

# THE SALAAM ENSEMBLE

## *Music of the Near and Middle East*

**Art Form: Music**

**Style: Traditional**

**Culture: Near- and Middle-East**

### MEET THE ARTIST:

**The Salaam Ensemble** brings together five famous and inspiring musical talents in this awe-inspiring performance of vocal and instrumental music from the middle and near east, a world of magical sounds that are unfamiliar in most of our every day lives here in America. The band members include *John Bilezkjian*, world renown *oud* player (ancient lute) and famous singer from the country of Jordan, world famous drummer *Souhail Kaspar* from Lebanon playing *darabuka* or goblet-shaped drum and renown percussionist *Houman Pourmehdi* on *ney* (cane flute), *tanbur* (lute) and Persian (Iranian) hand drums, and master of the *santur*, *Mahshid Mirzadeh*. The director and announcer of the ensemble is *John Zeretzke*, who also performs on *kemence* (ancient fiddle). John has been bringing excellent educational performances to the schools through Music Center for over 23 years. World famous Egyptian ethnomusicologist and master *ney* player Dr. A. J. Racy is advisor to the group. These musicians represent some of the most well-known and respected Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Armenian musicians in the world, all brought together on one stage to share their diverse musical expertise and love for these different styles of eastern music.

### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

*Salaam* translates in English as 'peace' and is also a greeting that people use in most Arabic cultures everyday. The performance takes listeners on an exotic journey with the sites and sounds of these unique musical instruments that date back thousands of year to ancient civilizations. Audiences will learn to 'listen' for unusual pitches used in these diverse styles of music, identify different rhythmic patterns and enjoy the translated poetic expressions in the lyrical songs that are sung in Arabic or *Farsi* (Persian). Story-telling, personal and descriptive narrative are woven into this performance, along with some exciting hands-on rhythmic call and response clapping and participation. The members of the ensemble represent the splendid diversity and unity of cultures not only in America, but of people throughout the world today. The musicians of Salaam create a world of exotic, magical sounds and at the same time they bring to young listeners an understanding of music from far away lands and diverse cultures.



### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

The many styles of music from near and middle eastern countries developed over thousands of years and the instruments predate most western classical instruments. People and cultures developed their own musical systems, what we might call 'non-western' standards for writing and performing music. To many Americans, these ideas are completely unusual and difficult to hear, if you do not know what to listen to or 'feel' in the music. Here are some basic musical concepts that will be explored during the performance.

#### Occasions for Making Music and our Listening Experience

Arabic and Persian musical styles include music for a variety of occasions and functions - entertainment, dance, folk, listening, secular, spiritual, classical and other forms. Audience members or listeners in the middle east have a unique and awe-inspiring appreciation for the music and the musician's performance. When listening to the music, one must learn to 'let go' and let your mind and body 'feel' the music. The music is the vehicle for taking the listeners on a musical journey through sound and vibration.

#### Non-Western Scales and Rhythms

The notes used in middle eastern music are at different pitches than our music here in America. These intervals are called quarter tones or *mirco-tones* and they sound out of tune to the western trained ear. The scales in Arabic music are called *maqamat*. Musicians will use different *maqamat* when playing solos on their instruments (melodic - winds and strings). The age old art

of improvisation, or free-style creation in music making is called *taqsim* for instrumental improvisation or *layali* for vocal improvisation. Middle eastern traditional rhythmic patterns are also unfamiliar to our western ears, yet very exciting to listen to. Symmetrical and asymmetrical rhythms are used, including meters in 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and other

more complex time signatures. Drummers and percussionists must know all these patterns by memory.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How would you describe the instruments you just heard? What were they made of? What did they sound like?
- How did the music make you feel at times during the show? Was it exciting, sad, meditative, mysterious or joyful? Did it make you want to dance?
- How does this music differ from music that you listen to? Are the occasions or purposes of the music the same as what you listen to?
- Does anyone in your family play a traditional instrument from another country? Would you be interested in learning an instrument from another country?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC STUDIES:

Commonly, we refer to the Arabic speaking countries as the Near and Middle East. The Persians of Iran are included in that area even though it is a different culture than of the the Arab people. The Middle East spans thousands of miles covering a variety of diverse climates and interesting geography from rich coastal farmlands to rugged mountains to harsh, dry, sandy deserts.\*

- List as many countries as you can from a map of the Middle East.
- Read about the different climatic zones and weather patterns. What different types of weather patterns are there in different regions? What kind of landscape and land forms are there? Share what you discover. How might the geography of a region affect the history of it's people? What recorded events happened in past history due to dramatic weather?
- Research and observe historical maps of the Middle East, perhaps dating back as long a 1,000 years ago or maybe as recent as 10-20 years. How do the borders change over time between countries? What events happened back then that caused the borders to change? Were there even 'countries' at certain times in history? List the reasons why borders changed in history. Compare your findings with other students in your class.
- How does music effect history? Or does history change or effect the music of the time? Discuss this topic with the class. Does music carry a message to people long after it was first sung or written? What ideas, images or stories are told through music? How do traditions in a culture and its music get passed to the younger generations? What is a tradition? What is a traditional idea or concept in music?

