

RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY ALAIN WEBER

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8452

RABAB

Egyptian singing and epic songs



M
1838
E32
R112
1982

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

MUSIC LP

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8452

RABAB

Egyptian
singing and epic songs

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Side 1

- Band 1 "Ya hamam" (O Pigeon)
- Band 2 "Ya Habibi, ya asal, . . ."
(O honey hasting love)
- Band 3 "Ya Abu Lassa wa Taquiya" (O you
with the turban and the taquiya)
- Band 4 "Maoual" and singing

Side 2

- Band 1 "Abu Zeid El Hilali"
(My first word is to thank God)
- Band 2 Hamdi Matkal Kenawi
(instrumental to accompany
the stick dance)

Recordings, text and photos by Alain Weber
Translated Text translated From French by Brigitte Metra
Songs translated from arabic by Yussef Rezka.

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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The Egyptian "rababa" made of a coconut shell covered with a fish skin and mounted on a long tubular handle, is mainly used to back up local singers (morani shaabeya) and epic poets (shaer).

It has not undergone any changes since Gustave Flaubert came through the little town of Esna in 1870, although from his notes of that time he appears not to have been appreciative of its sound.

"The musicians arrived", he wrote "a child and an old man, the left eye covered it with a rag, they both scrape on the "rabfabe", nothing is more out of tune or unpleasant. The musicians never stop playing you have to shout to have them stop".

In Egypt today, there are still numerous professional "rabab" orchestras, which originate from diverse villages and travel widely to perform at festivals. The orchestra is always conducted by a "raï" (soloist or leader) who is also the group's lead singer.

SIDE A

1/ The raï Nadi Osman comes from TOD, small village south of Luxor on the oriental bank of the Nile river, the border between the cultivated land and the desert. 3 other musicians accompany him in this recording. Linked together by a family relationship basis of the unceasingly moving oral tradition.

Two of them also play the "rababa". The third one gives the rhythm with a "darabuka", conical shaped percussion instrument.

We first discover Nadi Osman, in his sixties, as a popular singer. He expresses himself through traditional songs, from various inspirational sources. These are spontaneously born from the fertile imagination of such and such a musician, and become quickly incorporated into the local or even national cultural heritage.

The cultural mark of the Upper-Egypt peasant society also singularizes itself by its language. The arab pronunciation in this area is different from the northern in that the "q" [ق] classical letter is used (which is not in the spoken arabic in Cairo). Only instead of pronouncing it like as in classical arabic, it is pronounced "Gaf".

Moreover a great number of expressions and images are peculiar to this region, bearing witness to the reference points this creative artist has to the environment in which he lives

a/ "Ya hamâm" [O Pigeon!]

Why are you crying pigeon?
You remind me of my beloved
And my heart is wounded by all these separations
They put me in a jail and took the keys
Telling me that the warder was away
They locked me up in a room without any window
To filter the outside perfume

* The first 3 pieces of this side are less than 5 years old, showing that "Traditional" music in Egypt is an outgoing form.

M
1838
E32
R112
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MUSIC LP

يا حمام بتنوح ليه ، فكرت عليه الحبايب
وانا قلبي مكوي و جروح على فراه الحبايب
سجنوني وخذوا المفا تيج وقالوا سجانك غايب
ولا طاقة بتجيلي روح انظر بيل الحبايب

Despite the apparent lightness of tone, the themes of Egyptian music dear to a certain poetical arabic imagination, since time immemorial are linked to the notion of nostalgia and sadness coming from a very often impossible love. The inflamed passion of man in a regulated, austere tribal context, drives him to a madness widely described in great traditional poems.
It is also through singing that he can express the sorrows of life's ups and downs.

b/ - "Ya Habibi, ya asal, ya Abu Darka massal" [O honey hasting love, your smile has no equal]

Your love only brings me worries
And my eyes do not want to be closed
Since I was born, I have never be lucky
The planted nose became a vulgar onion

يا حبيبي يا عدل ، يا بو ضحكة مثله
المرسال اللي بعته يا روبر امبارح واصل
حبك زود لي هومي وسعوني حرمة نومي
شقي البنت انا من نومي زرعني لور وطلع بهد

c/ "Ya Abu Lassa wa Taquiya" [O you with the turban and the taquiya]
[taquiya: woolen hat wore on the top of the head around which the white turban is wrapped]

I asked to the moon if you were far from my eyes
My love, what is going on, why are you hurting me like this
The wind knocked on the door
I thought that my love was coming
But the door was lying, it only trembled under the wind pressure
O you who through your nest
Why the sea is empty?
It is when my heart is lonely that it is captive

بال عليك القمر لو غبت عن عيني
يا حبيبي ايه النمر ما انت اللي كاويتي
ضرب الواعلي الباب قلته الحبيب جاني
وتار به يا باب كذاب انتهمر بالهاني
يا طار حنينك ابله مال بجرم خالي
لما القليب انبله في ابعه بات خالي

d/ "Maouâl" and singing interpreted by Hamdi Metkâl Kenawi and his mother. Hamdi Metkâl, son of Metkâl Kenawi Metkâl, the great "sâidi music master (sâidi: from Upper-Egypt), plays while his mother interprets a "maoual" sort of narrative melody, enriched by the leit-motiv "Ya leîl, Ya leîl, Ya ayni, Ya ayni" [O night, O my eyes] -If the plant grows and turns green it will be the joy of its owner and his family
 And the one who will build a palace for himself will keep it forever
 When it turns its back, life gives a bitter and sour task to every-
 -thing you drink
 And the one who forgets God suffers all the time
 His glance draws my heart to one side and my spirit to the other
 What can I do child of this land? Take me to the beloved's house
 Have you seen her beauty? You who wear the lemon coloured gallabiya
 She charmed me with her eyes,
 I came back home, I confessed it to them, they contradicted me
 She saw me and said we will meet tomorrow, but alas tomorrow
 already belongs to the past.

