

# RADICAL

WASHINGTON D.C. & NYC

ARTISTIC  
FREEDOM  
INITIATIVE

# RECITATIONS

ARTS FESTIVAL

NOV 15 - 18, 2019



ARTISTICFREEDOMINITIATIVE.ORG

PRESENTED BY

ARTISTIC FREEDOM INITIATIVE

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER'S MILLENNIUM  
STAGE, STUDIO THEATRE, BROOKLYN MUSIC  
SCHOOL, AND TAMIZDAT

# RADICAL RECITATIONS

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With four consecutive evenings of incendiary performances, Radical Recitations is not only a celebration of freedom of artistic expression, it is a testament to the radical power of storytelling to catalyze social change and a call to action in defense of artistic freedom.

**RADICAL RECITATIONS** is presented by Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI), who brought you Revolutions & Movements at Dupont Underground in 2018. This year, AFI has partnered with Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, Studio Theatre, Brooklyn Music School, and Tamizdat to bring you performances both powerful and personal by renowned, revolutionary international artists **NOURA MINT SEYMALI** (Mauritania), **TOTO KISAKU** (Congo), and **KING RAAM** (Iran/Canada).

With performances rooted in storytelling, poetry, praise, and boldly speaking truth to power, Noura, Toto, and King Raam take stages across Washington D.C. and NYC. These cutting edge artists show us how musical and theatrical narratives can be used to disrupt dangerous norms, and preserve those that venerate freedom of expression.

As artists are increasingly censored, imprisoned, restricted from moving freely across borders, tortured, or even killed, it is more critical than ever that we safeguard the right to free expression and zealously champion the courageous artists who exercise it. Artistic Freedom Initiative is unwavering in its commitment to safeguard and promote freedom of artistic expression. To this end, AFI facilitates pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance to persecuted and censored artists. Further, AFI supports artists who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing progressive social change and fundamental human rights.

# NOV 15



## NOURA MINT SEYMALI

Noura Mint Seymali's voice bends the arc of Moorish musical tradition. She transforms it for a global audience, and safeguards a literary and artistic tradition on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

**TIME** 6PM

### VENUE

The John F. Kennedy Center  
for the Performing Arts  
2700 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20566

Millennium Stage, Grand Foyer

### ADMISSION

Free

# NOV 16



## TOTO KISAKU

In his one-man play, *Requiem For An Electric Chair*, Toto tells the story of his arrest, imprisonment, and near death in Congo, and shares how his art ultimately saved his life.

**TIME** 7:30PM

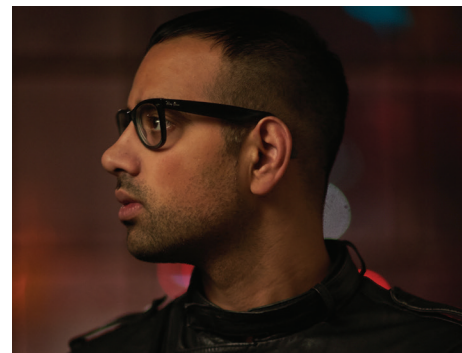
### VENUE

Studio Theatre  
1501 14th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20005

### ADMISSION

Tickets required  
[totokisaku.brownpapertickets.com](http://totokisaku.brownpapertickets.com)

# NOV 17



## KING RAAM

Raam's *Departure* is a powerful storytelling performance about his father's legacy and his family's persecution in Iran, woven together with his haunting songs and otherworldly voice.

**TIME** 6PM

### VENUE

The John F. Kennedy Center  
for the Performing Arts  
2700 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20566

Millennium Stage, in the Justice Forum

### ADMISSION

Free (tickets required)

# NOV 18



HEY  
NEW YORKERS,  
THIS ONE  
IS FOR YOU!

## KING RAAM

Raam's *Departure* is a powerful storytelling performance about his father's legacy and his family's persecution in Iran, woven together with his haunting songs and otherworldly voice. *Departure* is a personal journey of loss and abiding love.

**TIME** 7:30PM

### VENUE

Brooklyn Music School  
126 St. Felix Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11217

### ADMISSION

Tickets required  
[kingraamdeparture.brownpapertickets.com](http://kingraamdeparture.brownpapertickets.com)





# NOURA MINT SEYMALI

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**NOV 15**

**TIME** 6PM

**VENUE**

The John F. Kennedy Center  
for the Performing Arts  
2700 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20566

Millennium Stage,  
Grand Foyer

**ADMISSION**

Free

With her boundless voice, Noura Mint Seymali is one of Mauritania's foremost musical emissaries. Born into a line of Moorish griot (traditional West African storytellers, praise singers, poets and musicians), Noura is revolutionary in a number of intentional and consequential ways. She and her band are driven by faith in the music, and deep knowledge of the tradition it comes from. In her work, Noura pursues a novel vision that thoughtfully transforms Moorish music and positions it on the global cultural spectrum.

Further, Noura has always led a band that transcends complex racial boundaries within Mauritania by regularly working with Wolof, Soninke and Pulaar musicians, and collaborating with artists outside of Mauritania. While this is uncommon for Moorish griot, talent and cultural authority allow Noura to eschew notions of cultural purity. In so doing, she expands, modernizes, and ultimately safeguards this centuries old literary and artistic tradition.

Noura and her band conjure "a full blown sandstorm of hypnotic grooves, melding traditional Mauritanian instruments within an electrified psychedelic rock band." - The Quietus (UK). As described by NPR, "the arrival of Mauritanian vocalist Noura Mint Seymali in front of Western audiences feels like the start of a new era."





