

of occasions singing a cappella. The mood is calming but with a passion that's all the more powerful for its understatement and it all works surprisingly well without the stories and the costumes (although if you want those, check the CD booklet).

www.dancingturtle.co.uk

Jamie Renton

MAHSA & MARJAN VAHDAT

I Am Eve Kirkelig Kulturverksted FXCD 335

The Vahdat sisters' Kirkelig Kulturverksted (KKV) debut, *Songs From A Persian Garden*, was the document of a live recording, a soirée held in secret in the grounds of the summer residence of the Italian Embassy in Iran. It was held in secret because in Iran women are forbidden from singing in public. The sisters' sequel is again recorded in Iran, but this time the result of clandestine studio recordings, and once again a mixture of poems dating back as far as the 11th century and words from current writers. The acoustic settings by producer and composer (and Mahsa's husband) Atabak Elyasi are spare to the point of austerity, allowing the voices to luxuriate in the space. *Mystery* is a wonderful track ("When the moonlight of your eyes scatters night/ It rains flowers in my sorrowful field") with Mahsa's voice strong, clear and defiant over Pasha Hajai's sorrowful ney. There's an effortlessly heartbroken quality in Mahsa's voice, even when singing Rumi's ecstatic lyrics, while Marjan's voice has a more formal tone, though equally piercing. Separately they are powerful, when they come together, their strange harmonies, such as on the setting of Rumi's *King Of Love*, are extraordinary.

KKV is a prolific label, founded by the Norwegian church in 1974, and among its output of sacred music and Norwegian folk there are some surprising records: real gems of delicacy. This is one of them. Where ECM in Germany has earned an untouchable reputation for releasing records where the music shapes the silence, KKV is fast becoming an international label to watch. Hear a track on this issue's *fRoots* 32 CD.

www.kkv.musikkonline.no

Tom Jackson

Mahsa & Marjan Vahdat



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Spring Of Time: 78s From The EMI Archive Honest Jon's HJRCD 36

Give Me Love: Songs Of The Brokenhearted – Baghdad 1925-1929 Honest Jon's HJRCD 35

Back in the 1990s, Interstate Music began leasing 78rpm masters from the EMI archives for release on their Heritage and Harlequin imprints. They issued vintage African, Albanian, Cuban, Greek, Puerto Rican, Portuguese, Sardinian and Spanish compilations and I had a hand in it all. However, with those labels' unavailability now, it's wonderful to see that this huge and massively important archive of vintage world music is, thankfully, being mined once again, and, with *London Is The Place For Me* already under their belt, I cannot think of a better company than Honest Jon's to undertake it.

Here, following their West African compilation *Living Is Hard*, we have a broad sampler and a dedicated regional anthology to consider. *Spring Of Time* furnishes us with 30 wide-ranging samples of the world's music as recording engineers found it between 1903 and 1957. It contains some remarkable performances from an Albanian *shoket* (clarinet) through a Portuguese fado to English singer Joseph Taylor's title performance from 1903. You'll also find stuff from the Sudan, Spain, Japan, Georgia and elsewhere, so those of you who own, say the *Secret Museum Of Mankind* sets on Yazoo or Dust-To-Digital's *Black Mirror*, will know what to expect.

The Baghdad anthology is something else again. It comprises 22 performances from 1925 to 1929 recorded for the Iraqi market. A lively and diverse selection, it includes traditional and contemporary pieces, sacred and secular, in Arabic, Kurdish and Hebrew, and as a portrait of what was available in Iraq in the last half of the 1920s, it's about as good as you'll ever get on one CD. There are some startlingly bleak and blunt lyrics transcribed here, offering insight into what people thought and felt at the time, which turns out to be not a lot different from their concerns today. The background notes are excellent, a model of research clearly drawn directly from source material in the EMI archives, and each performance is explained and contextualised. Very nice production

