

FAOC COMPANY BIO

What the F*** is **FAOC**? FAOC pronounced FOWK stands for Friggin' Arab Orchestra Company, or Freakin Awesome Old Crones, or Funny Arabs Occupying Canada, or Foul-mouthed Aunties Offgassing Cannabis. You decide!

FAOC is **Maryem Tollar** and **Roula Said**, long time friends and musical collaborators, well established in Toronto's vibrant world music scene. Maryem is a true Global Diva with a list of awards that could stuff several shawarmas. Roula is a musician, dancer, poet, actor, Wedding Officiant, and Death Doula. FAOC was born during the otherworldly weirdness of the early pandemic months when they released a holiday EP, **Arab Ladies Sing Christmas Carols written by Jews**, destined to become a classic. In 2024, they joined farcical forces with the brilliant **Anand Rajaram**, who co-wrote, co-starred and directed FAOC in their theatre shows, **Beige Christmas** (2024); **Very Shady Arab Ladies** (Fringe Festival 2025), at VideoCab; **FAOC Saves Christmas – Santa gets FAOC'd** (Radio Play 2026). Maryem and Roula will be at the 2026 Toronto Fringe Festival at Video Cabaret Theatre July 5 to 12, 2026 with the premiere of their new play "Book of Ooka - The Immaculate Misconception", co-created and directed by HRH Anand Rajaram.

Maryem Tollar is a renowned Egyptian-Canadian vocalist, known for her world music performances. Her voice has been heard on the theme of CBC's *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and A.R. Rahman's Bollywood hit, *Mayya Mayya*. Tollar was the featured vocalist in Tafelmusik's production of multi-media performances of "Tales of Two Cities: The Leipzig-Damascus Coffee Houses" and the narrator and vocalist in "Safe Haven". She performed Christos Hatzis' piece "Syn-Phonia – Migration Patterns" with The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and Inuit throat singer Tiffany Ayalik; and his multi-media piece "Constantinople" with The Gryphon Trio and Patricia O'Callaghan. She performs with several Toronto musical groups including Al Qahwa (Traditional Arabic Music and Original compositions); Turkwaz (Traditional Turkish, Greek, Arabic and Balkan vocal repertoire); LuA (co-led by Shameema Soni); Tabiba (intergenerational pan Arab drum and vocal ensemble); and with storyteller Dawne McFarlane, adding music and sounds. Maryem toured in the fall of 2022 with "The Cave" (Libretto by Tomson Highway, Music by John Millard, Script by Martha Ross). January to April 2023, she toured with the stage adaptation of Ann-Marie MacDonald's book "Fall On Your Knees" providing music and acting in the role of Mrs. Mahmoud (Directed by Alisa Palmer, Script by Hannah Moscovitch) and she will be reprising the role in 2027 at Toronto's Crow's Theatre. Maryem was awarded the inaugural Johanna Metcalf Prize for Performing Arts in 2019.

Roula Said weaves song, poetry, movement and music to create passionate performances and soulful ceremonies. She serves as a Life Celebrant, Counsellor and End of Life Doula. Roula legally officiates weddings in Ontario and facilitates milestone ceremonies such as baby namings and coming of age celebrations. As a trained Death Doula, she provides loving end-of-life care from diagnosis to final breath (and support to the family beyond). Roula also offers spiritual counselling under the mentorship of cutting-edge soul-attuned psychotherapist, Dr. Larry Nusbaum. She is a Juno-nominated vocalist, poet, dancer and actor. After teaching Middle Eastern dance for over 30 years, she has distilled her work into a suite of offerings that are steeped in tradition yet fundamentally oriented toward what she calls Embodied Soul Attunement.

