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Claude Chalhoub *Diwan*

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Claude Chalhoub, born in 1974, was originally supposed to follow in his father's footsteps and become a hairdresser. As a little boy, he helps out in his father's salon in the christian quarter of Beirut: he sweeps up hair from the floor, he hands scissors. Apart from the art of hairdressing, which is also practiced by Claude's four brothers (not by the six sisters), there is another family tie: Arabian music. Not a single day passes without the family listening to Fairuz, the goddess of Lebanese music, on the radio. Every Chalhoub family member plays a musical instrument or sings. Claude is assigned a violin. *"When the civil war began, we naturally didn't go to school. My occupation was playing the violin. As I didn't know the technique so well, it was more like making experiments with the violin."* Almost every day, while fusillades crackle and bombs hit, Claude practices in a damp, ill-lit cellar. *"That was a rather special situation that created a strong bond between me and the instrument."* The violin turns into one of the most important constants in Claude's life. His talent wins him a scholarship in England. Just before the end of the war, he escapes his traumatized home country. Without any friends or relatives, with hardly any knowledge of the English language, he starts a new life far from home. *"I had to kneel into my studies much more than the others to get to know orchestra music, chamber music and solo performance better. Listening to others, getting advice, all that was new to me."* His hard work and keen perception make him an outstanding student, who dives head first into the extensive repertoire of classical music. He attends almost every symphonic concert in London. Already as a student, he receives the first prize for a performance at his college with his composition 'Oriental Images'. His debut concert 'London Smith Square' paves the way for a series of successful concerts all over Europe.

"After finishing my classical studies, I began to do research on new colors and visions. My first step was turning back to traditional Arabian music and the art of improvisation." In this phase **Daniel Barenboim's** attention was drawn to Chalhoub. Barenboim was looking for musicians for his 'West-Eastern Divan Orchestra', a cultural and political project with great symbolical power in which Christians, Muslims, and Jews work together. Barenboim made Chalhoub concertmaster in 1999 in Weimar – a milestone in his early artistic development. Another one arises in Weimar as well: the audience, the press and record company people are enthused by Claude playing a chamber concert, he is offered a contract for his first record. The production begins in Los Angeles in 2000 with **Michael Brooks**, who has produced Brian Eno, Tom Waits, and Elvis Costello among others. He describes **Claude Chalhoub's** style: *"His violin playing had that larger than life, in your face quality that great singers have."*

Yo Yo Ma, one of the world's most successful cello players, notices Claude and invites him to Tanglewood, to contribute to his 'Silk Road Project'.

Claude Chalhoub's talent is more than virtuoso Arabian improvisations, and is more than being a typical interpreter of classical music. His assets in performance and composition are clearly in merging styles and musical traditions of various culture areas – be it European, Arabian, or Indian.

"When I play the violin or compose, I visualize. I see colors and light, more than any tangible pictures."

His music has a great visual quality to it. Listening to it creates a cerebral cinema with amazing suggestive power. That is why **Oliver Stone** uses Claude Chalhoub's music for his documentation 'Persona Non Grata', and Sally Potter for 'Yes'. The **Dutch National Ballet** dances to his compositions, and in the Arabian area many pop stars want Claude as their arranger, violinist, and producer. He also teaches violin at the Beirut Conservatory, and musical theory at Notre Dame. He does all this to materialize the projects his heart beats for: his own compositions. They can be listened to on the new CD 'Diwan', recorded at the FWL studios with musicians of the famous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

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