Rahim Alhaj, oud

When the Soul Is Settled: Music of Iraq

with Souhail Kaspar, percussion
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1. Taqsim Maqâm Âjam  8:48
2. Taqsim Maqâm Mukhâlif  4:32
3. Taqsim Maqâm Sîkâ  7:42
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INTRODUCTION

Until the last part of the 20th century, the land of Iraq was known best to the rest of the world for what occurred there long ago, in the valleys near the confluence of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Iraq today occupies the same geographic locale where the great civilizations of Mesopotamia arose more than 5000 years ago. In the fertile valleys near the water, people made music, cultivated crops year-round, built the first cities, and pioneered written forms of language. A clay slab perhaps depicting a woman playing a lute dates back to the late prehistoric period of the Sumerian city of Uruk (4500-3100 B.C.). A wood-bellied lute appears on royal seals and other iconographic imagery from that period.

It is an instrument tantalizingly similar to, and perhaps a direct ancestor of, al `ud (English: the lute, the oud; Arabic: the wood stick), featured on this album. But there is a gap of more than a thousand years in the present state of knowledge about what happened to that instrumental tradition between the fall of Babylon to the Persians (in 539 B.C.) and a few centuries before the beginning of Islam (in 622 A.D.). The region, especially the desert, was a magnet for the tongues, and the Arab Turks migrated into the area in the 3rd century A.D., founding the cities of Al-Ambel and later Al-Hira.

The oud was held in very high regard as a solo instrument with its own distinct repertoire during much of the Abbasid period (750-1258), with its royal court and capital at Baghdad. Iraq musicians today harken to that time as a golden age for their instrument and their music tradition, and Rahim Alhaj, soloist on this disc, is no exception. He carries a strong sense of aesthetic continuity with the music of his homeland, as well as his teachers and their teachers, and he recognizes that Iraqi culture has dramatically changed in the last century, and much about its music has changed as well, and he recognizes that he himself is an agent of musical change. This album is comprised primarily of Rahim Alhaj’s tasqām (sing.: tasqām) instrumental improvisations offering an early 21st-century interpretation of maqāmān, including material rooted in and derived from the Iraqi maqām tradition, as well as more recently created compositions.
THE IRAQI MAQAM

A maqam (plural: maqāmāt) in Arab music is often depicted by its pitches represented as a scale, that tells only a part of its story, a tale that can only be touched upon here. Each Arab maqam does indeed include unique pitch content, but it also includes other characteristics, most prominently directionality of melodic movement and specific melodic formulas. Its building blocks are theoretically based on tetrad chords (archetypal three or four notes of various intervallic sizes within the span of a 4th), sometimes trichords or pentachords, spanning a 3rd or a 5th respectively. Most often, maqāmāt are analyzed in terms of two of these building blocks, the upper and lower ajānas (singular: jīn), which may overlap, be adjacent, or joined. In addition, each maqam tends to have specific other maqāmāt it typically modulates to. These and other elements offer infinite variation, and artistry is attained by subtle and emotionally affective use by the musician. Another meaning of maqam conveys the idea of spiritual station in Near Eastern mystical tradition.

In Iraq, maqām carries all the meanings found in the rest of the Near East but also refers to what was, until the early 20th century, a particular vocal tradition found only there, a specific repertoire of pre-composed songs and improvised vocal sections, as well as other unique identifiers. Counterparts to the Iraqi maqām tradition may be seen and heard in the suite forms such as the Persian dastgāh or Central Asian mogām and maqām, in areas east of Iraq. The pitch content in Iraq, what the West calls a scale, is named nagham (plur.: naghām). The Iraqi maqām’s traditional instrumental ensemble (called chārghī, prominently the čārghī Baghdadī) was comprised of spike fiddle (jūzā or jawza), trapezoidal dulcimer (santūn), and two or three single-skinned percussion instruments, usually the hand drums dağf (frame drum) or riqa (tambourine) and dūmbak or darabukka (goblet drum), or sometimes naqara (a small kettle drum pair, played with sticks). The group accompanied and cued the singer, providing pitch and rhythm frameworks, all following the melody and enriching the musical sound and aesthetic enjoyment for the audience, but the instrumentalists played a distinctly secondary role to the voice. Until the early 20th century, at least three regional styles of Iraqi
maqām were prominent, each associated with one of the important cities of Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk. This album is based upon and focuses solely on a later development, a pan-Iraqi style. Rahim Ahlai says, "The chalghi Baghdadi was unfortunately named, as they performed material from Mosul, from Kirkuk, from all over Iraq, as well. Indeed, they sang dash, which is Persian. And the brothers Jamil and Munir Bashir were originally from Mosul—but they studied, lived, and performed in Baghdad."

