Ahmed Mukhtar was born 1967 in Baghdad and has played the *oud* and *Arabic percussion* since 1979. He worked with many traditional music groups and musicians in Baghdad. He studied *oud* and *percussion* with the masters *Ganim Hdad* and *Jameel Jerjis* and then went on to continue his studies of these styles at the *High Institute of Music* in Damascus. Later he studied at the *London College of Music*. From 1990 he became a performer and teacher and toured the major cities throughout the Middle East and Europe, as well as Boston, Philadelphia and New York.

His festival performances include the *International Festival of Arabic Music in Cairo, 1994*; the *Conference of Arabic Music in Damascus, 1995*; the *International Music Feast* at Cambridge University (England), 1997; the *International Conference and Festival of Lutes and Music* in France and Spain 1998-2002; the *Festival of Iraqi Culture*, Stockholm, Sweden 2002 and 2003; *WOMAD Global Festival*, Reading 2003 (England); as well as numerous live performances and concerts for BBC Radio 3, London, in 2004, and a guest performance at the *BBC Radio 3 Mediterranean Music Fest 2004* in Rome, Italy.

Ahmed has written music for plays and documentaries for Arabic and Western TV stations, such as MBC, ART, Mustakela and BB5. He released two CDs in 1996 and 1999, both with traditional music and original works. In 2003 ARC Music released his CD *"Rhythms of Baghdad"* (EUCD1781).

The UN chose Ahmed and sixteen other musicians from all over the world to release a CD for the benefit of the victims of terrorism and wars. This was adopted by the Human Rights Association. Today, Ahmed presents his own educational musical programme *"Speech of the Oud"* on the *Al-Mustaqillah* satellite channel which broadcasts from London. This programme embraces the history of Arabic music and its theories, the oud and playing methods for all levels from beginners to advanced players. He also teaches oud, Arabic music theory and percussion in colleges in London.

Ahmed Mukhtar's research of the heritage of Arabic maqam, especially into oud music of the Iraqi school, led him to discover a new maqam related to the Arab philosopher Al-Kindy. His music is rooted in this rich and complex tradition while also taking it in unique new directions.

"The unfretted Oud may be the hardest of all instruments to play, with its delicately flattened intervals, but Mukhtar extracts magic: he can make it dream, gallop or thunder, and he uses silence to great effect." Michael Church, The Independent, on Sunday, 23 March 2003

"Ahmed Mukhtar's blessed fingers fashion shades and shapes from his instrument that most people can only dream of. Veering from sprightly melodic segments to passages of innovative strokes and strums, the effect is a unique excursion to the heart and soul of sensual acoustics." Rob Smith, Taplas Magazine (April/May 2003)

"Mukhtar works outside the area of song and does not limit himself to merely making musical entertainment. His music is rooted in the traditional Iraqi style and he uses the different playing techniques, adding tremolo to distinguish his playing. He also has a unique style of harmony." Asharq Al Awsat (Arab Newspaper)

"The essence of Ahmed Mukhtar's project is presenting Iraqi Music with pure human respect, and he relays the Iraqi musical heritage in all its scope, especially the rich rural music. He is the first to present this kind of music as a soloist with his distinguished virtuoso technique." Almada Newspaper (Baghdad, Iraq)

Alaa Majeed *(Nay)* was born in 1960. He studied at the Iraqi Institute for Music in Baghdad and graduated with a "High Arts Diploma". After his graduation, from 1984-1996 he worked as a music and nay teacher. Later he became the "Music Supervisor" at the Iraqi Institute for Music. He was the founder and leader of many groups in Iraq, such as "Babylon" and "Ishtar". Since 1996 he has worked in Dubai as the conductor of the "Arabic Music Orchestra" and as a composer and studio director.

Shaker Hassan *(Percussion, oud, keyboards, composer, arranger)* was born in 1972 in Baghdad. He studied Iraqi traditional music at the Baghdad Institute of Music. Shaker worked with many traditional and folk music groups such as the "Muoner Basher Orchestra" and "Mushshahat" and the "Arabic Music Orchestra". He also studied percussion with *Jameel Jarjace* and piano with renowned Iraqi teachers, as well as oud with *Ali Al Amam*. He has played on numerous TV programmes and composed more than 30 songs for Iraqi and Arabic singers. He also recorded percussion on many CDs for Arabic instruments.

Hassan Falih *(Qanun, composer)* was born in 1963 in Basra, in the South of Iraq. He graduated from the Baghdad Academy of Music and the Baghdad Institute of Fine Art. He then became a teacher of the qanun at the Institute of Music and Ballet in Baghdad. He toured extensively throughout the Middle East and Europe between 1991 and 1995. In 2001 he was awarded the "Best Qanun Player of the Arab World" Award from the Arabic Music League and the Arab League. He is the conductor of the "Kazem Al Saher Orchestra".

