



In Focus

FILM, BOOK, MUSIC, & VIDEO REVIEWS



The Doom-Tek Project: Hamdi El-Khayyat

Produced by Movses Panossian, 2004, approximately 50 minutes

Contact: www.hollywoodmusiccenter.com, (818) 240-8888

Rating: Highly recommended

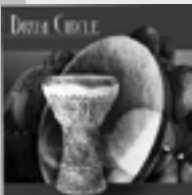


Samasem Presents: Drum Rhythms for Oriental Dance

Produced by Turquoise International, approximately 60 minutes

Contact: www.turquoiseintl.com, (818) 999-5542

Rating: Average



Drum Circle

Produced by Movses Panossian, 2004, approximately 40 minutes

Contact: www.hollywoodmusiccenter.com, (818) 240-8888

Rating: Recommended



Nourhan Sharif Presents: Arabic Rhythms Volume Two: The Drums of Lebanon

Produced by Aboudi Badawi, 2001, approximately 50 minutes

Nourhan Sharif Presents: Arabic Rhythms Volume Wahid

Produced by Yousry and Nourhan Sharif, approximately 50 minutes

Nourhan Sharif Presents: Arabic Rhythms for the Advanced Dancer—Volume Talata 3, 2004

Produced by Yousry and Nourhan Sharif, approximately 75 minutes

Contact: www.egyptianacademy.com, (718) 784-4361

Rating: Highly Recommended



Gems of the Middle East: Volumes I, II, and III

Produced by Mary Ellen Donald, 2002

Contact: Maryellendonald.com

Rating: Highly Recommended

Leila Haddad Presents: Traditional Tunisian Rhythms

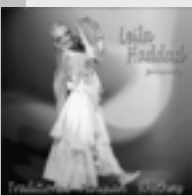
Produced by Birame Pathe N'Diaye, 2001, approximately 60 minutes

Leila Haddad Presents: Traditional Sidi Mansour—Songs and Beats From Tunisia

Produced by Leila Haddad, 2003, approximately 50 minutes

Contact: www.leilahaddad.com (France)

Rating: Highly recommended



Rhythm Review

by Nina Costanza

Many rhythm CDs are currently on the market. Some are excellent teaching tools; others are good for performance; and some answer both needs. The *tabla* is a defining feature in many compositions. A versatile and essential component of Middle Eastern folk and modern music—and essential to dancers—it is used to play intricate supporting patterns or to introduce complex nuances for melodic lines. Found in nightclubs, recording studios, and classical conservatories, it is fundamental to musical arrangements. This article is a review of some recent rhythm productions. (For information on specific productions, see the end of the review. As we have become accustomed, spellings on CD covers are inconsistent. The spelling used on the individual CDs is maintained, where applicable.)

The Doom-Tek Project, featuring the superb Egyptian percussionist, Hamdi El-Khayyat, is an excellent collection of basic rhythms and variations including *saidi*, *maqsum*, *sama'i*, and *wardi*. It is informational (in addition to illustrating patterns, an historical overview of the *tabla* is provided) and musical. The ten selections, lasting about four to five minutes each, are not recorded as a solitary *tabla* line, but include accompanying percussion, all played by El-Khayyat. While the compositions are excellent for classroom work, each selection is also appropriate for performance.

Rhythms “lessons” on recordings can be boringly repetitive if constructed merely as patterns. In *The Doom-Tek Project*, El-Khayyat treats rhythmic demonstrations as individual compositions, and he mixes his rhythms. None of the pieces, while staying true to the rhythmic form, are conventional: They are individually conceived and executed by the artist. *Samasem Presents: Drum Rhythms for Oriental Dance*, on the other hand, is monotonous and unimaginative. This CD can only be used as classroom exercise. It does the job, though, of teaching simple patterns through metric repetitions. Its thirteen tracks cover the scope of basic Egyptian meters, including: *saidi*, *maqsum*, *maqsum saeria*, *malfuf*, *ayoub*, *wahda kebira*, *masmoudi kebir*, *masmoudi soghayar*, *conga*, *karachi*, *sama'i el sakil*, *khaleegy*, and Moroccan rhythms.

