

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 5, 2018, Théâtre 71 Scène nationale, Malakoff
- January 11, 2019, Bonlieu Scène nationale d'Annecy
- January 31, Maison de la Culture de Bourges
- February 22, Maison de la Musique de Nanterre
- March 16, La Ferme du Buisson Scène nationale, Noisiel
- April 5, Millau Jazz Festival
- April 16, Festival Les Détours de Babel, Grenoble
- November, Le Grand T théâtre de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes

CAIRO'S CRY

To Peter Corser's saxophone continuous exhale, to Karsten Hochapfel's "barock" strings, to clarinetist Yom's klezmer intonations, young poet Abdullah Miniawy responds with the striking voice of a symbol of an Egyptian youth hungry for freedom and justice. The virtuoso singer whispers or proclaims Sufi songs against a tapestry of hypnotic loops, leading the entranced audience on a mystic journey. Spirituality and liberty meet in a shared desire of invention to carry the hopes of peoples too long muzzled by political, social, and religious oppression. Between rock, jazz, oriental music, and Sufi and spoken word poetry, *Cairo's Cry* invents a powerfully metaphoric world, born of a desperate need for alterity and encounters that would transcend roots, identities, and borders.

ABDULLAH MINIAWY

Abdullah Miniawy is a young Egyptian poet, singer, and composer from the oasis-city of Faiyum. He has performed in front of tens of thousands of people on the squares of Cairo and in the city's clubs during the revolution, before moving to Europe, where he has been working on numerous projects with La Voix est Libre and the bands Carl-Gari and SighFire. Along the way, his path crossed that of trumpet player Érik Truffaz, rapper Marc Nammour, oud players Kamilya Jubran and Mehdi Haddab... Strongly attached to freedom and to the free circulation of ideas, he uploads his songs for free on the internet.

PETER CORSER, KARSTEN HOCHAPFEL, YOM

Paris-based multi-instrumentalists Peter Corser (England) and Karsten Hochapfel (Germany) accompany various styles of improvised shows, from jazz to world music. Yom (France), a neo-klezmer clarinetist with varied influences, shares their enthusiasm for musical exchanges that transcend borders.

72th
EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tireless and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

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INTERVIEW WITH ABDULLAH MINIAWY

Tell us about your career.

Abdullah Miniawy: I spent the first 18 years of my life in Saudi Arabia, homeschooled, without many spaces of freedom. I started writing poetry very early. I discovered the internet when I was 9 or 10, and it opened a new world for me. At around 15, I created a website on which I published my poems, which became a sort of open platform for poetry. That's how I came across rap for the first time. I went back to Egypt during the revolution. In Faiyum, my city, I took part in some rap battles, but my texts weren't seen as rap because they were too poetic and literary. I moved from slam to spoken word poetry (a form of poetry performed over music) because I thought that singing, modulating sound, would help my texts. I loved imitating Quran chanters and the singers they inspired. There was like a mystical force there close to Sufism. In 2011, Aly Talibab invited me to take part in a concert shortly after the January demonstrations on Talaat Harb Square [near Tahrir Square], sponsored by the bookstore El-Shorouk, in front of thousands of people. It was the first time I sang in public. After this very successful first concert, I soon became popular. I then created a band with musicians I met on the internet, and we recorded a few songs. Downtown Cairo was full of energy and freedom back then, there was a lot going on both culturally and politically... Mahmoud Refaat's production company 100Copies Studio helped me perform in a few places in Cairo. In 2014, I began singing with Ahmed Saleh, an electro composer and musician from Alexandria. We toured a lot in Egypt and abroad. We performed in very famous clubs, but the energy of those years of revolt was gone, and the atmosphere had changed.

Where did the idea for *Cairo's Cry* come from, and how did it come about?

Blaise Merlin: "La Voix est Libre"—a festival for which I oversee encounters between artists from all over the world—was invited in 2014 by the Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF), a multidisciplinary event created in Cairo right after the revolution by director Ahmed El Attar. I found in Cairo a very creative atmosphere and discovered artists open to musical encounters. Mahmoud Refaat gave me an album by Abdullah Miniawy. It was a revelation. The spirit of "La Voix est Libre" was embodied in his voice, his singing, his poetry, his improvisations, his freedom. We spent 3 years trying and failing to bring him to France, because it's very hard for a young man who hasn't done his national service to get a visa. Abdullah was eventually able to join us in 2017 thanks to the work of a number of partners. Once he got to Paris, we started working on *Cairo's Cry*. The band which will perform at the Festival d'Avignon is made up of saxophonist Peter Corser, who uses the circular breathing technique, neo-klezmer clarinetist Yom with his rock, jazz, and psychedelic influences, and Karsten Hochapfel playing the cello and electro-acoustic guitar. It's a project that transcends borders, an unclassifiable object, which finds its creative energy in a subtle equilibrium between harmony and chaos.

Abdullah Miniawy: In February 2017, Peter Corser and I met every day to work in his recording studio with texts I had written and music he had playing in his head. "Purple Feathers", a song on the album by Peter's band SighFire, was created during those sessions. *Cairo's Cry* is made up of about a dozen songs.

Why do you sing in very erudite Arabic, and what led you to Sufism?

Abdullah Miniawy: Literary Arabic is a very rich language with different levels of meaning. It has a highly metaphorical style and many hidden meanings, which leaves room for interpretation. I find this style to create a "pacified" form, because everyone is free to find the meaning that suits him or her. Some think I'm an infidel, others that I'm very religious, and others yet that I'm a Sufi student. I wrote "Les étudiants du tiers monde" ("Students of the Third World") after the April 2016 demonstration. It seemed as if everybody had been asleep for a while, because nothing was happening, and all of a sudden, everyone woke up. The text is addressed to the Egyptian youth, it's about an Italian student, Giulio Regeni, who came to Cairo to research workers' unions. He was found dead and tortured, and the circumstances of his death remain obscure. I started looking into Sufi philosophy relatively early. I had a very isolated childhood, and reading was a way for me to escape. I studied Eastern philosophy, which had a huge influence on me. The political vision and freedom of love, thought, and faith of the great Sufi philosophers was a great inspiration.

What did coming to France mean for you? How do you see your future? What do you hope the future will be like for Egypt?

Abdullah Miniawy: Coming here allowed me to overcome my shyness. I'm thinking about new projects, like adding video to my shows, or creating a Sufi choir, a more ambitious project. In Egypt, there are fewer perspectives. There isn't much hope for now, even if public support means I'm not as monitored as I used to be. Many of my friends are in prison. I hope that talking freely about it here might change things, but it's difficult. Not all my texts are about politics, I write a lot about everyday life, about questions our society refuses to see. When a situation becomes unbearable, I write texts to denounce the unacceptable. I talk about those left behind, of course it's political. I'm also looking for a new way to communicate beyond social networks, I closed down my Facebook account to redirect people to my website, which is getting more and more viewers. Working with other artists also allows me to spread my ideas. I'm a dreamer, I don't think people should be ashamed of dreaming, especially in the world we live in. I think I'll stay away from Egypt for a while. As for my future, I dream of big things, even though I don't know which ones yet. I keep my enthusiasm up and my mind open. I'm too "small" to imagine a future for my country. I want young people to be able to grow up in peace, I want the youth to be left alone because they're the future of the country. I want so many people to be freed from prison, so many of them like Islam Aashri, [photojournalist] Shawkan, Alaa Abdel Fattah, and many others.

Interview conducted by Malika Baaziz and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach
* Blaise Merlin is the artistic director of the festival « La Voix est Libre » and the originator of the show *Cairo's Cry*.