

Middle Eastern Music Ensemble

Under the direction of Issa Boulos, the Middle Eastern Music Ensemble (MEME) at the University of Chicago promotes the exchange of musical ideas and Middle Eastern cultures through a variety of programs and events based in Chicago. This season has realized a fine balance between old and new for the ensemble.

Boulos commented that MEME is evolving with the participation of new members from the university and greater Chicago community. At a recent concert attended in full at Fulton Hall, over ten new members joined with veterans of the ensemble in celebration of Arab Heritage Month. The evening's program reflected the maturation of the ensemble not only through the mixture of fresh repertoire with favorites, but through the *taqasim* (solo improvisations) performed by ensemble musicians to introduce different modalities of Arabic music. Boulos notes that despite the pattern of turnover familiar to a university community, MEME maintains a character and personality that is cultivated in the collaborative process of music-making. "I seek to offer the best experience possible," remarks Boulos, "by bringing out an awareness of how music is made during our rehearsals. Music is hedonistic, tedious, entertaining, serious and dramatic,



and we can learn this not only theoretically but through performance practices." Just as musical material is approached with an understanding of how style, repertoire, and instruments are influenced by vast and disparate places -- from North Africa and Egypt to Turkey and Iraq -- concert programs inflect commonalities between musical styles. Boulos encourages students to listen carefully to recordings at home and share their ideas in weekly rehearsals held at Pick Hall.

Responding to increased public interest in Middle Eastern music, several members traveled away from Chicago to participate in regional concerts and festivals. A group appeared in a world music festival, held in October 2005 at Miami University in Ohio, that honored A.R. Rahman, a composer of Bollywood film music. An invitation to the Michigan Festival of Sacred Music was extended to a *takht* (traditional Arab music ensemble) of the ensemble's finest musicians, including Majed Abu Ajamiyya (*ney*), Issa Boulos (*'ud*, vocals) and Wanees Zanour (violin). The

Halveti Jerrahi Order of Dervishes, the sponsors of the latter concert, will reciprocate with their own guest appearance in MEME's January 29 concert at Fulton Hall, "Musical and Poetic Portraits of Turkey."

Additionally, MEME co-sponsored a concert series of guest artists. Trio Joubran began the season by performing for a standing-room only audience. Their unique compositions and arrangements will be welcomed back in the spring for an encore concert. Ahmet Tacoglu and the Hacettepe University Fine Arts Faculty Classical Music Ensemble visited in October, and were followed by Chalghi El-Saffar, who graced the Khorsabad Court at the Oriental Institute with classical repertoire of the Iraqi school of maqam.

MEME continues to expand its resources and outreach to students and community members. Each visit mentioned above offered the rare opportunity to work with the guest artists in workshops and master classes as well as the week-long summer workshop for music teachers that introduced theory and practice of Middle East music (see p.10).

Shayna Silverstein is a performer with the Middle East Music Ensemble, and a Ph.D. student in the Department of Music.

Congratulations to Center Members!!

Robert Bianchi, Lecturer, Law School, awarded the *2005 Middle East Studies Association Albert Hourani Prize*, for his book, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2004). see pg 15

Issa Boulos, Conductor-Middle Eastern Music Ensemble, was awarded the *Artists Fellowship Award* by the Illinois Arts Council, in recognition of Illinois artists and their outstanding work and commitment within the arts. This is the second time that Issa has received this award.

Fred Donner, Professor, Islamic History, NELC and Professor Kenneth Hall, Ball State University, were funded by the *National Endowment for the Humanities* for a 2005 Summer Institute for teachers entitled, "Culture and Communications in the Pre-Modern Islamic World". see p. 8

Traci Lombré, Project Assistant-CMES, received a *2005 Joseph J. Malone Fellowship in Arab and Islamic Studies* from the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, Washington, D.C., to study the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Holly Shissler, Associate Director-CMES, Assistant Professor, NELC, was selected as a *2005-06 Resident Keddie-Balzan Research Scholar* at the University of California at Los Angeles, to teach and conduct research on women, gender or the family in the Muslim world.

Martin Stokes, Director-CMES, Associate Professor, Music Dept., was awarded the *2005 Jaap Kunst Prize* from The Society for Ethnomusicology for his article entitled, "Music and the Global Order." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33: 47-72, 2004.