



(LYRCD 7355)

MUSIC OF THE NILE VALLEY

TRACKS:

1. El Barh, El Barh (Nile, Nile) - 4:10
2. Stick-Dance - 3:33
3. Hilal Gesture - 17:26
4. Suffara and Ney Solo - 9:15
5. Dance of the Ghawazies - 5:20
6. Dance for the Valiant Men - 8:18

THE MUSIC

Arabic music originated from encampments of nomadic tribes along the Arabic Peninsula. One can imagine the Bedouins in their constant wanderings singing traditional chants (hida) accompanied by the dull thump of camel hoofs. At the same time another type of incantation was coming into being which was eventually to inspire and influence the medieval epic era of Europe. Such chants extolled the merits of daring warriors and exalted the feasts of men in battle.

In addition to the Bedouin tradition, contemporary folk music in Egypt is imbued with an archaic, earthy sense representative of the peasant class. Upper Egypt, isolated as it is, retains deeply felt bonds to ancestral customs and distinct social relevance to the tribal institutions of the past. A whole network of Bedouin families from Hedjaz in Saudi Arabia form a part of the rural population in this section of Egypt. The antiquity of their villages, which were settled back in Neolithic times, breed a sense of wonder in the traveler to this land.

Even now, some forms of tribal warfare survive and exert a distinct influence on the well being of the villagers. Generally speaking, each family tribe tends to specialize in a trade or skill based on past kinships. These include tapestry weaving, blacksmithing, dairy production, and the arts of music and dance. The people of these tribes are often entangled in thunderous quarrels and bitter

clan rivalries, which relate to land ownership upon which their original code of honor depends.

In Upper Egypt one may still find numerous musicians split up in several families in a few main villages. The purity of their ancient oral tradition is preserved from father to son at a professional level. The harsh life of the “fellah” (peasant) is somewhat lightened by seasonal village feasts centering around the performances of these semi-nomadic musicians. During these functions the musicians assume the role of guide and herald of the spiritual and moral values of the village, especially in times of crisis.

ANNOTATED TRACKS:

1. “El barh, El barh” (Nile, Nile) in Qena.

The Egyptian “rabab” is composed of a resonator made of a coconut shell with a fish skin and mounted on a long tubular handle that is prolonged by an iron spike. Two horsehair strings are vibrated by a large bow also strung with hair.

The “rababa” orchestra is intended either for the dance or for the popular song idiom.

The leader or “Rais”, Gamal Tewfick, sings while playing the “darrabuka” a pottery bowl drum with a skin. (A percussion with conic form.) His song recounts the sadness of a woman as she sees the felucca (boat) of her lover leaving the river shore. “On the Nile, On the Nile he waved his handkerchief at me . . .”.

2. “Stick-dance” (in Qena).

Introduced by a short “taksim”, a sort of freewheeling improvisation based on a pre-determined theme: “Raks al tahtib” stick-dance. This masculine dance pits two opponents in a duel; armed with long wooden sticks facing each other they battle to the precise rhythmic patterns of the musicians.

3. “Hilal Gesture” (in Harmont alBabur).

The poet in the peasant society is the featured narrator of epic tales. Among many local legends of Upper Egypt the most popular is the Hilal gesture, in it are related the exploits of Abu Zeid and the Beni-Hilal tribes. The strange mythic personality of Abu Zeid is evoked by the “fellahin” with their swarthy faces encircled by tightly wound white turbans and wide angular mustaches.

In his narrative, the poet (Chaer) Youssef Hassann (65 years old) explains: Abu Zeid weary as he was, went to rest in a vineyard and said - “When danger comes, man is blind.” Meanwhile his nephew attracted by the grapes, gathered a bunch. The slaves of the land owner “Khalifa Zanati” surrounded him, and beat him with sticks “O slaves, we are strangers from the country our people are generous and possess many camels, but you are evil and despicable” - said Abu Zeid. After listening to him, the slave’s chief planted his spear in the young man’s rib; he proceeded to howl so loud that the garden shook.

“O uncle, this spear is burning inside of me.” and his face was like smoke - “there is no more hope, uncle, go to my mother, tell her gently of my death for women are tender in misfortune”. When he gave up the ghost, Abu Zeid buried his nephew and took his rababa to sing and console his own relatives. When his song attracted the slaves, he hurled himself at them and unsheathed his sword. A few minutes later their heads were strewn all over the ground like watermelons.

4. “Suffara” and “Nay” solo (at Esna)

The “Suffara” and the “Nay” are two oblique flutes played without reeds. There are two types: one of classical origin (ney), the other, its popular version (Suffara). In this piece, Fawzy Hafez

displays a fresh spontaneous fervor. The early part finds him playing to a higher register of the “Suffara”; he then concludes his solo on the nay.

5. Dance of the Ghawazies (at Qena)

The Mizmar, a wind instrument, is related to the Oboe, the high pitch of this instrument makes it an instrument suitable for large outside audiences. Mizmar players (Zummarin) usually play in trios or quartets supported rhythmically by a sort of double headed drum, the “Tabla Baladi”, also often the name of the group.

Another feature of this orchestra is its purely instrumental character, as it is essentially reserved for the dance. This piece commemorates the “Hawazies” dance, famous professional dancers, descended from the “Barmecide” family (end of the 8th century), successively honored, and then denied by Harun-Al-Rashid, according to E.W. Lane (1899). Despite becoming victims of repression throughout the ages, their performance is still highly sought.

Tiny cymbals (Sagat) fastened between the index and the thumb of each hand provides a rhythm for their dance. Natives of Luxor, these three dancers are accompanied by the “Rais” Ahmed Hasab from Garasos; he cuts in “Achra el Dekka” of “Salam” to welcome the arrivals of new guests, according to the “Saidi” tradition of upper Egypt.

6. Dances for the Valiant Men (at El Khezam)

After the passage of young girls praising the new bride: “Raks al Gedaa” variation of the stick-dance. The soloist of the group: Quenawi Bakmit. Quenawi also from Garasos demonstrates his virtuosity (Tanayn al Mizmar) twice consecutively.

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