By the early 20th century, modernity was a powerful force affecting Iraq and bringing rapid change to Iraqi cultural traditions. The venerable maqām (in Arabic: al-maqām al-'Iraqi, plural al-maqāmāt al-'Iraqiyah) was no exception. Featuring vocal soloists, the Iraqi maqām tradition was the most prominent urban repertoire, one that appears to have remained stable and constant for the past 150 years. Some scholars believe the Iraqi maqām tradition is continuous back to the Abbasids, but there is, so far, insufficient documentation before the 1800s to support that attractive hypothesis. Other instruments appeared in a new sort of Iraqi instrumental ensemble in the 1920s, including oud, qānūn and with the Western violin replacing the santūr and the jūza. And the Egyptian tabla often replaced the more resonant, deeply pitched Iraqi metal drum: dambuk. The ensemble was called takht al-sharqi and it performed a lighter, more popular repertoire.

Following studies in Turkey through the early 1920s, the largely self-taught virtuoso cellist, oud player, pianist, and composer Shéfīdī Haidar Tārgān lived and performed in the West from 1924-1932. He accepted an invitation to return to Baghdad in 1934 from his cousin King Faisal, to "create an Institute of Arabian Music in the Abbasid tradition" (Chabrier 1978:98). He founded the Institute of Fine Arts (Ma'had al-Funūn al-Jamī'ah) there in 1935, which later gave rise to the Baghdad Conservatory. Haidar's aesthetic sensibility, certainly strengthened by his years in the West, was that of the oud of medieval times, a solo instrument equal to or surpassing any in the Western orchestra. He taught that instrumental music could stand alone in its beauty and affect, and not simply provide accompaniment to vocal recitatives. He
القوانين كما أحدثت اللغة العربية. مكان الجلوس وعرفت الفرقة باسم التنظيم الشرقي وتضمنت معيوناتها المختارة من الموسيقى الهندسة والطبيعية.

بعد إكمال دراسته في تركيا في بداية القرن العشرين، عاش الفنان العربي المبدع المطور، ولد عازف الفلوت في الغرب حيث معروف النجاح منذ سنة 1924 حتى 1932. وفي سنة 1946 لقي دوماً عزفه النظام الفني، فصله من فيلمه حيث عاد إلى بغداد، وإنشاء معهد الموسيقى العربية. (شريانية 1988: 87). وفقاً لما يراه المعهد، فإن المعهد الذي تأسس سنة 1931، وهو المعهد الذي يقع فيما يسمى معهد الموسيقى العربي في بغداد، ونال من المعهد تأسيسه أن يكون مستقلًا من جماهيرته، فتعشره جمهور الموسيقى العربية، ولهي نسبة استغلال الموسيقى العربية في المجموعة الطيفية. وفي 그래نت تلك الآلهة أضاف ورد شاذلياً من الأعنب ليوزيد من قيمة تعبيرها كجزء لملاءمة أن جمهوره يستعمل كل الأتروشة البديلة.

كان من بين أولاء المبدعين، عازف الكمان جميل بشر (1917-1977)، وهو الذي خلق في رسالة المعهد. كان جميل بشر نفسه موسيقياً ومهاً إلى حد بعيد، ويعتبر الفضل في استدامة إلهامه كالمؤسس للمعهد. جامع تأصيلته على إذاعة柏林ية، ويعمل في الدورية العربية، وذلك عبر نظم وحشام غريب، (1960-1977)، كان جيل جيل في المعهد، وواصل تصرفه حتى صار من أبرزُ أفراد المعهد.

