

Michel Sajrawy Yathrib



Musical Concept

Sajrawy's musical ambition is to reconcile the jazz of western culture with the „Makamat“ of the Middle East, and Schoenberg's avant-garde, in order to develop, and then perfect a completely new sound.

„Makamat“ – these are „oriental“ composition forms, rooted in ancient traditions, consisting of very special melodic lines based on quarter note steps – an exceptional musical vocabulary. Each one of these „Makamat“ has a distinctive sequence of notes in a specific range, with one or more tonics and a melodic phrasing unique unto itself.

Beyond this, each of these „Makamat“ has its very own ethos attributed to it, associating various and very different moods. For example, in the ninth century Safi el-Din gave every hour of the day its own Makam.

Today, there are about sixty „customary“ Makamat in the Arabian world. An enormous challenge for interpreters of these compositions – the Makamat, are all relatively similar in structure; the art lies in making the subtle differences distinguishable and enabling the audience to experience their vibrancy.

This requires an explicitly sensitive ear from the musicians, as well as virtuoso mastery of the instruments.

As a rule, oriental guitarists equip their instruments with additional frets in order to be able to create the quarter note steps necessary for “Makamat”.

Unfortunately, this inevitably leads to a lack of precision in the intonation: The quarter note steps called for here are NOT exact quarter intervals – in ascending succession they are a little bit higher – accordingly, in descending succession they have to sound a little bit “darker”...and for this the musician alone is responsible.

Michel Sajrawy tackles this difficulty with his own unconventional solution: Having on the one hand tried out the limited suitability of additional frets, he nonetheless rejects the usual use of “fretless guitars”. They do offer complete freedom of intonation, but according to Sajrawy, can only be a compromise for the sound as well as the character. They just don't do justice to the sound he really wants!

Sajrawy creates the desired quarter note steps by bending the strings. A very unusual, if not unique technique for interpreting “Makamat”.

It spices the original sound with an almost “bluesy” note, and does not require any additional alterations to the instrument.

All that can be heard is the virtuoso result of the ingenious interaction of fingers and ear.

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