



**University Musical Society (Ann Arbor) and  
Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation  
Co-Commission Lebanese-American Composer Tarek Yamani  
to Write New Work for the Spektral Quartet**

**Digital World Premiere of *Berytus* Presented in Late October**

ANN ARBOR, MI and ABU DHABI (September 30, 2021) -- The **University Musical Society** of the University of Michigan (UMS) and the **Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation** (ADMAF) announce the digital world premiere of a new four-movement suite, *Berytus*, written by Lebanese-American composer **Tarek Yamani** and performed by the Chicago-based **Spektral Quartet** on **Wednesday, October 27 at 7:30 pm (Eastern Time, GMT-4)**. The Arab-World Premiere will take place as part of the Abu Dhabi Festival 2021 on Thursday, October 28 at 8 pm (Gulf Standard Time, GMT+4).

The 40-minute program will be available on demand through November 27 and also includes Yamani's work *Skylines Ahead*, written for string quartet and darbuka (performed remotely by Khaled Yassine in Beirut). The program was recorded in late September at the Logan Center on the University of Chicago campus.

*Berytus* was composed by Yamani, who now resides in Berlin, a few months after the Port of Beirut explosions in August 2020. Its title comes from the Ancient Greek name of the Roman colony of present-day Beirut, which became an Arab city when it was conquered by the Muslims in A.D. 635.

*Berytus* was co-commissioned by the University Musical Society as part of a 2020/21 season Digital Artist Residency, which was designed to support artists eager to adapt through creating projects for the digital frame. It was this program that brought Yamani and the Spektral Quartet together for their first collaboration, along with the Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation.

Additional support is provided by the Arab American National Museum (Dearborn, MI) through a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Tarek Yamani was in the midst of a residence that was supposed to lead to his UMS debut on March 13, 2020 when all performances were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. As part of the preparations for that residency, he spoke with Doyle Armbrust, a member of the Spektral Quartet whom UMS commissioned to interview Yamani. At that point, Spektral had never used microtonal scales that are used in traditional Arab music, and Yamani had never composed for string quartet. Over the course of the season that followed, the two joined forces to collaborate as part of a UMS Digital Artist Residency, where they held public virtual listening parties to better understand each other's creative inspirations, spoke to University of Michigan class groups, and developed a new work that stretched each of them artistically.

In addition to the concert performance, which will feature a live, online conversation with the artists after the US premiere, Tarek Yamani will participate in a virtual talk on Wednesday, October 20 at 7:30 pm Eastern (GMT-4) at the Arab American National Museum as part of their "Across Disciplines" series, which pairs artists who work in different genres interviewing each other, discovering unexpected connections, and discussing their newest projects. Yamani will be in conversation with Yemeni-Bosnian-US multi-media artist Alia Ali, whose work explores cultural binaries through a critique of linguistics and inherited political structures and narratives that lead to polarization and miscommunication.

### **About the Artists**

Born and raised in Beirut, **Tarek Yamani** is a Lebanese-American award-winning composer and pianist who taught himself jazz at the age of 19. Since the release of his debut album *Ashur*, in 2012, he has been reinventing classical Arab music within the framework of Black American music in a genre often dubbed "Afro-Tarab," a self-coined name that acknowledges both jazz's African roots and the Arab concept of "tarab," or emotional transcendence through music.

Multi-Grammy nominees, the **Spektral Quartet** actively pursues a vivid conversation between exhilarating works of the traditional repertoire and those written this decade, this year, or this week. Since its inception in 2010, Spektral has been known for creating seamless connections across centuries, drawing in the listener with charismatic deliveries, interactive concert formats, an up-close atmosphere, and bold, inquisitive programming. While this pairing was unconventional, it fit naturally into their mode of working with composers outside of the "contemporary classical" space.

### **About the Commissioners**

A recipient of the 2014 National Medal of Arts, **UMS (also known as the University Musical Society)** contributes to a vibrant cultural community by connecting audiences with performing artists from around the world in uncommon and engaging experiences. One of the oldest performing arts presenters in the country, UMS is an independent non-profit organization affiliated with the University of Michigan, presenting over 70 music, theater, and dance performances by professional touring artists each season, along with over 100 free educational activities. UMS is committed to bold artistic leadership, engaged learning through the arts, and access and inclusiveness. Since 1990, the organization has co-commissioned and supported the production of nearly 80 new or reimagined works. Matthew VanBesien became the organization's seventh president in July 2017.

### **About Abu Dhabi Festival**

Established in 2004, Abu Dhabi Festival acts as a time of celebration but also as a time of gathering and exchange for the population of the Seven Emirates of the UAE, the region, and the world. Abu Dhabi Festival commissions, produces, preserves, and presents annually the greatest works of music and arts to create rich cultural experiences in the UAE and beyond. Its strong international presence nurtures invaluable cultural dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding to build a more peaceful future through the arts. The Abu Dhabi Festival is a program of the Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation, among the oldest non-profit cultural organizations in the Arabian Gulf. Founded in 1996, it is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge, of development, of culture, and of creativity. Over those last 20 years, ADMAF has pioneered new practices and new works, supported Middle Eastern debuts, and nurtured the careers of gifted young professionals throughout the Arab world.

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