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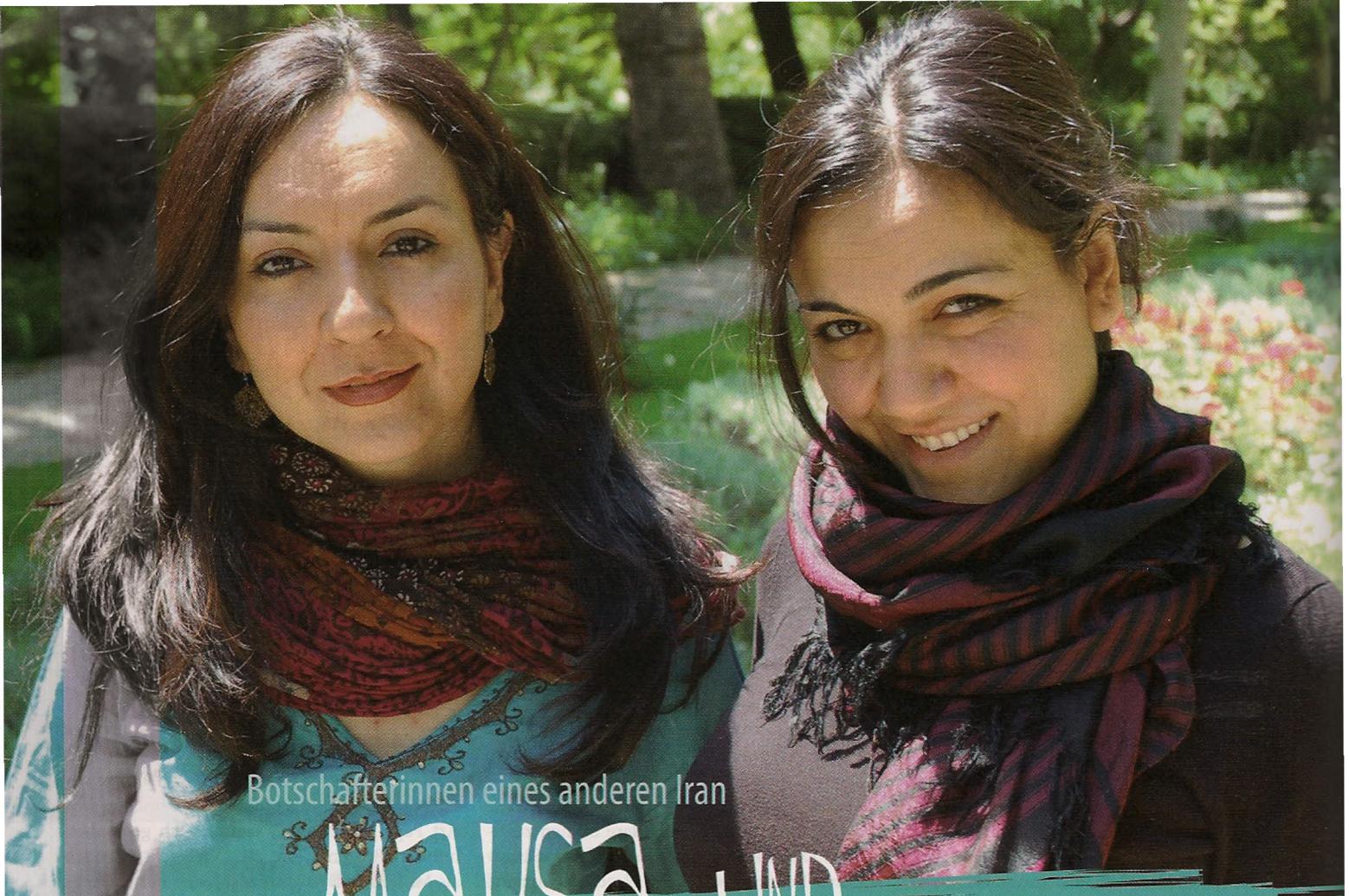
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Botschafterinnen eines anderen Iran