The *tabla* is not only a rhythmic tool. It has pitch. El-Khayyat (*The Doom-Tek Project*) modulates the pitch of his instrument.



The Intimate Act of
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Katia: Amar El Laily

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An Ancient Art for
Ageless People

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Nadia Gamal:
"The Legend"

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He can be as riveting when he strikes the drum as when he chooses to take a breath. In "Zahrani Cut," for example, he intermixes differing *tabla* "tonalities" making his instrument speak. "Dancer's Heartbeat," jazz-like, offers continual changes and variety of patterns playing off the riff of more commonly known rhythmic models, only to return to the conventional phrasing. Appropriately, the last track is "Talking Drum." My only complaint is a small one. The underlying *ostinato*—the percussive bass line that keeps the regular meter—sounds synthesized. It is not a bad idea when teaching to have a bass drum track layered underneath the more melismatic *tabla*.

It lends depth and provides a foundation for the *tabla* "riffs." Not used delicately, the drum machine commonly offsets acoustic balance. Similarly in Nourhan Sharif's *Arabic Rhythms Volume Two: The Drums of Lebanon*, the underlying drum track, whose purpose it is to maintain a regular meter upon which the *tabla* renders its variations, is too heavy and detracts from the *tabla*.

Regardless, Yousry and Nourhan Sharif always offer works of high caliber. *Arabic Rhythms Volume Two: The Drums of Lebanon*, one of a rhythm series, is a good learning tool for basics. *The Drums of Lebanon* and their *Arabic Rhythms Volume Wahid* are similarly constructed with eight tracks of repeated rhythmic patterns concluding with two drum solos. *The Drums of Lebanon* features drummers Georges Rizik, Georges Mansour, and Yosef Ibrahim demonstrating *beledi*, *malfuf*, *soudasi*, *nawari*, *karachi*, *hagaah*, *rumba Arabi*, and *T'lete Arba*. With suitably minimal narration by Amy Montevaldo, each track, corresponding to a different rhythm, is identified by its time signature. Under the direction of Yousry Sharif, engineering by Ashraf Zakaria, and Yousry Mohamed's skillful *tabla* playing, the rhythms exhibited in *Arabic Rhythms Volume Wahid* include *malfuf*, *maqsoum*, *ayoub*, *saidi*, *fallahi*, *masmoudi*, *khaleegy*, and *chiftetelli*. Nourhan Sharif narrates, identifying the rhythm, its meter, and its sound. This CD is much more creatively developed, giving the artist more leeway to demonstrate variations within the rhythmic type.