\* See attached map.

- Legend:
- 🌀 Artistic perception
  - ❖ Creative expression
  - ▶ Historical & cultural context
  - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
  - \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

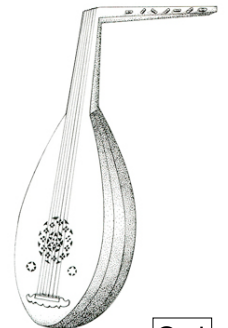
- ❖ Have the students clap in 2 or duple time (1-2), saying *ap-ple* as they clap. Put an accent or loud pulse on the first beat (1-2 1-2). Have the students clap in 3 or triple time (1-2-3), saying *blue-ber-ry* as they clap. Put an accent of loud pulse on the first beat of the pattern also (1-2-3 1-2-3). Now combine the 2 pattern with the 3 pattern and you get a rhythm in 5, keeping the accents in the same place as you did in the beginning (1-2 1-2-3), saying '*ap-ple blue-ber-ry*' as you clap along. You have just experienced playing a rhythm in 5 or 5/4 time, used in the music of Turkey, Iran, Greece, and other parts of the Middle East.

How about we try a 7 or 7/8 pattern? It's easy. Two apples and one blueberry! (1-2 1-2 1-2-3). For now, keep the accents on the first beat of each group of 2's and 3's. Can you 'feel' the rhythm of this pattern? This is a rhythmic pattern from Armenia, Turkey and Macedonia.

A popular Arabic and Greek rhythmic pattern is *kashlimar*, in 9 or 9/8 time. Three apples and one blueberry! (1-2 1-2 1-2 1-2-3)

Can you create your own rhythmic pattern and play it using these guidelines in counting? (2's and 3's - apples and blueberries)

- ▶ Research an instrument from the Middle East. Compare and contrast what you discover with modern day instruments you already know. List 4-6 interesting ideas you learned about the instrument you chose. Share your findings with other students.
- 🌀 Listen to some selections of middle eastern music. Can you identify the pitches or micro- tones that sound out of tune to you? Can you identify unusual rhythmic patterns used in the music? What instruments are being played?
- ⇒ How does listening to this music make you feel? Does it 'take you away' to another place or time? Does it create an emotional feeling inside you? What is that feeling? Can you describe it? Do some musical selections make you want to dance or move?



Oud

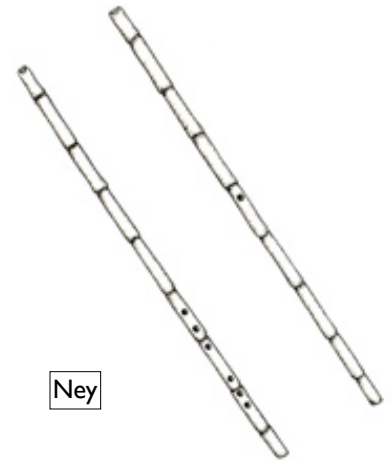
## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

The Diagram Group, *Musical Instruments Of The World*, Paddington Press Ltd., England, Canada and Australia, 1976  
[www.zworldmusic.com](http://www.zworldmusic.com)  
Home page for Salaam Ensemble  
[www.maqamworld.com/instruments](http://www.maqamworld.com/instruments)  
Arabic instruments, sounds, photos, descriptions and history  
[www.dejkam.com/music/iran\\_traditional/instruments](http://www.dejkam.com/music/iran_traditional/instruments)  
Persian instruments, sounds, photos, descriptions and history

# VOCABULARY AND MAP: SALAAM ENSEMBLE

## The Musical Instruments

- *Voice* - the oldest instrument of all
- *Oud* - the ancient lute
- *Ney* and *Nai* - Persian and Arabic can flute
- *Dayereh* or *Daf*- Persian frame drum with metal rings / played by the Sufis
- *Darabuka* and *Tombek* - goblet shaped drum made with a goat skin
- *Bendir* - round frame drum made of a wooden frame and animal skins
- *Riqa* - middle-eastern tambourine
- *Kemence'* or *Rebab* - spike fiddle played on the knee with a horse hair bow
- *Saz* and *Tanbur* - forms of the ancient lute, with a longer neck
- *Qanun* - ancient trapezoidal shaped zither or harp played on the lap



Ney



Darabuka



Arabian North Africa and the Middle East