Mahsa und Marjan Vahdat

Zwei Schwestern mit Liedern aus einem persischen Garten

Was fällt Ihnen zuerst ein, wenn Sie an den Iran denken? Islamische Revolution? Mullahherrschaft? Wächterrat? Namen wie Khomeini, Khamene'i, Ahmadinejad, Mussawi? Staatsterror gegen die Opposition? Geheime Atomwaffenprojekte? Kopftuchpflicht für Frauen? Oder gar die Achse des Bösen? Oder wie steht es mit Namen wie Hafes, Rumi, al-Halladsch? Oder mit Mahsa und Marjan Vahdat? ►

Text: Michael A. Schmiedel

Wenn Ihnen die erstgenannten Namen und Begriffe vertraut sind, die letztgenannten fünf Namen aber nichts sagen, sind Sie wahrscheinlich ein aufmerksamer Nachrichtenverfolger oder eine am Zeitgeschehen interessierte Zeitungsleserin, aber es entgeht Ihnen doch die kulturelle Dimension dieses Landes, dessen Geschichte viel weiter zurückreicht als in das Revolutionsjahr 1979

oder auch in die Zeit des von der Revolution vertriebenen Schahs Pahlavi und dessen Kultur viel reichhaltiger ist, als die Nachrichtenbilder und Zeitungsartikel es uns vermitteln.

Botschafterinnen dieser tieferen Dimension ihrer Heimat sind die Schwestern Mahsa und Marjan Vahdat, zwei junge Frauen, geboren 1973 und 1976 in Teheran. Die Botschaft, die sie vermitteln hat wiederum zwei Dimensionen und zwei Zielgruppen. In einer Familie aufgewachsen, die der islamischen Revolution nicht

anhing, erlebten sie das neue Regime als eines, das dem eigenen Leben enge Grenzen setzt, zu enge. Dass auch die Pahlavi-Herrschaft keine war, die die Menschenrechte achtete, soll hier nicht geleugnet werden, aber in mancher Hinsicht bot sie nach westlichem Vorbild seinen Bürgern Freiheiten, die ihnen die Mullahs wieder nahmen. Zu diesen Freiheiten gehörte nicht nur die Möglichkeit, sich als Frau ohne Kopftuch in der Öffentlichkeit zu bewegen, sondern auch, als Sängerin öffentlich aufzutreten. Letzteres hat

„Iranische Künstler haben gelernt, wie sie Dinge indirekt ausdrücken können.“

sehr wohl eine lange Geschichte im Iran. Heute hingegen gilt die weibliche Stimme den Sittenwächtern als zu erotisch, um sie der Öffentlichkeit zuzumuten, ebenso wie das weibliche Haar. Auch für die Vahdat-Schwestern wird da keine Ausnahme gemacht. Das öffentliche Spielen von Instrumenten ist ihnen erlaubt, aber wenn sie im Iran singen, dann in privaten Räumen oder allenfalls in kleinen Sälen mit nur weiblicher Zuhörerschaft. „Ich denke nicht, dass wir dadurch irgendetwas Illegales tun. Wir treten nicht öffentlich auf im Iran, und so tun wir gar nichts gegen das Gesetz“, meint Mahsa Vahdat. Aber sie singen im Ausland, in Norwegen, in Italien oder in Deutschland, wo Marjan in Köln Musikwissenschaft studiert und wo beide in Rudolstadt auf dem TFF in der Stadtkirche ein Konzert gaben, begleitet von Mahsas Ehemann Atabak Elyasi an der Langhalslaute Setar, Pasha Hanjani an der Flöte Ney und Ali Rahimi an der Rahmentrommel Daf.

Eines erschließt sich den europäischen Zuhörern schnell, nämlich der Reichtum persischer Melodien, Rhythmen und Arrangements, wenn auch alles für unsere Ohren orientalisch-exotisch klingt. Schwieriger wird es mit den Texten, nicht nur, weil sie auf Farsi gesungen werden. Auch englische oder deutsche Übersetzungen helfen nicht sofort weiter. Es ist die Poesie einer für uns doch ungewohnten Lebensart, sehr sinnlich, sehr süß, sehr schmachtend. Da braucht es Erklärungen, Kommentare – und Zeit ...

