said to me, “You are my son;
today I have become your father.

11
اعْبُدُوا الرَّبَّ بِخَوْفٍ، وَاهْتَفُوا بِرِعْدَةٍ.

12
قَبَلُوا الْإِبْنَ لِنَالٍ يَغْضَبُ فَتَسِيدُوا مِنَ الطَّرِيقِ. لِأَنَّهُ عَنِ قَلِيلٍ يَتَّقِدُ
عَظْبُهُ. طُورَى بِجَمِيعِ الْمُتَكَلِّينَ عَلَيْهِ.

8 Ask me, and I will make the nations your
inheritance, the ends of the earth your
possession.

9 You will break them with a rod of iron;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

10 Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.

11 Serve the Lord with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.

12 Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

II.

Jibreel enters, addresses Daoud

Jibreel: Your candle is almost out. You should rest, habibi. Your eyes should, too.

Daoud: I have lived without water and food, I will be ok without my eyes. As long as I have my voice, I'm still here.

J: What are you writing?

D: I don't know. I wanted to tell the world... in an article, I thought. Or a book. But I can only write music now, songs of sorrow and sadness, but also of praise and wonder. It is hard for me to explain...

J: I understand. When an experience affects your entire being in such a way, you need more than words to express... but right now we are here, in this shelter, where we may not even actually be safe. We all are reduced to being simply human here. Perhaps you should rest?

D: Yes (*his eyes connect with J's eyes for a moment*)

pause

J: I tried to get the children to play, but they won't. They're afraid to even kick around the makeshift--the funny football I created for them, out of rags.

D: Of course they are.

J: (*Gesturing to Daoud's notebook*) May I see?

D: (*Surprised*) Oh, yes. It's... (He hands the candle and his notebook to J, who reads, curiously)

J: (*Reading aloud*) "In the beginning you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands." This is... it is truly, wonderful. It occurs to me--

D: --that I should post it? Sell it? Send it? Somewhere? Yes, I would if I could. But... well, I wrote it with a pen, by candlelight, so... well, you know.

J: Well, of course the world should see it, hear it, feel it, but... (*timidly*)... perhaps we could all of us participate and help you?

D: What do you mean?

J: We should all--especially the children here, with us, who are so frightened and feel so powerless--we should join in your effort and write songs together... to express all our overwhelming feelings and fears and thoughts. I don't mean to impose... but, it just, it occurs to me that perhaps we could all benefit from learning to express our story this way. It's so very powerful. And we would keep busy...

D. *(Curious, amused, not quite sure that this idea is even feasible but willing try)* Well, I suppose. Yes. Why not?

J: Wonderful, I will gather people. Let's try. It might be the best way to help get our minds off of the "music" raining down on us from the outside.

D: Alright.

J: Wonderful! This will work! I am sure of it!

D: *(grabs J's hands before he can exit, looks at him and repeats)* "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands."

Exit Jibreel.

Later, with the children around them, and some adults as well, J and D and their new followers collaborate on a piece of their own.

Children: Can we tell them we are hungry? I would like to have some chocolate! Can we tell them we cannot sleep, because it is loud? Do they know we didn't do anything? Can we tell them that? Can we tell them how much it hurts our hearts to see our parents die before our eyes?

J: Yes, children, this is the power of art. We can say what we want, and make them feel what we feel.

Chorus: We do have all the time in the world down here, and we have nothing but our feelings to feel...

J: ...so we must express them fully!

Chorus: The only rhythm I can think of is my heart pounding inside my chest. That is my mortality, my fear, it is not "art."

J: It is fear, yes, but it can become art. Pounding, shaking, fear, anger... all of it can be conveyed wordlessly. Just try. You honestly have nothing left to lose, right?

Chorus Member concedes reluctantly and joins the others. Perhaps because he doesn't want to be left alone.

D: This is inspiring! I have felt so alone with my words and my songs, but suddenly I feel as though I may be able to raise my voice louder and more fully, and actually make the entire world hear my voice. Yallah, to work!

They all get to it.

They've been working and creating for some time so that when the bombs finally come and destroy the shelter, all the pages are left and a full final hymn has been created. The piece will end with them all "rising up" to sing their last song together:

1 Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry
come unto thee.

