

TECHNOLOGY TIME TRAVELLING FOOD FESTIVAL CHEF ON THE EDGE MOTORING BENTLEY CLASSIC GOES HYBRID

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Dior's autumn/winter 2023
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ULYSSE NARDIN

ARTS COLLABORATION

Music to Vivaldi's ears

East melds melodiously with West in the ACO's upcoming take on *The Four Seasons*, writes Michael Bailey.

On the face of it, the ornate sounds of Antonio Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* have little to do with the hypnotic, microtonal work of Egyptian-Australian oud master Joseph Tawadros.

However, for Tawadros, who will play the Venetian's four-concerto triumph alongside his own compositions at recitals with the Australian Chamber Orchestra this month, it's a natural fit.

"Baroque music is close to Arabic music. They both move diatonically, there's a strength of melody in them," says Tawadros, speaking to *Life & Leisure* during a break in rehearsals at the ACO's Pier 2/3 headquarters in Sydney.

From his lap he picks up his oud, which looks a bit like a plump acoustic guitar, except with 12 strings running along six courses, filigreed wood covering three sound holes, and an intriguing bent-back neck.

With lightning-fast fingers, he rips through a Western C major scale, then progressively changes the notes to modulate it into something that could be blasting from a bazaar.

"Working with the ACO, it's all about finding those points of crossover," Tawadros says of this and previous collaborations with the orchestra – along with his younger brother James on the riq, an Arabic tambourine, which Joseph says he "plays like a drumkit".

"There's this misconception that if you play something fast, it's not as soulful, but in *The Four Seasons* I hear all these fast passages that have so much emotion and passion. That's exactly what is possessed in the music I try and write."

Historians have long pondered how much Eastern and North African music

Vivaldi might have heard and been influenced by in 18th-century Venice, then a major trading hub. Tawadros is confident he heard plenty.

"You'd assume those sailors on the trading boats would have had a few instruments on them," he says. "I can certainly pick when Vivaldi is switching between Arabic modes."

Not that Tawadros is enamoured with all Western music. The classical period that followed the baroque period carried with it experiments in dissonant harmony that are uncomfortable to his ear and his playing approach. "I would never pick Brahms for a project," he says.

At which the ACO's artistic director, Richard Tognetti, looks up from his score of Mehmed Vi Vahideddin's *Nihavend Taksim*, a minor-scale improvisation which will open the upcoming concerts, and for which he has meticulously transcribed the Ottoman sultan's microtonal lines into quarter-tones that can be read by his 16 ACO colleagues.

"Oh, come on. You could call it 'Brahmi'!" he cries, needling Tawadros in a way that only old mates can.

Tognetti first met Tawadros in November 2001, when, after the World Trade Centre attacks, the violinist organised a cross-cultural concert at Mudgee's Huntington winery, and called up the young oud player who'd impressed him at a concert put on by music students at the University of NSW.

Tawadros had then been playing the instrument for only eight years. Born in Cairo in 1983, he'd moved to Sydney's Redfern with his family aged three, and while elder brother John tried to turn him on to electric guitar, Tawadros only had eyes for the Eastern version.

"I'd seen this movie about Sayed Darwish,



Violinist and Australian Chamber Orchestra director Richard Tognetti with oud maestro Joseph Tawadros at the ACO's Pier 2/3 base in Sydney. PHOTO: LOUIE DOUVIS

the guy who composed the Egyptian national anthem, who as an orphan swapped his dad's gold watch for an oud," he says. "In one scene he opens up the watch and hears an oud solo. Incredible."

Aged 10, Tawadros bought his own oud from Glebe Markets with the savings from a paper round, and started spending all his spare time practising.

"People think it's harder to learn than a guitar because there are no frets, and there are extra strings, but I think every instrument has the same [degree of] difficulty," he says.

"If you have the passion and the time you'll be OK. And musicians like Richard and myself are still learning about our instruments, exploring other sounds."

In that spirit, the ACO and the Tawadros brothers have been frequent partners over the years. They were even nominated for an ARIA award for their joint 2012 album *Concerto Of The Greater Sea*.

