

Dhafer Youssef - Birds Requiem (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Birds Canticum "Birds Requiem" Suite* 2. *Sweet Blasphemy* 3. *Blending Souls & Shades (to Shiraz)* 4. *Ascetic Mood* 5. *Fuga Hirundinum "Birds Requiem" Suite* 6. *Khira "Indicium Divinum" Elegy for My Mother* 7. *39th Gülay (to Istanbul) - Aytac Dogan* 8. *Archaic Feathers "Birds Requiem" Suite* 9. *Sevdah (to Jon Hassell)* 10. *Ascetic Journey - Aytac Dogan* 11. *Whirling Birds Ceremony "Birds Requiem" Suite* Dhafer Youssef (oud, vocals), Hüsni Şenlendirici (clarinet), Nils Petter Molvær (trumpet), Aytaç Doğan (kanun), Eivind Aarset (electric guitar, electronics, second ear), Kristjan Randalu (piano), Phil Donkin (double bass), Chandler Sardjoe (drums)

Tunisian oud master, vocalist, and composer Dhafer Youssef is globally renowned for his restless musicality. He has used his ancient instrument -- five millennia and counting -- to explore jazz, classical, and blues, in addition to the classical and folk musics of the Middle East, North Africa, and Mediterranean regions. The ephemeral *Birds Requiem* is his debut offering for Sony's resurrected Okeh imprint. The players on this date include his trio with pianist Kristjan Randalu and trumpeter Nils-Petter Molvaer, and the complete ensemble (which recorded primarily in Sweden) features clarinetist Hüsnu Senlendirici, bassist Phil Donkin, drummer Chander Sardjoe, and electric guitarist Eivind Aarset, which also provides various electronic treatments. Aytac Dogan plays the zither-like kanun. The four-part "Birds Requiem Suite" is, as expected, the heart of the recording: it introduces it, plays two distinct parts in its middle section, and closes it. There are elemental theme-like qualities in each section, none of them predictable nor pat; neither do they act as mere showcases for Dhafer's virtuosity, but instead are carefully conceived ensemble pieces with the oud at their collective heart, with distinct harmonics, timbres, and interplay. There are seven other compositions as well. "Blending Souls & Shades (To Shiraz)" is the set's longest track. It commences as a sparse folk lament and becomes a labyrinthine jazz improv workout, with a stellar guitar break by Aarset and gorgeous falsetto by Dhafer. "Ascetic Mood" is a slow, brooding trio work for oud, clarinet, and piano. According to Dhafer, "Khira 'Indicium Divinum' Elegy for My Mother" was a spontaneous improvisation between his voice, Molvaer's trumpet, and Randalu's piano. It is easily the most moving and beautiful thing here. Other oud greats, from Rabih Abou-Khalil and Anouar Brahem to Titi Robin and Hamdi Makhlouf, have furthered the instrument's reach and juxtaposed it with jazz,

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improvised, and other world musics, but Youssef's Birds Requiem -- for its range, formal historical considerations, emotional expression, subtle yet distinctive colors and textures, as well as its truly stellar musicianship -- has used it to create a musical language that, while readily acknowledging the traditions that have informed it, is truly of his own creation. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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