(١) اذا فخر الزرك بفرح صاحبه وخليه
 والى بناله قصر على طول الزمان موله وخليه
 (٢) شفت الخسوة ابو جلابيه لوني
 نظري نظرة من عيون الساحة
 روحت دارنا اقول لام صونني، دار الجبل
 الدنيا لما حبل قوم سقى مرطاه وخليه
 شافني وقال لي ها قابلك بكرة
 الدنيا لما حبل تنزل عالي المنصب
 وفات بكرة بقاله زمان
 والى ما يقوله ياسا تر على طول الزمان ينصاب
 نزلت دموعي على خدي قنا وينصاب
 وانا عمل ايه يا صبارينا عدوني دار الجبل

SIDE 2

Introduction for "Abu Zeid El Hilali"

Nadi Osman's second aspect is that of the poet [shaër]. The poet's artistic rôle as narrator and exhorter is the oldest in the arabic world. We constantly find it in the bedouin society. Each tribe had its own poets and competitions of eloquence and inspiration were common.

Then, the monochord "rababa", already would accompany the epic storyteller's oratories as it does today, in the peasant society which although it is sedentary, is semi bedouin in its origins, and remains deeply impregnated with this period.

Abu Zeid El Hilali [El Hilal: moon crescent] legendary figure, first appears in folklore about the time tribes migrated from the Nedji desertic plateau (Arabia) towards Fatimide Egypt in the early XI^o century. After a long stay in the south of the country, the Beni-Hilal and Beni-Soleim tribes were finally sent to Ifrikya (present-day Tunisia) where they caused some disturbance to the Emir El Haizz Ben Badim's reign (Fatimide's enemy).

Abu Zeid appears as a typical hero, noble brave and cunning. He also is a bard, and even often used to seduce his enemies with the "rababa" before surprising them with a sudden attack. When he sang, the poet narrates, even the birds would stop their flying to listen. This epic, narrated in successive episodes generally begins with a moralising speech. In the present case, we can even detect some sufi influence.

My first word is to thank God
God is happy with mankind
It is Him who elevated the sky
By His power He extended the world

If you are a man of good and if you pray in the name of the Prophet
Your God will be in touch with you in secret
Then in Paradise, you will enter in places where the "uris" are
They will come close to you and will always stay by your side

I am always moaning, grieving and unhappy
Separated from my beloved
God we ask you for an open solution
It is you who establishes order in the Universe
Your solution is closer than thunder
It opens the door of the Universe

You must pray, man, because your life is not in your own hands
You, my brother, may be you only have to more days to live
Before you will meet your Lord

Cursed be the world and the one who is satisfied in it
It is a world of betrayal, there is no security,
It shines to the one who desires it before turning it back on him

It is I who am on the market of love and who weighs things
I am conformed by life, but I lost my reason
To whom must call, if not to God who has elevated the sky without
any columns

My God, you are the greatest, you never sleep
It is I who am on the market of love and who weighs things

اول كلامي باذكر الله ، كنت الاله عاقله ارضي . : رفع السما لغوه علاه ابقه رته ببط الاراضي
يا صني قلبي عم النبي يا صلاك ، وتلق ربك بروصالك . : كنت في الجنة قد خل مملك بنات الجور كلب ومالك
امورك يا دنيا على ما لداسه ، انا الاله سالت مداح عيوني . : انا الاله جرحي طفيح ما لداسه لكن بالعنف شافق وولي
انا فاضل في قضيتي وانين مكيف جافوني الحبابي . : يا الاله قصه نا فرجله ، فكلت صنيغ الخليفة
وصلي عم الزين يا معبود ولا تفننا العرف ايدك . : يا خي لك يومنا وحقوق و تعرف على حكم سيدك
وجا في طبيبي قلقتنا ، الاله معاه علة فلقتنا . : امرة الاله ما ترد جناح وحرص قوي صنولدا
فزال الجبل منزله منين ، عاجبيني صني كفوفه . : ويطلع في طارود الليل شيم سد حالنا خوفه
يلعن ابو الدنيا و ابو الفرخان لا . : دنيا رديئة طاشته ما لداسه امان
ترحم لمن يرحم وترجع تغدره . : لعه القصور العالية تكنه الارمال
يا عيني على اه . . يا عيني على آه . : وانا الاله في سوء الغرام و زمان
آمنت لله نيا كتم اما تر . : عقلي ذهب صندا ما غني طار
اشكي لك رفع السما بلاعه . : الاله تعالى واه لا ينعام
ولا ط من ركب الكحيل خيال . : ولا كلامك القتا بيان العدا
ولا كل من يعادي الرجال ينعام .

Instrumental piece by Hamdi Metkâl Kenawi

This record concludes with an instrumental piece intended to accompany the stick-dance (Râks al tahtib) duel where the stick replaces the sword.

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