

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8512

# MUSIC OF UPPER-EGYPT

played on the rebabā, mizmar, arghul and darabuka

RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY ALAIN WEBER



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1838  
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1979

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

MUSIC LP



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8512

**SIDE 1**

Improvisation on Popular Themes (sibs) 18:00  
recorded 7/31/77 at Quena

**SIDE 2**

1. Improvisation on Popular Themes (arghul) 15:00  
7/31/77 recorded at Quena
2. Improvisations on Popular Themes (mizmar sa'idi)  
recorded 7/22/77 4:00

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# MUSIC OF UPPER-EGYPT

played on the rābābā, mizmar,  
arghul and dārābukā

RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY ALAIN WEBER

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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# MUSIC OF UPPER-EGYPT

Compiled and anotated by Alain Weber

## EGYPT

Egyptian popular music, with its traditional transmitted character, reveals old musical forms which go back to the Djâhiliya (pré-Islamic période). In fact, Arab music, before it was inspired by the rich Persian or Greek cultures, drew its dreams and rhythms from the old chant of the desert, itself for a great time determined by the moving step of the bedouin mounts. Only later on, when the Arabic world reached some stability, could it then find its true identity through a cultural influence which grew unceasingly and lead to a true synthesis of the musical styles that belonged to the différent conquered countries.

Egyptian popular music, even though largely unknown in the occidental world proves to be extremely rich; there is no region without its own musicians, no village without its own music. It is present in daily life of the "fellah," fulfilling its rôle as a popular art. Whether a peasant in his field, a boatman crossing the Nile on a "felouque" or a woman rocking her baby, Egypt sings its joys and sorrows at the mercy of time, punctuating the precious moments of life all in touch with its fertile land and its great nourishing river.

Nevertheless, one must make a distinction between amateur music and the more elaborate music which, as a matter of fact, fully appropriates the monopoly of a thousand year old tradition. The oral tradition, pivot of the whole popular culture is once again impressive in its effectiveness, transmitted admirably from father to son, it hands down a living music from its inception to the present. Its fragility, alas, becomes apparent nowadays against the technological aggression.

The "âlatiyah" (musicians), all professionals grouped by family, by village or quarter of a town, spread out far beyond their own territory, recalling somewhat the wandering soul of the French "trouvères" and "troubadours" in the XI<sup>e</sup> century.

In Upper-Egypt, that is in southern Egypt, stretching from Assiut to Aswan (New Nubia), numerous villages have been settled since the Neolithic period. These villages hug the bank of the Nile, still very closely mingled with the vestiges of a glorious ancient past. Because of its isolation and a certain rigidity among the inhabitants, this area has managed to keep its own cultural and dialectic identity. Ever since the invasion of Amr Ebn el Ass and his troupes, the VII<sup>e</sup> century A.C. brought Egypt in the cultural growth of the Arab world.

The government of Quena in the very heart of Upper-Egypt, gathers a great number of musicians that we can divide into two main groups, each one corresponding to an instrument and a particular function. The first one is with the "rababa" and singing, the second instrumental with the "mizmar."

The latter is reserved for dances of which the most popular is the stick-dance done by men (Râqs el tahtib), the dance of the horse (Râqs el Kheil) and the dance of the "ghawazies" (young professional dancers).

However, a few exceptions do exist such as the one on this record in which the orchestra does include the main instruments of the Egyptian folklore as well as their two rôles: dances and singing. We can only approve about this initiative which without betraying the tradition, proves the spontaneity of a living folklore as well as the talent of the instrumentalists.

### The instruments:

#### 1. The "rababa":

The term "rababab," of Persian origin, designates a fiddle with one or two strings whose morphology varies according to the different regions of the Arab world, throughout which the instrument is widespread. The Egyptian "rababa" is composed of a soundbox made of an opened coconut shell covered with a fish skin and mounted on a long tubular wooden neck, prolonged by an iron spike that goes through the shell. The two horsehair strings are held by large lateral pegs on the upper part of the handle. They are vibrated by a bow made of cane and also strung with horsehair.

#### 2. The "mizmar":

The "mizmar," is a popular wind instrument related to the oboe. Its origins seem to be very old for the "aulos" and the "tibia" from the ancient Greece and Rome were also double-reed instruments. Called "zamr" or "zoummar" as well, it has the shape of a cylindrical tube ending in a conical bell, often circled with metal. It has seven holes on the upper side, one on the underside, and is tuned to the diatonic major scale. The double-reed (gach) made out of a thinned tube of cane flattened at one end, is set in a metallic tube, itself fitted in the main mouthpiece.

Three types of "mizmar" are used, each of a different length and register; the "sîbs," the smallest; the "mizmar sâ'idi" of a medium size and the "telt," the biggest one.

#### 3. The "arghul":

It is a double clarinet. The tube on which the melody is played has six holes. The drone, already longer, can be lengthened by extra segments and reach up to six feet or more.

#### 4. The "darabuka":

It is a pottery bowl-drum with a skin.





## SIDE B

1. *Improvisation on popular themes (arghul)* 15 mn  
(recorded the 7/31/77 at Quena)

With the same mastery, Saad Mustafa Soliman uses the "arghul" as a solo instrument in a piece dedicated to Aswan. Fawi Ahmed Mohammed (34 years old) is proving his abilities with the "rababa" in long instrumental pieces, where often the two instruments meet on the unisson, demonstrating a technique strengthened since their childhood. The end is a return to the stick-dance.



2. *Improvisation on popular themes (mizmar sâ'idi)*  
4 mn (recorded the 7/22/77)

The "reïs" Abdin Hossein, originally from Garagos village, plays as an exception on a solo, accompanied by the "tabla baladi," a double skinned drum, giving its name to the formations of Egyptian oboe.

After the usual introduction "Ya Rabb be toba" (O, Lord forgive me) a few themes are developed with the "mizmar sâ'idi," among them again "Ruh, ya Hamada, ruh" and "Zaki, Zaki" (Look, mummy, Zaki is crying) . . . picked up joyfully by a few inhabitants of Zaniya village gathered together for the occasion.

## EGYHPT

### SIDE A


1. *Improvisation on popular themes with the "sîbs."*  
18 mn

### SIDE B

1. *Improvisation on popular themes with the "arghul."*  
15 mn
2. *Improvisation on popular themes with the "mizmar sâ'idi."* 4 mn

*Text, photos and recordings: Alain WEBER with the help of Francois COUFLAN.*

*Text translated from French by Brigitte METRA.*

LITHO IN U.S.A. 

## SIDE A

- Improvisation on popular themes (sîbs)* 18 mn  
(recorded the 7/31/77 at Quena)

First of all, the "réïs" Saad Mustafa Soliman (27 years old), originally from Balass village is playing on the "sîbs" earlier described as a solo instrument, sustained by his brother Walid (20 years old) who, due to the breathing technique (the air is inhaled through the nose while the cheeks act as air pockets, being repeatedly inflated and then relaxed) maintains a constant . . . note with the "arghul." The soloist after a short introduction, throws himself into prodigious improvisations, going from one theme to another with tremendous dexterity and rapidity. After the theme "Ruh, ya Hamada, ruh," he enters into a demonstration of virtuosity (tanayn el mizmar). Then, "Râqs el tahtib" (stick-dance), followed by two songs interpreted by the elder brother Abdel Wahab (34 years old) playing the "darabuka" at the same time.

