

Halim El-Dabh



A Celebration Of Life

March 4th 1921



September 2nd 2017

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Halim Abdul Messieh El-Dabh,

March 4, 1921 – September 2, 2017

Composer, performer, ethnomusicologist, and educator Halim El-Dabh is internationally regarded as one of Egypt's foremost composers of classical music and one of the major composers of the twentieth century. His numerous musical and dramatic works have been performed throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Among his compositions are eleven operas, four symphonies, numerous ballets, concertos, and orchestral pieces, works for band and chorus, film scores, incidental music for plays, chamber and electronic works, music for jazz and rock bands, works for young performers, and pieces for various combinations of African, Asian, and Western instruments. He is known for the music that he wrote for the Sound and Light show at Pyramids of Giza. His extensive ethnomusicological research, conducted on several continents, has led to unique creative syntheses in his work which are frequently imbued with Near Eastern, African, or ancient Egyptian aesthetics.

For Halim, music and life were one. He heard and saw sound in everything and shared his passion and joy in music and life with all around him. By living, learning, working or playing with him, we have known Halim as a manifestation of an artistic vision, the counter perspective on a paradigmatic philosophy, the complementary angle in an earnest debate and to be, in that moment, fully captured by his attention and fully drawn into the world as he hoped it could be. Few human beings are so frank in opinion, so vital in contribution and so unassuming in nature.

We are all gathered here to celebrate his life.

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Introductory Music

It is Dark and Damp On the Front (1949) **Tuyen Tonnu**
Halim El-Dabh *Piano*

Welcome

President, Kent State University **Beverly Warren**

Introductory Remarks

Interim Chair, Department of Pan-African Studies **George Garrison**

Coptic Prayer

St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Cleveland **Father Mikhail**
Edward Mikhail

Remarks from the Family

Wife of Halim El-Dabh **Deborah El-Dabh**
Son of Halim El-Dabh **Habeeb El-Dabh**

Audio Documentary

The Sound of the Soul (2005) **Mark Wiitanen**
Narration **Halim El-Dabh**

Poem

Poem for El-Dabh **Mwatabu Okantah**

Musical Performance

Sonic No. 7 (1955) **Blake Tyson**
Halim El-Dabh *derabucca*

Protestant Hymn

Riverwood Chapel **David Hurst**
Laurel Hurst
Bryan Thomas
double bass

INTERMISSION **10 min**

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Born into a musical family in Cairo, El-Dabh studied piano and *derabucca* and began composing at an early age. Although trained for a career as an agricultural engineer, his musical talent and immersion in Egypt's cosmopolitan musical life increasingly led him toward a life in music. By 1949, El-Dabh had gained notoriety for his avant-garde compositions and piano playing which led him to apply for, and receive, a Fulbright grant to study in the United States, where he met his first wife – Mary Hyde El-Dabh. After researching Native American music in New Mexico, he began studies with Aaron Copland and Irving Fine at the Berkshire Music Center in Massachusetts. Having also achieved renown for his virtuoso *derabucca* playing, in 1958 El-Dabh played the solo part in the premiere of his *Fantasia-Tahmeel* (for *derabucca* and strings), with the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski. Also in 1958, he began working closely with the great American choreographer Martha Graham, composing the epic opera-ballet *Clytemnestra* (1958), which is considered her masterpiece; he eventually composed three more ballet scores for her. His *Opera Flies* (1971) is the only opera to have been composed on the theme of the Kent State tragedy of May 1970. In addition to his compositional activity, El-Dabh also conducted musical field research and recording throughout Egypt and Ethiopia, as well as in Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Morocco, Greece, Macedonia, Uzbekistan, Brazil, Mexico, and Jamaica. He further studied the Native American cultures of the American Southwest and the African American cultures of the southeastern U.S. A pioneer in the field of electronic music, El-Dabh began early sonic experiments with wire recorders at the Middle East Radio Station of Cairo in 1944. In 1959 he was invited by Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky to join the first group of composers at the newly established Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York, where he created a number of significant works. His *Leilya and the Poet* (1959-61), recorded for Columbia Masterworks in 1964, is considered a classic of the genre.

