



CINQ CHANTS

INTERVIEW WITH FRÉDÉRIC DEVAL

Through its Transcultural Music programme, the Royaumont Foundation aims to show that the vast modal system of the Arabic-Turkish and Persian maqams can be combined with contemporary western aesthetics. Five of the resulting creations will be in Avignon this year.

Frédéric Deval: The first one, *Sleep Song*, was created in 2011 and is directly connected to the Iraq war, before the more recent upheavals in the Arab world. It is based on interviews conducted by poet and performer Mike Ladd with American veterans. Mike Ladd wrote poems based on those interviews which were then brought together, in Royaumont, with the poems of Iraq's Ahmed Abdul Hussein and of Maurice Decaul, an America veteran. Those poems are slammed or performed, carried by their own rhythm and by a musical fabric weaved by Vijay Iyer (American pianist of Indian descent), Serge Teyssot-Gay (French guitarist), and Ahmed Mukhtar (oud player of the Iraqi diaspora). *Interzone Extended* (2012/2013) is the extension of *Interzone*, which was first a creation of Serge Teyssot-Gay (electric guitar, France) and Khaled Aljaramani (oud, Syria). Building on its success, *Interzone* is now a quintet that includes Keyvan Chemirani (zarb), Carol Robinson (clarinet), and Médéric Collignon (trumpet). *Interzone Extended* is the successful alliance of the language of rock and that of Syrian music, with its *maqam* structure.

The third of those propositions is *Wasl*, headed by Kamilya Jubran (oud, vocals, Palestine-Israel), with Sarah Murcia (double bass) and Werner Hasler (trumpet and electronics). It is a bold experiment that tries to stretch the limits of the Arabic language and music. Kamilya Jubran first came to prominence with her band Sabreen in Palestine, before coming to Europe to continue her career. This show strikes a chord with the recent upheavals in the Arab world and with this Palestine that looks a lot like the Andalusia of Mahmoud Darwish's poem: "Was Andalusia here or there? On the land or in the poem?" This is what Kamilya Jubran sings.

The fourth show, *AlefBa* (2013) is a sweeping project headed by Fabrizio Cassol, who has long been a pioneer of transcultural music. He founded Aka Moon in Brussels in 1992, and has wandered the planet to meet other cultures and create a new musical language. Bringing together eleven musicians and poets from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey with European and American—more precisely Iraqi-American—musicians, *AlefBa* was a smashing success (Festival of Aix-en-Provence, Royaumont). It is a direct echo to what happened in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Egyptian singers play a central part here. Sheikh Ehab Younes (vocals, Egypt) and musician Mustapha Said (vocals and oud, Egypt/Lebanon) are both blind, and their singing leads to the creation of what Fabrizio Cassol calls a "street oratorio."

Oración (2014) is a new creation developed by artists-in-residence in Royaumont from February to June. It will be performed at the Festival of Aix-en-Provence and the Festival d'Avignon this summer. What is *Oración*? The monotheistic religions that are Christianity and Islam gave birth to two great monodic songs, the Andalusian *saeta flamenco* and the *Adhan* (the muezzin's call to prayer), to which we can add the *Tawshish*, which is a song of praise, and Syrian variations on those great monodies that can be found throughout the Middle East. With the *saeta* and the *Adhan*, we have two great monodic songs emerging at the same time in the Spanish Christian world and in Islamic countries. The question at the heart of *Oración* would be: how can those great songs, which are still very much alive today and retain a great vitality, inspire three great composers of the Arab world such as Ahmed Essyad, hailing from Morocco and a well-known presence on the French contemporary music scene for the past few decades, Fawaz Baker, the Syrian musician, oud player, and musicologist, former director of the music conservatory of Aleppo who now lives in France, and Amir ElSaffar, a 38-year-old Iraqi-American living in New York who also performs in *AlefBa*?

How did this articulation with the word and the legacy of the Persian, Arabic, and Turkish maqam come about?

