

After Yeats

Merit Ariane: Voice, Oud

Drinking Song - أغنية شراب

From a concept by William Brooks
With a text by W. B. Yeats
Translation by: Nadim Nu'aymah
Informed by writings by Yeats and Ronald Schuchard
Composed by Alcyona Mick
From materials supplied by Merit Ariane Stephanos

*Wine comes in at the mouth
And love comes in at the eye;
That's all we shall know for truth
Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh.*

Sweet Dancer - الراقصة الحلوة

From a concept by William Brooks
With a text by W. B. Yeats
Translation by: Fu'ad Rifqah
Informed by writings by Yeats and Ronald Schuchard
Composed and performed (recorded Oud) by Nehad el Sayed
From materials supplied by Merit Ariane Stephanos

*The girl goes dancing there
On the leaf-sown, new-mown, smooth
Grass plot of the garden;
Escaped from bitter youth,
Escaped out of her crowd,
Or out of her black cloud.
Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer!*

*If strange men come from the house
To lead her away, do not say
That she is happy being crazy;
Lead them gently astray;
Let her finish her dance,
Let her finish her dance.
Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer!*

A Deep Sworn Vow - عهد قطوع بحرارة

From a concept by William Brooks
With a text by W. B. Yeats
Translation by: Nadim Nu'aymah
Informed by writings by Yeats and Ronald Schuchard
Composed by Jason Emberton
From materials supplied by Merit Ariane Stephanos

*Others because you did not keep
That deep sworn vow have been friends of mine;
Yet always when I look death in the face,
When I clamber to the heights of sleep,
Or when I grow excited with wine,
Suddenly I meet your face.*

To A Child Dancing in the Wind - الى طفل يرقص في الهواء

From a concept by William Brooks
With a text by W. B. Yeats
Translation by: Nadim Nu'aymah
Informed by writings by Yeats and Ronald Schuchard
Composed by Merit Ariane Stephanos
From materials supplied by Merit Ariane Stephanos

*Dance there upon the shore;
What need have you to care
For wind or water's roar?
And tumble out your hair
That the salt drops have wet;
Being young you have not known
The fool's triumph, nor yet
Love lost as soon as won,
Nor the best labourer dead
And all the sheaves to bind.
What need have you to dread
The monstrous crying of wind?*

Notes

I tried to instil the character of spoken Arabic into my musical readings of the poems. There is a lot of melody in Arabic, it is a very playful language and emotions are often carried on the sleeve. The language, like the culture, is both sensory and sensual. There is occasional room for wide pitch variation, in momentary outbursts of emotion. Letters are often 'savoured' intensely, especially letters signified with a 'shadda', i.e. double letters. There are strict rules as to how to pronounce and set words; certain letters need to be prolonged, while others cannot be lingered on. It is said that your mouth is 'full' when you speak Arabic; some letters, pronounced at the back of the throat or with the whole of the tongue, literally 'fill your mouth'.

To develop my reading of the poems, I experimented with different approaches, intoning the texts either in a sing-song or more spoken manner with implied pitches; I also experimented with moments of word-painting and dramatic declamation. For three of the poems, I chose a particular maqam (mode) to reflect the atmosphere of the poem: the mournful maqam 'Saba' for *A Deep Sworn Vow*, maqam 'Sika' for *Drinking Song* (the root note of this maqam is a 'quarter tone', to evoke a slight feel of 'instability') and the bright, playful yet majestic sound world of maqam 'Rast' (in which the third degree is a 'quarter tone') for *Sweet Dancer*. For *To A Child Dancing in the Wind* I started with the rhythm of the words, following the driving, whirlwind rhythm implied in the language. To work out specific pitches, I followed the melodic contour implied by the language, as well the dramatic/emotional intent of the lines. To determine the rhythm of the words, I explored both a more naturalist spoken pace, as well as accentuating the implied rhythmic feel.

Merit Ariane is a singer and composer specialising in Middle Eastern and Arabic music. Inspired by her German/Egyptian heritage and her initial training as a Western classical singer, Merit draws on Arabic and Western contemporary classical influences in her music and is passionate about exploring a dialogue between both cultures.

Merit's musical interests range from researching ancient Arab Christian chant in Lebanon, a repertoire which she has sung with The Clerks and her ensemble Zanubia, to exploring the boundaries between music and theatre, performing for Shakespeare's Globe and Opera North Resonance. Merit sings with her own ensembles Jaljala and Hjaz, has recorded for the BBC and Channel 4 and lectured at the British Museum. Merit is a professor at the Royal College of Music and is currently studying for a PhD in performance at York University, generously supported by a Jack Lyons scholarship.

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