Niyaz presents *The Fourth Light Project*
An Immersive Multi-Media Experience
Friday, November 3, 2017, 8 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

This program is part of the Moss Arts Center project, SALAAM: Exploring Muslim Cultures. The project is made possible by a grant from the Association of Performing Arts Professionals; Building Bridges: Arts Culture and Identity, a component of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.

The performance runs for approximately 85 minutes with no intermission.
Biography

NIYAZ

The Fourth Light

Electro-acoustic outfit Niyaz breaks new ground on The Fourth Light, a far-reaching album that defies the conventions of “world music” and makes a bold statement to a global audience. After three successful albums, which have topped the world music sales and radio charts and placed them in front of audiences around the world, Niyaz has created what is arguably their most mature work yet. Mixed by Grammy-nominated producer and electronic musician Damian Taylor (Björk, The Killers, and Arcade Fire), the album offers exotic rhythms, outstanding acoustic performances, and, of course, the bewitching melancholy of front-woman Azam Ali’s voice, all seamlessly blended into a production of richly textured arrangements, sweeping choruses, and electronic beats. The band’s musical and personal heritage lies in the mysticism and allure of the East; however, Niyaz was formed in California and is based in Montreal, and one of their aims has long been to build a bridge between East and West—a sanctuary from a modern world of polarized ideologies.

On The Fourth Light, lead singer, co-composer, and co-producer Ali takes on the role of electronic musician for the first time, programming all the beats for the album. This is a major achievement for a woman who, until now, has been principally recognized for her spellbinding voice, which has been featured in some of the biggest Hollywood film and television scores. “It was a tremendous challenge to take on what is generally a very masculine role,” Ali says. “People know me as a singer, not an electronic musician, and there was an initial fear that I would not be taken seriously. Once I freed myself up mentally from that self-imposed limitation, I discovered a whole new world inside myself, a world that led me to my greatest personal triumph on this album, which was transcending the role that had come to define me simply as a singer.”

In many ways, The Fourth Light is a feminist album. The production and programming duties that Ali has taken on—duties usually associated with men—is just one part of it. At the center of the album is Rabia Al Basri, the first female Sufi mystic and poet. Born in the 8th century in what is now Iraq, she served as the main source of inspiration for the music on this album. Al Basri was born into extreme poverty during a time when women’s rights were severely constrained. Sold into slavery at a young age, Al Basri defied the odds and managed to find the inner strength and resolve that would eventually lead to her liberation both as a woman and a spiritual figure. As Ali explains, “[Al Basri’s] struggles even in the 8th century remain quite relevant to our time, when women continue to strive to rise above the status of inferiority placed upon them by many patriarchal societies around the world.”

Al Basri is credited with the creation of the concept of divine love, which today lies at the heart of Sufi mysticism. Though only fragments of her poems have survived, the words that do remain carry a powerful message. Her writing served as the building blocks upon which Ali and co-writer and multi-instrumentalist Loga R. Torkian constructed three of the album’s most potent songs: Tam e Eshq (The Taste of Love), Man Haramam (I Am a Sin), and Marg e Man (My Elegy).

The song Aurat (Woman) further drives home the cry for gender equality. The track’s lyrics are based on a visionary poem by Kaifi Azmi, one of the greatest, most progressive Urdu poets of the 20th century. Azmi’s original text was written for his wife in the 1940s and called for women to stand shoulder to shoulder with men, during an era when women lived in very traditional societies in an India that was still not independent.

There has always been a deep social conscience woven into the music of Niyaz. Though many of their songs are original compositions based on or inspired by ancient poetry of the great Eastern mystics, a large part of their repertoire is derived from traditional folk songs of ethnic and religious minority groups in the Middle East who have suffered great oppression. The new album features five of these folk songs: Shir Ali Mardan (Song of a Warrior) from the Bakhtiari region of Iran; Yek Naza (A Single Glance) from Khorassan, Iran; Eyvallah Shahim ‘new rendition’ (Truth) from the Alevi-Bektashi tradition in Turkey; and two from Afghanistan, Sabza Ba Naz (The Triumph of Love) and Khuda Bowad Yaret (Divine Companion).
**Biography, continued**

The message of hope in the face of oppression and the need for unity remain pivotal to the band. Their sublime, ever-evolving mix of poetry and song is delivered through music that is both uplifting and transformative. Niyaz already bridges East and West, the acoustic and the electronic; now the band aspires to restore a severed bond between the past and the present. “It’s a daring task to try and bridge the chasm between peoples,” says Ali, “but if we can make that happen, even for the moments when people listen to our music, then who’s to say we did not triumph in our goal?”
Engagement Events

