



(LYRCD 7347)

ANCIENT EGYPT

Composed and Performed on Traditional
Near Eastern Instruments By Ali Jihad Racy

Tracks:

1. The Lamentations of Isis (Racy) - 3:07
2. The Land of the Blessed (Racy) - 6:55
3. Hymn to Osiris (Racy) - 5:28
4. The Boat of Millions of Years (Racy) - 4:52
5. The Holy Lotus (Racy) - 3:38
6. Funeral Procession (Racy) - 5:06
7. Hymn for the Sunrise (Racy) - 5:23
8. The Triumph of the Deceased (Racy) - 5:30

This musical tribute to ancient Egypt was originally composed in 1978 for the King Tutankhamun Exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum. It was inspired by the artistry of the ancient treasures and the religious symbolism of The Egyptian Book of the Dead, which suggested the titles of the compositions. Played continuously during the exhibit, the music had a distinctly haunting and meditative effect. The recording is unique in that it is the creation of an accomplished Lebanese-born artist who captures the essence of Near Eastern sound and presents it in a contemporary innovative musical idiom.

Only traditional Near Eastern instruments were used in the making of this recording. The nay, an open-ended reed flute, can be heard throughout either as a solo or a background instrument. On track 6, the nay is replaced by a salamiyyah, a small reed flute, which in Egypt accompanies Sufi songs and dances. The buzuq, a long-necked fretted lute with

metal strings, is also highlighted, for example in a long solo on track 2. Other instruments featured are: the 'ud, a short-necked fretless lute; the tar, a large frame drum; the sajat, small brass finger-cymbals; the mijwiz, a double-clarinnet made from reed; and the mizmar, a type of oboe made from wood.

The music incorporates Near Eastern elements, as shown by the melodic ornamentation and the occasional drone accompaniment. Yet it possesses an abstract and ethereal quality enhanced by an emphasis on nonmetric, free-flowing rhythm and pentatonicism. Reminiscent of Gregorian chant and Chinese and Indonesian melodic systems, pentatonic scales are also found in the musical traditions of Nubia and Sudan, in which vestiges of ancient Egyptian music are believed to exist. The music is characterized by a delicate transparent texture accentuated by the ubiquitous breathy sound of the nay.

The acoustic capabilities of traditional Near Eastern instruments are explored and expanded in this work. Novel tone colors are created through the incorporation of harmonics and the nontraditional grouping of instruments, such as the mijwiz, 'ud, nay, and sajat, which are heard on track 3. Furthermore, unconventional playing techniques are employed. Harp-like effects are achieved by constructing melodies on open, single, instead of double, courses of strings. Drones are produced by bowing the buzuq and the 'ud, traditionally plucked instruments. Trumpet fanfares are simulated by blowing into the stem of the mizmar without the reed.

The music links three different worlds: antiquity, the contemporary Near East, and the electronic age. The artist's unusual facility with his instruments and the infinite possibilities offered by recording technology made this work possible. Through the painstaking process of analog overdubbing, different musical lines were recorded separately and then mixed into a subtly engaging ensemble format. Studio techniques provided the music with ambient sound effects integral to the musical expression.

Ali Jihad Racy is a virtuoso performer, composer, and Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California at Los Angeles. Born in Lebanon, he comes from a well-known family of artists, scholars, and academicians. Racy is internationally recognized for his extraordinary musicianship and his numerous publications, including his award-winning book, *Making Music in the Arab World* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). He is a master of many traditional instruments, particularly the nay, a reed-flute, and the buzuq, a long-necked fretted lute. He has performed extensively in Lebanon and has appeared in major U.S. theaters, such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and the Hollywood Bowl and at international venues, including the Beiteddine Festival in Lebanon and the Commonwealth Institute in London. He has composed and performed for the Kronos Quartet and the Sacramento Symphony Orchestra, as well as for feature and documentary films. His music has been released on a number of CDs, including three Lyrichord albums, *Ancient Egypt*, *Taqasim with Simon Shaheen*, and *Mystical Legacies*, and on a Kronos Quartet release titled *Caravan*. Dr. Racy is the recipient of numerous honors and tributes from a variety of cultural institutions for his outstanding artistry and his continuous work toward greater intercultural understanding and cooperation.

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Lyrichord Discs Inc.

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291
email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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