

Aynur Hedûr: Solace of Time

Dreyer Gaido (43 mins)

★★★★★

Kurdish singer's seventh album



If you have seen Aynur in *Crossing the Bridge*, the successful 2005 documentary by

Fatih Akin about

music in Istanbul, it's unlikely that you have forgotten her voice, and if you haven't seen it, you should. The Kurdish singer has developed her career since then and this is her seventh album. Things do not begin auspiciously however, with the syrupy piano and strings arrangement of the first track, but get more lively with the title-track featuring the singer herself on *tanbur*, and even better with the traditional dance 'Govend E', with brilliant percussion in the spotlight.

The high points of the album are the *ghazal* 'Halil Kurban' and the interpretation of the classic Sivas folk song 'Ezîm Ezîm Ezîliyor' by aşık Zazal Halil, illuminated by Erkan Oğur, whose instrumental countermelodies on *kopuz* (fretless lute) and guitar provide depth. The considerable interpretive talent of Aynur and her powerful and expressive voice seem presented at best when not constricted by orchestral settings, and this mixed offering seems uncertain in its direction, resulting finally successful only in parts. I'd recommend instead *Keçe Kurdan*, her 2005 album on Kalan, featuring resolutely contemporary versions of Kurdish folk songs.

FRANCESCO MARTINELLI

TRACK TO TRY Ezîm Ezîm Ezîliyor

Marla Leigh Rhythms of Tof Miriam

Marla Leigh (41 mins)

★★★★★

New Age for a new age



If, like me, you have a reptile-brain suspicion of recordings that bring together New Age sensibilities with world drums and ethnic flutes, then I heartily recommend you cast aside your prejudices and listen to *Rhythms of Tof Miriam*. Marla Leigh is a Grammy-nominated frame-drum virtuoso and this, her debut album, draws inspiration from the musical traditions of the Middle East.

The abiding atmosphere throughout is haunting and meditative, as ambient drones underpin free-flowing

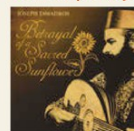


Joseph Tawadros Betrayal of a Sacred Sunflower

JT Records (66 mins)

★★★★★

Contemporary oud moods



The *oud* player and composer Joseph Tawadros has worked tirelessly over the last decade to move his instrument into new musical areas. Recent projects have seen him collaborating with symphony orchestras and New York contemporary jazz stars, but *Betrayal of a Sacred Sunflower* is a more understated affair, with only a small ensemble of excellent musicians accompanying him on piano, violin, electric guitar and occasional trombone.

The oud and electric guitar seldom seem to marry together well and it's testament to Tawadros' musical

judgement that the spare textures created here allow his inventive improvisations to blossom. It's high praise to compare the album's wistful mood to Anouar Brahem's ravishing *Le Pas du Chat Noir*; however, there are also moments of genuine fun and anyone doubting the oud's ability to be a groovy funk-machine need only listen to 'On the Flipside'. The only grumble is that Tawadros has chosen to set up his oud so the lower strings consistently buzz on certain notes: while this sounds effective and almost *sitar*-like in some instances, it can also start to niggle. But nonetheless, this is a delightful recording.

BILL BADLEY

TRACK TO TRY *The Sun Still Shines*

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Daniel Spornar

rhythms played on drums that seem to sing: listened to on headphones in the midst of lockdown, this evokes an other-worldly feeling of time standing still. You can tell something about a musician by the company they keep and the other performers on this recording – most notably the renowned Israeli *oud* and *ney* players Yair Dalal and Meira Segal – are world class. The recorded sound is beautifully balanced, combining both a crystal clarity that captures instrumental colour and suitably sensuous reverberation. It's this attention to detail, craft and inspired musicianship that make *Rhythms of Tof Miriam* so much more than a cut above the usual tosh played in shops selling crystals and incense!

BILL BADLEY

TRACK TO TRY *Loning*

TootArd Migrant Birds

Glitterbeat Records (43 mins)

★★★★★

Thoughtful Middle Eastern disco



Hasan and Rami Nakhleh are two brothers who live in a village in the Golan Heights, the plateau that was part of Syria until annexed by Israel after the 1967 Six Day War. Three years ago, with their guitar-based album *Laissez Passer*, they mixed desert blues and reggae in their intriguing songs of life as stateless musicians. But now the dominant instrument is a vintage Arabic synthesizer that Hasan first played as a child, and the main influence is Middle Eastern disco.

The result is an inventive, pleasantly tuneful and slightly quirky set that veers from an updated treatment of styles that were popular in clubs back in the 80s, through to a dash of electro reggae and an atmospheric synth instrumental, with Rami providing the electronic and live percussion. The backing is mostly upbeat but Hasan's gently urgent vocals are often bleak. There are party songs, ('Moonlight' to 'Red Sea Disco'), but 'Trouble Watan' is a thoughtful study of life on the Golan, 'Wanderlust' is a dream of escape, and 'Babe' is the story of a woman desperate to leave a dominant husband – 'better emigrating than a slow death... damn you, baby.' Translations from Arabic are thankfully provided.

ROBIN DENSELOW

TRACKS TO TRY *Pretty Woman*