

AGENDA

LEBANON

FILM

‘La Dolce Vita’
Metropolis Cinema-Sofil, Achrafiyeh
April 8, 8 pm
+961 3 533 710
“La Lanterna Magica,” Metropolis Cinema’s retrospective of the works of Italian auteur Federico Fellini, continues with this story of a passive journalist’s week in Rome, and his search for both happiness and love that will never come ... (Tickets LL5,000. All films will screen in 35 mm, in Italian with French subtitles).

MUSIC

Irtijal
Masrah Beirut, Ain al-Mreisseh
April 8, 8:30pm
www.irtijal.org
The 10th anniversary edition of Irtijal, the International Festival of Experimental Music in Lebanon, continues (at a different venue) with a series of electric guitar-dominated sets. Dark duo Court-Circuit are followed by local boys Scrambled Eggs and Dutch/British punk icons The EX. (Tickets LL15,000)

Ricky Ford
MOJO Club, Hamra Street
Through 16 April
+961 707 96279;
+961 3 443 033
An evening of soulful American jazz with veteran tenor saxophonist Ricky Ford, accompanied by George Kassiss (piano), Samer Saghir (drums) and Makram Aboulhosn (bass).

Kathryn Farmer
Jazz Lounge, Ain al-Mreisseh
Until April 11
+961 1 367 299
The New York vocalist and pianist, who has worked with such jazz luminaries as Phil Wilson, Ricky Ford, Melvin Sparks and Irene Reid, plays a stint in Beirut.

ART

Ginane Makki Bacho
Art Circle, Hamra
Opening April 8, 6:30 pm
The Beirut-born artist, whose work was seen at the Beirut Art Center’s 2009 exhibition “The Road to Peace,” presents a series of creations from the last two years.

‘I Come and Stand at Every Door’
Zico House, Sanayeh
Through April 19
+961 1 745 092
The self-taught artist Maher Kouraytem unveils a series of new canvases on the tradition of “outsider art.”

‘I Am a Teenager Again’
Ayyam Gallery, Downtown
Until May 26
+961 1 374 450
Syrian painter Khaled Takreti presents a new series of “campy yet sophisticated” canvases, drawing on a number of art traditions in order to create a psychedelic alternate reality.

Just a thought

Happiness is the only sanction of life; where happiness fails, existence remains a mad and lamentable experiment.

George Santayana
(1863 - 1952)
Spanish-American philosopher, poet and novelist

REVIEW

The sound of something moving, invisible

The tenth-anniversary edition of Irtijal opens with singular, dissonant clarity

Jim Quilty
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: Three-movement ensemble performance isn’t itself uncommon. Habitues of upper-crust concert halls may associate the form with the concertos and symphonies of Western “classical” music – where variations spring from the players’ competence and their interpretation of a score somebody else wrote down.

So there was something oddly exciting about the concert in three movements performed in Ain al-Mreisseh Tuesday evening. A separate ensemble performed each component, and, being improvised on an array of instruments, the music was utterly dissimilar, yet the three parts also spoke to one another with a singular, dissonant clarity.

The evening wasn’t programmed this way, yet that’s what emerged from the opening-night concert of Irtijal, the international festival of experimental music in Lebanon.

The opening fusillade in the festival’s tenth-anniversary edition was launched in the intimate confines of Ain al-Mreisseh’s Masrah Beirut – resurrected from dereliction on the eve of its demolition – so place and practice were arrayed in a nice counterpoint.

Counterpoint was a central feature of the opening act, Conca/Doerner/Meyer/Zaven.

Three-quarters of the quartet – Paed Conca (clarinet and guitar), Axel Doerner (trumpet) and Sabina Meyer (voice) – are well-known in the international experimental music circuit. The fourth, pianist Cynthia Zaven, is better known for her composition than her performance.

The four had met as a group for the first time a couple of days before the concert and had had their first rehearsal together some time after that.

Irtijal regulars wouldn’t be surprised by this information – it is a free-improv festival, after all. Some bewilderment did emerge from how accomplished the quartet’s musicianship was, despite having spent



Zaven and Meyer

Photo by Azakir

so little time together.