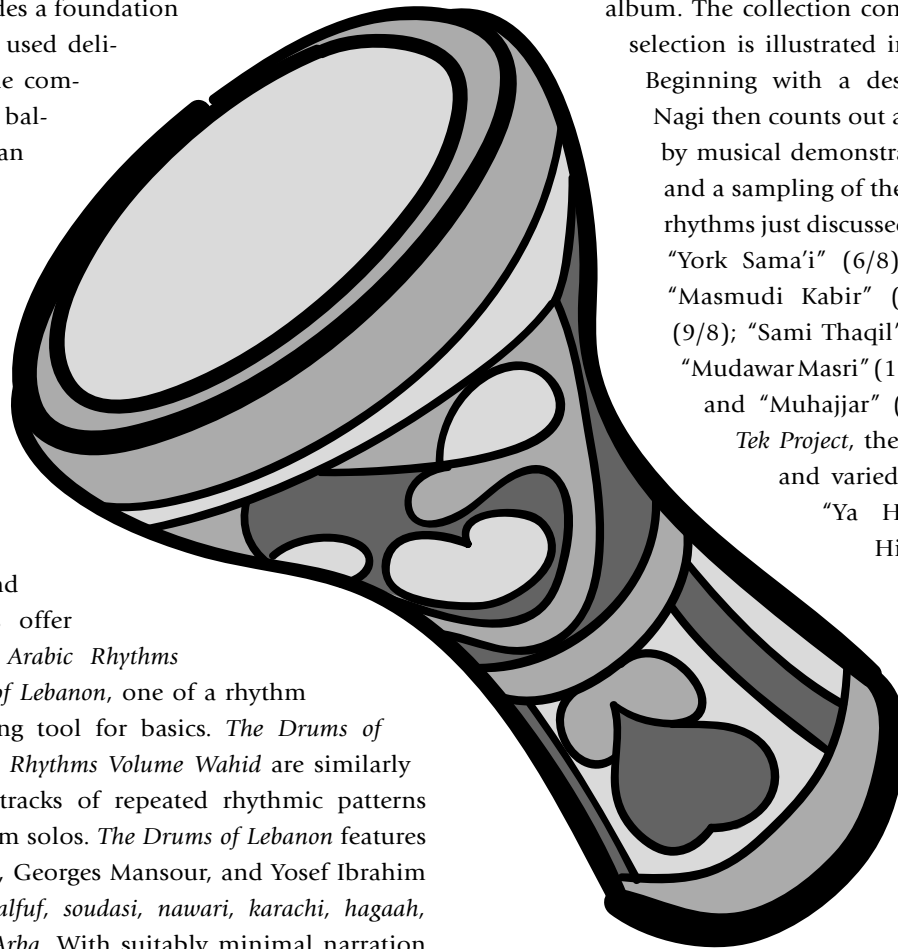
The bass-heavy synthesized drum line is absent here, providing a more balanced sound and permitting the *tabla* to be clearly accentuated.

Yousry and Nourhan Sharif's most recent rhythm CD, *Arabic Rhythms for the Advanced Dancer—Volume Talata 3* was created to increase the advanced dancer's vocabulary. The rhythms are based on the *Muwashahaat*—poems dating back to Andalusia, Spain. Sayyed Darwish (Egypt) and Omar Al-batch (Syria) are two contemporary composers who have written music using these rhythms. Percussionist Karim Nagi performs (*tabla*, *riq*, *zagat*, *dhola*, and bass drum), and narrates the album. The collection consists of ten tracks. Each selection is illustrated in well organized detail. Beginning with a description of the meter, Nagi then counts out a single phrase, followed by musical demonstration, tempo variations, and a sampling of the *Muwashahaat* using the rhythms just discussed. The selections include "York Sama'i" (6/8); "Dawr Hindi" (7/8); "Masmudi Kabir" (8/4); "Aqsaq Afrangi" (9/8); "Sami Thaqil" (10/8); "Awis" (11/4); "Mudawar Masri" (12/4); "Muraba'a" (13/4); and "Muhajjar" (14/4). Like *The Doom-Tek Project*, these pieces are interesting and varied. The playing is expert.

"Ya Haggar" and "Hidiyya Hindiyya" are two drum solos that conclude the album. This is a rich find, an album that is educational for the dance professional and music theorist. Here, one will find all the depth, meatiness, sensual intensity, and "new" excitement that some techno

compilations, such as the new *Turbo Tabla*, work so hard to achieve through production gimmickry.

Another wonderful and unusual contribution of *Arabic Rhythms for the Advanced Dancer* is the rhythmic notation provided on the liner notes. Such notation helps to fill a big gap in Middle Eastern music education in the United States. Mary Ellen Donald, percussionist and educator, has also contributed



