



music

## Maestro pledges support for Egyptian orchestra

Conductor Kristian Alexander has voiced his support for Cairo Symphony Orchestra, hailing it as 'one of the finest professional organisations in Africa and the Arab world'.

Alexander recently became the first Canadian to conduct an Egyptian orchestra, leading the symphony in a performance of 19th and 20th century French repertoire at Cairo Opera House in November.

Alexander praised the orchestra's resilience in the face of Egypt's political instability. 'The musicians have a strong feeling of purpose,' he told *IAM*. 'They are confident that culture, and classical music in particular, will always remain part of the rapidly evolving Egyptian society.'

Although the orchestra is supported by the state, it has been able to continue with its 55th season despite ongoing political turmoil as Egypt re-

drafts its constitution. The conductor said working with the orchestra was a 'great experience' thanks to the musicians' work ethic, spirited approach and talent.

'The musicians are highly skilled and flexible,' he said. 'They adapted very quickly to the type of sound that I asked for, which allowed for instant modifications of interpretation and style. It was like a perfect match that produced effortlessly flowing variations of tempi, fine dynamic nuances, and colourful sound.'

The Toronto-based maestro also met with Ines Abdel-Dayem, chair of Cairo Opera House.

Abdel-Dayem was controversially dismissed from her role earlier this year by Egypt's minister for culture, Alaa Abdel-Aziz, but was later reinstated following widespread protests at her removal. Abdel-Dayem has

been an outspoken critic of the minister's ultra-conservative agenda, which she claims will restrict the rich cultural life of the country.

'She is an extraordinary woman with a grand vision about Egypt's future,' said Alexander. 'She has inspired and successfully led, by example, thousands of musicians and artists towards a future where culture will keep its prominent place in Egyptian society.'

Cairo Symphony Orchestra has confirmed that it wishes to work with Alexander again, an offer which the conductor is keen to accept. '[The orchestra] has tremendous potential that can be further developed, and I would be very excited to be part of it,' he said.

Alexander is music director of Toronto's Kindred Spirits Orchestra.