

Arabic Music Retreat Frequently Asked Questions

Does the Arabic Music Retreat welcome beginners?

The answer is, it depends. At its core, the Retreat is not designed for beginning musicians. However, there are several types of 'beginners', and many will find that the Retreat is beneficial, although for some it is quite challenging. Please contact us at: arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com to discuss your individual situation.

Here are some examples. If you are an experienced musician who can read music notation and play an instrument, even though you don't know anything about Arabic music, you will have an easier time at the Retreat. If you are a 'heritage' player of Arabic music with a Middle Eastern background and play by ear, you will be challenged to learn all the new material in time for the concert, but you should be fine. If you are not experienced in any kind of music and cannot read music notation and do not know the 'language' of music, you will have a hard time, UNLESS you are a percussionist or singer.

One option for beginners is to attend as a beginning percussionist, and to use the Retreat as a way to decide which instrument to study in the future. Some beginning students take basic private lessons and play basic percussion in the ensembles.

If you are in a situation like those described please feel free to ask us for more information: arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com.

Do you loan instruments at the Retreat?

No we do not loan instruments; you will need to bring your own.

I want to study more than one instrument at the Retreat. Can I do this?

Due to our very busy schedule, you will not be able to study more than one instrument. You will need to focus on one instrument for private lessons and commit to playing one instrument in your chamber group. At the end of the week, you will be performing in a chamber group and the large orchestra so you'll need to concentrate on the instrument on which you'll perform.

Why do I need to send an audition recording?

We require everyone attending for the first time to send us a simple recording of the attendee playing the instrument he or she plans to study at the Retreat. We use this recording to assess your playing level so we can assign you to the right private lesson instructor, and to assign you to a chamber group. Most of our chamber groups are 'mixed level', so we need to make sure there is a good balance of ability in each group.

I'm a western trained musician and don't know anything about Arabic music. What should I send in my recording?

Play something you perform well, preferably as a soloist. If you send a recording of your playing in an ensemble, make sure your instrument is clearly audible.

Can I send an mp3, or provide a Youtube link for my audition recording?

Yes. That is fine. You can e-mail an mp3 or provide a youtube link. Send it to arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com

I have no clue how to make a recording. How should I do it?

You can make a simple recording on your smart phone. If you don't have a smart phone, you should buy a hand-held recording device to record your private lessons and lectures at the Retreat. You can use that device to do your audition too. Once you've made the recording, you should e-mail it to: arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com

Can I pay my registration fee by credit card?

Yes, you can use your credit card to pay via www.paypal.com to arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com. Feel free to contact us at arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com with any questions about using paypal.

I'm coming from Canada – how can I pay my Retreat fee?

If you live in Canada, you can either use Paypal to remit your fee, or have your bank make out a US\$ check to the Arab American Arts Institute. IMPORTANT: Make sure the front of the bank check has the name of a US Bank written there, so we can deposit it in the US without any additional fees. If you send a check that is not acceptable to our bank, we will return your check and ask for another one. Note: A US\$ Postal Money Order from Canada is also acceptable.

I'm coming from outside the US and Canada. How can I pay my fee?

The easiest way to pay for your Retreat fee, if you are living outside the US and Canada, is to either get a US relative to write a check and mail it. Otherwise, contact arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com for bank wire information.

Housing

What are the different housing options at the Retreat?

We offer several housing options for participants.

1. **Willits Hallowell Conference Center** – shared double room in the air-conditioned conference center where everyone at the Retreat gathers for meals. The conference center has a limited number of double occupancy air-conditioned hotel rooms. Each room has a private bath. We assign two participants to each room. You can read about the facility here: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/willits>
2. **Dormitory** - The dorm is not air-conditioned, and like all college dorms, it has one big, shared bathroom on each floor. These rooms provide a basic bed with linens and towels. The location is close to the conference center where we all have our meals together. The dormitory has an elevator.
 - a. **Single dormitory room** – single bed, desk with chair, chest of drawers, and closet.
 - b. **Double dormitory room** – 2 single beds, 2 desks with chairs, 2 chest of drawers, and 2 closets.

3. **Commuter** – For those who live in the area or prefer to find housing on their own, the commuter rate covers all activities, lunch and dinner. (Note: the commuter rate does not include breakfasts until the final day – August 14th).

I would prefer a single room at the Retreat. What are my options?

You can book a single room in the dormitory or you can book a room at the nearby B&B's (see below)

I really need air-conditioning and I strongly prefer a single room. What are my options?

Due to high demand for the air-conditioned conference rooms, if you want to stay in the conference center you must agree to have a room-mate. If you must have a single room with air-conditioning, there are two Bed and Breakfast inns that are a short distance from the Mount Holyoke College campus where the Retreat takes place. Their rooms are air-conditioned and most have private baths. Please book your room early because they sell out during the Retreat.

