

Mela Meierhans

Rithaa – Tales of the Hereafter II

Arab lament and mourning rituals

A musical theater with Kamilya Jubran

Cross-cultural music projects are very much en vogue, yet generally tend to end in clichéd exoticism. This cannot be said for projects by Swiss composer *Mela Meierhans*. When Meierhans ventures on such crossing of cultural borders, musical worlds are brought into an electrifying exchange. „Aunt Hänsi“, created in 2006, was the first part of *Mela Meierhans'* Trilogy of the Hereafter on lament. The piece contrasts artificial singing with Swiss yodel – an ear opener for either genre. In „Rithaa – Tales of the Hereafter“ Meierhans takes her project one step further. Not only does she bring together contemporary European and Arab music in this second part of the trilogy, but through her cooperation with Palestinian composer *Kamilya Jubran* also composes a sensitive exchange between Orient and Occident. The basis of this compositorial encounter is made of tone rows derived from the letters of the Arab and Latin alphabet. Since it is still mostly for the women to mourn the dead, the focus of this piece addressing Arab death rituals and laments is on the female voice. On three singers, to be precise: *Kamilya Jubran*, known in the Arab world mainly for her singing, *Leslie Leon*, mezzo-soprano from Berlin, and *Nawal Noah*, an Egyptian professional mourner. The latter, however, will not be present on stage personally but by means of a video projection (by *Sandra Gysi* and *Ahmed Abdel Mohsen*). The three women stand for different sound traditions, in their voices creating a fusion of the Arab and European music worlds. The multifaceted range of sounds of the piece is matched by a babylonian welter of languages. Based on lyrics by contemporary Arab poets, by the legendary pre-Islamic poet Al-Khansa, and by US-American philosopher Judith Butler, the women recite and sing in Arab, German and English. They will be accompanied with music by *ensemble dialogue*. Concept of space by: *Martin Müller* (light/stage setting), *Charlotte Frisch* (choreography), *Thea van Woland* (visual arts). Part 1 and 2 of the Trilogy of the Hereafter were

commissioned by Gare du Nord, Bahnhof für Neue Musik in Basel. The project is realized as a co-production by Gare du Nord and MaerzMusik festival, in cooperation with Pro Helvetia Cairo. „Rithaa – Tales of the Hereafter“ is sponsored by the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) and the Swiss Cultural Foundation Pro Helvetia.