„Oh Liebe, ich wundere mich,

ich bin verzaubert von Dir

In der ganzen Welt bin ich bekannt als ein Irrer

Der Majnuni-Brief beginnt mit mir

Obgleich, vor diesem gehörte ich zur Elite
des Buches der Weisheit

Oh, mein Weinverkäufer, oh, meine Quelle
der Verzückung

Ich kann mein Lebensprickeln in Dir finden,

Ich bin eine Ney, und Du bläst mich

Wenn Du mich lebendig willst,
dann atme in mich hinein

Du bist Jesus und ich war tot seit
eintausend Jahren.“

„Avaze Shoushtari“ von Mansur al-Halladsch, um 858-922, nach der englischen Übersetzung von Mahsa Vahdat)

Doch eines merkt man auch hier: Dies ist nicht die Sprache religiös-politischer Fanatiker. Nein, es ist die Sprache der Liebe und der Mystik. Schon alleine die Verwendung eines Textes von Al-Halladsch könnte orthodoxen Muslimen aufstoßen, denn er wurde wegen Gotteslästerung hingerichtet, weil er Sätze wie „Ana l'haqq“ („Ich bin die Wahrheit.“) ausrief, für ihn ein Ausdruck seiner mystischen Einheit mit Gott, für seine Gegner eine Anmaßung und Blaspemie.

Auch der Lobpreis des Weines ist alles andere als islamisch korrekt und taucht doch so oft auf in den Texten der Sufis, der islamischen Mystiker, so auch hier und da bei Maulana Dschalal ad-Din Rumi (1207-1273), dem berühmtesten aller Sufis, dessen Wirkungsbereich zwar hauptsächlich auf dem Gebiet der heutigen Türkei lag, das aber damals zum persischen Reich gehörte. Der von ihm gegründete Orden ist noch heute für die Derwische berühmt, die im Tanz die Vereinigung mit Gott erreichen wollen. Den Vahdat-Schwestern geht es bei ihrer Rezeption der sufischen Texte indes weniger um ihre religiöse Bedeutung als um den Grad an Freiheit, den sie ausdrücken – Freiheit von geistlicher Bevormundung, Freiheit in der Bestimmung des eigenen Verhältnisses zu Gott und den Mitmenschen. So sind sie sehr interessiert an Rumis Liebesgedichten, die er einem anderen Sufi, Schams-e Tabrizi, widmete und interpretieren sie durchaus sinnlich, während es auch die Möglichkeit gibt, in ihnen Allegorien zu sehen, genau wie im Lobpreis des Weines.

Von der Möglichkeit der Mehrdeutigkeit der Texte machten iranische Schriftsteller und Musiker seit eh und je Gebrauch, und auch die Vahdat-Schwestern verstehen sich auf diese, in Zeiten der Zensur überlebensnotwendige Taktik. Vor allem die Texte von Hafes (um 1319-1369) seien dazu sehr gut geeignet, da sie komplexer als die von Rumi seien, erklärt Mahsa Vahdat. Würde die Zensur die Aufführung eines Textes verbieten wollen, könne man diesen auch so erklären, dass er für das Regime ganz harmlos erscheint. Indes stecke schon jede Menge Kritik an Scheinheiligkeit, an Instrumentalisierung von Religion für politische Zwecke und dergleichen in Hafes' Dichtungen. Im Iran ist er so berühmt und beliebt wie hier bei uns vielleicht Goethe, der ihn in seinem *West-östlichen Divan* auch einer deutschen Leserschaft zugänglich machte. „Die meisten Leute haben Hafes und den Koran zu Hause. Er ist heilig. Sein Grabmal ist ein Mekka für alle Iraner, ob religiös, ob nicht religiös“, sagt Mahsa Vahdat. Sein Grabmal in Schiraz ist eine Pilgerstätte, und diese Berühmtheit schützt natürlich auch die, die seine Texte heute verwenden. „Die Zensoren können sie nicht bannen, denn Hafes und andere große Dichter sind ein Teil unseres Erbes und großen Namens der Poesie.“