Amongst others Hassan performed at the following festivals: the Youth Music Festival, Moscow; Zacobana; Folk Music in Poland, We are the Future-Festival in Italy, the National Women's Union Festival in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the majority of Arabic music festivals, such as festivals in Kartaj, Jarash, Beit al Dian and Dubai.

Hassan released four CDs: *Aoun Sharda* (Eyes), *Mahatat shareda* (Iraqi Stations), *Collection of Kazem Al Saher 1*, *Collection of Kazem Al Saher 2*.

Waseem Faris *(Joza)* was born in Baghdad in 1970. He studied violin at the "School of Music and Ballet" and graduated in 1986. Then he went on to study at the Iraqi Institute for Music Studies from which he graduated in 1991. He participated in many international festivals such as the Music Conversance held in the Arab World Institute, the Jarash International Festival in Jordan, the Iraqi–Turkish Cultural Week in Ankara, Turkey as well as the Festival of Arab Music in Cairo. Waseem worked as music teacher and choir master at various schools in Jordan and Dubai. He is renowned as a soloist of the Joza and other instruments.

1. **Gorg-iraq (The Two Rivers)** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece is based on the ancient *maqam Jaharga* played in the rhythm *Jorjena*. It describes the life along the rivers Tigris and Euphrates and their banks lined with palm trees.

2. **Childhood** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece depicts an innocent childhood and peaceful life free of disputes. It is based on *Maqam Ajam* which was widely used in the Abbasid period (750–1258 AD).

3. **Iraqi Café** *(arr. Ahmed Mukhtar)*
In Iraq the café is a calm and safe place central to social life and social interaction. In the café traditional music (maqam) is performed and being listened to and appreciated. This piece is based on *Maqam Bayat* (C, D*b*, E*b* (microtone), F, G, A*b* ,B*b*, C) in a rhythm called *Sangil Sama'i*.

4. **The Road to Baghdad** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece based on *Maqam Nahawand* (an ancient Iraqi maqam) expresses the feelings of the composer while he is travelling back to Baghdad after long years of absence. He experiences mixed feelings of sadness and apprehension of not finding Baghdad the same as when he left, and at the same time anticipation and happiness about returning to this beautiful city.

5. **Sufi Moments** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece is based on *Aqsak*, an ancient Sufi rhythm, and on the m*aqams Nagreez* and *Rest*. It represents Sufi moments the player has lived.

6. **Dance of War** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece describes individuals who cause war and how they 'pose', and 'dance' and 'celebrate' their war without caring about consequences. It is based on *Maqam Nowaather* played in a very ancient, pre-Islamic martial rhythm.

7. **After the War** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece is based on *Maqam Ajam* with many accidental notes (*sharps*, *double sharps*, *flats*, *double flats* or *naturals* prefixed to a note). The very old rhythm is derived from percussion instruments and rhythms from pre-Islamic time. The music expresses a mixture of sadness about the massive destruction caused by war, and the relief and happiness experienced at the end of that destruction. You can observe these feelings most clearly on the faces of the children.

8. **Sama'ai Baghdad** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece tells about ancient Baghdad during the Ottoman period (1299-1923 AD), the time of classical form and music. The composition is based on *Maqam Kurd* (D, E*b*, F, G, A, *Bb*, C, D) and there are many modulations to other maqams. The rhythm *Sama'ai thaqil* (10/8) is very old and comes from the Abbasid period (750-1258 AD). It actually represents one of the very important periods in the history of Baghdad. Usually the introduction – four bars in 10/8 rhythm – should be composed, but in this instance Mukhtar left the player to improvise these four bars, to allow him to be part of the composition. It is customary that every movement should contain one maqam, but in this piece two maqams are played in every movement. The composer created a special rhythm for the fourth movement and called it *'Mukhtar Rhythm'*.

9. **Doulab Mukhtar** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
Doulab literally means "wheel" or "circle". This is a short introductory instrumental composition. The *doulab* sets the mood for a maqam and is intended to establish its special character such as its structure of intervals and the emotion or atmosphere attached to it.
Usually a *doulab* is very slow-paced and uses only four or five of the seven notes of an octave. In this piece Mukhtar presents a modern view of this composition by using all fourteen notes of two octaves and by increasing the tempo to make it more accessible for Western listeners.

10. **Motherly** (Oud & Joza) *(arr. Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece expresses the composer's feelings about the death of *Margaret Hassan*. It is also a gift to his mother and to every Iraqi mother.

11. **Iraqi Kurdish Dance** *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece is based on a Kurdish rhythm and on *Maqam Muhaier,* which is widely used in the Kurdish area in northern Iraq. It is an optimistic outlook on Kurdish everyday life.

12. **Arab Marshes** (Saba) *(Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece is about the marshes in the south of Iraq, with their incredibly rich plant and wildlife. Many songs and pieces of music have been written about them. The scale played here is called *Mahmadawi*: C, D*b*, E*b* (microtone), F*b*, G, A*b*, B*b*, C.