Thursday, November 2, 2017
CLASS VISIT: MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION
Students in Virginia Tech's Arabic program engaged with members of Niyaz during this class visit, hosted by Nadine Sinno, assistant professor of Arabic in Virginia Tech’s Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

Thursday, November 2, 2017
WORKSHOP WITH ITRAAB ENSEMBLE
During their visit, Niyaz led a workshop with Itraab, an Arabic music ensemble founded in 2014 and supported by the Moss Arts Center. The Itraab Ensemble, whose name means “creating enchantment through music,” is free and open to participation for all. Under the direction of Anne Elise Thomas, ethnomusicologist, the ensemble learns musical pieces from various parts of the Arab world for performance on percussion, voice, and Arabic instruments. Instruments are provided for use. Musical experience is a plus, but not necessary. Young people (ages 10 and up) are welcome to participate with an adult. For more information or to join the group, contact annethom@vt.edu.

Friday, November 3, 2017
TALK: FEMINISM, SUFISM, AND MUSIC
Before the performance, Sinno and Thomas led this discussion on feminism, Sufism, and music and the enduring legacy of Rabia Al Basri, the central figure of Niyaz’s Fourth Light Project.

Special thanks to Salaam: Exploring Muslim Cultures team, Anisa Mehdi, Anne Elise Thomas, Hussein Rashid, Nadine Sinno, and Wolf Brown

For Virginia Tech Students

The Division of Student Affairs invites you to engage in the Aspirations for Student Learning to do more, be more, and aspire to be your best self.

Aspirations for Student Learning
Commit to unwavering CURIOSITY
Pursue SELF-UNDERSTANDING and INTEGRITY
Practice CIVILITY
Prepare for a life of COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP
Embrace UT PROSIM (That I May Serve) as a way of life

One way to work toward these aspirational goals is to engage in Keystone Happenings. Keystone Happenings highlight the Aspirations for Student Learning, provide opportunities for learning, and challenge students to reflect. Search “keystone” on GobblerConnect at gobblerconnect.vt.edu/events to discover these opportunities.

Keystone Happening Reflections for Niyaz
The Fourth Light Project chronicles the life of Rabia Al Basri, who is considered to be the first female Sufi mystic and poet. Considering this, Niyaz states on their website that “The Fourth Light is in many ways a feminist album.” How did the performance explore multiple facets of femininity?

For more resources for educators, students, and lifelong learners to help you dig deeper and engage with this performance and our other season performances, view our Learning Guide at artscenter.vt.edu/experiences.
About Salaam: Exploring Muslim Cultures

SALAAM: Exploring Muslim Cultures (salaam means “peace” in Arabic) is a project that is engaging communities in Southwest Virginia with the diversity of Muslim cultures through an exploration of stories, images, sounds, and perspectives. Designed in collaboration with an extensive network of campus and community partners, this multi-year process of story-sharing, performing, and visual arts will culminate in an original production created by an ensemble of students and community members in collaboration with guest artists. A range of activities will raise awareness of Muslim identities and cultures and foster a more inclusive community among individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

GET INVOLVED

October 1-November 17, 2018
NEWMAN LIBRARY PROJECT EXHIBITION

Spring 2018
SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS
Embrace Virginia Tech’s motto of Ut Prosim by participating in one of Salaam’s unique service-learning projects with community organizations. Register at tinyurl.com/yaglgxjt.

Spring 2018
SALAAM: EXPLORING MUSLIM CULTURES COURSE
For more information, contact professors Carmen Gitre at cgitre@vt.edu and Will Taggart at wtaggart@vt.edu.

January 29-March 17, 2018
WORKSHOPS: OMAR OFFENDUM, KARIM NAGI, + SABA TAJ

March 17, 2018
SALAAM: EXPLORING MUSLIM CULTURES PERFORMANCE

For more information and to participate in project activities, contact project director Jon Catherwood-Ginn at rjginn@vt.edu.

This project is made possible by a grant from the Association of Performing Arts Professionals; Building Bridges: Arts, Culture, and Identity, a component of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; and the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.
In the Galleries

PIA FRIES
September 14-December 9, 2017
Ruth C. Horton Gallery and Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor

Internationally acclaimed artist Pia Fries (Swiss, based in Dusseldorf, Germany) integrates silkscreened fragments of 16th- and 17th-century Baroque and Mannerist prints into a hybrid fusion of figuration and abstraction, art historical tradition and adventurous innovation. Intense color and lush paint careen, halt, retreat, then advance across expanses of empty white surfaces in a statement about the intersection of movement and stasis, past and present, and art and life. This exhibition presents a selection of paintings and prints from renowned private collections and prominent galleries in New York and California.

For more information on this artist, please visit piafries.com.

GALLERY HOURS
Monday-Friday, 10 AM-5:30 PM
Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu or 540-231-0840.