

**Rashed
Juma:
Arabesque**



To be
released,
2005

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Rating: Exceptional

Review by Nina Costanza

It is rare to receive music to review that is extraordinary. Rashed Juma's music is refreshingly original and contemporary, and the execution, concert quality. Here is a rare voice where inspiration, ingenuity, and personal expressiveness converge. Juma's debut album, *Arabesque*, is exquisite. The CD is not yet released, so detailed production information is not available.

A native of Kuwait, Juma was born into a family of musicians. He began musical training as a child on the *oud*, moving onto the violin at age 12. He obtained his bachelor's degree in music performance at the Kuwaiti Higher Music Institute. He continued classical music studies in Vienna and in the United States with a protégé of Jascha Heifetz. He recently obtained a Doctorate of Musical Arts in violin performance from the University of Miami. Juma has traveled extensively, performing both as a soloist and as a member of various music ensembles.

Arabesque merges world, Arabic, classical, and jazz genres, but is unlike most "fusion": It is unpretentious, heartfelt, and unique. Juma's modern disposition and technical ease reveal a depth of knowledge sensitively and organically driven by his vision.

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And he has one, which in itself is lately rather uncommon.

All nine tracks feature the violin with elegantly sensual orchestrations. Track 1, the best of the album, sounds like a tango. The harmonies of track 2 are haunting. A violin *taqsim* dramatically builds toward New Age-sounding vocals accompanied by atmospheric sounds, rendering a Gypsy feel. Track 3 is another tango-esque piece, a rich arrangement founded on syncopated rhythms. Track 4 is constructed on the harmonies of an ancient song from an old recording, which introduces and closes this selection. It is a gorgeously sad song in minor key. Classic *taqsim* elements of the violin are transformed by modern, jazz-like percussion, including the piano and electric guitar. Track 5 is constructed on

a *chiftetelli* rhythm. An *oud* solo intercedes but does not stray from the fundamental theme. Typical of Juma, he brings the various voices into melodic unison, establishing emotional drama. Track 6 is a romantic melody in minor key. Track 7 contrasts with a more theatrical melody and rhythmic patterns (including syncopated hand clapping) converging toward its conclusion. Track 8 is a vocal piece featuring the *oud* and jazz piano. Reminiscent of track 1, the short violin counterpoint of track 9 suggests a tango culminating in a more somber end.

Juma comprehends the intrinsic nature of dance and the drama of music. Intricate rhythms, contrapuntal themes, and seductive harmonies are techniques that experienced musicians can manipulate, but

creating exceptional melodies as an organizational principle is a special gift of that artist who has something to say. The only criticism: The tempo is often too much of the same.

This music is arresting—in the mind, heart, and in the gut. Rashed Juma is an artist to watch for.