



USA // DANCE
AUSTRALIAN EXCLUSIVE

LAYLA & MAJNUN

Mark Morris Dance Group & Silkroad Ensemble

Melbourne International Arts Festival will host an Australian exclusive with *Layla and Majnun*, a classic Middle Eastern story of love created by renowned American choreographer Mark Morris and the legendary cellist Yo-Yo Ma's Silkroad Ensemble.

Performing in Australia for the first time, virtuosic musicians from the celebrated Silkroad Ensemble will fuse musical traditions across cultures, alongside sixteen dancers from the Mark Morris Dance Group in their Melbourne premiere, inspired by ballet, modern and folk dance and led by one of the most gifted choreographers in the world.

Central to the work are Azerbaijani mugham vocalists, Alim Qasimov alongside his daughter and protégée Fargana Qasimova, whose vocal commands have earned them rockstar status, including a UNESCO Music Prize, one of the most prestigious international prizes in music.

The tale of *Layla and Majnun*, the story of would-be lovers doomed to separation and death which has transfixed humanity for millennia, will be the largest-scale production of this modern classic ever seen in the West.

Backed by a dazzling stage and costume design by the late Howard Hodgkin, one of Britain's greatest contemporary artists, the stunning set will feature a backdrop of his famous painting *Love and Death* which will be accented by flowing gowns and tunics in coral and blue.

Melbourne Festival's Artistic Director Jonathan Holloway said: 'This work made its debut over one hundred years ago as the Middle East's first opera. Today, this traditional tale has been reworked by the finest artists of our

generation for audiences of the twenty-first century in a special co-commission with Melbourne Festival.

'Specially invited by one of the world's greatest cellist, Yo-Yo Ma, to interpret the Silkroad Ensemble's new chamber arrangement through movement, Mark Morris has delivered a complete feast for the eyes and ears in this re-imagining of *Layla and Majnun*.'

Since founding Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980, the award-winning choreographer has created over 150 works including 22 ballets and 20 operas. Described as 'an innovator and a conservative, a satirist and a romantic' (*The New Yorker*), Morris has been ranked as among the top five American choreographers of today.

Pre-dating Romeo and Juliet by a thousand years, this tragedy of unfulfilled yearning, as described by Mark Morris as 'an enlightening tragedy - a visually, musically and choreographically unified and self-contained concert piece,' is ultimately elevated into a communal celebration of love's power to penetrate even the hardest of hearts.

'This is the most ambitious and profound work that Morris has created in the past ten years or more.'
– The New Yorker

Presented with Arts Centre Melbourne.

Arts Centre Melbourne, State Theatre
Wed 10 – Sat 13 Oct
Wed – Sat 8pm, Sat also 2pm
\$39-\$139

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