



(LYRCD 7437)

MYSTICAL LEGACIES
ALI JIHAD RACY
Performs Music of the Middle East
Accompanied by Souhail Kaspar

THE MUSIC

Music of the Middle East is known for its meditative ecstasy, the extraordinary emotional state it is capable of generating in both the listener and the performer. This ecstatic dynamic can be traced back to antiquity, the medieval courts of Damascus, Baghdad, and Moorish Spain, and the mystical legacies of various Sufi orders. This recording provides a rare opportunity to savor the distinctive ambiance of Middle Eastern music as performed today in Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. Featured is performer, composer, and scholar Ali Jihad Racy accompanied by percussionist Souhail Kaspar. Here these two master artists perform at a high level of *salтанah*, namely the creative state that inspires musicians to evoke *tarab*, or “musical ecstasy” within the initiated listeners.

The music consists of ten excerpts from a live concert featuring Ali Jihad Racy with Souhail Kaspar at the 1993 Los Angeles Festival on August 21 at the Inner Peristyle sculpture courtyard of the J. Paul Getty Museum. The Concert was presented as part of The Masters of Music series. Performed on a variety of string, wind, and percussion instruments, the content illustrates the traditional textures, timbres, embellishments, microtones, and melodic and rhythmic modes of traditional Arab music. It includes

improvisations and interpretations of works by Racy and other composers.

The performances reflect Racy's mastery of the Arab musical tradition, his phenomenal versatility, and his innovative use of Middle Eastern instruments. Also demonstrated is Mr. Kaspar's extraordinary virtuosity as a drummer, as well as the highly intricate musical interactions that occur between the two artists. On this album, the applause originally heard after each of the concert pieces was deleted in order to highlight the flow of the music. Understandably, the recording retains some of the natural sounds that typify live musical performances.

MUSICAL SELECTIONS

1. Sufi Medley for the nay and tar consisting of an improvisation, or taqasim, in the melodic mode Bayyati, followed by a group of song tunes heard in Sufi rituals, particularly in the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo.
2. Taqasim and Sama'i Bayyati al-'Aryan, a solo improvisation on the 'ud in the maqam, or melodic mode, Bayyati, followed by a sama'i in the same mode composed in the early twentieth century by Ibrahim al-'Aryan of Egypt. The sama'i is a traditional instrumental genre that employs a verse-refrain format and for the most part a ten-beat rhythmic pattern. In this piece Kaspar accompanies on the riqq.
3. Moorish Impressions, an improvisation and a free instrumental interpretation of a traditional Arab song titled "Bil-LadhiI-Askara." The song expresses devotion to the beloved days of Andalusia and belongs to the muwashshah genre, which is known to have originated in Moorish Spain. In this example, played on the bowed-tanbur, Racy alternates between bowing and strumming. The accompaniment is played on the smaller tar.
4. Taqasim and Sama'i Nahawand Racy, an improvisation in the mode Nahaw and performed on the buzuq, followed by a sama'i in the same mode, composed by Ali Jihad Racy, with Souhail Kaspar on the tablah.
5. Themes of Yearning, performed on the nay with mazhar accompaniment. This is an instrumental interpretation of two Lebanese songs: a) "Sanarji'u Yawman" ("We Shall Return Someday"), composed by the Rahbani brothers of Lebanon and originally sung by the female singer Fayruz; and b) "A'tini n-Naya," originally composed by Najib Hankash and the Rahbani brothers. For the latter piece, the text comes from Kahlil Gibran's *The Procession* and speaks philosophically about return to nature and the mystical power of singing and playing the reed-flute: "Give me the nay and sing / for singing is the secret of eternity. / And the moaning of the nay / shall endure after existence perishes."
6. Strumming Magic, an improvisation on the smaller buzuq. Producing rich drone effects, the playing technique is frequently used by local Gypsy musicians to create a

festive musical mood.

7. Enchanting Beauty, an improvisation and an instrumental interpretation of an old folk song titled, “Ya Mayilah ‘al-Ghusun.” Describing the captivating beauty of the beloved, the song was later adapted by the Rahbani brothers and sung by Fayruz. In this piece Racy plays the tanbur with the bow, then strums it briefly and continues the same performance on the nay. Kaspar accompanies on the smaller tar.

8. Taqasim Hijaz, a solo improvisation in the melodic mode Hijaz performed by Ali Jihad Racy on the ‘ud.

9. Sabá Medley, an improvisation in the mode Sabá followed by a collection of folk tunes in the same mode with added improvisations and variations. The medley is played on the nay with accompaniment on the tablah.