We started a project called *Maqam et création (Maqam and creation)* in 2005, around a residence in Aleppo that same year. It began with the idea that the modal arborescence that Arabs and Turks call maqams shouldn't be seen as a treasure to guard, but that it should instead be put in circulation in the perspective of a new creation. That this currency that the maqams are should take part in artistic exchanges. The scansion of those poems is reminiscent of slam, rap, and spoken words poetry. You'll find it in the music of Djamchid Chemirani, the father of Keyvan Chemirani. When he transfers the rhythm of the Persian language from his voice to the zarb (a small drum), he forces us to realise that language *is* rhythm. Ten years later, this rhythmic word goes through *Five Songs*, vibrating like a membrane hit by the world.

In Europe, where "the East" and "the Arab world" are regularly recycled by musical productions, you say that musical orientalism continues to thrive under the name of "world music."

This cycle was conceived outside of this category of "world music," with the overtones it often has in France and in Europe, as the avatar of a certain form of orientalism, of exoticism. Because it comes from far away, the music of those cultures is all the more attractive. They're seen today as were seen thirty years ago the shamans of Siberia



or the whirling dervishes of Konya, all those rare musicians belonging to oral traditions who used to play at the Théâtre de la Ville. Eastern music is still too often seen through the prism of exoticism and orientalism. There remain today a number of festivals that have adopted this as their banner. I actually think that, perhaps for the first time, this banner could be interesting. But all the mental representations it summons are obsolete; an entire dimension is ignored, along with all the potential for creation of those musical languages. But that's exactly what is interesting today: how to create something from this sort of musical compost, or not to oppose legacy and creation? The concept of world music isn't useful anymore. We shouldn't consider those forms of music, which belong to an oral tradition, as patrimonial. Either they are endangered, dead or dying, in which case there's nothing left to do but cry about it, or they are still alive, which should only whet our appetite for creation.

The world moves so fast that it is sometimes hard to gauge the combined effects of globalisation, migrations, the internet, and the advent of digital technologies on cultures and music.

Contradictory elements are broadcast all over the planet, it's a symbolic struggle between different systems of representations. It's a question that no longer obeys a purely national logic. I don't believe in the concepts of nation or nation state and I think, along with a number of anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai, that a certain form of music is no longer enclosed within a culture and that a culture is no longer enclosed within a perfectly delineated territory, itself perfectly represented by a State. It's a vision that we inherited from the 19th century, on which international relations are still based. And with globalisation, with international economic powers, with the flow of information through digital technology, we can see that all cultures are relative. They all gravitate around one another, their orbits keep crossing one another. We exist in this system of attraction and repulsion, in which national control is no longer possible.

At the same time, this multicultural Europe to which you aspire still struggles to think of itself that way.

There was, in 2000 in Lisbon, a European summit about the necessity of the construction of a Europe of skills and knowledge. I believe that this is the Europe we should promote. A multicultural Europe would have a great potential for creativity, both in terms of economy and culture. However, if the forces of disassociation were to triumph, Europe could split or know the kind of events that recently shook the Arab and African worlds and we would be naïve to think only happen there. That being said, we can try to work on a long-term plan, to promote an economy of knowledge that would incorporate culture. Or we could also fall into cultural decay, towards the commercial exploitation of culture in favour of the private powers of the market, with artists seen as nothing more than vectors of brand identity.

What has Royaumont's experience been like, from that point of view?

Royaumont has been a model for the combination of private and public funding for thirty years now, long before the constraints placed on public financing forced local governments to look towards sponsors... When we talk about art, we don't mean the market of art, but the art of living together, of knowing others by knowing oneself and knowing oneself by knowing others, through our expressions... Royaumont is a place that mixes private and public economy, heritage and creation, global and local visions. In that sense, it can teach us something about that Europe to which we aspire.

Interview conducted by Mustapha Laribi.

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	Pour vous présenter cette édition, plus de 1750 personnes, artistes, techniciens et équipes d'organisation ont uni leurs efforts, leur enthousiasme pendant plusieurs mois. Plus de la moitié relève du régime spécifique d'intermittent du spectacle. Ce carré rouge est le symbole de notre unité.	