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jazz

Release April 28, 2023

MASAA Beit

RABIH LAHOUD: vocals
MARCUS RUST: trumpet, flugelhorn
REENTKO DIRKS: double-neck guitar
DEMIAN KAPPENSTEIN: drums, percussion

Live:

- 03.02. Gütersloh, WDR Jazzpreis Preisträgerkonzert
- 09.03. Essen, Schloss Borbeck : / IRADE
- 10.03. Lörrach, Burghof
- 11.03. Offenburg, Reithalle im Kulturforum
- 23.03. Mindelheim, Jazztage JAZZ ISCH
- 15.04. Köln, Philharmonie
- 20.04. Hamburg, Rolf-Liebermann-Studio
- 21.04. Hamburg, Rolf-Liebermann-Studio
- 20.06. Stuttgart, Musikfest
- 22.06. München, Unterfahrt
- 27.06. Nürnberg, Musikfest ION, Kartäuserkirche

MASAA - Beit

For many years, the quartet Masaa has been fascinating audiences in both East (from Tunisia to Azerbaijan all the way to Izmir, Turkey) and West (from Spain to Germany, where the four musicians are based, to Great Britain). On their latest album to date, *Irade*, the band celebrated the addition of their new member Reentko Dirks, whose guitar mastery added spectacular new facets to the group's sound. In 2021 *Irade* was awarded the German Jazz Prize in the category Vocal Album of the Year, and the Lebanese singer, poet and composer Rabih Lahoud, who lives in Monheim near Cologne, received the *WDR* Jazz Prize as well.

Also the media is enthusiastic about the band. The *FAZ*, for example, praised "the cosmopolitan charisma" and especially emphasized that "the melodic lines and the warm timbre of Rabih Lahoud and Marcus Rust are catchy and interesting at the same time." *NDR Info* stated: "The music has an incredible flow, a sophisticated dramatic structure [...] and captivates with a trumpet and flugelhorn sound of almost unsurpassable closeness and warmth." [Süddeutsche.de](https://www.sueddeutsche.de) concluded: "Music that unites loud and quiet, thoughtful and intense sounds, Orient and Occident in an extraordinary way."

The new, fourth album *Beit* manifests the musical depth of the band, their unique sonic language and the creative will of everyone involved. Just the title track alone seems like a breathtaking roller coaster ride through emotions and subtle musical changes. Initially calm, almost contemplative, with pleasing guitar speckles, delicate strings, sensitive vocals and drifting trumpet sounds, the song changes radically halfway through: over an odd-meter groove, Rabih Lahoud raps cascades of syllables and words, sometimes in direct dialogue with Rust. Also in "Nabat" Lahoud reveals his chanting skills, alternating between accentuated spoken poetry and melodic passages. Songs with tempo and drive, including "Racines" and

"Resistance" sung in French, as well as the sprightly optimistic "Flowers", create contrasts to slower pieces like "Mantra" and "Sukuni", whose intensity results from reduction. In between, there are pieces like "Return" with a strikingly dynamic development.

Rabih Lahoud's captivating vocals, with expressiveness over several octaves up into high registers, consistently form the quartet's gravitational center. Embedded in nuanced arrangements of great dynamics that impress live and on record. The playing of trumpeter Marcus Rust, unmistakably rooted in contemporary jazz, spans from lyrical passages to rhythmic phrasing and exciting dialogues with Lahoud's melismas; Rust's enormous sound spectrum oscillates from onomatopoeic to hushed to radiant (micro-)tones. Drummer Demian Kappenstein supports and inspires with ease, sometimes sensitive, sometimes lurking or energetic. In addition Reentko Dirks creates versatile sounds with his special acoustic guitar. On one of its two necks Dirks plays delicate pickings and vigorous chords that even reach flamenco-like vehemence. The second neck is strung partly with bass strings and partly with double courses, and there are no frets on the upper half of the fingerboard, which makes it easier to play glissandi and quarter tones. This way Dirks comes close to the sound of a double bass and the Arabic lute oud. On *Beit*, Masaa subtly works with string section for the first time, sometimes a bit edgier like in the title piece, sometimes floating or slightly swelling like in "Mantra" and "Lotus", other times more orchestral like in "Freedom Dance".

While Lahoud writes all the lyrics, the compositions are mainly by Rust and Dirks. "But they are more like sketches rather than full scores," says Lahoud, explaining the collective working process, "everyone contributes ideas, and as a result the music never stays the way it was originally notated." To develop the new repertoire together, the quartet retreated to an old house in the region *Bergisches Land* in May 2021. "It's located far away from all urban distractions, so we couldn't do anything else there but our music," Rabih Lahoud laughs.

Many pieces are based on personal experiences that in discourse evoke universal thoughts. The togetherness and mutual understanding from which creativity emerges is a central idea of *Beit* (in English: house, home). "Home is not a particular place or space. It is something that arises primarily on an interpersonal level and is projected onto places and spaces. It fascinates me that through intensive dialogues we can build a kind of house, create a home," says Lahoud, "we need a place for this, where people can be and communicate with each other as equals. And when the music sounds, the new unknown space turns into a familiar environment, a home is created, and through the familiarity and security that comes with it, the possibility to freely express the inner arises."

This time Rabih Lahoud's poetry is limited to Arabic, Lebanese, and French. His associative, metaphorical texts are intentionally ambiguous and always have deeper meaning. "When I say something very explicitly, it closes doors. So I always ask myself in what way I can push for change when I don't like something." That does not only apply on a verbal level, he says, but also on a larger scale, when an inner force is necessary for taking action. Lahoud is familiar with change; after all, he lived in Lebanon for about fifteen years before his family emigrated to Germany. The idea of a certain society still drives him today, Lahoud notes: "When I thought of 'Zeryab', I thought of medieval Andalusia and the way different cultures lived together at that time."

In direct comparison with the previous album *Irade*, the playful interaction especially of Lahoud's vocals and Dirks' oud-like arabesques is now much stronger. "Reentko actually inspires my intonation," Lahoud asserts contentedly. The special aesthetic of oriental music shines through again and again, although it is not ostentatiously put in the spotlight. Some pieces, such as "Zeryab" with the Nahawand mode woven in, are based on odd and complex meters, while "Abun Rahal" is based on a classical Maqam Saba that works with minimal intervals and conveys pain.

"Our third record was a call for change. *Beit* now arrives at a point where it's better," Rabih Lahoud summarizes. Indeed, the new songs do not only seem more philosophical and more profound, but also brighter. If you want, you can consider Masaa in the same league as crossover artists like Dhafer Youssef and Rabih Abou-Khalil. *Beit*'s music is more finely detailed than ever, the interaction even more nuanced. Like a close-up shot that makes many things clearer.

<https://masaa-music.de>