

There is the world that we know – or think we know. There is music, that vast, bottomless realm beneath human consciousness. And, off to the side, there is world music, this entity and phenomenon whose very name eludes logic. At root, the term implies a kind of disturbing, what-else-is-new ethnocentricity at work: world music, in some way, can be described as music from outside of the First World, a western perspective on culture existing beyond its prescribed boundaries.

If there's a lesson to be gleaned from the post-McLuhan era global body politic, it is that we are wary villagers, connected by the tentacles of technology and concerns of a world grown increasingly accessible, but unsure of how to deal with the knowledge. With accessibility comes the potential translational confusion. And so, world music takes on an unstoppable life within the musical marketplace. It's a world of great potential liberation, venerable tradition, and semantic befuddlement.

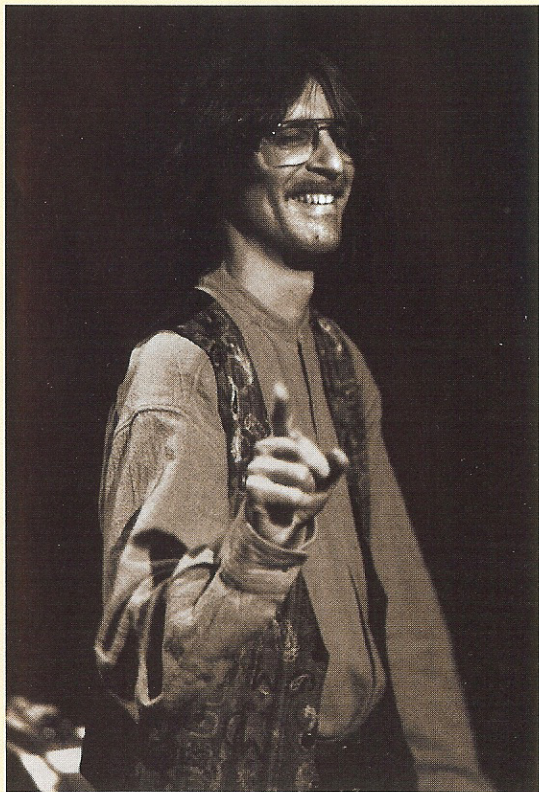
What, then, to do with – and what to make of – the music of Rabih Abou-Khalil, the

Lebanese oud player who settled in Munich in 1978, and who, over the course of now twelve albums of his music, has created a place to call his own?

Within his music, in a parallel universe to the thing we call jazz and the more nebulous thing we call world music, Abou-Khalil takes the oud to new heights – or should we say breadths? To coin a phrase, he wails on it. Guitar lore celebrates those players who combine gymnastic plectrum work and that certain gut-level intensity and rightness; this guy has that quality. Just as difficult to ignore are Abou-Khalil's roots, which reveal themselves all along the way in his music.

Abou-Khalil calls his new album *Odd Times*, but the “odd” is a doppelganger qualifier, a social statement, and an in-joke, all rolled up into one. There's nothing odd about the odd time signatures which casually dot the landscape of this music, anymore than the term “world music” aptly describes the alchemical process by which the elements of the music come together, naturally and without need for apology.





He has found willing and handy allies in the mission. *Odd Times* opens with Howard Levy's chugging harmonica riff, the locomotive breath of Americana, evoking hopeful trains and unrepentant locusts. An old hand at rhythmic mediation, Mark Nauseef navigates his way through the music on drums, abetted by Nabil Khaiat's frame drum parts, creating a kind of sleek rhythmic chassis that never strains under the weight of multi-cultural. Michel Godard's low range urgings and honkings supply a bass presence that links the music to American marching band aesthetics (Sousa, et al.), and also the elephantine brass instrument's rightful place in the earliest jazz ensembles as well as more adventurous new ones. Reduce this band to its essential elements, and you have a globalized ensemble, touching on many traditions while carving out its own, invented as it goes.

Abou-Khalil is, in the end, less concerned with applying to world music attitude than with constructing his own world of music, with its own inner logic. In any art form, that's the ultimate aim: to draw on the tools and language

around the artist, but to manipulate norms and expectations in such a way that we, the audience, are happily thrust into a new dimension. We pay visits to these dimensions, returning to our own "world," refreshed and slightly shaken.

Josef Woodard, Santa Barbara 1997



Wer in der Flut der Informationen die Welt sehen will, muß ihr ein Gesicht erfinden. Sich ein Bild machen von etwas, ist ein Akt der Erkenntnis und der Phantasie und erfordert Distanz. „Man kann heute die Welt nur noch von Punkten aus beobachten, die hinter dem Mond liegen, zum Sehen gehört Distanz, und wie wollen die Leute denn sehen, wenn ihnen die Bilder, die sie beschreiben wollen, die Augen verkleben?“ schrieb Friedrich Dürrenmatt 1952, auf seine Schweizer Provinzialität angesprochen. Alle zeitgenössische Kunst, das hat schon Schiller in einem berühmten Aufsatz erkannt, ist eine der Distanz, des Bewußtseins (er nannte das