1 يَا رَبُّ، اسْتَمِعْ صَلَاتِي، وَلْيَدْخُلْ إِلَيْكَ صُرَاجِي.

3 لَأَنَّ أَيَّامِي قَدْ فَيَّيْتُ فِي دُخَانٍ، وَعِظَامِي مِثْلُ وَقِيدٍ قَدْ بَيَّسَتْ.

3 For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.

6 أَشْبَهْتُ فُوقَ الْبَرِّيَّةِ. صِرْتُ مِثْلَ
بُومَةِ الْحَرْبِ.

6 I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.

11 أَيَّامِي كَظِلِّ مَائِلٍ، وَأَنَا مِثْلُ الْعُشْبِ بَيَّسَتْ.

12 أَمَا أَنْتَ يَا رَبُّ فِإِلَى الدَّهْرِ جَالِسٌ، وَذِكْرُكَ إِلَى دَوْرٍ فَدَوْرٍ.

11 My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

18 يُكْتَنَبُ هَذَا لِلدَّوْرِ الْآخِرِ، وَشَعْبٌ سَوْفَ يُخْلَقُ يُسَبِّحُ الرَّبَّ:

12 But you, sit enthroned forever;
your renown endures through all generations.

19 لِأَنَّهُ أَشْرَفَ مِنْ عُلُوِّ قُدْسِهِ. الرَّبُّ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ نَظَرَ،

18 Let this be written for a future generation,
that a people not yet created may praise the
Lord:

20 لِيَسْمَعَ أَيْنَ الْأَسِيرِ، لِيُطْلِقَ بَنِي الْمَوْتِ،

19 “The Lord looked down from his sanctuary
on high, from heaven he viewed the earth,

21 لِكَيْ يُحَدِّثَ فِي صِهْيُونَ بِاسْمِ الرَّبِّ، وَبِتَسْبِيحِهِ فِي أُورُشَلِيمَ،

22 عِنْدَ اجْتِمَاعِ الشُّعُوبِ مَعًا وَالْمَمَالِكِ لِعِبَادَةِ الرَّبِّ.

20 to hear the groans of the prisoners
and release those condemned to death.”

23 ضَعَّفَ فِي الطَّرِيقِ قُوَّتِي، قَصَّرَ أَيَّامِي.

24 أَقُولُ: «يَا إِلَهِي، لَا تَقْبِضْني فِي نِصْفِ أَيَّامِي. إِلَى دَهْرِ الدُّهُورِ سُنُوكِ.

21 So the name of the Lord will be declared in
Zion and his praise in Jerusalem

25 مِنْ قَدَمِ أَسْسِنَتِ الْأَرْضِ، وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ هِيَ عَمَلُ يَدَيْكَ.

22 when the peoples and the kingdoms
assemble to worship the Lord.

26 هِيَ تَبِيدُ وَأَنْتِ تَبْقَى، وَكُلُّهَا كَتُوبٌ تَبْلَى، كَرْدَاءٍ تُغَيِّرُهُنَّ فَتَتَغَيَّرُ.

23 In the course of my life he broke my
strength; he cut short my days.

27 وَأَنْتِ هُوَ وَسُنُوكِ لَنْ تَنْتَهِي.

24 So I said: “Do not take me away, my God,
in the midst of my days; your years go on
through all generations.

28 أَبْنَاءُ عِبِيدِكَ يَسْكُنُونَ، وَدُرَّتُهُمْ تُثَبِّتُ أَمَانَكَ.»

25 In the beginning you laid the foundations

of the earth, and the heavens are the work of
your hands.

26 They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.

27 But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.

28 The children of your servants will live in
your presence; their descendants will be
established before you.”

Indianapolis Symphonic Choir

Founded in 1937, The Indianapolis Symphonic Choir is one of the nation’s most established and dynamic musical institutions and this recording marks its 80th anniversary season. Among the most active symphonic choruses in the United States, this independent symphonic chorus reaches in excess of 25,000 persons each season with more than 25 performances and a comprehensive educational/outreach program. The approximately 200 volunteer singers demonstrate the Choir’s commitment to musical excellence through their talent and dedication during each forty-four-week season. Under the Artistic Director of Eric Stark, the organization is led by a professional staff and governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. More information is available at www.indychoir.org.

