

Lucid Culture

GREAT MUSIC THAT'S NOT TRENDY

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An Amazing “Neo Middle Eastern” Triplebill at Drom

That opening act [Zikrayat](#) - celebrating the release of their new album Cinematic – didn't steal the show from the other bands on the “neo Middle Eastern dance party” bill Thursday night at Drom attests to how good they were. There are plenty of terrific Middle Eastern musicians in New York, including the [New York Arabic Orchestra](#) and the crew who make [Alwan for the Arts](#) their home base. Zikrayat (Arabic for “memories”) mine the haunting, plaintive, lushly beautiful world of golden-age Egyptian and Lebanese film music from the 40s to the 60s. It was hard to tell bandleader/violinist [Sami Abu Shumays](#)' originals from the classics: the band sent a poignant, mysteriously slinky mood and maintained it all the way through their hourlong set. Alongside Shumays this time out were [Apostolis Sideris](#) on bass, [Bridget Robbins](#) on ney flute, [Tareq Abboushi](#) on buzuq and a first-class dumbek (goblet drum) player who used his one solo to mess with his bandmates, and then the crowd, and got the whole house laughing at themselves.

After a couple of undulating, hypnotic dance numbers with all kinds of interplay – between violin and buzuq, or violin and ney – they launched into “one of those quirky Abdel Wahab operatic pieces,” as Shumays called it, moving majestically from an ominous buzuq taqsim against stark bowed bass, to a dramatic theme that went doublespeed and then back again. Another Abdel Wahab piece swayed with a sensual bounce, a launching pad for a stinging buzuq solo and some soaring crescendos from Robbins' flute. The Lights of Lebanon, said Shumays, was “unbelievably tricky,” which was an understatement: it was sort of a Middle Eastern Abbey Road, a mini-suite of good ideas that could have been fleshed out even more than they were, the best among them a low, intense violin solo delivered with brooding poignancy. They closed with a couple of mysterious numbers, artfully mixing up the time signature. They're at Galapagos on 11/21 playing classic Mohammed Abdel Wahab belly dance pieces at 7 PM sharp.

[Raquy and the Cavemen](#) had a new cd of their own, Release the Green Lover, to celebrate; the crowd reacted vigorously to the long drum solos that they used to consume the early part of the show and

then closed with. [Raquy Danziger](#), when she's not playing whirlwind tabla rhythms, excels at the kamancheh (the Iranian spike fiddle popularized by Kayhan Kalhor), which she played in tandem with eleven-string guitarist [Liron Peled](#). His custom-made axe adds layers of lushness to the incisive sting of a Turkish saz. A handful of the violin/guitar pieces, accompanied by a percussionist on Peled's "dumset" (a full drum kit made out of dumbeks for extra low oomph), were toweringly intense, blending the ornate feel of 70s art-rock with Middle Eastern tonalities, all sorts of overtones floating from the strings. The Mad Marionettes was aptly titled, and absolutely creepy, with brooding, astringent kamancheh and all kinds of dynamic shifts. The album's title cut was surprisingly playful, almost goth, with a 5/4 dance interlude two steps from Stonehenge.

[Copal](#), the headliners, also had the release of their hypnotically captivating new cd Into the Shadow Garden to celebrate. Violinist/composer [Hannah Thiem](#), backed by an incisive cellist plus a terse five-string electric bassist and drummer who used a syndrum for a snare, quickly established an irresistible groove that finally succeeded in getting the dance floor in motion, and kept it bouncing for the rest of the night. Even the group's dancer, who looked at least six months pregnant, moved with a pulsing grace. Thiem's darkly catchy melodies are deceptively simple, giving band the chance to ease in and out of the mix, dub style, trade off riffs or bring the groove down to just the violin or cello and drums. Ungaro, an upbeat, tarantella-flavored number gave Thiem the first of many incisive, crescendoing solo spots; the aptly titled Shadows took on a surprising variety of shades, compared to the dusky mystery of the album version, including a hypnotically reverberating dumbek-and-drums interlude. A brand-new, as-yet untitled number shifted into brighter tonalities until the cellist went off on a chilling, trill-laden solo. They also explored klezmer-tinged and then atmospheric territory, with the plaintive Ether (whose German lyrics depict a bereaved woman searching for her dead lover, whose presence she can feel but not see), before going back to long, snaky, slowly crescendoing jams.

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