



Ramadan Nights LSO St Luke's Live Review

The Bedouin Jerry Can Band take a proprietary approach to their music. Illegal file-sharing, they warn, will "incur the wrath of the ancient pharaohs". They disdain the Stratocasters beloved of the Touareg guitar bands that have made desert music synonymous with gritty, loping blues played at a camel's pace. These Bedouins take a different approach. Their music is played on reed pipes, the *simsimiyya*, or five-string lyre, and the *rababa*, a single-stringed wolfskin fiddle. The percussion is hammered out on the detritus of the six-day war: ammunition boxes and the eponymous jerry cans.

Their concert as part of the Ramadan Nights festival conjured a near-Biblical setting. There was a four-poster tent, with rugs on the floor covered with clay jugs. Medhat El Issawy and Goma Ghanaeim, sitting cross-legged, played a duet on flute and lyre. In ones and twos, more of the band appeared, all in full Bedouin robes and sandals; nine in all, the only absentee the elderly poet Soliman Agmaan, kept away by visa problems.

Most of them took turns stepping up to lead: a Chaucerian mix of singers and songs ranging from the mildly bawdy to the tragic. Periodically Rana Awad, in a colourful embroidered dress, engaged in a bouncing step dance with Ghanaeim, who shook a colourful camel-driving stick like a Bedouin Morris dancer. Behind them, the percussion section thumped jerry cans to produce a deep, metallic bass boom, slapped the mouth of a clay jug until it moaned like a djinn, and knocked triplets out of an ammunition box.

Late on, Ayman Hassanne roasted coffee beans in a frying pan, tossing them noisily for full effect, before crushing them with a giant pestle to an expectant fiddle tune. Nostrils quivered in anticipation. The band's manager, Zakaria Ibrahim, incongruously dressed in a diamond-patterned sweater and shiny shoes, joined Khalied Al Sharawy to hymn the role of black coffee in resolving disputes and preserving cultural identity. Other members of the band handed out cups of fresh coffee to the audience. Music, dancing and hot refreshment: an oasis of hospitality so perfect that stepping back out into a rainy old street came as a shock.

**** DAVID HONIGMANN 22 October 2007