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EAO POSITIVE GLOW

March 2010

P.O. Box 5194

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The **Egyptian American Organization** takes great pleasure in inviting you, your family and your friends to celebrate the arrival of Spring at the annual

Sham-El-Nessim Picnic



Saturday May 1st, 2010
Starting at 11:00 AM

William Mason Regional Park (Shelter #6)
18712 University Drive, Irvine, CA 92612

(from 405 Fwy, exit Culver Drive, park is at intersection of Culver & University Drive)

Come and enjoy a traditional Sham-El-Nessim Breakfast (with Fissikh!), Sport games, Tawla & Chess Tournament, Folk Music, and great company. Lunch will also be served.

Contribution: Adults \$ 25.00;
youth and students \$15
Please mail your check

No Later Than April 17 to:

EAO, P.O, Box 5194, Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 90274

If you would like to support the potluck breakfast or if you have any question, please contact May Mikhail who is coordinating the event at 818-609-0695 or e-mail her at: maymikhail@roadrunner.com.

Eggs and Fish: A History of Sham El Nessim



You wake up early, feeling the excitement. Even your grandparents are going out to the park today. The whole family will play. And there is this special light and breeze combination, not hot yet, but bright and warm enough that being outdoors all day is comfortable. The

end of winter is declared. The eggs you colored and decorated yesterday in the kitchen are all packed--so is the fessikh fish that the adults go silly about. Other things, too. Just like every other year you can remember. It's that favorite day in the year. It is Sham El Nessim. Those of us who have grown up in Egypt can identify with the sentiment of excited anticipation we woke up with on the morning of Sham El Nessim in the years of our childhood.

Egyptian architect Ahmed Ibrahim Hilmy gives us a somewhat more mature insight into that special Egyptian holiday in his scholarly article entitled "Sham El Nessim: Between the Essence of Belief and the Spirit of the Future" published in 2001 in *Al-Ahram*. Hilmy traces the history of Sham El Nessim to its historical sources in Ancient Egypt. He distinguishes Sham El Nessim from other political or social occasions commonly celebrated on the basis that while the social or political celebration is bound to an event and acquires its significance from its context, Sham El Nessim has been engraved in the hearts of Egyptians for thousands for years. The significance of the socio/political occasions will fade in time as their contexts become less palpably relevant; the spirit

Hilmy explains how the pyramid as built by our ancestors was designed so that light reflected from its entrances would converge into a point in its interior that, due to the features of the earth's rotations, would transform into an oval form: the form of an egg. This event happens on one particular day in the year: Sham El Nessim--the celebration of the sun incarnated in the oval form of an egg, symbolizing life, born of the womb of the pyramid, come to declare the blossoming of earth after the long winter.

So this is the sun's celebration, a day when the pure and innocent children dress its earthly symbol, the egg, with the sun's own brightest colors through their lively decorations and designs.

Hilmy provides a brief account of the Ancient Egyptian legend of genesis. It tells of the egg from which the sun came, out of the primal ocean. Symbol of the sun incarnate, the egg represents the bursting of life from its source. In the yolk, like the sphere of the sun, the secret of life is enclosed. From here, as from the pyramid, a creature will emerge, searching for death, incubation, and ultimate resurrection.

And in the oval form of reflected light within the pyramid, on that particular day, ushering spring every year, the egg, with the sun incarnated in its shape, becomes the manifestation of the belief in the idea of creation and return to life.

The Ancient Egyptian belief that all creation started from an eternal deep and limitless ocean also led to the symbolic value given to fish. On this day celebrating life and resurrection, salted fish (fessikh) has been





one of the staples of the Egyptian morning meal. Imbued with primal life from the deep ocean, preserved through the process of salting (much like the preservation of the form through the process of mummification), the fish stands for the principle of life, death, preservation, and reincarnation so central in Pharaonic beliefs. The material symbolism is further developed as the colored eggs and salted fish are accompanied by green items and roots coming from under the ground,

reflecting the idea of resurrection from the underworld.

So central in Ancient Egyptian belief, the concept of death as a passage to resurrection and return to life gives the highest significance to the pyramid, the tomb and the womb of Pharaoh. Hilmy explains that the structure of the pyramids, both the large Giza pyramids and other smaller ones, was designed with a smooth, chalky stone exterior that allowed them to reflect sunlight, each form reflecting an abstract representation of the map of Egypt (the delta being an inverted pyramid). These structures become symbolically an offering of Egypt itself to the sun, who in turn will endow the nation with the flood, eventually fertilizing the land with new life.