The quartet’s sound would not be out of place in a concert of “contemporary classical” music. It began with an unassuming sputter from trumpet and clarinet, which, with the aid of the piano, staggered to its feet, as though the notes themselves were exhausted. Vocalising in no discernable language, Meyer’s voice arose with what seemed equal reluctance.

After a few moments, voice and piano began to adhere, reforming into something like consonance, provoking the trumpet to intervene with a complex line of warbling dissonance.

Over the course of the quartet’s four numbers, the tenor of Meyer’s voice ran the gamut from crystalline bel canto to whispers to earthy intonations of Gospel.

Doerner’s trumpet demonstrated equal range, from unstopped broken-steam-pipe hissing, to siren-like wailing, to visceral-sounding blurts and farts – produced with the help of a plunger head over the trumpet bell.

While voice and trumpet continued this virtuosic jostle at centre stage, piano and clarinet remained more circumspect in the wings.

Zaven’s minimalist playing tended to express itself in short, asymmetrical photons of sound. At one point, while Zaven accompanied Meyer in a staggering, wordless lieder, Conca set aside his clarinet in



Doerner and Conca



Kerbaj and Hautzinger

favor of his guitar (played on his lap, a foreign object clattering upon the strings for percussive resonance).

As may be evident by now, such music defeats conventional efforts to depict it. Generally, the more melodic tones of the piano and voice tended to provide (relatively) warm counterpoints to the more discordant trumpet and clarinet/guitar.

Free improv elicits different responses from interested audiences. Some spectators appear delightedly preoccupied with the musicians’ technique. For those able to listen to music without looking, the effect is to cast an ephemeral, shifting sonic landscape directly against the brainpan. In this form, it suggests a smirking antidote to both the image-saturation of pop cultural production and image-obsession of contemporary visual art.

For audience members with their eyes still open, the evening’s second set resembled the first, insofar as one of the performers was a curly-haired, black-clad female pianist.

Magda Mayas’ technique is quite unlike that of Zaven, though, since she is more likely to address the instrument while standing – plucking, pulling or pounding upon the instrument’s strings – than sitting at the keyboard.

Mayas’ regular collaborator is jazz percussionist Tony Buck. He takes a more conventional-looking approach to his instrument, in as much as he sits behind a drum kit and devotes considerable energy to pounding the skins with things. He seldom uses drumsticks, though, preferring a array of bells and hand-held percussion instruments that maximise the percussive bang for the buck.

The hammered, plucked, strummed and attenuated string sounds Mayas conjured up and the array of clicks and bangs Buck demands of his instrument – accompanied by the structural creaks of wood and metal against drum skins – might have made for little but cacophony. The communication between the two performers, though, is so seamless that the result is a

sort of multiply-layered and -textured sound sculpture.

The evening’s headliners, Franz Hautzinger’s Oriental Space, performed last.

The quartet featured Hautzinger and Mazen Kerbaj on trumpets, Sharif Sehnoui on guitar and Helge Hinteregger on electronics.

The trumpeters’ techniques could not be more dissimilar. Hautzinger generated his array of constricted, choked bleeps and squeals in a conventional-looking manner, though the bell of his instrument was so close to the mike that it might have been on the verge of swallowing it.

Kerbaj addresses his instrument in a more irreverent manner. In concert it’s common to see him affix a rubber hose (tipped with a saxophone mouthpiece) where the mouthpiece would be, balance a plastic bowl or a metal ashtray on the end of the horn and make ample use of, mm, fluids.

Sehnoui will sometimes strum the strings of his guitar but he’s more fond of using it as a percussion instrument – wedging a metal ashtray into the strings and tapping various parts of the guitar with chopsticks.

Standing behind a table arrayed with electronics, Hinteregger’s function on stage seemed to be to groove to the (remarkably groove-free) music while generating electronic noises and manipulating the sounds generated by the other three players.

Only later does it become clear that his performative striding-about and face-making is actually making music. A band of microphones strapped around his throat captured the sound of his muscle, bone and throat action, which his machines bent to accompany the ambient whizz-bang of the other players.

It represents an altogether different sort of vocalisation than that demonstrated by Sabina Meyer earlier in the evening. The effect, though, is complementary to that of the evening’s earlier contributors – conjuring up landscapes that can only be heard, peopled with the sounds of something moving, invisible, across it.

