Fasl Ajem is a family of maqamat which includes the Western major scale. In Turkish, it is spelled Acem while the Persian dastgah is named Mahur. Our first piece is in the specific maqam of Jihargah (dastgah Chahargah), wherein the 3rd and 7th degrees are pitched slightly lower than those of Ajem, which itself has 3rds and 7ths lower than the major scale, tuned exactly like the Western major was in the Baroque era and earlier. The maqamat of Ajem evoke strength and majesty, and are typically used in national anthems all over the world. Ajem can also convey a sense of cheerfulness as in our first song.

Tala Min Bayt Abuha was composed by Samir Iskenderiya, a Jewish musician from Alexandria, Egypt who was a double agent for both the Mossad and Egypt's own intelligence service. It is a simple love song in which the target of the singer's affections repeatedly turns him down.

Refrain:    Tal3a min beit abuha
            Royeh3al beit eljiran.
            Tal3a min beit abuha
            Royeh3al beit eljiran.
            Fatma salem 3al3aya
            Yimkin el helu za3alan.
            Fatma salem 3al3aya
            Yimkin el helu za3alan.
**Fasl Nahawand** is a family of Maqamat evoking drama and emotion extremes. In Western music, it is frequently used to evoke sadness. The Turkish spelling is Nihavent.

The Armenian folksong **Qele, Qele** was collected and arranged by the legendary Armenian musicologist and monk Komitas Vardapet, who through his individual suffering has become a symbol of the Armenian genocide. It is a song about love from a far distance, wherein the singer compares his beloved to a quail (“lorik”) and sings of all the things he misses about his beloved. The song begins in Ajem, suggesting cheerful encounters in the singer's past; but the second section turns to Nahawand, in which the singer's notes call out mournfully for his far away lover.

**Refrain:**
Siravor lorik,  
Viravor lorik,  
Lorik,  
Sevavor lorik,  
Lorik jan.

Throughout the Arabic-speaking world, the tune **Lama Bada Ya Tathana** is known and sung as a favourite melody. The song was composed by the muwashshah poet-musicians, exiled from Andalusia by the Reconquista because they refused to convert to Christianity. Some made new homes in Poland and the Balkans, while the composer of this song most likely found new roots in Tunisia. The melody explores the upper jins of Nahawand, dropping hints of maqam Hijaz, implying a feeling of longing amidst desolation.

**Aziza** was composed by one of the most important classical composers of Egypt, Mohammed Abdel Wahab, as the theme song for the 1955 film by the same name. The piece was composed as a bashraf (Turkish “peşrev”), a form consisting of four independent musical sections called Khane which all conclude with the same Taslim section. The final Khane brings us back to Ajem once again, suggesting a moment of cheerfulness in Akef’s character amidst the backdrop of a turbulent lifestyle.
Mazamir is a sharqi composed by Riyadh al-Sunbati, the oudist and composer who worked frequently with the legendary Egyptian classical singer-composer Umm Kulthum. The name of the composition is the plural form of mizmar, the Arabic ancestor of the oboe, often played in pairs. In the 19th century and earlier, mizmar were paired with drums and sent out into the villages to recruit young boys into the Egyptian military. The name may be related to the Hebrew word “zemir”, meaning “song” or “melody”.

Çadırımın Üstüne has long been a favourite of the Ensemble and those who enjoy dancing to it. The lyrics encapsulate the spiritual essence of the Roma way of life, living as a perpetually economically-depressed minority. As the rain drips on his tent roof, the singer acknowledges his debts and the pointlessness of paying his creditors in a usury-based society, but in the same breath thanks God that he is “not dead yet,” and proceeds to suggest cooking more food, blowing what little money he has on needless items at the bazaar, and enjoying watching the women dance.

Zeyna, Zeyna is another well-known composition by Mohammed Abdel Wahab written specifically for and named after the Egyptian belly dancer and film actress Samia Gamal, who was born Zaynab Ibrahim Mahfuz. Mohammed gave Samia her “big break” by asking her to appear in his 1944 film Rousasa fi el Qalb (“A Bullet Through The Heart”), where she appeared as a bellydancer in one scene. This piece was premiered in their 1956 film Zanouba.

We end tonight's performance with a stop in the Balkans to play the Buglarian cow-herder's dance, the Bučimiš. The Ottoman approach to music thrived in the Bulgarian countryside, even under communist suppression, meaning that dances, rhythms, and modal structures lost in Turkey itself survived in Bulgaria. This dance is very close to 4/4 time, except that the third beat is slightly shorter, almost as though the dancer is a cow with a stone lodged in one hoof. The melody takes a tour of most of the maqamat we performed tonight. It begins in Nahawand, then lingers a long while in Hijaz. A brief ray of sunshine and strength is glimpsed in maqam Ajem before returning and finishing again in Nahawand.

Fasıl Bayyati evokes joy and vitality. It is also used to evoke feminine sexuality, especially in dancers. Compositions in Bayyati tend to be relatively light in mood and optimistic. Maqam Bayyati is known as Dastgah Šur in Persian classical music, and known as Makâm Uşşak in Turkish classical music.

