

BARBARA-FAIRUZ By singing Barbara and Fairuz, Dorsaf Hamdani wanted those two great singers to talk to each other. A conversation between the tall, dark lady, who revealed her wounds and wildness in a streaming of crystal, and the Lebanese diva who embodied the soul of her people with a fascinating artistic boldness. The result is so clear that it all seems obvious: the similarities between their nonconformist worlds, the astonishing freedom that springs forth from each song, the ties between the souls of two artists who both remain mysteries, each in her own culture. After all, Barbara long seemed strange to many of her French listeners, and Fairuz, working with the Rahbani brothers, introduced many modern if not outright exotic elements in her songs—electronic music, Latin American sonorities, jazz... Dorsaf Hamdani has chosen from their respective repertoires intimate songs, songs of the beating heart and the naked soul. By calling on Daniel Mille to serve as musical director for the show, she confirmed the path she's chosen: Barbara and Fairuz together, between great loves and whispered confessions, between melancholy and sparkling, between vertigo and majesty.

Show premiered on 6 February, 2015 at Festival Au Fil des Voix, Paris.
Preview on December, 2013 at Théâtre municipal, Tunis (Tunisia).

DORSAF HAMDANI Recognised as one of the greatest voices of Tunisia, Dorsaf Hamdani likes to broaden her horizons, both in space and time. A student of malouf, the Arab Andalusian music of Tunisia, and of the semi-classic genres that appeared in the Mashriq in the 20th century, she learnt western music theory and receiving countless awards in her country and abroad... She's an indefatigable traveller, from master class to encounter with the masters, from festivals to a doctorate in musicology at the Sorbonne. She's sung at the Cairo Opera and worked with the greatest artists in Arabic music, such as Salah Ghoubachi or Selim Sahab. In 2010, she took part in the creation of *Ivresses*, based on the poetry of Omar Khayyam, along with Persian singer Alireza Ghorbani—which was met with critical and public acclaim. Looking to the east, towards Lebanon and Egypt and the great Arab voices, she led the project *Emirat el tarab (Princesses of Arabic Songs)*, which brought together songs by Umm Kulthum, Fairuz, and Asmahan. Proud of her radiant multiculturalism and always looking for artistic truth, Dorsaf Hamdani embodies the mutations of the modern Mediterranean.

DANIEL MILLE Daniel Mille's early experience with music says much about him: having abandoned the accordion after spending two years trying to learn to play it as a child, he comes back to it when he sees Richard Galliano accompanying Claude Nougaro. And so he'll play both French songs and jazz, never afraid to embark on a new adventure; a unique musician, at once well-read and instinctive, romantic and pointillist. Throughout his original career, he accompanies singers (Claude Nougaro, Christophe, Salif Keita, Jacques Higelin, etc.), leads unique projects (two albums recorded with Jean-Louis Trintignant) and bold personal creations, like this recent homage to Astor Piazzolla, accompanied by three cellists. He didn't know the first thing about Fairuz before Dorsaf Hamdani called him, and had played only a few notes in Barbara's show *Lily Passion*, as a young musician in Paris in 1986. But the Tunisian singer's project echoes his own obsessions—space, air, silence, and fervour.

INTERVIEW WITH DORSAF HAMDANI

Dorsaf Hamdani, you have a certain experience of musical adventures outside of your Tunisian culture, for instance with your album *Ivresses*, based on Omar Khayyam's Persian poetry in 2011, then with *Princesses of Arabic Songs*, dedicated to songs by Umm Kulthum, Asmahan, and Fairuz, in 2012. Those were already journeys through space and time.

Dorsaf Hamdani: To me, Umm Kulthum, Asmahan, and Fairuz are a bubble, a single entity, a whole. I tried to understand what gave them the place they still occupy in the memories of Arab people. By leaving my country, I tried to define what my culture was. I understood where I'm from and what I want. I'm a Tunisian, but it doesn't stop there. I'm from today, but also from other times. I'm nostalgic for the great Egyptian musical films, for the great singers that are at the heart of the culture of all Arab countries. When I listen to Umm Kulthum or Asmahan, I hear not only their technique and beauty, but an entire world. A world I was already familiar with before I entered it as a singer.

How did you come then to bring Fairuz and Barbara together?

I had planned on working on French music, and with Saïd Assadi, my producer, we thought the artistic cooperation between France and Tunisia consisted mostly in having artists from one culture tour on the other side of the Mediterranean without there being any collaboration between the two cultures. Many in France know who Fairuz is, and most Tunisians have at least heard a few songs by Barbara. And the idea was all the more stimulating because, truth be told, Barbara didn't seduce me right away. I spent a few years studying in France, during which I saw how beloved she could be. I understood how important she was as a woman, as a musician. My sister thought she was beautiful. I was intrigued. And yet I could buy her records and forget about them for years at a time. Back in Tunisia, as I was preparing the show *Princesses of Arabic Songs*, listening to Fairuz, Umm Kulthum, and Asmahan a lot, I once again picked up my Barbara records, and all of a sudden it all fell into place. I finally got what she was singing about. Then, in 2012, the fifteenth anniversary of her death led to many books being published, and I read a lot about her. So when we came up with the idea to bring Fairuz and Barbara together in a unique creation, I was ready to delve into her songs and to find the right arranger for the project. When I first met Daniel Mille, I knew right away he was the right person for the job.