13. **Horizon** (Oud & Qanun) *(arr. Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This improvised piece is a conversation between two instruments. It tries to reflect the musician's horizons while playing and how they 'meet'. It is based on *Maqam Al Hujaz*, an ancient maqam, from C (C, D*b*, E, F, G, A*b*, B*b*, C) and also takes excursions into "branches" of *Maqam Al Hujaz*, such as *Hujaz Carr* and *Negreez*.

14. **Segah** (Rhythmic taqsim [pronounce: tak'seem]) *(arr. Ahmed Mukhtar)*
A *taqsim* (usually a free improvisation without a specific rhythm) on *Maqam Segah* and its branches such as *Huzam* and *Segah Iraq*. This particular *taqsim* has a specific rhythm to it.

15. **Moments in the Mosque** (Taqsim qanun) *(arr. Ahmed Mukhtar)*
This piece, played on the *qanun* [ka-noon] depicts beautiful moments in an old mosque.

16. **Taqsim Joza** *(arr. Ahmed Mukhtar)*
An improvisation played on the *joza*, an Iraqi spike fiddle.

***Al Joza*:** The *joza* is a four-stringed spike fiddle. It is between 60 and 75 cm long (23.5 - 29.5 in.) with a small resonator made from a hollowed-out coconut, cut off at both ends. One opening is covered by lamb or fish skin. The wooden neck has four tuning pegs. Four steel strings of different gauges pass from the metal spike at the bottom of the resonator over a grooved bridge on the membrane. The slightly curved bow is made from pliable wood and horse hair. Traditional tuning is in perfect 4ths (a, d', g', c"). The pitch is chosen to suit the accompanied voice. The compass is about two octaves.

The player rests the spike on his left knee and holds the neck with his left hand, while bowing with his right.

The *joza* is used to accompany urban classical music. Together with *santur* (dulcimer), *daff* and *dunbuk* (drums), it is part of local traditional ensembles but has recently increasingly also been played solo.

The *Oud* is a short-necked fretless plucked lute of the Arab world – the direct ancestor of European lutes. Its name derives from *"al-'ūd"* ('the lute'). It is the principal instrument of Arab music and was traditionally mainly used to accompany singing. It is also played in Turkey, Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Somalia.

The oud has a large pear-shaped body, a short fretless neck and is most commonly strung with five or six courses of double strings made of gut or nylon. They are plucked with a plectrum (*rīsha*, 'quill') made of an eagle's feather held between thumb and forefinger, or with a plastic plectrum. There are many tuning systems but mostly the strings are tuned in 4ths: *G*, *A*, *d*, *g*, *c'*.

The *Nay* is an oblique rim-blown flute of the Middle East. The term derives from the old Persian word for 'reed' and by extension 'reed flute'. The classical Arab *nay* consists of an open-ended segment of 'Persian reed' with six finger-holes in the front and one in the back. The edge of the tube at the top is lightly bevelled. It may vary in length from 32 to 81 cm (12.5 - 32 in.). The reed

pipe from which the instrument is made should not be less than three years old and the tube must be hard, smooth and compact; the distance between the nodes is taken into consideration. Several instruments can sometimes be made from one long reed stem. The *nay* is an urban instrument and the only wind instrument played in Arabic 'art music'. As part of ensembles found in Arab towns it appears alongside the *oud* (lute), the *qanun* (box zither) and two drums: the *daff* (frame drum) and the single-headed *dunbuk* (drum). As a solo instrument it is used for *taqsim* (improvised solo passages) and for accompanying religious song.

The *Qanun* [ka-noon] is a plucked box zither of the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Asia. It is a classical instrument of the Arab world and Turkey. In its final design and form the instrument was invented in the *Abbasid* period (750-1258 AD) by the legendary musician and instrument maker *Al Faraby* († 950 AD). The qanun has a trapezoid body with one rectangular side. The longer side varies in length between 75 and 100 cm (29 - 39 in.) and the box is 32 to 44 cm wide (12.5 to 17.5 in.). It is usually strung with 87 nylon strings (formerly gut strings) in groups of three which run across a bridge resting on five patches of fish skin. The instrument has a range of about four octaves. The player rests the qanun on his knees or on a table with the longest side facing him and the perpendicular side to his right. The strings are plucked by ring-shaped plektra made from buffalo horn placed on both index fingers.

Ahmed Mukhtar - *composer, producer, musical director, oud*
Alaa Majeed - *nay*
Shaker Hassan - *percussion, oud, keyboards*
Hassan Falih - *qanun*
Waseem Faris - *joza* (spike fiddle)

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Jawaher Studio, Dubai, *engineer:* **Majeed Begges**
Aghani Studio, Dubai, *engineer:* **Anis Mohammed**
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DIGI Song Studio, London: *engineer:* **Fadel Falih**
Producer: **Ahmed Mukhtar**
Premaster: **Diz Heller**

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