

## Middle East **REVIEWS**

### Ramzi Aburedwan & Dal'Ouna Ensemble Oyoun Al Kalam

Riverboat Records



Originally recorded in 2007, *Oyoun Al Kalam*, by multi-instrumentalist Ramzi Aburedwan

& Dal'Ouna Ensemble finally gets a digital release 17 years later. This album of poetic songs and instrumentals from the Middle East region is made up of original compositions and was the first of the group's four records. It features soaring vocals by 'Oday Al-Khatib and Noura Madi, both young refugee students of the Al-Kamanjati music school that Ramzi

founded.' Though it is a traditional album in terms of instrumentation, it also very much feels contemporary, because music as good as this will always have a timeless quality. The opening track, 'Idha Al Shamsi' sets the tone of intricate *oud* playing that really showcases Aburedwan's mastery of the instrument. 'Tayara' is a story of a kid dreaming of being able to fly. The ten-minute instrumental opus, 'Mandira Hijaz' is another example of multi-instrumentation featuring the oud, accordion, percussion, viola and *buzuq* that you never want to end. *Oyoun Al Kalam* is a pleasant listen but it also requires full attention as this is music that stirs emotions and heightens the senses.

YOUSIF NUR

**TRACK TO TRY** *Tayara*

### A.G.A Trio Araxes

Riverboat Records



These tunes are steeped in sadness, arriving from Anatolia, Georgia and Armenia, the homelands of each band member. This is the trio's second album, featuring Mikail Yakut, whose accordion lies at the centre, like a small orchestra, flanked by the soft-blowing Arsen Petrosyan (*duduk*) and Deniz Mahir Kartal (*kaval*). The double-reed woodwind and end-blown flute complement each other on each side of the stereo field. Kartal also plays the *divan*, a hybrid developed from the *saz* lute. Introverted and

expressive, the performance exposes each instrument, but the combined presence of the three still creates a surprisingly full spread of sound. The compositions are contributed by all three members, sometimes involving an instrument leaning forward to glow individually, the emphasis changing from tune to tune. 'Dark Elf' has a slow sway to its melancholic celebration, then 'Dancing Horses' has a robust, percussive melody. The accordion is restless on 'Wind of Araxes', the *duduk* and *divan* highlighted during its slow, mournful development. The most up-tempo prancer of *Araxes* is 'Kavkasiuri' (Caucasian), followed by a closing dance that is known by different names in each of A.G.A.'s three native lands.

MARTIN LONGLEY

**TRACK TO TRY** *Wind of Araxes*

### Süeda Çatakoğlu Süeda Sings Sezen Aksu

Ahenik Müzik



Sezen Aksu: an unconventional contemporary female public figure in Turkey, for half a century

she commented with her songs on the evolution of society, reflecting its changes and innovating its popular music. Composer and lyricist, she's penned tunes beloved by generations of listeners, and still relevant today.

Süeda Çatakoğlu (b1997), student at Berklee College of Music in Boston, US, was accompanied by Sezen's songs in her long travels across Turkey first, then Europe and now to the US. She started to sing them live, as part of her act, then developed the idea into a full-fledged tribute album. Her own spare arrangements set off the colours of her voice against a rotating background band involving some Turkish musicians and some colleagues at Berklee. She treats the songs with creativity and empathy, from the sentimental to the sarcastic and even gloriously celebratory, not trying to imitate the original delivery, accompanying herself on piano in a contemporary idiom that never loses the melodic flow. Sinan Cem Eroğlu's contributions on fretless guitar are always appropriate. A special highlight is 'Dansöz Dünya' which gets a stunning India-themed reworking that finds new meanings in its lyrics and music.

FRANCESCO MARTINELLI

**TRACK TO TRY** *Dansöz Dünya*



**TOP  
OF THE  
WORLD  
TRACK 2**

### Mohammad Syfkan I am Kurdish

Nyahh Records



Sometimes moments of grace spring from conflict in a way that feels like the premise for a film or a novel. The story of Mohammad Syfkan is one of those moments. As the title of his debut album suggests, he is a Kurd, and therefore stateless in a sense, even before conflict came to his homeland.

Born in Syria, the singer and *buzuq* player founded the Al-Rabie Band in the city of Raqqa in the mid-80s. When civil war engulfed his country, and one of his sons was killed at the hands of the Islamic State, Syfkan fled as a refugee to Ireland. The moment of grace is in

the coming together of two musical worlds: Syfkan's Middle Eastern and North African-infused wedding and party music met the Irish session, and a kinship was felt.

These eight tracks include traditional numbers mixed with songs by Egyptian composer Baligh Hamdi, Kurdish Arabesk singer Ibrahim Tatlis, and the title-track by Syfkan himself. He is accompanied on several tracks by fellow Leitrim musicians Eimear Reidy on cello and Cathal Roche on saxophone. Elegant and varied in pace, this is not simply dance music, but a rich accompaniment to your next *soirée*.

NATHANIEL HANDY

**TRACK TO TRY** *A Thousand and One Nights*