Die zwei Dimensionen der Musik von Mahsa und Marjan Vahdat sind somit die, den Reichtum der iranischen Musikkultur jenseits der Tagespolitik ins Bewusstsein der Menschen zu bringen und mit Hilfe der alten und einiger neuerer Texte (wie von Tahareh Chorratolein, Mohammad Ebrahim Jafari und Ali Akbar Sheida) eine ganz sublime und doch wirksame Regimekritik zu betreiben. Die beiden Zielgruppen sind zum einen Iraner, zum anderen Menschen anderer Länder. Die Schwestern bemühen sich dabei, sich immer im Rahmen der iranischen Legalität zu bewegen. So können

sie zwar nicht im Iran öffentlich als Sängerinnen auftreten, aber ungehindert das Land verlassen und wieder zurückkehren. Im Ausland besteht ihr Publikum gleichermaßen aus (Exil-)Iranern und Nicht-Iranern. Erstere verstehen die Texte und sind vertraut mit der Kunst von Ironie und Mehrdeutigkeit, letztere finden diesen Zugang nur über Umwege, aber genießen die Schönheit der Musik und entwickeln so ein anderes Gefühl für die persische Kultur. „Die iranische Poesie“, so Mahsa Vahdat, „ist voller Ironie. Iranische Künstler haben gelernt, wie sie Dinge indirekt ausdrücken können.“ Paradoxerweise ist es ihre Funktion als Botschafterinnen eines positiveren Iranbildes, die in den Augen des Regimes die Vahdat-Schwestern als imagefördernd erscheinen lässt.

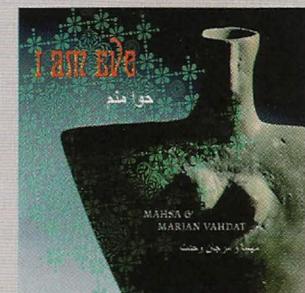
Für die internationale Karriere der beiden erwies sich 2004 das CD-Projekt *Lullabies From The Axis Of Evil* des norwegischen Produzenten Erik Hillestadt als sehr förderlich, das Musiker aus den von George W. Bush so genannten „Schurkenstaaten“ präsentierte. Auf diesem Weg kamen auch die Vahdats mit Musikern aus ganz verschiedenen Musikkulturen zusammen und lernten die Weltmusik kennen. Sie selbst beschränken sich zwar auf iranische Musik, aber beim Zusammenspiel mit den anderen Kolleginnen und Kollegen entsteht schon hier und da eine Fusion oder zumindest eine westliche Begleitung zu den nahöstlichen Texten, so auch auf ihrem zweitneusten Album *Songs From A Persian Garden*, das von vier Iranerinnen und Iranern sowie vier Norwegern eingespielt wurde. Die Melodien, die sie verwenden, sind denn auch nur zum Teil traditionell oder althergebracht, einige sind auch neu komponiert, besonders von Atabak Elyasi, oder improvisiert.

Das Leben im Iran ist für Menschen, die weder mit dem Regime übereinstimmen noch ihr Fähnchen mit dem Wind zu drehen bereit sind, gefährlich. Ach, könnten sie nur aus ihren Gräbern steigen, al-Halladsch, Rumi und Hafes, und den Regierenden die Wahrheit zeigen, die die Quelle des Lebens ist! Aber vielleicht sind sie es längst in Gestalt von Mahsa und Marjan Vahdat und bedienen sich ihrer verbotenen Stimmen ... ◀

WWW.
mahsavahdat.com

DISKOGRAFIE:

Songs From A Persian Garden
(Kirkelig Kulturverksted, 2007)
I Am Eve (Kirkelig Kulturverksted, 2008)



Middle East



Sami Moukadem The Facts of Life for the Palestinian

Sami Moukadem

Mid Price (68 mins)



Unflinching collage of politicised music & poetry



It's impossible to pick up the lavish booklet that accompanies this CD and not be moved, especially given the recent situation in Gaza. Extraordinarily vivid photos of Israeli soldiers pointing rifles at Palestinian children and other scenes of the day-to-day horror of life in the West Bank are juxtaposed with notes explaining the political background to pieces of music and poems by Lebanese guitarist Sami Moukadem. They have such no-holds-barred titles as 'Dispossession' Re-writing History' and 'The New Auschwitz Living Exhibition'. Not being of Palestinian origin perhaps makes Moukadem an even more powerful advocate for the cause. The music on his self-released album is clearly heartfelt and born of a deep compassion and a justifiable anger.

In a letter that arrived with the CD, Moukadem wrote: *'I am not sure what category it would go under; it has Arabic flavours with wider influences'*. That's probably as close as it's possible to get. Much of the material has a sombre, Middle Eastern jazz flavour and perhaps the closest analogue is the recent work of the Jewish saxophonist Gilad Atzman, who plays on the album. The Irish singer Roona Hartman handles most of the vocals, augmenting Moukadem's spoken word passages. You can download the entire package – music, photos and text – for free at www.samimoukadem.com.

Nigel Williamson

Ulaş Özdemir Bu Dem: This Breath

Kalan CD 453

Full Price (48 mins)



Intimate poems from a saz master



Turkish *saz* player Ulaş Özdemir accompanies Iranian Kurdish *tanbur* player Ali Akbar Moradi on their duo CD *The Companion* (Hermes), and Moradi with Kayhan Kalhor on their album *The Wind* (ECM), but this is a new solo disc. It features music collected by Özdemir and his father in Kahramanmara province in southern Turkey, from the Alevi-Bektashi repertoire of the local *aşik* folk poets. Özdemir knows many such performers and his music recreates the intimacy and directness of their style. These songs are traditionally heard within the *muhabbet* (intimate gathering) section of religious ceremonies of the Alevi-Bektashi. The word *dem* in Turkish has several meanings – not simply breath, but a moment, an era, and even wine. In Alevi-Bektashi poetry there's always a spiritual dimension to the texts and a song such as 'Aşik Oldur' is about how the *aşik* gives himself to his lover/God. It's a shame that the texts are not translated, as many of them are by important and outspoken Alevi Sufi mystics like Niyazi Misri (17th century) and Nesimi (14th century), who was skinned alive in Aleppo for his heretical beliefs.

Özdemir has a good singing voice, but it's as an instrumentalist that he makes the strongest impression here. He plays two old kinds of *saz* (lute) – the larger *dede sazi* (holy man's *saz*) which is sacred for the Alevi and played not with a plectrum, but with the fingers, and the small two-string *ruzba*, which has a delicate, treble sound. The eight poems are framed with three instrumentals

on *dede sazi* at the opening, *ruzba* in the middle, and the two instruments together at the end.

Simon Broughton

Charbel Rouhana & The Beirut Oriental Ensemble *Hand Made*

Forward Music FWD014

Mid Price (41 mins)



Filigree craftsmanship from some of Beirut's finest



It's now widely recognised that post-civil war Beirut has become the cultural capital city that it deserves to be and musicians like Charbel Rouhana are symbolic of the city's renaissance. Traditionally, formally educated players looked West for their inspiration but the new generation are more conscious of their Eastern heritage. However, Lebanon has always been at the crossroads and the Beirut Oriental Ensemble's Mediterranean sound reflects this meeting of styles. Using a small collection of established Eastern instruments, the group's sense of ensemble is faultless and the improvisations scintillatingly fresh: it's especially delightful to hear the Lebanese *bouzok* – a wire strung, long-necked lute – so prominently featured. Arab music purists may raise an eyebrow at the inclusion of a bass guitar but, in this context, it underpins the other instruments perfectly and you wonder why it isn't heard more often. The mood of the recording shifts with each composition; always erring on the tasteful side of easy listening, the thoughtful side of relaxing and the measured side of frantic virtuosity.