Grandmary's – www.grandmarys.com phone: 413-533-7381

Daniel Stebbins House – <http://www.danielstebbinsbedandbreakfast.com> phone: 413-533-2149

In addition, within a half an hour of the Mount Holyoke campus, there are several hotels. You can see a list of them on the college website here: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/about/visit/lodging>

What is the nearest airport to the Retreat?

The closest airport is Bradley International Airport (Airport code BDL) located in Hartford, Connecticut, which is about 45 minutes from South Hadley, the town where Mount Holyoke College is located.

How do I get to the Retreat from Bradley International Airport?

You can either arrange a taxi, book a ride on Uber, or book a limousine service such as Valley Transporter. www.valleytransporter.com Valley Transporter carries many Retreaters and faculty to the Retreat, so they know the location of Willits Hallowell Conference Center at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA.

I am flying to the U.S. just to attend the Retreat. Into what city should I fly?

Boston and New York are the closest international airports. If you have the choice, fly into Boston. It is much closer and more convenient than New York.

Arriving in Boston

From Boston, you will need to take a bus or train to Springfield, MA or Amherst, MA. Bus line: www.peterpanbus.com Train: www.amtrak.com Then you will have to take a taxi or Uber to the Retreat.

It is possible that some Retreaters may be able to drive you to the Retreat from Boston. Please contact arabicmusicretreat@gmail.com to find out if anyone is available.

Arriving in New York City

Try to arrive in New York the day before the Retreat, since it will take a full day to get to the Retreat from New York. After arriving in New York, you will need to take a bus or taxi to Manhattan, and then take a bus or train to Springfield, MA, followed by a taxi to the Retreat. See information below about bus and train service from New York.

How can I get to the Retreat from New York City?

Bus: There is a daily bus that runs from the Port Authority in New York to the center of the town of South Hadley, which is a 10 minute walk (downhill) to the Conference Center. The bus leaves at 5:30 am and arrives around 10:30 am. This requires one bus transfer in Springfield, MA. If you decide to come later in the day you could take a bus to Springfield or Amherst, MA. Link to Peter Pan bus: www.peterpanbus.com In all cases you will need to take a taxi or uber to the Retreat.

Train: Amtrak runs trains daily to Springfield, MA. From there you will need to get a taxi (or Uber). www.amtrak.com

How do I get to the Retreat from the Springfield bus station or train station?

You can either arrange a taxi, book a ride on Uber, or book a limousine service such as Valley Transporter. www.valleytransporter.com Valley Transporter carries many Retreaters and faculty to the Retreat, so they know the location of Willits Hallowell Conference Center at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, MA.

Getting to New York and Boston after the Retreat

After the Retreat, you will have to make a reservation for a train or bus. It is not the Retreat's responsibility to arrange your travel plans to or from the Retreat. Many Retreaters are happy to drive others, but you will need to arrange this on your own.

What is the weather like at the Retreat?

The weather in August can be hot, rainy, dry or cool. Keep an eye on the weather forecast ahead of time, and bring a jacket as well as some kind of rain gear. Here is the intellicast link for the South Hadley, MA weather forecast: <http://www.intellicast.com/Local/Weather.aspx?location=USMA0390>

Working out at the retreat.

The Kendall Sports and Dance Complex contains a fitness center, gymnasium, pool, and dance studios that may be used by Retreaters, though on a limited "summer hours" schedule. Check with the Willits Conference Center reception desk for the current hours and open swim times when you arrive on campus.

There are also short walking/running trails on the campus.

Doing laundry at the Retreat.

If you need to wash clothes while you are at the Retreat, you have to wash them yourself using the washer and dryer at the dormitory. This involves getting a special card and detergent. You cannot pay cash. To avoid wasting your practice time on laundry, plan on bringing enough clothes to last the week.

Buying supplies at the Retreat.

South Hadley is a small town. There is a deli-restaurant, a bookstore, a local bank with an ATM, a post office, and two places to get coffee. There is also a campus store that is only open part of the day. If you need supplies during the Retreat and you don't have a car, you will need to get someone to drive you off-campus to shop. The Retreat doesn't provide the service, but usually some Retreaters will make a run to the store if needed.

I need to send a package to the Retreat:

FedEx, UPS, and the USPS deliver to Willits Conference Center. Address your package as:

Your name
Care of Arabic Music Retreat
Willits Hallowell Conference Center
Mount Holyoke College
50 College Street
South Hadley, MA 01075
phone: 413-538-2215

Additional packing list suggestions:

- Rain gear.
- Music stand for practice and chamber groups.
- Portable luggage cart or wheeled cases for large instruments. (5-10 minute walk from dorm or conference center to music hall (classes).
- Swimsuit or workout wear if you wish to use the athletic center.

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