RABAB

Egyptian singing and epic songs
RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY ALAIN WEBER

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 Matkai 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 Yusef Rezka.

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET
FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8452
RABAB
Egyprian singing and epic songs

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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 as not undergone any changes since Gustave Flaubert came through the little town of Esna in 1876, 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 "rais" (soloist or leader) who is also the group's lead singer.

SIDE A

1/ The rais Nadi Osman comes from Tod, small village south of Luxor on the oriental bank of the Nile river, the borderer between the cultivated land and the desert. 3 other musicians accompany him in this recording. Linked together by a family relationship basis of th 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 sixtees, as a popular singer. He expresses himself through traditional songs, from various ins-pirationnal sources. Those are spontaneously born from the fertile imagination of such and such a musician, and become quickly incor-po-rated into the local or even national cultural heritage.

The cultural mark of the Upper-Egypt peasant society also singulari- ses itself by its language. The arab pronunciation in this area is different from the northern in that the "q"[q] 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.

af"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 jail and took the keys

Telling me that the warden 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.
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 rose became a vulgar onion

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
d/ "Maouâl" and singing interpreted by Hamdi Metkâl Kenawi and his
mother. Hamdi Metkâl, son of Metkâl Kenawi Metkâl, the great "
sâîdî music master (sâîdî: from Upper-Egypt), plays while his
mother interprets a "maouâl" sort of narrativ melody, enriched by the
leit-motiv "Ya leil, Ya leil, Ya aynî, Ya aynî" (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.

SIDE 2

Introduction for "Abu Zeid El Hilali"

Nadi Osman's second aspect is that of the poêt (sha'ër). The poêt'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 XIst
century. After a long stat in the south of the country, the Beni-
Hilal and Beni-Soleim tribes were finally sent to Ifrikiya (present-
day Tunisia) where they caused some disturbence 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 poêt
narrates, even the birds would stop their flying to listen.

This epic, narrated in successive episodes generally begins with a
moralising speach. 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 comforted by life, but I lost my reason
To whom must call, if not to God who has elevated the sky without

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

Instrumental piece by Hamdi Metâî 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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