So no wonder that since the dawn of time, the people of Egypt are keen on going out on that day to open spaces, exposing themselves to the rays of the sun, for it has on this day accepted the offering (corban) and distributed its own gifts on earth. We may agree with Hilmy's conclusion that this day will continue to be a holiday of celebration for future generations as it has been in the past, for it is destined to continue through the ages, regardless of the forgotten fundamental beliefs, though they may have taken different shapes in human history. And the colored egg, and the salted fish, and the green onions, and all the other staples, laden with symbolic significance, will be gathered by Egyptians, wherever they are, to the sunny open places, where we pay tribute to the goodness of the world given to us. ♦

The EAO wishes Happy Easter to our members and friends celebrating the feast on April 4, 2010.

Please inform any member of the board of your interest in any of the following programs currently being formed:

- Book & movie review and discussions
- Acting, musical performance, or other stage-related functions.
- Facebook group for EAO's young adults
 - Career days & mentorship for youth
- Retreats for networking & leadership development for young adults
- International travel

NOTE FROM THE COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

The Communications Committee is working on revisions of the newsletter to better serve our community and friends. We look forward to including feature stories, images of interest, links to relevant sites and announcements about cultural events in the greater Los Angeles area. Please e-mail us any information that you would like to see included at: faiwawshe@yahoo.com

Thank you,

The Communications Committee:

Nabila Badawy, Mamdouh Fayek, Abla Magid, Nabil Magid, Ahmed Shereen, Faiza Shereen.

A hundred years ago in Egypt . . . Salma ya Salama

There is a thoroughfare in Alexandria that runs through the heart of the city, much like an American town's "main street," from the old Mansheya square to the flower clock where it transforms into the large boulevard heading east to the suburbs. Alexandria, like all of Egypt, has many faces, and these are seen together in close proximity, offering contradictions that are remarkable only to a stranger who is not blinded by familiarity. The thoroughfare, Shari' Fouad, alias Al Horeya, alias Gamal Abdel Nasser, marks the divide between Kom El Dikka to the south and the Cartier Grecque to the north. The latter, at least as this writer remembers it, was a neighborhood of elegant villas, beautiful gardens, and a few apartment buildings from the early 20th century, reflecting the styles of the modernist period (wrought iron gates, art deco cornices) and colonial identity. Completely residential, it's population had to depend on the shops on the other side of Shari' Fouad--or beyond, in Kom El Dikka--for groceries, a bakery, or even a newspaper vendor. The buildings on the south side of the street formed a kind of wall, blocking one's view of what was beyond, with only a few winding narrow alleys into the old ghetto. It was as though this was the end of the city. But like the backdrop on a stage, it hid behind it a whole other world, buzzing with life. Here was the butcher shop and the dairy and the makwagui, where laundry was sent for starching and ironing by hand, the makwagui, being the "ironer" who stood all day long, gliding his iron over silks and linens worn by the ladies from across yonder. Here, life was fabricated, to be consumed on the other side. And here, a hundred years ago, the young Sayed Darwish composed his music to the lyrics of Salma ya Salama. The song expresses an Egyptian sense of nostalgia for the homeland, and both the words and the powerful rhythm reflect a folk genre that was new at the time and that designated a break with the old, Ottoman-influenced traditional music.

Sayed Darwish became in fact the first "local" singer and composer in Egypt, and grew to be venerated as the father of popular Egyptian music.

He collaborated with famous figures, including Nagîb al-Rîhanî in theater. Darwish lived through the important years of the first world war and the nationalist movement that led to the revolution of 1919. The patriotic sentiment of his songs and music reflects a passion that is motivated by instinct and connection to the land rather than politics or ideology. Taking the words from one of Mustapha Kamel's famous speeches, Darwish wrote the famous song "bilady, bilady, bilady" that was adopted in 1979 as Egypt's national anthem. During his short life, Sayed Darwish produced 22 operettas, 50 taktoukas, 17 muashahhs, and more than 200 plays.

In 1977, Egyptian-born singer and artist, Dalida, released a new version of Salma ya Salama in Arabic and later in French. It was among the first ethnic fusion hits in the world, recorded in four languages: Arabic, French, German, and Italian. Dalida, an Italian Egyptian and naturalized French singer and actress, was born and raised in Shoubra, Cairo. Dalida's father was first violinist (primo violino) at the Cairo Opera House. Dalida performed and recorded in more than 10 languages including: French, Italian, Arabic, German, Spanish, English, Dutch, Japanese, Hebrew, and Greek. She received 55 gold records and was the first singer to receive a diamond disc.

Perhaps there is more that unites these two Egyptian-born artists than Salma ya Salama. Perhaps it is the language of the many contradictions of Cairo's Shoubra and Alexandria's Kom El Dikka that inspired them?

Listen to the French version of Salma ya Salama:
http://www.last.fm/music/Dalida/_/Salma+Ya+Salama

Listen to the Arabic /Spanish version:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8HTnDkocvQ>