

*Lebanese-American Singer, Mayssa Karaa, fresh out of Berklee College of Music, surprises and enchants audiences worldwide with her powerful and haunting vocals on "White Rabbit"—the new Arabic adaptation featured in the Award winning film **American Hustle** and Sony Music Soundtrack.*

# Mayssa Karaa

## Biography

When she was 7-years old, Mayssa Karaa was rehearsing with the choir at her school in Beirut, Lebanon. Out of 100 voices, the choir director noticed one, and began muting the singers one-by-one until only Mayssa's voice remained. He had found his soloist for the year-end concert. A short time later, Mayssa performed a difficult patriotic song with such authority and power that the principal made her sing it three times during the recital. And so began the rise of one of the most remarkable young singers out of the Arab world today.

Born in 1989, near the close of a 15-year conflict in Lebanon, Mayssa was not supposed to become a musician. She was a good student, but recognizing her artistic talent, her parents encouraged her to pursue a musical education at the Conservatory of Beirut, where she studied piano, music theory, and vocal training. Mayssa performed at events for a variety of non-profit charities—UNESCO, The Lions Club, The Lebanese School of the Blind and Deaf, CapHo (an organization for needy children) and many others. Mayssa and her family were active in their community, and these benefit concerts allowed her to mature as an artist away from the pressures of a professional career.

In 2006, as a new conflict embroiled Lebanon, Mayssa and her family joined relatives living in the Boston area. She studied civil engineering there for two years, and was successful, but not happy. Mayssa's father—now convinced that music was her true calling—helped her attain an audition at the Berklee College of Music. Naturally, she aced it, enrolling at the prestigious school in 2008 and graduating in 2012. During these years, Mayssa found powerful new allies to champion her artistic development. In 2010, she performed a concert in honor of the Permanent Representative of the *Organisation Internationale de La Francophonie*. This led to an invitation to sing in Boston's historic Faneuil Hall, filled with uniformed veterans of the fight to liberate France at the end of World War II—a deeply moving experience, and a distinct honor for Mayssa.

Through an unexpected turn of events, Mayssa was introduced to the manager for Italian tenor Pasquale Esposito, who had come to Boston to perform. After a short audition, not only did Mayssa open the show, and join Esposito in performing Andrea Bocelli's "The Prayer," but she soon began touring with him, establishing a lasting bond. Mayssa sang at Esposito's San Francisco Christmas concert for four consecutive years. In the summer of 2013, she joined him in Naples for the shooting of a forthcoming documentary, "Enrico Caruso: His Life, His Music, His City."

In her final year at Berklee, Mayssa became a student of Arabic music composer, educator, and oud and violin virtuoso Simon Shaheen. Shaheen too recognized an outsized talent, and began including Mayssa in his own concerts around the United States.

At Christmas time in 2011, Mayssa returned to Beirut to give her first official concert there, joined by two other exceptional Berklee students and local Beirut musicians. They performed at the American University of Beirut's Assembly Hall, an old church reserved for concerts with particular cultural significance. Mayssa made a sensation in her old hometown. The concert was titled "One Moment in Time," after a song by her favorite popular singer, Whitney Houston. Mayssa was now versed in Western classical singing, opera, rock, pop, jazz, and various international traditions. In 2012, she sang a challenging piece by Hafez Nazeri, in Persian, with the Berklee World Strings Orchestra. She then toured a number of American cities with the World Strings Orchestra.

At Berklee, Mayssa also delved into Greek, Turkish, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European music. She even recorded a pop rock song called "Winter to Spring," a collaborative project with two other Berklee students. And of course, she studied jazz, the school's central focus. Jazz music was new to Mayssa, but strangely familiar, as it shares both complex melodies and an emphasis on improvisation with the Arabic music she had lived with since her youth. Through these experiences, Mayssa's voice has matured to become a staggeringly powerful instrument. And she's just getting started.

Mayssa's manager, Dawn Elder says, "Mayssa has the capability to cross over like no other artist before her. The unique colors, tones, and grittiness in her voice, and her versatility in both English, Arabic, not to mention Persian, Italian and French, is unprecedented. Her passion for rock music and desire to bring an organic fusion with Middle Eastern music to her songs is both refreshing and exciting."

In the fall of 2013, Mayssa recorded a new Arabic adaptation lyrics written by Dawn Elder, Hanin Omar and Mark Batson of the Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit." The Los Angeles Times wrote that Mayssa's version "outdoes the original." This unique performance was created for the Golden Globe Sag Awards, and 10 Academy nominated, Sony film *American Hustle*, directed by David O' Russell starring Christian Bale, Bradley Cooper, Amy Adams, Jenifer Lawrence and Robert De Niro—who speaks Arabic in the scene featuring Mayssa's transcendent performance. The song soon became the most talked about tune on the Sony/Legacy American Hustle Soundtrack. And not long afterwards, Mayssa Karaa and "White Rabbit Arabic Version" became a featured attraction at many of the films' premieres. Karaa performed the song live for the first time at the prestigious Dubai International Film Festival before festival goers receiving rave reviews including from David O'Russell and all the International media.

Amid all these projects, Mayssa is beginning work on her own debut CD, a groundbreaking combination of rock, pop, and Arabic music that will bring together all her diverse talents and experiences. "This is who I am," says Mayssa, "not Middle Eastern all the way, not rock all the way. I am creating my own style." And the world of international popular music may never be the same.

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