Lebanon's blend of urbane sophistication and exotic allure makes it an ideal first stop on a wary European's journey into Arabia. If you consider Arab music to be impenetrable, *Hand Made*, with its rich diversity of colour and feel, is probably the album to win you round.

Bill Badley

Mustafa Said *Roubaiyat El Khayam*

Forward Music FWD016

Mid Price (60 mins)



Persian poetry set beautifully



The 12th century poem 'Roubaiyat El Khayam' is one of the towering monuments of world literature; it has been translated from the original Persian into almost 50

languages. The beauty of the text has inspired numerous musicians, the latest being the virtuoso *oud* player, singer and composer Mustafa Said. His approach is quite minimal – using only a quartet of musicians, playing *rik* (tambourine), *qanun* (psaltery), *nay* (flute) and *oud* (lute) – allowing for the greatest flexibility in improvisation. The style of performance is very much that of a classical *takht* (ensemble) with the musicians clearly influenced by both medieval and 19th century traditions – a sound that suits the atmosphere of the poetry especially well. The playing is measured and graceful throughout and Said's vocal improvisations are impressively athletic, though the sound he produces may not be to all tastes. Translations of the poetry are not provided with the CD, but they can easily be downloaded from the Forward Music website, and the recording is certainly best appreciated when listened to as a whole with these to guide you. As many Arab musicians are exploring new musical avenues to create a contemporary Oriental sound, it's reassuring that someone like Mustafa Said should also be looking back and seeking inspiration from the glories of the past.

Bill Badley

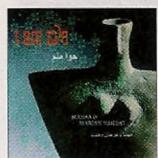
Mahsa & Marjan Vahdat *I Am Eve*

Kirkelig Kulturverksted FXCD 335

Full Price: (60 mins)



Soulful singing from Iranian sisters



'Singing is a blessing'. The opening line of Mahsa Vahdat's web homepage speaks from the heart of a singer who is unable to perform in her home country, Iran, where public solo singing by women is restricted to all-female audiences. Most of Mahsa and her sister Marjan's recordings have therefore been released outside Iran, including their earlier collaboration with a group of Norwegian jazz musicians on *Songs from a Persian Garden* (reviewed in #50) and appearances on *Lullabies from the Axis of Evil*, both released by Norwegian label Kirkelig Kulturverksted.

On this new album, the sisters are joined by composer Atabak Elyasi (Mahsa's husband) and an ensemble of some of Iran's finest performers, as well as vocalist Christophe Rezai (of the Nour Ensemble; heard on 'Mirage'). There is something indescribably soulful and deeply magical about the voices of these two women. They really are a treat to listen to, particularly the passages where the two

Middle East

voices weave in and out of each other, as they do on several tracks. The music draws on both Iranian classical and folk music traditions and the instrumentalists themselves come from a diverse range of musical backgrounds. The liner notes are beautifully put together with all of the lyrics presented in both Persian, Kurdish and English.

This CD is a statement of the power of the female voice, as reflected both in the music, the lyrics – including one track set to the poetry of 19th female poet Tahereh Ghorratolein, a pioneer of women's rights in Iran – and the liner visuals which include a statue of the ancient Iranian goddess of fertility from 1,200 BC; as the opening title-track says: 'my body is the first verse in the poem of creation'. Above all, the album is a testimony to the resilience and creativity of women musicians in Iran who, despite many odds, continue making their voices heard through albums such as this. They are certainly worth listening to. Mahsa Vahdat sings as part of the Iranian Women's Voices concert at Cadogan Hall on February 11.