INTERVIEW

Mother, son dodge Freud with ink drawings

Matern Boeselager
Special to The Daily Star

BEIRUT: “People always tell me that I have a strange relationship with my mother,” says Mazen Kerbaj. “Already at the age of 9, I asked my mom whether I could exhibit with her. She told me that I would have to work hard.”

It seems Kerbaj has finally managed to gain his mother’s approval. “You and I and the Painted Paper,” now on show at Galerie Janine Rubeiz, has afforded him a chance to show his work alongside that of the woman who gave birth to him.

The show grows from a collaboration between Kerbaj – part of the team of organizers and performers at the ongoing Irtijal experimental music festival – and Laure Ghorayeb. For months, the duo (both now established artists in their own right) joined forces to produce a series of 31 large and small-scale ink drawings, intricate pieces that clearly convey their shared passion for playful experimentation and spontaneity.

Although the idea had been floating since Kerbaj’s 9-year-old request, it was only after several recent attempts at collaboration that mother and son decided they were ready to fill a gallery together.

After the 2006 war, Kerbaj and Ghorayeb exhibited drawings dealing with that catastrophe side by side. In 2007, each produced a self-portrait that was then handed over to be

worked upon by the other. The finished pieces won the Prix du Jury at the Sursock Museum’s “Salon d’Automne.” When their gallerist suggested doing a show together, both felt that there was potential for more.

“In a way, that first cooperation was still too polite,” Kerbaj explains. “I was always afraid I would destroy the specific aspects of her work. This time, I started dealing with our work as if it were mine. If somehow I ruined it, I tore it up without regret.”

Naturally, the two did not always agree. As Ghorayeb recalls, the beginning of their cooperation was not always harmonious. “Mazen was always afraid I would destroy his work by painting over it. All artists are megalomaniacs. They don’t like to recognize that somebody else might be as good as they are.”

The duo did not usually work on the canvasses at the same time. One would start a piece and send it to the other without comment, who then added whatever he saw fit. In this way, a single piece underwent numerous transformations, accumulated new layers of meaning and provoked the occasional fit of rage when one felt that the other had crossed the literal line.

Over time, however, the cooperation between mother and son reached a stage where both felt that they were producing more than a mere addition of each others’ ideas. “Somewhere along the process, Mazen and I learned to recognize when the other outdid

himself,” Ghorayeb recalls. “We urged each other on.”

“It was stimulating,” Kerbaj agrees. “It was not just a combination, but a new thing. I did stuff I could never have done alone,” Kerbaj added.

The drawings reflect this evolution in the dynamics of their alliance. The earlier works, completed over a longer period of time, form elaborate palimpsests that combine peculiarly distorted faces with intricate patterns. While the two artists’ styles are occasionally virtually impossible to disentangle, the overall impression is still that of two craftsmen sharing the space on a canvas between them.

For the later works, the duo was under increased time pressures. The resulting pieces are less carefully worked, but larger and more audacious. It is in these works that the mother-son relationship is explored more explicitly.

One of the paintings, entitled “Histoire de pommes,” (A Tale of Apples) rehashes the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in a series of crudely drawn couples, naked but never touching. The Arabic words, “They ate the apple,” are repeated in each panel. To underline their alienation, Kerbaj drew the faces of a man and a woman with no mouths on each side of the canvas.

Although he emphasizes that it was his mother who first started drawing naked people, he muses that a psychoanalyst might draw the conclusion that he “somehow accomplished an