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Musical Performance

The Invisible Bridge (2007) **Karen Patterson**
Halim El-Dabh *cello*

Remarks

Professor, Department of Pan-African Studies **Idris Kabir Syed**

Remarks from the Family

Daughter of Halim El-Dabh **Shadia Kirk**
Daughter of Halim El-Dabh **Amira Ranney**

Remarks

Emeritus Professor of Ethnomusicology **Kazadi wa Makuna**

Musical Performance

Kakilambe **Kent State Cultural Expressions**
Led by Olugbala Manns

Remarks

Emeritus Professor of Ethnomusicology **Terry Miller**

Remarks

Executive Director, Standing Rock Cultural Arts **Jeff Ingram**

Musical Performance

Symphony for 1000 Drums (2005) **Grant Marquit**
Maurice Jackson, Blake Tyson, Olugbala Manns, Ron Slabe, Leatrice Tolls, Habeeb El-Dabh, Jeff Ingram, Amy Unruh, Abby Greer, Lynnette Morrow, Tom Morrow, Susan Clark, Josh Sherman, Joanne Pippin, Baba Jubal Harris, Jeffrey Bowen, Dan Susany, Pam Susany, Jeffery Rotnam

Closing Remarks

Dean, College of the Arts **John Crawford-Spinelli**

Indigenous African Prayer

Professor, Department of Pan-African Studies **M.L. Nambuo Temu**

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Halim El-Dabh loved to teach, share his love for music and knowledge and to push his students to think outside their typical boundaries and engage in music and life. He served on the faculty of Kent State University's School of Music since 1969. He also taught at Haile Selassie I University in Ethiopia (1962-64) and Howard University in Washington, D.C. (1966-69) He is one of only eight Kent State University faculty members to have held the title of University Professor, Kent State's highest faculty distinction, and was a recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award (1988). Retiring in 1991, Emeritus Professor El-Dabh continued to teach and compose prolifically, in addition to conducting workshops for children, and to explore new avenues of sound creation and exploration through painting. El-Dabh's course entitled African Cultural Expression is still taught today and led by Olugbala Manns.

Halim continued to be happy, optimistic, loving, enthusiastic and passionate until the end. He died peacefully and gracefully in his home in Kent, Ohio on Sept. 2, 2017, he was 96 years old. His life and spirit will continue to live on through his music and through those he inspired, influenced, taught, mentored and cared for.

Halim is survived by his wife Deborah, three children – Habeeb, Shadia and Amira, and grandchildren Nathan and Rakia.

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Contributions

Dr. Beverly Warren, President, Kent State University

Dr. Todd Diacon, Provost, Kent State University

Dr. Alfreda Brown, Vice President, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Dr. John Crawford-Spinelli, Dean, College of the Arts

Dr. James Blank, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Isaac Nettey, Associate Dean, College of Aeronautics and Engineering

Dr. Amoaba Gooden, Chair, Department of Pan-African Studies

Dr. Jane Dressler, Interim Director, Hugh A. Glauser School of Music

Dr. George R. Garrison, Professor, Department of Pan-African Studies

Mrs. Lisa Strebler, Secretary, Department of Pan-African Studies

Mark Wiitanen, Studio ZOO

Photos Provided by

Deborah El-Dabh, Shadia Kirk, Amira Ranney, James Vaughn, Terry Miller, Bob Christy, and Kent State University Libraries Special Collections and Archives

Multimedia Provided by

Ron Slabe, Martha Graham Dance Company, Jeff Ingram, Mark Wiitanen, Idris Kabir Syed, and Kent State University

Special Thanks

Eftihia Tsengas, Linda Walker Angotti, David Badagnani, Seth Robinson, Ron Slabe, Leatrice Tolls and the Department of Pan-African Studies



**“The one thing you want to avoid in this world,
are the words ‘What if ...’ ”**

- Halim El-Dabh

حليم الدبح