



Music Director
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Al-Bustan Music

INTERVIEW WITH KARIMA SKALLI



Penn student Melusine Boon Falleur interviews Karima Skalli

As part of Al-Bustan's [2012-13 Arab Music Concert Series](#), Moroccan vocalist **Karima Skalli** was invited to Philadelphia for a week of rehearsals and demonstrations, culminating with concerts in Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington DC.

A team of University of Pennsylvania students enrolled in The Wharton School's Management 100 class worked with Al-Bustan over the Fall semester to promote Skalli's visit. Penn student **Melusine Boon Falleur** conducted this interview with Skalli on November 13, 2012 at Greenfield Intercultural Center. Melusine, a freshman, who grew up in Paris, interviewed Skalli in French and wrote this translation into English. Fellow Penn student **Akaki Skhirtladze** took photos during the interview and in rehearsal with Al-Bustan's resident *takht* ensemble.

When did you start singing?

Karima Skalli: For me, singing is like a mystery, is something you cannot grasp. The voice is something independent from the body. It is a gift that is within you from the day you are born. I started singing in my childhood during parties with my family, and I discovered that I had this special gift. I was then able to improve this gift, to make my voice more precise. Overall I would say that it was more a process than a particular moment when I started singing.

Did you always know that you would be a singer?

Karima: When I started singing, it was something I was doing more as a hobby; as something I enjoyed. Of course, I had the dream of singing in front of a large public when I was younger but I didn't picture myself as a professional singer. However, at the age of 16, I tried to join the performing art scene but my father was opposed to that idea. Indeed for a woman of my social class in Morocco, it wasn't seen as something good. It wasn't before I got married and had children that all this passion for singing exploded and I decided to start my singing career.



When was your first professional concert?

Karima: My first real concert was at the Cairo Opera in 1999 with a big orchestra. I was a real shock since I was used to singing with a shy and distant voice at family gatherings. That day, I had to suddenly walk on the stage of the Cairo Opera and sing in front of hundreds of people.

Do you write your own songs?

Karima: I write a lot of songs about different themes that are very personal such as spirituality or my own emotions, but I never had the boldness to interpret them. Maybe one day, I'll be able to sing them in front of a public, especially since I still write.

What are the different writers that have accompanied your career?

Karima: I have interpreted songs from many different Arabic sources. My repertoire goes as far back as the poets of the 2nd century. I have also performed songs from Iranian authors.

You said earlier that you have a husband and children, how do you manage to balance your personal and professional life?

Karima: My singing career involves a lot of traveling since I often perform at concerts outside of Morocco. For example, I have been in a lot of countries in the Middle East; I have been to Europe and also to America. Even though I started singing when both my children already had a school path; it is sometime hard to be both a mother and a singer. There is always a trade-off, either when I travel for my concerts or when I stay home to take care of my family. A woman will always feel guilty when she leaves her home, but for me singing is also a duty; something I owe to society.

Do you always pay attention to the meaning of the songs you perform?

Karima: For me, singing doesn't need any lyrics or theme. To convey my emotions I need to be touched by the song. I believe that true beauty and inspiration is greater than words. Singing is about sharing a moment, sharing an emotion with the public.

If you could sing for a cause, what would it be?

Karima: I think that at the moment, the world is facing a lot of challenges. I could sing for every cause if I could, for women that are suffering, for victims of violence, for children... etc. I want to sing to bring some light back to our earth. People need to see what is essential, see what is very profound. I try to share my emotions with my public when I sing so I can touch their hearts. I also believe that it is part of my role to promote Arab culture in the world and that is why I appreciate working with Al-Bustan.