significantly in this vein. Her substantial body of work comprises albums with complementary booklets of musical analysis and rhythmic notation. *Gems of the Middle East*, produced in three volumes of text and music, is an excellent educational tool for dancers, teachers, drummers, and any musician interested in learning details of Middle Eastern rhythms. It is a comprehensive collection of classic bellydance rhythms from Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece. The music is full-sounding, so it is surprising to find that only two musicians are generating these fertile tonalities: the late Mimi Spencer performs *qanoun* and vocals, and Donald, the *doumbec* and tambourine. Selections on Volume I (seventeen tracks) include "Saba Samir," "Laillet Hob," "Hebbina," "Azizh," "Toutah," "Nibtidi Mnene al-Hikaya," and "Hagala Drum Solo" (with *djembe*). Volume II (seventeen tracks) contains "Tamrihinna," "Laili Ya Layali," "Cleopatra," "Spectacular Rhythms Finale," "Rampi Rampi," "Chiftetelli Taqsim," "Fakkaruni Finale," and "Sabroso Drum Solo" (with bongos and *djembe*). Volume III (ten tracks) offers "Sawwah," "Medley" (with "Anta Omri," "Ya Ain Munayyati,"

and "Al-'Elbi Ya' Shaq Kulli Gameel"), "Princess of Cairo," and "Andah Alaik." Each volume is rich with selections from old to newer classical music played with finesse. The booklets give rhythmical analysis and notation for every single piece.

THE TABLA IS

respected by classical artists of modern and folkloric genre—of the West and East—and is obviously finding an eminent place in popular music from fusion, jazz, and world beat, to hip hop, etc. It is an ancient instrument experiencing a renaissance on an international scale.


"It is a rare opportunity in the Middle Eastern dance field to be able to learn and utilize expertise directly from the source of our explorations and fascinations" (Liner notes, *Traditional Tunisian Rhythms*). From American-born percussionist, Mary Ellen Donald (classical *raqs sharqi*) to Tunisian-born Leila Haddad's new releases, *Traditional Tunisian Rhythms* and *Traditional Sidi Mansour—Songs and Beats From Tunisia*, the dancer has many good resources for learning or practicing various rhythms from all over the globe. *Drum Circle* symbolizes what internationalization can offer. This selection is a collaborative effort of percussionists from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Performers include: Fathi Amin, Ahmad Al

Mari, Hani Samir, Amir Nabil, Magdi Mshmosh, Mhamma Johari, Haysam, Safad Srar, Hsen Zahhar, Jamale Shamia, Mahmoud Hashash, Nigm Hanafi, and Kazim Al Iraqi. Each of the ten tracks combines different rhythms suitable for an Oriental performance. (The titles are a little odd, but this does not reflect on the wonderful quality of these unique solos.) "I Salute the Rakasa," for example includes *fallahi* and *maq-soum*; "Everyone Gather Around" uses *masmoudi*, *maq-soum*, and "Africi"; "Boy's Stick Dance" includes *malfuf*, *saidi*, *maghrebi*, and *fallahi*; and "The Hidden Art" incorporates *beledi* and *fallahi*. Each track is detailed, full, and pure in sound.

Leila Haddad's *Traditional Tunisian Rhythms*, recently recorded in Tunis, is excellently produced and marvelously performed. In the twelve tracks, Tunisian rhythms are presented not only with percussion, but also with the *zokra*, *mezoued*, and vocals, instruments as integral to rhythm as the percussion. The meters explored are *halla* (6/8), *ghita* (6/8), *jerbi* (4/4), *boughi* (2/4), *allaji* (6/8), *bou siga* (2/4), *mrabaa bedoui* (8/8), *mhawchi* (2/4), *fazzani bedoui/arba* (2/4), *souga* (2/4), *bou nawara agrebi* (2/4), and *fazzani tounsi/beldi* (2/4). *Traditional Sidi Mansour—Songs and Beats From Tunisia*, a complement to the rhythm CD, incorporates and demonstrates the rhythms within the melody lines. Only traditional, Bedouin instruments are used. Comprising twelve tracks of serious folklore, the songs are earthy and complex.

The *tabla* is respected by classical artists of modern and folkloric genre—of the West and East—and is obviously finding an eminent place in popular music from fusion, jazz, and world beat, to hip hop, etc. It is an ancient instrument experiencing a renaissance on an international scale. H

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 in Middle Eastern percussion
 for over thirty years
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