Armenitsa is a folk melody from the rebetika tradition, the ethnic Greeks who were forcibly removed from the former Ottoman Empire with the establishment of the Turkish Republic. In exile, they found themselves rejected by mainland Greeks and had difficulty finding work. We take our version tonight from the rebetika singer Rita Abatzi. The singer (intended to be male) says he is getting drunk on ouzo to burn away the memory of his bygone love.

The Alevi spiritual Pazarlık Edelim (“How can we bargain?”) is an incitement of God's faithful to abjure the academic side of religion and focus on the day-to-day spirituality of faith. We take tonight's version from the 2014 recording by the Anatolian folk singer Şirin Üstün.

Refrain: Hatmin Kur'an senin, senin, olsun sen benim olsun sen benim Haydar sen benim.

The last song of our first half is an ever-widening mystery for the Ensemble. Ya Ayn Mawlayitan, performed by the Lebanese singer Samira Tawfiq, was first transcribed by CUMEME founding director Nikolai Ruskin in 2003, who was frustrated by our inability to find a translator who can speak this dialect of “mountain Arabic” from al-Sham, the mountainous region currently dominated by the Islamic State. We know little about its background or meaning, though our Arabic-speaking members have been able to shed a little more light on some of its meaning. Lack of meaning aside, we still enjoy playing it and look forward to sharing it with you tonight!
**Fasl Hijaz** expresses both solitude and the longing of the mystic for the Divine. This longing is also symbolised by lyrical allusions to the desert, the literal meaning of “Hijaz”, which is the endonym of the Arabian peninsula. Fasl Hijaz is traditionally a plagal maqam, meaning its “dominant” tone is the 4th rather than the 5th. The authentic maqam of Hijaz is called Hijaz-kar, which we will explore as well. The difference between the two leads many Middle Eastern theorists and composers to classify the two as separate fasilah. The Turks call this makâm Hicaz, while Persians call it dastgah Homâyun.

Refik Fersan (1893–1965), also known as Tanbûrî Refik Şemseddin, was one of the most important Turkish composers to have come of age during the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. His composition of this Hicaz Peşrev demonstrates the breadth of his compositional abilities and worldly awareness, as well as his important historical position straddling the old and new Turkeys. This fine peşrev in the Ottoman tradition also drops hints of influence from Western classical composers, especially in its majestic third Khane. The peşrev is also filled with delightful, moving figures of diverse rhythm, helping explore the complexities of other makâmlar in reference to the solitude and longing of Hijaz.

**Quando el Rey Nimrod** is a well-known Sephardic folksong that tells the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic story of Abraham versus Nimrod. While this story appears nowhere in the Bible, it is found in the Talmud and acknowledged as cannonical and true by Christians and Muslims throughout the world. The language of the Sephardim is called Ladino, and is rooted in medæval Spanish peppered with Hebrew terms. Hijaz is here used to express longing for oneness with the Divine, “la luz de Yisrael,” which is the intended aim of Abraham's legendary iconoclasm.

Refrain:     Avraham Avinu, Padre querido
             Padre bendicho, luz de Yisrael

The Istanbul folksong **Yedikule** tells the story of a sad hookah-smoking man who spent 20 years in the dreaded Yedikule prison after Ottoman guards arrested him. His crime is never mentioned explicitly, though the singer bitterly states that he was betrayed by an informant. Hijaz is here used to give an impression of the isolation of spending 20 years in an Ottoman prison.

**Raftam ke Raftam** is one of the most intense Persian songs. Its literal meaning has to do with a woman who has left her lover. The woman sings of her loneliness, regret, and inability to understand why she left, saying “I went because I went.” A haunting version of the song was recorded by the legendary Iranian singer Marzieh in the 1960's or 1970's. After the 1979 revolution, she was banned from singing to audiences of men and women together. Since she was only permitted to sing to women alone, she refused, saying “My singing is for all Iranians.” She would walk into the mountains near Tehran and practice her radif by a waterfall so that she could not commit a crime by allowing anyone to hear her sing. After struggling against government oppression for nearly two decades, Marzieh left Iran and found a welcoming audience of exiles around the world. She discovered that her performance of Raftam ke Raftam had taken on a far greater meaning than its original version. Iranians in exile see Iran as the jilted lover while the woman who left is the revolution which failed to deliver its promises of human freedom and an end to political corruption. Iranians used to pass around cassette tapes of this song along with other banned music, but with the advent of the internet age, Iranians now exchange such music through encrypted email and file hosting in other nations.

**Girdim Yarım Baçasına** comes to us from Azerbaijan. The piece makes extensive use of the number three in its form and melody. The singer tells of “coming into the garden of my beloved”, a common idiom in Middle Eastern religious literature. The singer fell in love when she or he was young, but it was not an affair meant to last, so the singer's loneliness is expressed by makâm Hicazkar.

Refrain:     Gel, gel, gel güzelim gel sevirem seni.
             Eger qismetim olursa alaram seni.