10. Breeze of Nostalgia, a short improvisation, followed by an interpretation of a Lebanese popular song, “Nassam ‘alayna l-Hawa.” Composed by the Rahbani brothers, the song speaks about longing and reunion. The music is performed on the buzuq and tablah.

TRACKS AND TIMES

1. Sufi Medley 6:40
2. Taqasim and Sama‘i Bayyati al-‘Aryan 7:16
3. Moorish impressions 6:39
4. Taqasim and Sama‘i Nahawand Racy 10:03
5. Themes of Yearning 8:12
6. Strumming Magic 0:54
7. Enchanting Beauty 4:48
8. Taqasim Hijaz 1:54
9. Sabá Medley 6:09
10. Breeze of Nostalgia 4:26

Total Time 57:06

THE INSTRUMENTS

Nay: an end-blown reed flute typical of the urban and Sufi traditions of the Middle East (Selections 1, 5, 7, and 9).

‘Ud: a short-necked fretless lute with five double courses of strings and a sixth single string, some made of nylon, others of metal-wound silk (Selections 2 and 8).

Buzuq: a long-necked fretted lute with plucked metal strings (Selections 4 and 10).

Racy's instrument has a large number of diatonic and microtonal frets and three courses of strings (two triple sets and one single string). Also used is a smaller folk version of the instrument with a carved body and a higher pitch (Selection 6).

Bowed-Tanbur: a bowed-lute that was made in Turkey, but was specially fretted and strung by Racy in order to produce a desirable variety of melodic intervals and to create additional drone and overtone effects. Also in performance Racy sometimes alternates between bowing and, while keeping the instrument in an upright position, strumming the strings with the fingernails of the right hand, thus producing strikingly contrastive sounds (Selections 3 and 7).

Tar: a large frame-drum without cymbals, used in secular and sacred, particularly Sufi, contexts (Selection 1). Also a slightly smaller tar is used (Selections 3 and 7).

Riqq: a small tambourine that occupies a central position in the traditional Arab ensemble.

Also called daff, this instrument is associated with a highly intricate performance technique (Selection 2).

Mazhar: a large tambourine heard mostly in Egypt, particularly in some Sufi rituals and wedding festivities (Selection 5)

Tablah: a small vase-shaped Arab drum covered with skin on one side. Today it is a standard member of the Arab orchestra (Selections 4, 9 and 10)

THE ARTISTS

ALI JIHAD RACY is a virtuoso performer, composer, and Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California at Los Angeles. Born in Lebanon, he comes from a well-known family of artists, scholars, and academicians. Racy is internationally recognized for his extraordinary musicianship and his numerous publications, including his award-winning book, *Making Music in the Arab World* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). He is a master of many traditional instruments, particularly the nay, a reed-flute, and the buzuq, a long-necked fretted lute. He has performed extensively in Lebanon and has appeared in major U.S. theaters, such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and the Hollywood Bowl and at international venues, including the Beiteddine Festival in Lebanon and the Commonwealth Institute in London. He has composed and performed for the Kronos Quartet and the Sacramento Symphony Orchestra, as well as for feature and documentary films. His music has been released on a number of CDs, including three Lyrichord albums, *Ancient Egypt*, *Taqasim* with Simon Shaheen, and *Mystical Legacies*, and on a Kronos Quartet release titled *Caravan*. Dr. Racy is the recipient of numerous honors and tributes from a variety of cultural institutions for his outstanding artistry and his continuous work toward greater intercultural understanding and cooperation. All Jihad Racy is a member of ASCAP and Racy Notes Publishing Company.

SOUHAIL KASPAR is a highly acclaimed performer on Near Eastern percussion instruments and a Durfee Foundation award winner. Born in Lebanon, Mr. Kaspar received his early music training in Syria, where he assimilated the basic theory and technique of Arab percussion from established artists. Since then, he has played with various celebrated ensembles and vocalists. Now based in Los Angeles, he has performed in major Middle Eastern venues in the United States and has accompanied singing stars in this country and abroad. Kaspar has appeared with A.J. Racy in numerous concerts and cultural events. He has also recorded on a number of albums, including Khaliji, featuring compositions from the Arab Gulf region, and Awzan, which illustrates the various Arab rhythmic modes. Kaspar has been giving master classes and workshops throughout the country.

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