

Julian Cowley on
Palestinian hip-hop and
Nipponese twang

Golden Beirut

Various

Out Here CD

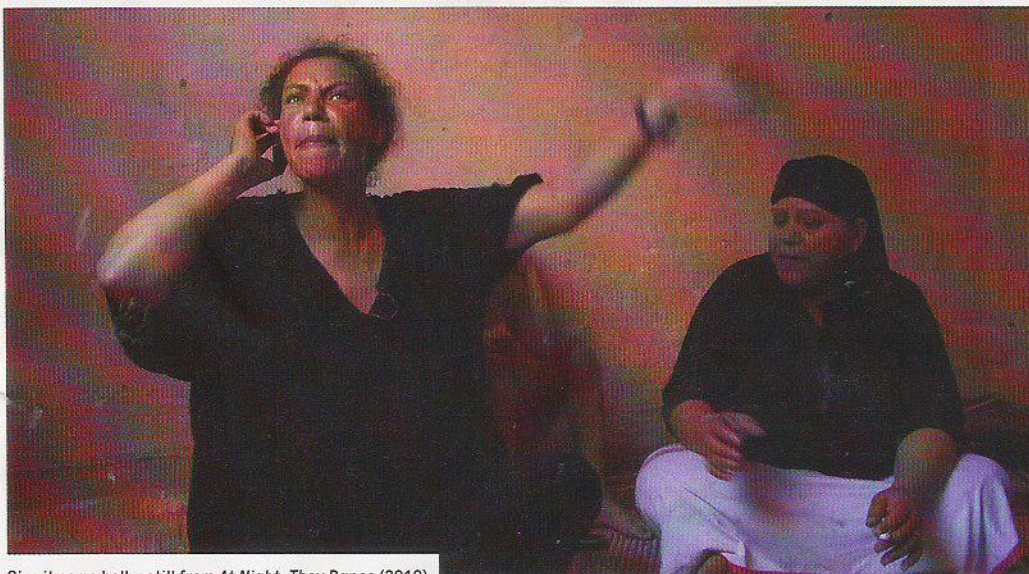
"I can detect in my solo music a strong influence of the war soundscapes of my youth," Lebanese trumpeter Mazen Kerbaj told me in 2005. *Golden Beirut*, 12 songs assembled by Thomas Burkhalter of Norient (see Bites), bears further witness to the ravages of Lebanon's recent history. This selection of indie rock, hip-hop and electro-pop opens faultlines within those commercially sanctioned genres, releasing a gush of irony and spleen. The post-punk guitar thrash and overt verbal violence of "Russian Roulette" by Scrambled Eggs, the incensed eloquence of Palestinian rappers Katibe 5, Praed's caustically revisionist wedding music, Maschrou Leila's satirical folk rock, Lumi's treacherously cute electroclash – the Beirut underground surfaces in multiple guises.

The Norient Film Festival, devoted to music documentaries, is now in its third year. Over four days in January, the Reitschule in Bern, Switzerland will host screenings, club nights and live shows. Broadly the topic is non-Western music, but co-director Michael Spahr is keen to stress they're moving away from the 'classic' take on World Music: "We're focusing more on new urban sounds in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America. We're trying to show how digitalisation and globalisation are bringing music closer to us and how it's all linked together. We've shown a movie about the punk scene in Beijing [*Beijing Bubbles*], or about kuduro dance music in Angola [*It's Hip To Be Angolan*]. *Sleepwalking Through The Mekong* was actually the opening film of our first festival. It's about Americans going to Cambodia, and that was the perfect film for us, to move into this 'Noriental' world."

Spahr is a film maker himself, and ten years ago made a film about the British Asian music scene with music anthropologist Thomas Burkhalter. Burkhalter set up Norient around the same time – it's an online news network for musicians, academics and journalists, offering a webzine, lectures, concerts, club nights and record label, as well as the annual film bonanza. Their *Golden Beirut* CD release is a compilation of tracks from "a young generation of musicians from Beirut that is tired of war, fed up with politics, sick of religious madness, and angry about Euro-American exoticism." Unusually, the Norient website provides plenty of context for this music, for example an essay by Burkhalter titled "Tarek Atoui: Digital Bricolage", which confronts head-on the contradictions in Western perceptions of Middle Eastern musicians, as well as some of those musicians' conflicted relation to their own local traditions. It's a messy, disputatious business, and a long way from the rosy-cheeked, muesli-fuelled approach to World Music familiar elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Norient are gearing up for the January film screenings. "We have themed nights," explains Spahr. "The first night will be about the Arab world: we'll have people talking about the Arab revolution and the meaning of hip-hop in the Arab revolution. Our opening film will be *I Love Hip-hop In Morocco*, which was actually shot a few years ago, but shows how the spirit of the youth is rebelling against the old elites. Also an Egyptian film about belly dancers called *At Night, They Dance*. It's a pretty rough film, actually, maybe too depressing to open the festival, but it shows a reality in the Arab world. The second night is a Balkan night: a film about polyphonic male choirs in Albania, and how they deal with young people who like to listen to Techno and don't want to sing the old songs. Then the film *Shukar Collective* shows Romanian DJs and Roma musicians working together. It's not all happy! Actually it shows how difficult it is to get these two cultures together. Then there's a special dancehall night – first we'll show a film about a dancehall in Northern Ireland, called *Paradiso* [by Alessandro Negrini]. These are mainly Protestant people in a Catholic neighbourhood; in the 1960s they used to have dances that everyone would go to. Then when all the troubles started they built a wall around the whole neighbourhood. It's a heartwarming story about old guys setting up a concert in their old neighbourhood. And the other film is about dancehall in Jamaica, *Hit Me With Music*, by Mike Galloper."

For the closing night, Norient will up sticks across town to the Bee-Flat jazz club, where they will screen *Coz Ov Moni* by Ghana's Fokn Bois. From the trailer it looks hilarious. Spahr agrees: "It's really funny, like a long video clip, playing around with all the African clichés. Then we move back the screen and there will be the Fokn Bois from the movie performing live on the stage." □ Norient Film Festival, Bern Kino In Der Reitschule, 12–15 January. norient.com
Clive Bell



Give it some belly: still from *At Night, They Dance* (2010)