# TOTO KISAKU

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## “REQUIEM FOR AN ELECTRIC CHAIR”

**NOV 16**

**TIME** 7:30PM

**VENUE**

Studio Theatre  
1501 14th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20005

**ADMISSION**

Tickets required  
[totokisaku.brownpapertickets.com](http://totokisaku.brownpapertickets.com)

Toto Kisaku is an award-winning Congolese playwright, actor, director and producer. Detained for putting on plays critical of the Congolese government, Toto arrived in the United States in 2015 seeking political asylum, which he was granted in 2018. His one-man play, *Requiem For An Electric Chair*, tells the story of his persecution and eventual exile from Congo, and opens with his interview with a U.S. immigration officer. Through this narrative, Toto shares the story of his arrest, imprisonment, and near death in Congo, and shows us how his art ultimately saved his life.

In his work, Toto explores themes of transgression, oppression, and poverty, often challenging the boundaries between performance and daily life. Toto is the 2019 International Festival of Arts & Ideas Artist-in-Residence. In 2010, he was the recipient of the Freedom to Create Prize, presented in Cairo, Egypt. The prize is a celebration of the courage and creativity of artists, and the positive influence of their work to promote social justice and inspire the human spirit. Toto was also the recipient of the 2018 Rebecca Blunk Fund award, granted by the New England Foundation for the Arts. Toto has been featured in NPR, ArtForum, and Washington Times.





# KING RAAM

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## “DEPARTURE” (A WORK IN PROGRESS)

**NOV 17**

**TIME** 6PM

**VENUE**

The John F. Kennedy Center  
for the Performing Arts  
2700 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20566

Millennium Stage,  
in the Justice Forum

**ADMISSION**

Free (tickets required)

**NOV 18**

**TIME** 7:30PM

**VENUE**

Brooklyn Music School  
126 St. Felix Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11217

**ADMISSION**

Tickets required  
[kingraamdeparture.brownpapertickets.com](http://kingraamdeparture.brownpapertickets.com)

Raam began his musical career as the singer/songwriter/founder of Hypernova, a post-punk band born in the Tehran underground of the early 2000's. A politically active singer, he joined protests and wrote songs that spoke out against the government. In 2011, he launched his solo career as King Raam in Toronto, Canada.

In January 2018, Raam's father, Kavous Seyed Emami, a prominent Iranian/Canadian professor and environmentalist, was arrested on false charges of espionage. Two weeks after his arrest he was killed under suspicious circumstances in Tehran's Evin Prison. Raam and his family attempted to flee Iran, but Iranian authorities detained his mother and confiscated her passport. Raam and his brother were allowed to depart, but his mother was held hostage in Iran for over 500 days. In his new work, “*Departure*,” Raam channels his creative energy into a storytelling performance about his family's experience and his father's legacy, woven together with his music. King Raam has been featured in MTV, NPR, The New York Times, Vanity Fair, CNN, PBS, BBC, and VICE.

*“Departure” is being developed during King Raam's residency in the **Safe Haven Incubator for Musicians NYC** (SHIM NYC), a new residency program launched by **Artistic Freedom Initiative** and **Tamizdat**.*



# ARTISTIC FREEDOM INITIATIVE

## OUR MISSION

Led by immigration and human rights attorneys, Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) facilitates pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance for international artists at risk.

AFI is dedicated to safeguarding and promoting artistic expression, a fundamental human right essential to cultural development and the functioning of a free and open society. AFI is committed to advancing creative cultural exchange, championing art produced in exile, improving conditions for artists in their home countries, and protecting their ability to express themselves creatively through the arts.

## OUR PROGRAMS

AFI facilitates pro bono legal services and resettlement assistance for at-risk artists, produces exhibitions and events to showcase these artists' work, and fosters artist networks that in return promote artistic freedom globally. AFI has:

- Worked on over 225 artist cases, providing an estimated \$600,000+ in pro-bono legal services.
  - AFI's artists come from 30+ countries including Iran, Syria, Bangladesh, India, Uganda, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, Lebanon, Turkey, Venezuela, and Georgia.
  - AFI's artists work across 19+ artistic disciplines.
- Launched the NYC Artist Safe Haven Residency Program, hosted at Westbeth Artists Housing in New York City and established in coalition with several other arts and free expression advocacy organizations.
- Partnered with art spaces such as Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Queens Museum, Symphony Space, Dupont Underground, Le Poisson Rouge, and Time Equities Art in Buildings, who have donated gallery and performance space for exhibitions and other events to help promote AFI's artists.

## DONATIONS

Artistic Freedom Initiative welcomes donations at [artisticfreedominitiative.org/take-action](https://artisticfreedominitiative.org/take-action). AFI is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All donations are tax deductible.

## INQUIRIES

To inquire about AFI's pro bono legal and resettlement services for at-risk artists or explore collaborations, partnerships, or contributions contact AFI's Director of Programs, Ashley Tucker at [ashley@artisticfreedominitiative.org](mailto:ashley@artisticfreedominitiative.org). For more information about our mission and work, visit our website at [artisticfreedominitiative.org](https://artisticfreedominitiative.org).

## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS



BROOKLYN  
MUSIC SCHOOL



STUDIO  
THEATRE



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Artistic Freedom Initiative wishes to thank the John F. Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, Studio Theatre, and Brooklyn Music School for their collaboration on Radical Recitations, and for providing creative spaces to house this series of performances.

AFI also thanks the extraordinary artists who have contributed their work to this festival. Your inspired art and personal stories are the foundation of Radical Recitations, and are at the core of AFI's mission.

Special thanks to artist Farshid Shafiey for designing the cover art for this festival catalogue, and Francesca Campenella for her graphic design work.

Artistic Freedom Initiative thanks our generous donors and supporters, including the SDK Foundation for Human Dignity.