Rahim Alhaj was raised in Baghdad, began studying the oud when he was nine years old, and gave solo concerts from age fourteen. He attended the Baghdad Conservatory of Fine Arts, studying under Munir Bashir and Salim Abdul Kareem, while graduated from the six-year program with honors in 1990. He left Iraq the next year under pressure from Saddam Hussein's government. Rahim lived in Jordan and later in Syria until 2000, where he was granted refugee status and emigrated to the U.S., where he resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico. An improviser and composer, he has performed in hundreds of solo concerts throughout the Near East, in Paris, and across North America. His website is www.rahimalhaj.com. As received from his teachers, Rahim Alhaj carries the Iraqi musical tradition, yet he has moved it along toward the next generations in his own way, in his own time.

Souhail Kaspar is a master percussionist, born in Lebanon and trained at the Conservatory of Traditional Arabic Music (Nadi-Al-Funun Al-Arabia) in Aleppo, Syria. He lives in Los Angeles, but travels worldwide to work, in constant demand for performances, recording sessions, and teaching engagements. For online information, see www.nearastmusic.com.
"In this album, each piece is opened and closed in Iraqi style," says Rahim Alhaj. "The musical and aesthetic intention of the tradition is to settle the soul. When your soul is settled, then only are you really inside the maqām. The famous Egyptian composer Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1891) even said, 'All the Arab world’s music turns around Egypt, except Iraq, they have their own musical way.' This is the music of Iraq, absolutely and purely Iraqi, all about Iraq. Any connoisseur of Arabic music will recognize the playing as Iraqi in style."

The musical content of the album comprises nine expositions, each including an improvisation followed by an instrumental rendition of a famous song. Sometimes the improvisation is accompanied by percussion or drone, sometimes not. Three of the nine taqsim (singular: taqsim) are comprised of: a pre-composed instrumental prelude (duhūb), which briefly illustrates the maqām, followed by the instrumental improvisation to elaborate it, and often modulating to related maqāmāt as well, and then the whole piece is completed by the song. Alhaj says, "The duhūb played for Taqsim Muhillī, Taqsim Lāri, Taqsim Sharqī Rast, and the songs selected to follow the improvisation in that particular maqām are renowned in Iraq, and considered by Iraqis as characteristically Iraqi in origin."

The taqsim itself, the improvisation, always ends with emphasis on the principal or keynote with which its maqām began. The song follows. Within the frame of each particular maqām's character, Rahim Alhaj creates a refined aesthetic experience. Souhaib Kasper's percussion accompaniment is comprised of tablāh, ṭiqq, and dumbak parts.

"Don't worry about saving these songs! And if one of our instruments breaks, it doesn't matter. We have fallen into the place. Where everything is music."
The strumming and the flute notes
Rise into the atmosphere,
And even if the whole world's harp should burn up, there will still be
Hidden instruments playing...."
- Rumi

THE MUSIC NOTATION ACCOMPANYING EACH MAQAM REPRESENTS ONLY THE PITCH CONTENT OF ITS ORIGINAL, TRADITIONAL AND UNALTERED FORM.

1. Taqsim Maqâm Ājam (transposed to f)

Maqâm Ājam is close to a Western major scale based on a Bb tonic, differing by
but a few hundredths of a half tone in some of its interval sizes. But in this instrumental
exposition, Rahim Alhaj transposed to F,

both to produce better resonance on the oud by taking advantage of open strings,
and to increase the number of finger positions available. He doubled the traditional one
tone exploration of the maqâm to two full octaves, thereby expanding its expressive
emotional capacity. In this introduction, additional variation is added by excursions to
related maqâms Hijaz, Nawa, and Khanabat, and a final return to the lower octave
in preparation for the song that follows.

The percussion enters at 4:51 in a rhythmic mode (iqâm) called Wahda Kabi, a
duple syncopated pattern counted as 4/4, combined with another 4/4 common Near Eastern
iqâm called Maqûsâm. In Western notation of Near Eastern rhythms, the onomatopoeic
dūra (sometimes dūm; the "u" sounds like the "oo" in book) is shown by a note with
stem pointing down. Dūra is a hollow, deep sound produced by striking the center
of the drum or tambourine's skin. Takîk is a sharper, higher tap or beat near the rim.