This is a very introspective, stark show. It feels like we are hearing a single soul sing, sometimes in Arabic, sometimes in French, when their songs seem at first very different.

That is because of the songs we picked, which all could belong to both those women. I'm not interested in leaving Fairuz stuck in her world and Barbara in hers, with me in the middle, going back and forth between two souls, two universes. We had to be careful to do more than just a collage, to create a third universe with Barbara, Fairuz, and Dorsaf. Fairuz did a lot of spectacular songs, with large orchestras, but I only picked those that could fit Barbara's sensibilities. I wanted them to talk to each other, as if they were sitting together, quietly, like two friends. I also wanted to get off the beaten track of

my culture, to introduce in my interpretation something unexpected. I didn't want to be a French singer singing Barbara, I didn't want people to just hear Fairuz. I wanted to introduce in their songs elements from South America, from India, from Tunisia... What mattered was to create a third element that didn't exist before. Daniel Mille helped a lot in bringing them closer together.

Speaking of which, what was your goal when working together?

Daniel didn't think he would one day work on Arabic music. Right from the start, I told him: "You don't have to know this music. Try to make it yours, don't be afraid to go towards something that feels familiar to you." I told him not to be afraid to upset people, because I don't like when music is kept under wraps. And, when we played in Tunis, he was celebrated for his clever, simple, and unexpected approach to Fairuz's repertoire.

How can a musician so foreign to this culture enter Fairuz's world like that?

It is a great gift that Daniel Mille gave me by being so mindful in his approach. Fairuz's music is perfect for musicians like him. It wouldn't have been possible with Umm Kulthum or Asmahan, whose musical material isn't really malleable. Fairuz is our contemporary. She emerges at a time when Lebanon is a modern country, at a time of cultural upheaval that can't just be summed up to the use of electric instruments. It is quite the contrary, actually. There is something very simple, emancipated, and modern in Fairuz, which many in the Arab world don't quite understand. With the Rahbani brothers, she created something new, beyond even music. Fairuz is a mysterious singer, she doesn't smile much. She's not a luscious creature, not one of those femme fatales, of which there are many in Arab culture. On the contrary, her poetry, her clothes, her world, her eroticism are unusual. She's a hard woman, strict, committed, and deep down very Christian. She actually doesn't look or act very Arabic. She's similar to Barbara in that they share this sort of intellectual eroticism, which I find fascinating.

Was it easy for you, as a performer, to bring Barbara and Fairuz together?

What I saw in this project is also a work on the distance between the woman I am on the stage and the woman I am off of it. Like Barbara, like Fairuz, I am both those women, my own person as well as a character I create when I sing. I hope people see other women through me, that they understand that you can come from a culture like Tunisia while being a nonconformist woman.

Interview conducted by Bertrand Dicale / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

BARBARA AND FAIRUZ

They never met, and who knows if they were at all familiar with each other's music, but Barbara and Fairuz, creators who were as secret as they were unpredictable and fierce guardians of their creative freedom, who had little to do with the archetypal figures of women in their respective countries, have a lot in common. Beyond the language in which Dorsaf sings, one might be surprised not to be able to tell one world from the other. Melodies born in Lebanon or on the banks of the Seine seem to be made of the same material, the same palette, the same moods. Fairuz's sparkles seem to lighten Barbara's melancholy, and the European to lend her sharp intelligence to the romanticism of the eastern signer. A fertile experiment for Dorsaf Hamdani: "I understood you can be a very strong, very modern woman, while being torn within a rather conventional culture in which you try to offer another image of the woman."

AND...

CONCERT AT THE MUSÉE CALVET

Électro-Résonance with Superpoze and Camp Claude, 23 July at 09:00 pm

TOUR DATES FOR BARBARA-FAIRUZ AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

- 30 July 2015: Festival Au Fil des Voix, Vaison-la-Romaine
- 8 August: Église Saint-Hilaire, Poitiers
- 19 September: Festival du Chaïnon Manquant, Laval
- 20 September: Musée du Quai Branly, Paris
- 25 September: Musée d'Art - Fête du Livre, Toulon
- 6 November: Villes en scène, La Haye Pesnel
- 7 November: Villes en scène, Portbail
- 24 November: Beyrouth (Liban)
- 27 November: Opéra, Vichy
- 3 December: Parvis, Scène nationale Tarbes Pyrénées
- 30 January 2016: Auditorium Julien Gracq, St-Florent-le-Vieil
- 5 March: Rocher de Palmer, Cenon
- 12 March: Théâtre Scène nationale de St-Nazaire
- 18 March: Centre culturel L'Imprévu, St-Ouen l'Aumône
- 15 April: Théâtre Antoine Vitez, Ivry-sur-Seine
- 16 April: Scène nationale du Sud Aquitaine, Bayonne
- 23 April: Salle des Fêtes, Schiltigheim
- 3 May: Auditorium Jean Cocteau, Noisiel
- 10 May: Auditorium, Rouen

@DORSAFHAMDANI
#MUSIQUE

69th
EDITION

festival-avignon.com

f t i s #FDA15



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