

et Music

Groove to the Wave

Meet Egyptian-American musician Seif Al-Din, whose *Sand and Water* sets you up in an “electro-acoustic Mediterranean lounge”



Seif Al-Din's new album is capable of transporting your mind to where your body can't be. (Courtesy of Seif Al-Din)

By Marwa Helal

If you're worried about being too busy to take a trip to the beach this summer, worry no more. Egyptian-American musician Seif Al-Din's *Sand and Water* will take you there. Inspired by the Mediterranean, the album is deep and moving, the perfect gateway for the soul.

In addition to the crystal blue-green waters of our North Coast, Seif Al-Din cites two other influences; Hossam Ramzy and Rafa El Techuela's fast and dancy Flamenco Arabe and the jazzier Astrakhan Cafe by Anouar Brahem.

“There is a striking beauty, energy, spirit in the sounds of traditional Middle Eastern instruments — transcendental, in my opinion,” Seif Al-Din says. “So I set out to use, capture and recreate that spirit in a way that wasn't totally anything. *Sand and Water* isn't strictly Arabic music or flamenco music or jazz music or, or, or ... It kind of became its own thing. I personally call it electro-acoustic Mediterranean lounge.”

Of all the tracks on the album, “Solitude” is Seif Al-Din's favorite. He describes the vision he used to create it: “A guitar player, an ‘oud player and a violinist walk into a big abandoned warehouse, gather in the middle

(although in no uniform way) and start playing without saying a word to each other. They just play. It's ambient, it's improvisational, it's awkwardly silent at times, and it means everything and nothing at all.”

The album is great accompaniment for just about any activity — driving to the beach or getting through a day at work or background music to an evening with friends. It creates a dreamy atmosphere, playing on the imagination without disrupting whatever it is the listener is engaged in.

At this point in his career, Seif Al-Din has dabbled in many genres — from the electro-acoustic *Sand and Water* to hip-hop with The

Desert Crew, and currently Music without Borders and the R&B of Indian-American artist Miss Meghna — all operating under his independent label Crescent Productions.

“It’s a tough, tough business to get into and a tough business in which to earn a living,” he says. “It takes a lot of hustling and a lot of willingness to take what might seem to be a failure and turn it into a success.” He finds that success in the audience’s reaction. “There’s no feeling quite like seeing the emotion you put into a piece of music reflected in the listener as they experience it.”

Seif Al-Din is already working on *Sand and Water 2*, due out in 2008, and notes, “It won’t necessarily be like its predecessor. It’ll be crazier, more energetic and maybe a bit more electronic.”

But the *Sand and Water* collection isn’t the only thing music lovers can look forward to from this producer. Egypt Today recently listened to a track off of his latest project, *Music without Borders*, co-produced by Crescent Productions and its label partner Gomar Charlton. And let’s just say if *Sand and Water* is like a soothing glass of

chilled water on a hot summer day, *Music without Borders* is its alter ego — so hot, it has the potential to give the term global warming a new, positive meaning.

On the birth of *Music without Borders*, Seif Al-Din says, “In the summer of 2005, we were listening to a lot of different music ranging from Master Rakesh (India) to Fadel Shaker (Lebanon) to Jah Cure (Jamaica). We started experimenting with different ways of sampling some of their voices and music and came up with this sort of remix / mash-up that sounded really fresh.

“We hope to create a new genre of music mash-ups to be played in clubs and on the radio alongside dub, down-tempo and the like. Aside from the technicalities of the music, we hope to bring awareness to as many cultures as we can through the fusion of different parts of the world in one form of music. I guess you could call it musical unity at its finest.”

Though his worldview is obviously multicultural, the influence of his Egyptian roots strongly resonates in the music he creates. “I grew up with the sounds of everything

from Abdel Halim Hafez and Mohamed Abdel-Wahab to Omm Kolthoum and even more baladi music,” he says. “There’s a feeling to that music that’s almost inimitable and irreplaceable — every Egyptian should know that feeling.”

The tools of his musical heritage are never far from his reach. “My tabla sits right next to me in the studio, and I use it just as much as, if not more than, every other sound and instrument.”

It’s not just his melodies that have been touched by Egypt, but his song lyrics too. “Often, I try to write in Arabic then translate into English, depending on the feel I’m going for,” Seif Al-Din admits. “Love songs, for example — we all know how poetic Arabic can be when singing about love. In some cases, it inspires novel and unexpected ways of singing about love in English.” et

Have a listen for yourself at the following websites: *Sand and Water* thecrescent.biz/sandandwater • Seif Al-Din myspace.com/seifaldin • *Music Without Borders* myspace.com/musicwithoutborders

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