

ADDITIONAL PROGRAM NOTE

January 23, 2010

The Nile Bride
Nader Abbassi
Born in Cairo, Egypt

Nader Abbassi's multifaceted career encompasses professional experience as a conductor, bassoonist, singer, and composer. Artistic director and principal conductor of the Cairo Opera Orchestra since 2001, he serves in the same capacity with the Orchestra pour la Paix in Paris. Since his acclaimed mega-production of *Aida* at the pyramids in Giza in 2002, he has conducted numerous operas and ballets at the Cairo Opera House.

In 2006 Abbassi conducted Menotti's forgotten opera *Maria Golovine* in the presence of the composer at the Marseille Opera House, resulting in several return engagements. He has also conducted opera productions in Greece and China. He has been invited to conduct prominent symphony orchestras in Switzerland, Germany, France, Russia, Mexico, Sweden, Italy, Portugal, and Qatar, and returns to conduct the Sacramento Philharmonic after making his U.S. debut here in 2008.

Abbassi holds a first prize in bassoon and virtuosity in singing from the Conservatoire de Music de Genève and for several seasons he served as principal bassoon for the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and for the Geneva Chamber Orchestra. As a singer he appeared in the fields of opera, lied, and oratorio, specializing particularly in Baroque and contemporary music. He currently serves on the jury for the International Stenhammar Singing Competition at Norköping, hosted by the King of Sweden.

As a composer Abbassi has received prestigious commissions from the Geneva Ballet Company, Geneva Chamber Orchestra, and Swiss Chamber Players, among others. In 1986 the Egyptian Ministry of Culture award him the first prize in chamber music and in 1996 for symphonic composition.

Abbassi composed *The Nile Bride* in 2001, originally as a ballet. The composer has provided the following background:

"This story took place thousands of years ago in the cit of Thebes, at a time where people had clear beliefs about life and death. They believed that life was only a passage to arrive at a more worthy existence after death. It was a means for immortality.

"For them a happy eternity could be reached through their good deeds in life and the sacrifices they made to their gods. One of the deities the ancient Egyptians feared and worshiped was the god of the Nile. The Nile symbolized life, death, and eternity. It was valued

for its ability to turn barren land into green pastures and to provide the people with many other riches essential for sustaining human existence. The Nile was also feared as once every year it would erupt with anger to flood and destroy any village that would dare to stand in its way. The never-ending flow of the Nile resembled eternal movement and inspired many musicians and poets past and present.

"Indeed the Nile was so feared and valued that once every year a ceremony was held in its honor, during which a beautiful young virgin woman was offered to it as a sacrifice to express gratitude and to humbly beg its mercy during the flooding season.

"Around this time lived a beautiful young woman who was not frightened by the Nile, rather she was deeply in love with him in a special way. She was attracted by the Nile's overwhelming generosity, his gentle movement that would occasionally caress her body, and with his eternal power. Even his moments of rage were seen by her as a mere showing off of strength to impress her alone.

"To express her love, she would go to the river bank and dance every day especially for her lover, and in her moments of intimacy she would take off her clothes and would enter the water where she would continue to dance for hours. Indeed, the beautiful young woman became increasingly obsessed with the Nile and was convinced that the time to join her lover for eternity was approaching.

"Meanwhile, a young man from a village nearby had been watching her for many days and fell in love with her. One day he came out and told her of his feelings. He explained how he had been bewitched by her and how he would like to marry her. They continued to meet many more times by the river. She grew fonder of her admirer and began to imagine how wonderful life could be raising a family with this kind man. The beautiful young woman became very confused as she realized that she had to decide and choose between the Nile and the young man.

"It was around the beginning of the flooding season, as the water levels started to rise with anger and jealousy, that our heroine made up her mind. One right she approached the river bank with a calm and confident stride, for she had already chosen eternity over life. As soon as her feet touched the water she was swept by the violent currents and into the depths of the Nile. Her last human thought was that of reassurance that her love with the Nile was mutual.

"That year the people of Thebes did not need to sacrifice a virgin to the Nile in their traditional celebrations, as the following morning the Nile was calm again and the flooding season was the shortest one ever."