Eric Stark

In a dynamic career that combines performance, scholarship and collaborative community

leadership, conductor Eric Stark has established himself as a choral-orchestral specialist and an inspiring leader of singers of all ages. As a conductor of major works for chorus and orchestra, Stark's expertise extends from works of the 18th century through living composers. He has conducted in the Oriental Art Center Concert Hall in Shanghai, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Strathmore Hall in Bethesda, MD, and the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing among many others. Stark was named a Sagamore of the Wabash, Indiana's highest civilian award. In addition to his duties as Artistic Director of the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir, Stark is also Director of Choral Activities and Professor of Music at Butler University's Jordan College of the Arts. Stark is a graduate of Wabash College and Indiana University.

Mohammed Fairouz

Mohammed Fairouz, born in 1985, is one of the most frequently performed, commissioned, and recorded composers of his generation. 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 symphonies, operas and oratorios all engage major geopolitical and philosophical themes with persuasive craft and a marked seriousness of purpose. 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 and received "highbrow and brilliant" distinctions in *New York Magazine*'s taste-making Approval Matrix. Fairouz's solo and chamber music attains an "intoxicating intimacy," according to New York's WQXR. A composer who describes himself as "obsessed with text," he has been recognized by *New Yorker* magazine as an "expert in vocal writing" and described by *Gramophone* as "a post-millennial Schubert." His principal teachers in composition include György Ligeti, Gunther Schuller, and Richard Danielpour, with studies at the Curtis Institute and New England Conservatory. Fairouz's works are published by Peermusic Classical. He lives in New York City.

Najla Said

As an actress, Najla has performed Off-Broadway, regionally and internationally, as well as in film and television. Theatre credits include Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire* (Seattle Rep), the London and New York premieres of Karen Malpede's *Prophecy*, and Naomi Wallace's *The Fever Chart: Three Visions of the Middle East* (Central Square Theater). In April 2010, Najla completed an eight-week Off-Broadway run of her solo show, *Palestine*. That same year, she was named one of "Forty Feminists Under Forty" by The Feminist Press.. In 2012, she

collaborated with Vanessa Redgrave on "A World I Loved," based on her grandmother's memoir, which premiered at The Brighton Festival in the UK, and The Miller Theatre in collaboration with The Public Theatre in New York. In 2014, Najla's play *The Assumption of Mary* was featured as one of the 48 plays in *The Mysteries* at The Flea Theatre. Najla is a graduate of Princeton University and studied acting in New York at The Actor's Center. Her memoir, *Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused in An Arab-American Family* (based on her solo play), was published by Riverhead, a division of Penguin Books, in August 2013.

Dann Coakwell

Dann Coakwell, tenor, has been praised as a "clear-voiced and eloquent ... vivid storyteller" (*The New York Times*), with "a gorgeous lyric tenor that could threaten or caress on the turn of a dime" (*The Dallas Morning News*). Coakwell can be heard as a soloist on the Grammy-winning *Conspirare: The Sacred Spirit of Russia*, 2014 (Harmonia Mundi) and Grammy-nominated *Conspirare: A Company of Voices*, 2009 (Harmonia Mundi). He has performed as a soloist internationally and nationally under such acclaimed conductors as Helmuth Rilling, Masaaki Suzuki, William Christie, María Guinand, Nicholas McGegan, Matthew Halls, and Craig Hella Johnson. Coakwell serves as instructor of voice at Yale University, and holds an Artist Diploma in Vocal Performance from the Yale School of Music and Institute of Sacred Music, a Master of Music degree from Texas Tech University, and a Bachelor of Music from the University of Texas at Austin. More information is available at www.danncoakwell.com

Michael Kelly

Praised as "expressive and dynamic" and "vocally splendid", American baritone Michael Kelly continues to distinguish himself as a consummate artist, sought-after for his riveting interpretations of recital, concert and operatic repertoire. Captivating audiences with his "exquisitely self-effacing" artistry, Mr. Kelly is a versatile and innovative vocalist, having performed with The Cleveland Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and many others. Mr. Kelly has won prizes in several prominent competitions, including first prizes in 2013's Poulenc Competition and 2011's Joy in Singing. He is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and Juilliard, and was a member of the Opernstudio at Opernhaus Zurich. Michael is also the co-founder of SongFusion, a song recital series based in Manhattan.