The pair admit their collaborations can start off as academic exercises. "Arabic music is not as regimented as

Western, no one really uses sheet music," Tawadros says.

Which means he must make some compromises when Tognetti is transcribing his often complex music to transmit to the rest of the ACO.

"Once Joseph has decided on something he has to stick with it," Tognetti says. "If I'm writing something of his in a 7/16 [time signature], he can't suddenly add a note on stage – the violinists will kill him."

However, the Tawadros compositions to be featured in the upcoming concerts – emotive instrumentals such as *Permission To Evaporate*, which he wrote around the time of his parents' deaths a decade ago – have long evolved past their bloodless beginnings.

"It's music that gets into your bloodstream – I rate Joe as one of Australia's top composers," Tognetti says.

"And *The Four Seasons* has been taken into so many other genres, and you wonder why they bothered, but it's a 'wow' moment when you hear the oud and the riq suddenly playing *Summer*. It just feels right." **L&L**

DESIGN HOMEWARES

Inspired by the gods

Yasmine Ghoniem taps into a mythical world to put ancient Egypt underfoot, writes Stephen Todd.

There's a rug called Osiris, named after the god of the afterlife. It's composed of ochre starbursts on a mottled blue background – a reference to the painted adornment of royal tombs.

Standing sentinel in the corner of another is a cartoonish cat figure named Bastet, after the goddess of protection and pleasure; its graphic silhouette on a linear base evoking the rigour of ancient hieroglyphs. Hathor, for the goddess of music and fertility, is a deliciously off-kilter confection of kooky colour blocks teased together by a flirty, serpentine squiggle.

Yasmine Ghoniem's just-released rug collection is inspired by her Egyptian background filtered through a modernist vision of interior design.

"I've visited Egypt what seems like a million times since my childhood," says the Sydney-based interior designer, "but it was on a recent visit to the Egyptian wing of Berlin's Neues Museum designed by [British architect] David Chipperfield that I really observed the antiquity of my father's country for the first time.

"It hit me with a strong urge to honour that heritage but in a distinctly modern manner," Ghoniem says.



She left the museum – which features rare papyrus and statuary, the star being a quartzite polychrome bust of Nefertiti created in around 1340 BC – with a camera-full of photographs and graphite sketches she'd created on the spot, transfixed.

Back home, this ancient material informed a collection of 12 rug designs called 'Real Majik'.

"It was irresistible, the spell of these incredible works," she says, laughing.

Created in collaboration with the Tappeti carpet company – with whom Ghoniem has devised bespoke floor coverings for many of her award-winning interiors – the Real Majik collection is made by artisans in Nepal and India using Tibetan or New Zealand wool, silk and hemp.

Variably hand-tufted or hand-knotted, the first technique mixes loop and cut piles

From left: Details from the Hathor and Ra rugs; Karina Gobbo, left, and Yasmine Ghoniem with Osiris. PHOTOS: ANSON SMART



Need to know

The rugs in the Tappeti x YSG Real Majik collection are priced from \$4891. See tappeti.com.au



to create visual interest and under-foot texture; the second results in a nuanced surface that resonates around a room.

The colours are surprisingly intense, the shapes decidedly idiomatic.

While the designs are anchored in an ancient civilisation and steeped in her own story of being an émigré, Ghoniem's adroit modernist touch means they are avowedly contemporary. You don't need to know their backstory to appreciate their impact: it is evident in every fibre of their being.

"Yasmine has such unique taste and extraordinary style," says Karina Gobbo, who founded Tappeti almost 20 years ago.

"She pushes the boundaries with colour and form in the rooms she creates and the objects with which she fills them."

In Gobbo, Ghoniem recognises a kindred spirit.

"Like me, she's the offspring of immigrants [Gobbo's heritage is Italian] who has made her own way in the world.

"She's a powerhouse forging her own story. There is a real synergy between our aspirations and outlooks."

That synergy is manifest as Real Majik – rugs so strong on personality they are not easily stepped upon; rather readily admired, new deities to be revered. **L&L**