*Except from "Where Everything Is Music" reprinted by permission. © 1995 Coleman Barks from The Essential Rumi.
shown as a note with stem upward.


2. Taqṣīm Maqām Mukhlāfīn

This is a uniquely Iraqi maqām, found nowhere else in the Near East—in fact, “mukhlāfīn” means “different.” According to Rahīm Alhaj, Maqām Mukhlāfīn differs from the pan-Near Eastern Maqām Sīkā by virtue of its tonic, pitched a quarter tone higher than that of Sīkā, and here transposed up to A quarter-flat. The percussion sets a stately rhythmic pattern of 12 beats (a modified version of the Iraqi iqāt “Yūgrug”).

The oud begins slowly, to “capture the sadness that this mūqām portraits, and uses the space between the notes to express edginess, stress, and tension,” explains Alhaj. Note how his improvisation weaves in and out of attachment to the rhythm and briefly modulates to the related Iraqi Maqām Gūlgūlī, which shares the naghām of Mukhlāfīn but differs in terms of which pitches are emphasized.

At the end of the improvisation, percussion drops out for a few moments, while the oud continues to emphasize the maqām’s structure. Kaspar rejams Alhaj with the pan-Near Eastern iqāt Maqṣūrān in an up-tempo statement of an Iraqi song called “Take Off Your Veil” (“Thibæ Al-Abiāyā”),

1 تقايس مقام عجم (منتقل إلى درجة “الغا”)

مقام عجم قريب من السلالم الموسيقية الغربي الكبير (ناجور) ومضرب على المهمة “سي بيمول”

تقوم دخول الغا ولا يختلف عن ذلك في عدة أجزاء من المقام في بعض الأداب الأدبية.

لكن رحيم الحاج، بواسطة استعداداته للألحان المتنوعة، ينتمي في مقام عجم إلى درجة “الغا” وذلك فإنه يبتكر رمياً للفنائع الأنيقة. ويرى أن الأغنية المجلة للفنائع ذللك، قد صاغ مطابع المقام فجعله من جوائز كلامية بدلاً من جوائز واحد ولذلك ينص طائفته الوظيفية المجهزة، ووسطت التوازن بين المنتميات العربية. مثل مقام حجاز ومقام عجم بناءً مقام خيلية أشتركت تجربته أفرع أخرى لهذه المقامات.

يعود أخيراً للإيقاع المشخص للجازية كما بداية.

يدخل الإيقاع في نقطة 0:35:升降 يلتف إلى نقطة 0:45 3 متبوع بـ 0:45/69.

وفي الدور الموسيقي الغربي للمقامات الأندلسي يشير إلى “عنى بتحته فساقها” إلى استقلال الـ "الدام" صوت دفع منطقي. ينقل داخل إيقاع على وسط جدة الطيارة أو الزق، والـ "الدام"

وصيب أو رت أكثر حدة على المناطق القريبة من الإطار، ويرمز إلى بنية ساقها إلى أعلى.

وقيم الغا بثنى مقوم الطير الكبير عين “نواة على الحقول” في أذنية أفواهها سنة 1919 لنتفع تعقيم.

وهذا مهجر من بعد استعماره للمقام في مدينة دينوقت، وكتبها خصيصاً لبنيتها المُطربة لازم الجزء.

2 تقايس مقام مخالب:
3. Taqsim Maqām Sīkā

Rahim Alhaj approaches Maqām Sīkā (sometimes represented as Segah) in a pan-Near Eastern style, tranposing it up a quarter-tone to E, then moves into nearby Maqām Hijaz as prescribed, then to Awj, Awshār, and Sabā before returning to Maqām Sīkā. After the solo improvisation, the Iraqi song "The Girl with Her Eyes on Me" ("Ya Bint w-Enīch 'Alayya") is accompanied by rhythm instruments in a rapid 4/4. The particular rāq is known in Egypt as Sa'idi (from Sa'idi, English: Upper Egypt).

4. Taqsim Maqām Kurd

This maqām is found in Iraq and virtually everywhere in the Near East. "It is often considered reflective in its aesthetic sensibility, with a tinge of sadness," according to Alhaj.