Laudan Nooshin

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Baglama of the Yayla

Ocora CD560213

Full Price (71 mins)

★★★

Three saz masters get their due

Over the past 15 years, Ocora has released four discs of music from the Yayla – the pastures of south-western Turkey. In the old days, shepherds – generally of nomadic Turkmen roots – spent the summers up in the mountains and then brought their animals down for the winter. Now this way of life has



The massive collaborative *Jerusalem* project brought together in the name of peace

disappeared. The three musicians on this recording lived in the port of Fethiye, close to the prime Turkish cruising destination of Lüdeniz. The three veteran musicians – Ramazan Güngör, Ali Kivrak and Hayri Dev – play a small three-stringed *saz* known as *baglama* or *üçtellî* (literally 'three-strings'). The instrument has a light, delicate sound and, like a lot of nomadic music, is played solo – often with percussive and rhythmic effects, as much of the music was intended for dancing.

This repertoire is from another age and these players were probably the last of their kind. They are playing instruments homemade from apricot, mulberry and juniper wood, with great skill and dexterity. At least they have been recognised by some of Turkey's leading *saz* players – Arif Sağ, Erdal Erzincan and Erol Parlak – who all performed in a 1995 concert in Fethiye in honour of Ramazan Güngör. Since the mid-90s, when the recordings were made, Güngör and Kivrak have passed away, so it's great that this CD, with detailed notes and diagrams of their playing techniques, exists as a testament to their art.

Simon Broughton

Jerusalem: The City of Two Peaces

Alia Vox AVSA9863

Full Price (2 CDs; 142 mins; Hardback 435 pages)

★★★★

Jordi Savall's ambitious musical project



Despite the reference in the psalms to 'the peace of Jerusalem', the Holy City has probably seen more rapine and pillage, more regularly, than any other comparable patch of ground on the planet. Here the Israelites battled with the Jebusites, Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians,

Persians, Greeks and Romans; here the Arabs eventually succeeded them only to lose control successively to the Crusaders, the Turks, the British and the Israelis. In Jerusalem, every street corner has its own martyr or monument, saint or shrine. Its soil is drenched in blood spilt in the name of religion; its mental hospitals are full of whole hagiographies of lunatics claiming to be David, Isaiah, Jesus or Mohammed.

Jordi Savall's new project, a highly ambitious and massive two CD celebration of the music of this bloodiest of cities, holy to three religions and the cause of centuries of bloodshed between them, is little short of a revelation. It is certainly much more successful than the clumsy translation of its French title: *La Ville des Deux Paix* as 'The City of Two Peaces' would indicate. Two pieces maybe, as the Palestinians would certainly hope, but even one peace is usually stretching it in Jerusalem.

The project, which involves musicians and collaborators from 14 nations, is most successful on the early music ground that is most familiar to Savall and the set contains some superb renditions of the *chanson* of the Crusaders that compares favourably with earlier attempts to bring similar pieces to life by David Munrow and others. One of the stars here is Savall's longtime collaborator, the Catalan *tambour* player, Pedro Estevan.

Perhaps the biggest surprise on the album is the fabulous Sufi music, performed by the Palestinian group, al-Darwish from Galilee with Omar Bashir on *oud*. There is a wonderful track called 'Danse du Soma' which is probably the liveliest on the set, and which perfectly captures the excitement of a Sufi dance session.

The ancient Jewish temple music recreated with frequent use of the Abrahamic *shofar* (ram's horn) is haunting and beautiful, partly thanks to the ethereal voice of Savall's wife, the wonderful Montserrat Figueras. There is also a heartbreaking lament for the victims of Auschwitz, 'El Male Rahamim' composed in 1941 and recorded in 1950. The old pre-digital recording sits oddly beside the other material; yet it remains probably the single most beautiful track on the CD.

The only flaw in the set are the moments when the conceptual framework of the CD means that some tracks are included for completeness – a Quranic call to prayer for example – which would not justify themselves on artistic grounds, and are more of anthropological rather than great musical interest.

William Dalrymple

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