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Khalife enthralles Qatar with Arab Spring-inspired suite

AFP - Famous Lebanese composer Marcel Khalife enthralled a Qatari audience with his Arab Spring-inspired suite "Oriental" in Doha, presented in collaboration with the Philharmonic Orchestra he helped set up in 2007.

The late Sunday performance aimed "to echo the cries of the Arab people for freedom," said the 62-year-old composer, whose latest work brings together tunes from the traditional Iraqi maqam musical style, mixed with others from the Levant, North Africa, Egypt and Andalusia.

"There is much happiness" in Oriental, "echoing the cries of ordinary Arab people, which had been suppressed for (some) 50 years before they took to the streets to demand freedom," Khalife told AFP.

The Leipzig Radio Choir sang in Arabic accompanied by the Qatari orchestra at the opera house in Doha, located in the Katara Cultural Village.

Khalife's 31-year-old son Rami, following his father's footsteps, presented a requiem, inspired by the violence shaking the Middle East and North Africa.

"The large amount of death around us, especially in Syria and Arab Spring countries and the whole world led me to composing this requiem," said Rami, who played the harpsichord accompanied by chants from the Korean soprano Whal Ran Seo.

For Khalife, a leftist since his youth, the two works are "complementary."

The aspiration of Arabs to freedom is "an irrevocable process which will move ahead despite the obstacles of extremism and sectarianism," he said, adding that "difficult years are ahead."

Khalife played an important role in the establishment of the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, which was set up in 2007. It has 101 musicians from 30 countries but none from the Gulf state itself.

The creation of the orchestra is part of efforts by gas-rich Qatar to become a cultural hub in the Gulf.



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Lebanese composer Marcel Khalife is pictured during a rehearsal with the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, presenting choral compositions inspired by the Arab Spring, at the Doha Opera House in the Qatari capital on February 3, 2013. The famous Lebanese composer enthralled a Qatari audience with his Arab Spring-inspired suite "Oriental" in Doha.

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