



WIN
We have five copies of a Morgenland compilation album to give away. In which city does the festival take place? See p5 for details. Closing date September 12



Left: Iraqi *maqam* singer Hussain Al-Adhami and ensemble. This page, clockwise from top left: Ibrahim Keivo; the St Marien church in Osnabrück; a typical local wine bar; Kurdish singer Aynur with Iranian musician Kayhan Kalhor



Simon Broughton & Henning Pedersen

MORGENLAND FESTIVAL

Simon Broughton visits the pioneering festival in Germany that brings some of the best Middle Eastern musical talent to a small Westphalian town

Osnabrück is a typically small Westphalian town deep in the heart of Germany. An unlikely place to hear top musicians from the Middle East, such as Alim Qasimov from Azerbaijan, Djivan Gasparyan from Armenia and, last year, the wonderful collaboration of Iranian *kamancheh* player Kayhan Kalhor with Turkish Kurdish singer Aynur. But this is what the Morgenland Festival is about – creating an audience for Middle Eastern music and new fusions. It has also branched out, with some of its concerts taking place in nearby Hannover and, this year, it will cross the border into Deventer in Holland.

Morgenland is the quaint old German word for the ‘Orient’ – a bit like the ‘Near East’ in

English. In German it literally means the ‘Land of Tomorrow’ so it carries an implicit hope for a better, more connected world. The festival was started ten years ago by a former music teacher called Michael Dreyer. “You could spend years exploring the music of these *maqam* cultures from the Arab world, Turkey, Iran and Central Asia,” he says. “The importance of Morgenland is in showcasing artists from an area that doesn’t interact so much with Western Europe – and bringing these great musicians together with Western musicians. Germany, after all, is a very musical country,” he laughs.

Morgenland Festival celebrates its tenth edition this September and since 2005 they’ve focused on Iranian, Turkish, Syrian, Iraqi and

Kurdish music. Last year’s festival opened with singer Hussain Al-Adhami performing Iraqi *maqam* with a traditional six-piece ensemble in the St Marien church in the centre of Osnabrück. I loved hearing what sounded like a nostalgic song about Baghdad sung in this reverberant acoustic in front of a 16th-century altarpiece. At the end of his performance, Al-Adhami was given carnations and roses. He tore the petals off the roses and sprinkled them over the audience. Part two included Iraqi and Iranian musicians performing with the very multicultural Morgenland Chamber Orchestra in arrangements of music by the Iraqi-Jewish composer Saleh Al-Kuwaity and others. The discussions with the musicians in the old timber wine bars and beer houses of Osnabrück afterwards reveal what nonsense many of the ethnic and religious divisions are.

One of the most impressive achievements of Morgenland has been the discovery of new musicians and the release of good recordings of them on the Dreyer Gaido label, set up by the festival’s director. Foremost among the Morgenland discoveries is Syrian singer Ibrahim Keivo. He’s what the much-hyped Omar Souleyman should be. A dynamic and charismatic presence on stage, Keivo may not have the *keffiyeh* (headdress) and shades,

but he does have a huge following among the diverse communities in Syria.

“I met him first in Damascus in 2008,” says Dreyer, “and was amazed by his ability and agility on stage and his impact on the audience. I travelled with him across Syria in 2009 in the winter, when it was cold and windy, till we arrived in Al-Hasakah in the north-east, an area that still has a mixture of ethnicities. Keivo is descended from Armenians, but was brought up by Kurds and sings in the languages of all Syria’s communities. He is what Syria could be.”

I saw Keivo perform with German radio’s NDR Big Band in Hannover, when he stole the show, leaping up and down with his *buzuq* (lute) in a black silk shirt. He got up to dance to the fabulous clarinet of Kinan Azmeh, also from Syria, and whipped up the jazz orchestra to crazy speeds before pulling out a handkerchief to mop his brow. I would love to see him do a solo show. He’s clearly one to watch and, incredibly, is still based in Syria.

Last year there was also the premiere screening of a film about the Uyghur rock band Qeti, who performed at Morgenland in 2010 and released an album last year (reviewed in #94). The film, by Muqaddas Mijit, tells the quirky story of lead singer

Perhat Khaliq and his band getting together in Urumqi and trying to start a rock festival in Chinese Xinjiang. This was a direct result of the Morgenland experience.

But perhaps the most impressive achievement of Morgenland was last year’s spin-off festival in Erbil, in Iraqi Kurdistan. This is where the premiere of the Kayhan Kalhor and Aynur performance took place last August, but it deserves to be seen in concert halls across the world. It’s what the ambition of Morgenland is all about. One translator in Erbil put it this way: “As a young Iraqi living with conflict everyday in Baghdad, I believe the future lies in peace and young people playing together. Standing and playing together on stage is promoting ideas of peace and harmony for all people and all nations.”

Kalhor, Aynur and Qeti are among the artists returning for the festival’s tenth edition.

The most impressive achievement of Morgenland was the spin-off in Erbil, in Iraqi Kurdistan

But a new name is the legendary klezmer clarinetist Giora Feidman. His appearance ties in with the other good reason to visit Osnabrück – the museum (designed by Polish architect Daniel Libeskind) devoted to the brilliant painter Felix Nussbaum. Born into a Jewish family in Osnabrück, Nussbaum moved to Brussels when the Nazis came to power. In 1940 he was sent to a French prison camp, managed to escape and then lived in hiding in Brussels with his wife until they were discovered in 1944 and sent to their deaths in Auschwitz. His work is a powerful testament of this period – with the *Triumph of Death*, one of his last works, being a clarinet-dance macabre in a devastated city.

I’m sure the concert of Giora Feidman with Syrian clarinetist Kinan Azmeh will be totally life-enhancing and an intriguing meeting of styles. It will surely demonstrate the seductive and healing power of music. Maybe it will also evoke the story of another notable musical visitor, who once entranced the young population of Hamelin (Hameln) just down the road. ♦

+ DATES The tenth Morgenland Festival will be September 19-30 2014
+ ONLINE www.morgenland-festival.com