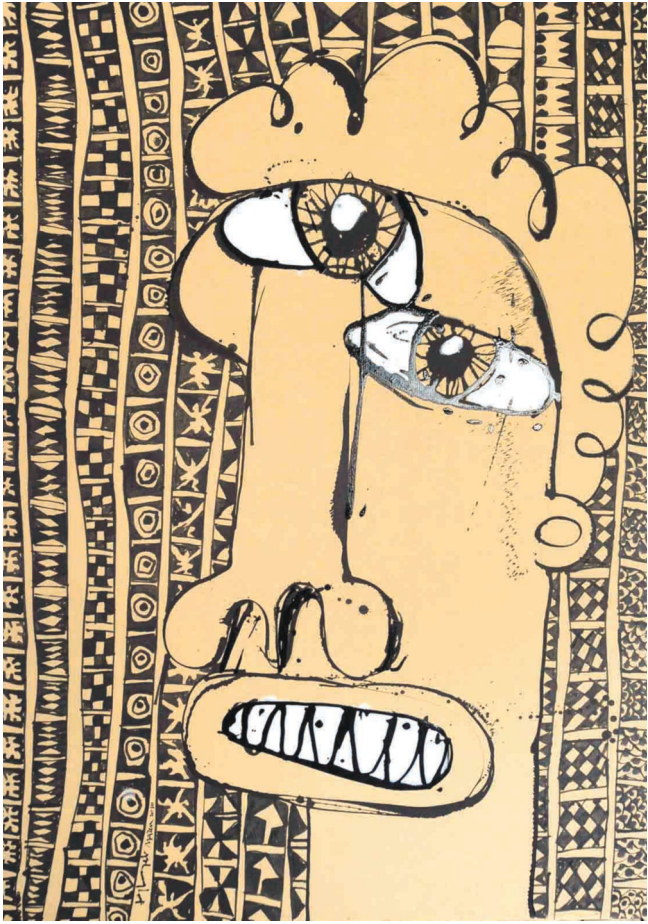
Oedipus complex, on paper.”

In the same vein, a triptych called “Entre soleil et lune” (Between the Sun and the Moon) shows a woman between two figures that clearly represent Kerbaj and his brother. On her front, the words “I am more beautiful than the moon and the moon is more beautiful than the sun” are echoed by both brothers’ anxious question, “Am I the moon, or the sun?”

To construct a textbook Oedipus constellation, he should have drawn his father as the rival, but Kerbaj explains that, visually, his blond brother presented more of a contrast to the equally dark-haired father.

Perhaps even Freud falls short of explaining the complex relationship between mother and son. Whatever one might read into their witty collaboration, aesthetically speaking, Ghorayeb and Kerbaj are artists first.

“You and I and the Painted Paper” is on show at Galerie Janine Rubeiz until April 10. For more details, call +961 1 868 290.



“Walid,” a mixed-media collaboration between mother and son.

HOROSCOPE

Aries (Mar. 21 – April 19)	Taurus (April 20 – May 20)	Gemini (May 21 – June 21)
Life is a little uncomfortable for you today – and not just because you’re a little prone to over-revealing. It’s one of those days when you might have to suppress your feelings.	You can feel intensely jealous sometimes and right now, you have a bad case of it! Maybe you’re right, maybe you’re wrong, but you need to do something extreme to relax.	You are hard to pin down today, though that might become frustrating, even for you. See if you can get your friends or colleagues to listen, rather than trying to turn everything into a dialogue.
Cancer (June 22 – July 22)	Leo (July 23 – Aug. 22)	Virgo (Aug. 23 – Sept. 22)
Try not to take on too much today – especially if you’re surrounded by jokers. Anything could be part of an elaborate practical joke, so use your intuition to avoid the worst of it.	Try to spend a little quality time with your folks today – kids especially, but really anyone who might need you. Your energy is best spent on helping those you love reach their potential.	Someone close – maybe a coworker, but more likely your mate or a family member – needs your full attention. Your listening skills are finely honed today, so you can make them feel heard.
Libra (Sept. 23 – Oct. 22)	Scorpio (Oct. 23 – Nov. 21)	Sagittarius (Nov. 22 – Dec. 21)
Focus on the here and now – especially when it comes to your home and possessions. You may need to take inventory or just reassess everything and chuck what’s not needed.	Your energy is flowing strongly through mind and body today, leading you to take new risks that should pay off for you. Others can see that you have what it takes and should line up behind you.	You need to try to figure out what’s really going on. It may be a good time for a long meditation session, or a conversation with someone who knows you well and is unafraid to tell the truth.
Capricorn (Dec. 22 – Jan. 19)	Aquarius (Jan. 20 – Feb. 18)	Pisces (Feb. 19 – Mar. 20)
You and your friends are feeling considerably more connected now, so make sure you’re in touch. You might have to act as the hub, which is a bit unnatural for you, but works today.	You’re a little concerned about how far your raw ambition can carry you – but you need to remember that you have plenty of talent. It’s a good day for you to shore up your efforts.	See if you can get some assistance with making up your mind today. It may be tough for you to ask the big question, but you should get some help that really resonates with you on a deep level.