HRH Anand Rajaram is an actor, writer, director, puppeteer, mask performer, teacher and performance artist. He has worked with numerous theatre companies in Toronto. With clown-based dance-theatre company, CORPUS, he helped create the Dora-nominated show, *Nuit Blanche*, and toured with that show and another CORPUS show, *Escadron Volant/A Flock of Flyers*, across Canada and Europe, and in performing *Flock*, also won the Gold medal in performance at the International Francophonie games (Olympic-style event for countries in the French commonwealth), subsequently touring the show to Benin, West Africa. With CORPUS he was also part of the successful kid's show, *Four Square*, for Corus Entertainment. Also with Corus Ent, he was writer and animatronic puppeteer for *Snit* on the show, *Snit Station*. His one-person mime show, *Cowboys & Indians*, (with musical accompaniment by accomplished musician, Bob Wiseman) won the Artist Spotlight Award at the Summerworks Theatre Festival. This show brought him to the attention of the Toronto Second City who hired him and with whom he created three shows, the first of which won a Canadian Comedy Award, the second of which was nominated for a Dora and all three of which brought him acclaim from audiences and critics alike. Due to his work with the Second City, he was asked to be a mentor/performer on *The Second City's Next Comedy Legend* tv show, a reality show that in Second City form parodies reality shows. He has also performed in a number of other tv shows, including playing a recurring principal role in the dramatic miniseries, *Across The River To Motor City*, and making a guest appearance in the Comedy Network's pseudo-reality show, *Punched Up*. He has a few features coming out as well as short films, some featured at the Toronto International Film Festival, including the film *Death Threat*, written and co-directed by Zarqa Nawaz, writer/creator of *Little Mosque On The Prairie*. He has also worked with director Mira Nair on the made-for-tv movie, *My Own Country*, and with director Deepa Mehta on the CBC radio broadcast of *Funny Boy*. He has appeared in many other CBC radio shows as well, both dramatic and comedic. He has a B.A in Theatre from the University of Waterloo.

Ernie Tollar is an internationally renowned musician and composer who has been contributing to the Toronto Jazz and World Music scene since 1980. He has performed in major jazz and folk festivals in Europe, India, Egypt, U.S.A., and across Canada. He can be heard with several Toronto groups including *Al Qahwa* (Traditional Arabic Music and Original compositions); *Near East Trio* (Indian/Arabic/Jazz); *Moneka Arabic Jazz* (North African/Arabic/Jazz); and *Armenian Jazz* led by Levon Ichkhanian. In 2022, Ernie created an étude book for the 'world woodwind' player. Ernie was the sound designer and performed as a live musician and actor in FAOC's "Very Shady Arab Ladies" at Toronto Fringe 2025.

Joska Tollar just completed his first year of university at The University of Toronto. He has been playing double bass since 2019; and electric bass since 2022. He majored in strings (double bass) at Etobicoke School of The Arts and continues to study privately with Mark Godfrey. His first professional role as an actor and musician was in FAOC's "Very Shady Arab Ladies" at Toronto Fringe Festival 2025. He has performed regularly at The Tranzac with his own group performing his original instrumental compositions and accompanying singers in different traditions of music including Jazz, Arabic and Folk music traditions.

Yvette Tollar is a Juno Award nominated vocalist, composer and producer who has appeared on stages across Canada, The US, South America and Europe. She fronts her own modern jazz project and has recorded and/or performed with Sheila Jordan, Mary Margaret O'Hara, Kevin Breit, Elizabeth Shepherd, Rich Brown's Rinsethealgorithm, Michael Occhipinti's Shine On The Universe of John Lennon project, Dominic Mancuso, Maryem & Ernie Tollar, John MacMurchy, Levon Ichkhanian, The Swing Shift Big Band, Mike Downes and Dave Restivo. Yvette teaches vocal, songwriting, ensemble performance and advises students with their 4th year recording theses at Humber College's Music Degree, Intro to Jazz and Composition Certificate Programs. She offers private instruction from her studio in Toronto.

Omneya Tollar is a registered massage therapist. She has appeared in Valerie Buhagiar's film "It's Hard To Be Human". Since 2025, she has been performing with Toronto based group, Al Qahwa.