

# Vintage Arab Classics Find New Life

Digital reproductions will celebrate greats, starting with Yusuf Al Manyalawi

A UNIQUE COLLECTION of classical Arab music from artists such as Sayyed Al Safti, Sami Al Shawa, and Amin Al Bouzari will soon be available in digital format for the first time. Lebanese businessman Kamal Kassar, founder of the AMAR Foundation, fought off competition from around the world, including Radio Israel, to purchase the astonishing collection of Egyptian music historian Abd Al-Aziz Anani, which included several thousand 78-rpm records of Egyptian and Syro-Lebanese music, 33-rpms, magnetic bands, books, monographs, and catalogues of recording companies. Virginia Danielson, ethnomusicologist and visiting lecturer at Harvard University says the haul is widely considered to be the most important collection of tarab music in the world.

"I didn't know exactly what was in it, but I knew it was important," Kassar tells Rolling Stone. "I started making an inventory and then discovered that what I had was unique. The core contained recordings from 1903-1935 of which no one has complete collections."

Kassar had never seen himself as a collector before, but rather "someone who just communicated my love for music to people around me." He was now forced to decide what to do with this collection. He came to the conclusion that "I was in possession of the memory of the Middle East and wasn't allowed to keep it for myself."

So he started AMAR, appointing a board that includes musicologists from France, America, Canada, Tunisia and Lebanon. Harvard University offered technical advice as AMAR built its own state-of-the-art recording studio and began the painstaking task of digitizing Kassar's collection (which now comprises 6,500 records and 6,000 hours of recordings on reel), beginning with music recorded in 1903. Besides completing a comprehensive collection of classical Arab music, the project will



also involve the creation of an online radio station. Kassar's ultimate goal, though, is simply to make the music available to the public, and to educate them about it. Last summer, AMAR set up a program for musicians in conjunction with Performa, an arts organization in New York, and the Sharjah Art Foundation, to introduce them to music from the nahda (Egypt's cultural renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century) period. The group included sound artists, composers and musicians from a variety of genres including DJ Spooky, Elliott Sharp and Lukas Ligeti who will all be playing at the Performa Festival in New York on November 5th, showcasing pieces inspired by the tarab music they heard last summer. "These were young musicians who were becoming acquainted with the music for the first time and they were so enthusiastic about this discovery," Kassar says.

AMAR's first release will be a 10-CD boxset marking the 100th anniversary of the death of Egyptian legend Yusuf Al

Manyalawi. The boxset consists of all of his recordings for the Gramophone Company, and includes an Arabic book, and a booklet in French and English. The release will be accompanied by concerts in Cairo, Beirut and Sharjah, with performances from artists including Mustafa Said, Ihab Younes, Darine Jabbour and Fadwa Al Maliki.

Cairo-born Manyalawi is one of the most important figures in the history of tarab music. By the time he made his first recordings with Gramophone, Manyalawi was already a critical and commercial success, having performed in the royal courts of Cairo and Istanbul. At the end of the 19th century, he was the most handsomely paid artist of the time, reportedly earning 100 Egyptian pounds for singing just one number.

AMAR will continue to release boxsets annually - next year it will be the volatile and brilliant singer Abdel Hay Hilmi's turn, with Bouzari, Safti and Shawa to follow, among others.

OLIVIA SNAJIE

## IN THE NEWS

### Guns N' Roses, Joan Jett lead Hall of Fame ballot

Nominations for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's class of 2012 are in - with **Guns N' Roses**, **The Cure**, **Heart**, **Joan**



Axl Rose

**Jett and the Blackhearts**, **Eric B. and Rakim**, the **Spinners**, the **Small Faces**/**Faces**, **Freddy**

**King** and **Rufus** with **Chaka Khan** all hitting the ballot for the first time. Previous nominees **Beastie Boys**, **Donovan** and **Red Hot Chili Peppers** also made the cut. The top vote-getters will be inducted on April 14th, 2012, in Cleveland, home to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum.

### Neil Young promises memoir for 2012

Following recent bestsellers from **Keith Richards** and **Patti Smith**, Young is publishing a memoir tentatively titled *Waging Heavy Peace* next fall. "Writing books fits me like a glove," Young said



Young

in a statement.

"I started and just kept going. That's the way my Daddy used to do it on his old

Underwood up in the attic." Young is writing the book, which will be published by Penguin imprint Blue Rider Press, without a co-author. "We've seen some material - it's enormously impressive," says Blue Rider president David Rosenthal. "He intends to cover a lot of stuff about music, life, love and family."

### Nervecell land Metallica support slot in capital

The local death metallers have been confirmed as the opening act at the metal legends' upcoming Abu Dhabi gig at Yas Arena on October 25th. "This is a dream come true for any band,"



Ribeiro

Nervecell's guitarist **Barney Ribeiro** says. "For our generation, Metallica

are the band that got us into this sort of music. So to play with them is... well, you wouldn't even dream it, you know? We've accomplished a lot in our 11 years as a U.A.E.-based death-metal band, but this is pretty much the pinnacle of our career right here."