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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF WISCONSIN TO HOST BENEFIT CONCERTS IN CONJUNCTION WITH REFUGEE WELCOME WEEK

MILWAUKEE, WIS. —The International Institute of Wisconsin (IIW), an organization dedicated to the promotion of international cooperation, understanding, and a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural perspective, will host two benefit concerts entitled “New Beginnings” on Sun., Sept. 18, as part of its annual Refugee Welcome Week activities.

The Refugee Welcome Week slogan for 2016, “Connecting Neighbors, Serving Communities,” is designed to recognize “that refugees make our communities stronger economically, socially, and culturally. Communities bring together immigrants and U.S.-born residents in a spirit of unity to raise awareness of the benefits of welcoming everyone – including new Americans.”

The concerts, at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., will be held at the Tenth Street Theatre, 628 N. 10th St. in Milwaukee, with a reception, a refugee photography exhibit, and a silent auction. Headlining the concerts will be William Neil and Tom Gullion of Project FourthStream known for fusing classical composition techniques with jazz. The guest artist will be Issam Rafea, a US-based Syrian Taasim oud (a pear-shaped stringed instrument, with 11 or 12 strings) virtuoso and composer.

FourthStream’s intention is to approach this type of music from the perspective where the composition serves to enhance the improvisation. Recent developments have included use of digital acoustic equipment and interactive video projections.

Rafea, winner of the 2010 “Best Composer Award” at the Dubai International Film Festival (Muhr Arab) for the film “September Rain,” is Chair of the Arabic Music Department at High Institute of Music in Damascus and the principal conductor of Syrian National Orchestra for Arabic Music. An active composer and arranger for television and theater, Rafea has made several solo appearances with the Syrian National Symphony Orchestra and has performed throughout the world. In March of 2013, he was invited to the United States to direct the Middle Eastern Music Ensemble and give a series of presentations and performances at the Northern Illinois University School of Music. Rafea currently resides in Illinois and continues to perform, compose, and teach.

The concerts will also feature a performance by Milwaukee-based Saadi Tawfeeq Al Baghdadi, a traditional Iraqi musician that plays the Ney (an end-blown flute) and the Oud. He has also performed previously at the Holiday Folk Fair *International*, which is produced by the IIW.

Proceeds raised will support the IIW and its Refugee Resettlement Program, which has assisted with the resettlement of individuals and refugee families fleeing violence or persecution in their home countries for more than 70 years. Assisting refugees with social and economic self-sufficiency, along with building strong families and connected communities, are the overall goals of the IIW resettlement program.

In 2015, the IIW assisted approximately 290 refugees, primarily from Myanmar (formerly Burma), with smaller numbers from war-torn Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan. Resettlement services include providing safe and secure living arrangements, basic necessities, links to resources to address physical, medical, economic and social needs, cultural orientation, case management and adjustment of legal status.

The cost of the *New Beginnings* benefit concert is \$30 per person, or \$25 for those under age 25 with a valid Student ID. Tickets, which are tax deductible, go on sale Mon., Aug. 1, and can be purchased at www.iiwisconsin.org or by calling 414-225-6220.

The IIW initiates, coordinates, and sponsors a variety of activities and programs appropriate to the fulfillment of its purpose, including immigration and social services, refugee resettlement, citizen diplomacy, and interpretation and translation. The annual Holiday Folk Fair *International* will be held Fri., Nov. 18 – Sun., Nov. 20 at the State Fair Park Exposition Center.

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