

Saturday 19th June, 2010

REVIEW OF THE WEEK



World at his fingertips ... Tawadros's oud sound is elegant and earthy.



JOSEPH TAWADROS
The Hour of Separation
(josephhawadros.com)
★★★★★

If Sydney were ever to be blessed with a major non-pop music festival, Joseph Tawadros's extraordinary ensemble would be its ideal culmination. This local/international collaboration would have to go on last, as other bands would hide, strike or resort to drugs rather than try to follow it.

For *The Hour of Separation*

Tawadros and his percussionist brother, James, went to New York and enlisted three of jazz's heavyweights: drummer Jack DeJohnette, guitarist John Abercrombie and bassist John Patitucci. The results should raise the international profile of Sydney's leading player of the oud (a fretless lute) to the same heights as his art.

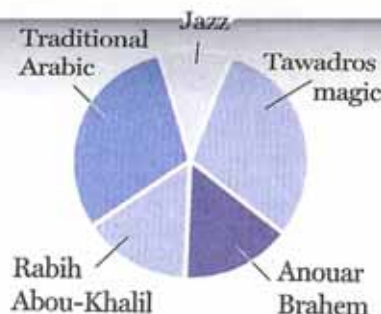
Having collaborated with local jazz musicians, Tawadros knew his compositions welcomed the creativity of improvisers coming from backgrounds other than his own in Arabic music. The trick was to pick the right people to respond not just with virtuosity but with empathy and fire. Tawadros can tick that box.

His oud sound is sumptuous: simultaneously haunting and warm, elegant and earthy. Its fretless nature makes for slippery, sinuous lines on faster runs but also for a profound melancholy when played sparsely, especially in the lower register (as on the gorgeous *Fly Away*). His captivating compositions light inspirational spot-fires beneath everyone's improvisation.

Patitucci disabused many of the notion that he was primarily given to pretty lyricism when he was here three months ago with Wayne Shorter. Then, the visceral intensity of his playing was paramount, as it is here. He does not merely negotiate Tawadros's more fiendish pieces (such as the opening *Phoenix*), he plays them with gusto, making the snaking lines plump and dangerous and soloing with similar vigour.

Abercrombie has always been jazz's most supple guitarist and that quicksilver quality perfectly suits this music. When he uses distortion, the sound is a textural neon light amid the prevailing acoustic glow but it works, harking back to his playing on the late Collin Walcott's magnificent *Cloud Dance*.

Also on that album was DeJohnette, the doyen of jazz drummers, who slots into the off-kilter rhythms with predictable ease, listening hard and detonating accents with his magnificent touch and tones. That he only plays on four of the 15 tracks would be a profound disappointment were it not for James Tawadros's wizardry



ensuring there is no sense of a void. The latter's riq (small tambourine) and bendir (frame drum) are all he needs to have a world of sonic and rhythm options at his fingertips. Sparks fly continually from James's interaction with his brother and the Americans, including a lively duet with DeJohnette.

This, Joseph's seventh album, is his finest – a considerable achievement in itself, given the quality of his recent output. The crowning glory would be to hear this band live. Please, sir/madam, may we have a music festival?
John Shand