Though traditionally played on a tonic of D or G, it is here transposed to G and its pitch range is again expanded for the improvisation to two octaves. As taught in Iraq, Maqām Kurd is never accompanied by percussion during its taqsim. So there is no rhythmic pulse, neither in initial exploration, nor during Rahim Alhaj's artful modulations to the related maqāms of Bayyat, Hijaz, and Lāmi on the way back to repeating the initial statement of Maqām Kurd. When the improvisation's last note dies away, the rhythm part establishes at 5/4 with a rhythmic mode called Jūrrāh (Sūr in Egypt); then the oud joins and plays with the Iraqi song "Oh, My Heart, Be Sick and Melt Away" ("Ya Gali-i Śī w-dhūbū").
5. Taqsim Maqam Bayyat-Husayni

According to Rahim Alhaj, Iraqi oud players are fond of improvising in this maqam comprised of elements of maqams Bayyat and Husayni, because it takes excellent advantage of the open strings. In his development, he included the constituent maqâms—Hijaz, Rast, and Nawa.

Following the improvised section, oud and percussion join at 5:42 in a song well-known in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon entitled “Send Me Away and I Will Know My Intentions” (“Dizzani wa-Araf Marâmî”). The Iraqis claim this composition as their own, as do the Syrians. The percussion accompanies principally in a 6/4 ḫaqā’ī (3+3) called sâgîn sama’, framed by the 5/4 pattern Masmûd Kâthir and the 4/4 Maqâm.

6. Taqsim Maqam Hijaz

This maqam is found throughout the Near East, usually centered on D, here played in G. Opening in Maqam Hijaz, he shifts to Rast, then to Nawa Ather, before returning to the starting maqam.

The oud then renders an instrumental version of the famous Iraqi song “Atop the Palm Tree” (“Faww in-Nakhrî”) with percussion accompaniment principally in ḫaqâ’ī Masmûd Saghîrî, a 4/4 pattern, with excursions to Malûf in 2/4.

5. تقاسم مقام طهري:

هذا المقام شائع شعبيًا في العراق مثل شعبيه في معظم أنحاء الشرق الأدنى، وطبيعة كلام الحاح
"يعمّر (أو المقام) لأنه في أصوبيه الجميلة مع نصه من الموسيقى، ومن أنه يُعرف عليه علماً على صوتيه
"ويصوى” إلا أن العازف يتحول إلى "موسيقا العلة الموسى الانتقال إلى مقاطعة الموسيقا.

وبعد إتمام التدريب، في العراق لا يمكن أن يصغّي تقاسم تقاسم مقام، كأي نوع من المقام، وذالك ليس
كما بعض الموسيقى في الانتظار للعائق أو لإلغاء الأسئلة أو المقاطع التي تتطلب فيها مهارة حلم الحاح، عندما
يتنقل بين المقامات الأخرى مثل البكاه ومزاح والكامي في طريق عودته لتكثر أو تكرار عرف المقام الانتقالية
المقام كرد، عندما يتم تصفح البوسية في القسم، يتم ستائر المقام الشخصي عند التوقف 3 التعديل
عذرو موسى يبسيح جنَّاً ينجم عن الموسيقى، تتعقب المقام وجماح وصاحب، بالعزة الأغنية العراقية "بقلب سل وتوت ".

5. تقاسم مقام بيات- حسين:

ييري رحمة الحاج بإثني العجز العراقيين، يعنى القسم في هذا المقام الذي يكون من بيات
حسن بالuttersة الثقيلة والمقاطع من الأوز المتفتحة، وقد فعل هو ذلك في تطويره لهذا
المقام حيث ضم إليه مكونات مجال أخرى مثل حموز وانتشار ألوئي.

في نهاية التقاسم ينضم الإيقاع إلى العود في النقطة 2-3 لحرف موسيقى أغنية ذات الأغنية الصغيرة.
7. Taqsim Maqâm Lâmî

The Baghdad singer Al-Qubanchi (1901–1939) introduced this Iraqi maqâm in the 1920s. Some believe he created it, some say he revived it from medieval theory texts, and, according to Rahim Alhaj, the Beni Lamm believe the maqâm is theirs by right of tradition.

