

*A composer of Egyptian descent transcends time and borders for the love of the country in which he was not born and an American pianist believes in music as a tool for love and communication. Both meet for a musical mission in Egypt.*

“Its fields are abundant. Its stored grains reach the sky. Its waters are full of fish. Its lakes are full of birds. Its fields green with grass and its banks full of dates. Happy is he who lives in it. Its poorest lives the life of the prosperous elsewhere, my beloved Egypt.” These are the words that the Egyptian composer Ryan Francis excerpted from the heart of enchanting ancient Egyptian art. It was performed in the Sawy Wheel and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina last march for the first time by the American pianist Kimball Gallagher as a concerto entitled “Anket” which in hieroglyphics means “horizon”. This is a debut for more performances to come for the duo in Egypt as part of their project to strengthen dialogue between nations through music.

Ryan Francis is one of the most established and famous composers in the US. He was awarded the Palmer Dixson Prize twice --a prize considered the highest award in music composition. He composed “Anket” specially to be performed in Egypt after being commissioned to do so by the American pianist Kimball Gallagher whose project aims at bringing people closer through music. Gallagher, through support from the NGO Cultures in Harmony, is carrying out a musical project in a country from each continent. He chose Egypt to represent Africa. His project in Egypt started with two performances that took place last March in the Sawy Wheel and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina with the help of the Bibliotheca’s and the Sawy’s orchestras and the singing of the internationally acclaimed soprano Neveen Alouba. Several international compositions were performed by Gallagher one of them being that which Ryan Francis composed. It is an excerpt from a long hieroglyphic poem entitled, “To my Beloved Egypt”. The performance was part of an international tour including 88 shows in 19 countries that Kimball Gallagher organized. The young composer does not hide his excitement and pride at participating in this project since his father is Egyptian and his mother Norwegian and he lives in the United States where he dreamt of composing a piece on his own land that would, in a way, represent its musical nature. And this was accomplished through “Anket” which blends international contemporary music and Egyptian popular music. His pride also stems from choosing a text that represents the greatness of the Egyptian civilization as a way of gaining inspiration from his past to create his future. Ryan said that the idea of choosing this piece (which his Egyptian father who is a linguistics professor helped translate) came to him when he was visiting the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and he “felt that the bibliotheca resembles me or that I resemble it. It’s built on Egyptian land, carrying an important part of its civilization and was designed by a Norwegian architect. I too belong to an Egyptian father and a Norwegian mother. I dreamt of presenting something there and my dream has come true.”

Kimball, on the other hand, is proud that, in spite of this not being the first time that he visits Egypt or performs here, this one is different because he is performing a new composition for the very first time in Egypt and the world. Even though he played several of Ryan’s compositions before, this one, in his opinion, has a different taste because it is from Egypt and for Egypt. Pianist Gallagher is known in the music scene as one of the most dynamic and entrepreneurial artists. He is trying to implement the

saying that music is the universal language of mankind. "I always believed in this saying and I think that a lot of people do too. But you will never know how true it is unless you start applying it, it is my key to the people all over the world."

Ryan Francis envisions that the project as a beginning for future collaboration between him and Egyptian pianists. He hopes that more of his compositions will be played in Egypt by Egyptian musicians. This is a dream that he shares with Gallagher who expresses a strong desire for more collaboration with Egyptian musicians.

By Nahid Naser

Photo: Imad Abdul Hadi