

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Presents

Mark Morris Dance Group

Mark Morris, Artistic Director

The Silkroad Ensemble

with Alim Qasimov and Fargana Qasimova, mugham vocals

in

Layla and Majnun

Visually Striking Collaborative Evening-Length Work

**Passionate Story of Tragic Love based
on Ancient Middle Eastern Tale**

Kennedy Center Co-Commission and D.C. Premiere

March 22–24, 2018 in the Opera House

(WASHINGTON)—The revered Mark Morris Dance Group, under the direction of Artistic Director and Choreographer Mark Morris, returns with the collaborative evening-length work and a Kennedy Center co-commission, *Layla and Majnun*, March 22–24 in the Opera House. The poignant and tragically beautiful love story of unrequited passion is adapted for the stage through original choreography from Morris and a score based on the 1908 opera by the Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli. Featuring bold set designs and costumes by the late esteemed English painter Howard Hodgkin, the dancers are joined onstage by celebrated Azerbaijani mugham singers Alim Qasimov

and Fargana Qasimova and musicians of the Silkroad Ensemble on traditional Asian instruments combined with Western strings and percussion.

From a 7th century Arabian tale, most notably expressed and translated by the famous poets Nizami Ganjavi and Muhammad Fuzuli, this ancient tale is well-known across many Middle Eastern and sub-continental cultures. The production, which premiered in September 2016, is based on the Ganjavi and Fuzuli translation. Closely akin to *Romeo and Juliet*, but predating the Western tragedy, the story over time, has taken on numerous forms and inspired works of poetry, visual art, literature, cinema, and music. When a young man's zealous feelings for his childhood love, Layla, earn him the nickname Majnun, or "possessed," his perceived madness turns their would-be reunion into scandal, misfortune, and eternal longing. Morris has described the work as "a visually, musically, and choreographically unified and self-contained concert piece. An enlightening tragedy..." that ultimately conveys "a message of profound, abundant, eternal love."

The Music and Choreography

Using a condensed arrangement of the music, originally created for the Silkroad Ensemble in 2007, Morris places the singers and musicians center-stage, a reflection of the style of performances from the region. Through mugham, a native Azerbaijani style of sung storytelling, characterized by long passages of structured improvisation and ornamentation, the vocalists interpret the central characters of Layla and Majnun while the dancers interpret the story through movement. Considered by Morris to be more of a dance-opera, his choreography, which is often lauded for its musicality, highlights the improvisatory style of the genre and incorporates elements of Azerbaijani dance such as strong, rhythmic footwork and general Middle Eastern elements like Sufi whirling.

FUNDING CREDITS

Layla and Majnun is a Mark Morris Dance Group/ Cal Performances, UC Berkeley production in association with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.; Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Chicago, IL; Hopkins Center for the Arts, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH; Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, College of Fine + Applied Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York, NY; Meany Center for the Performing Arts, Seattle, WA; Melbourne Festival, Victoria, Australia; Sadler's Wells, London, England; and University Musical Society of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

The presentation of Layla and Majnun was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets start at \$29 and can be purchased [online](#), at the Kennedy Center box office or by calling Instant Charge at (202) 467-4600 or (800) 444-1324. For all other ticket-related customer service inquiries, call the Advance Sales Box Office at (202) 416-8540.

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Mark Morris Dance Group
Mark Morris, Artistic Director

The Silkroad Ensemble
With Alim Qasimov and Fargana Qasimova

Kennedy Center Opera House

Layla and Majnun

D.C. Premiere

Thursday, March 22*–Saturday, March 24 at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 24 at 1:30 p.m.

*The March 22 performance will be followed by a post-performance discussion, introduced by Mark Morris and with singers Alim Qasimov and Fargana Qasimova. The discussion will be moderated and translated by musicologist Aida Huseynova.

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