It shares intervals with Maqâm Hijâz Kar Kurd, but its keynote (G) is different, as are its melodic and rhythmic frames. Egyptian composer Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab heard Maqâm Lâmî during a concert in a 1932 visit to Iraq. He liked it so much that he composed a new song using it, "You Who Planted the Orange Tree," and popularized the maqâm, which became fashionable in Egypt and across the Near East.

Rahim Alhaj opens with a strongly rhythmic instrumental prelude (dâdâb) in Wehda Kabîra rhythm to sketch the maqâm’s special character and emotional aesthetic, transposed here to G. The oud’s instrumental improvisation begins in Maqâm Lâmî, then makes incursions into neighboring maqâms, Kurd, Bayyât, Hijâz, and Kar Kurd, and finally returns to Maqâm Lâmî. The artist then plays a classical Iraqi song called "Tell Me, You, the Beautiful One" ("Gullî ya Hilû") with an accompanying 10-beat Iraqi rhythm, Jurîhî (see track 4).

8. Taqsim Maqâm Sharqi Rast

The Iraqi variation of the ubiquitous Maqâm Rast literally translates as "Eastern" Rast, here played in F rather than presented in the traditional C. The oud opens with a rhythmic dujjâb, accompanied by percussion playing Maqâm, and setting the pensive mood for this maqâm. He begins his solo improvisation in the initial maqâm, and then moves to neighboring Maqâm Parijâh. This modal construction is found only in
Iraq and Iran. Parşinah is a Farsi word meaning "the 5th step." He moves gracefully to Maqâm Hijaz, then Rast itself, before returning to Maqâm Sharqi Rast. At 8:43, percussion returns in Mâşum and Masmûdi Kabîr for the song "The Night is Sweet and Beautiful" ("Il Layla Hilwa").

9. Taqşîm Maqâm Saba

To close the set of performances, Rahim Alhaj chose Maqâm Saba, well known in all the Arab countries and Turkey. Saba is a primary conveyor of the emotions of sadness and grief, especially outside Iraq. Iraqi musicians have recourse to Maqâm Mukhâfîf for such expression.

For this recording, the soloist chose to transpose to A, rather than the conventional tonics of D or G. In the unaccompanied improvisation, he modulates to the related Hijaz, Ajam, and Hadidi (an Iraqi maqâm of the Maqâm Saba family) before turning again to Maqâm Saba to close. For the last song of the album, he chose "Oh Boy, Oh My Son" ("Yâ-Walad, Yâ-Bhîl"). The percussion accompanies the closing song in Iqâm Maqâm Saba.

The variations of the Iraqis' repertory of Maqâm Saba's traditions carry the performance to a higher level. Here, "Rast Shîrîf" is a new variation on the theme presented in the song "Мaqâm Saba," which is based on a new verse. The verse describes the virtuosity of the performers in this maqâm. The word "Parşinah" comes from the name of a Farsi word meaning "the 5th step." He moves gracefully to Maqâm Hijaz, then Rast itself, before returning to Maqâm Sharqi Rast. At 8:43, percussion returns in Mâşum and Masmûdi Kabîr for the song "The Night is Sweet and Beautiful" ("Il Layla Hilwa").
9 تقاسم مكان صبا:

لاقت هذه المجموعة من الأعمال اختبار رجيم الحاج، مقابل صبا الباحثة في كل الأقطار العربية وتركيا. مقابل صبا هو المدعو الأول على مشاهير الحزائم والنساء خاصة خارج العراق؛ وقد استعرضت عليه الموسيقيين العراقيين لمقابل موقف لتعزيز من اعتقاد هذه الأحاديث.

اختار العارف المغربي في هذا التسجيل أن يتنقل إلى "لا بد أن الفرار "دي" أو "دو" المسافرين. وفي عرفه غير المصحوب بالإيقاف يتجول العارف بين المقامات العربية مثل مقام حجاز وعجم ووحديدي (ومما ماعرف من عائلة صبا) قبل أن يعد ثانيا إلى مقم صبا ليختم به. وقد اختار أغنية (يا ولد يا بني) لتكون آخر أغنية في هذا الألبوم وهو يعرف لهما بصاحبة إيقاع المقسم.

About Smithsonian Folkways

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1997, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

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