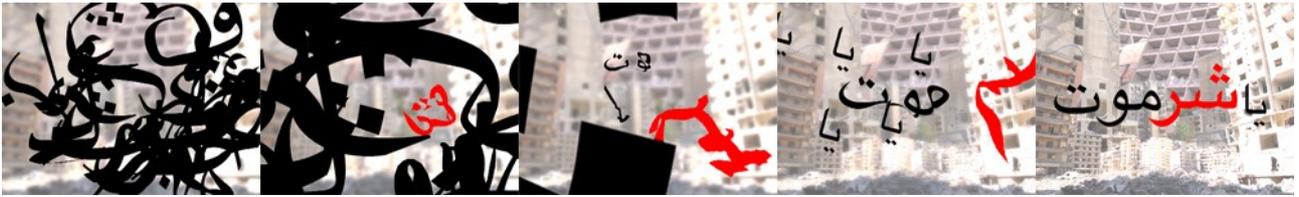


# يا شر موت

YA SHARR MOUT



**An audio-visual performance by Mahmoud Turkmani  
with texts by Nadia Tuéni and visuals by Michael Spahr**



'Ya Sharr Mout (means 'oh, evil, die' or 'son of a bitch' depending on the pronunciation) is an audio-visual performance by the Swiss Lebanese composer and musician Mahmoud Turkmani. On October 9th, 2007, Ya Sharr Mout was first performed at the Al-Madina Theatre in Beirut with a group of six musicians and one visual jockey (VJ).

'This project deals with the question about the translatableness of phenomena of life (language) into other phenomena (music and visuals). It is an attempt to translate words into pictures and to translate music into language and, finally, to connect both - music and words - by visual texts and theatrical production into a new unit. The characteristic of a sound can be expressed by the fact that I put it into words, space, picture and thereby reinvent it (by giving it a new meaning)', says the Lebanese composer and musician Mahmoud Turkmani about 'Ya Sharr Mout'.

He explains: 'The basic idea emerged from a very personal experience. I have tried to analyse and to write words which express the topic taboo in the Arabic language in a cancer-like way or backwards. Thus I came upon an amazing phenomenon: If the letters of a word are written backwards (or from the word centre backwards), then they invent themselves again and again and there are astonishing results (e.g. the sense of a word turns into its contrary/antonym).'

'I limited myself to words, which touch taboos and restrictions and which leave a lot of open questions. The visualisation of these words can be understood by an Arabic as well as a Non-Arabic audience without translation.'

Mahmoud Turkmani began to write compositions in a similar system as he played around with words. He also recycled some of his older compositions in that system, for instance playing sounds backwards or exchanging the order of notes.

During this process Mahmoud Turkmani came across the poems by Nadia Tuéni. He was impressed by her critical and sensitive look at Lebanon, especially the way she was dealing with the Lebanese civil war. 'Her words are expressing lots of my thoughts. I am amazed by the beautiful way she is saying so much with so few words', says Mahmoud Turkmani. Therefore he included texts from the book 'Sentimental Archives of a War in Lebanon' in 'Ya Sharr Mout' and wrote a vocal composition of the poetry of Nadia Tuéni.

To realise the visual part of the project the composer and musician Mahmoud Turkmani teamed up with Swiss video artist, film maker and visual jockey Michael Spahr (VJ Rhaps). A VJ manipulates (audio-) visual content in real-time and interactively with other artists. He creates unique movie collages, so called 'visuals', by mixing images from computers, DVD players, cameras and other video sources. These visuals are projected on a screen during the performance. The VJ is part of the ensemble, which performs 'Ya Sharr Mout'. He controls videos and noises with a turntable.

Mahmoud Turkmani and Michael Spahr started to work together at an early stage of the project. They started to create animations with Arab letters and words. On a trip to Lebanon they gathered footage and noises, which are also processed for the performance.

Mahmoud Turkmani interviewed several well-known writers and artists (Alawiya Sobh, Elias Khoury, Rana Eid, Rabih Mroué), discussed taboos with them and asked them to play with words. Some extracts of these interviews are included in 'Ya Sharr Mout'.

When Mahmoud Turkmani and Michael Spahr started working together, Spahr knew hardly any words in Arabic. He says: 'As a Non-Arabic speaker I started to experiment with Arab words in a very visual way. I started feeling like a "digital calligrapher" when I began toying around with the words Mahmoud Turkmani had given me.'

The performance of 'Ya Sharr Mout' consists of composed pieces and of improvisational parts. In the dramatisation the importance of music and moving images is constantly shifting. At the same time they are closely knit together so you never know if you are looking at a silent movie with live music or at a visualisation of a musical composition.

In October 2007 the world premiere in Beirut was held in front of an enthusiastic crowd. In August and September 2008 'Ya Sharr Mout' was performed at sold out Swiss festivals Theaterspektakel Zurich, Les Jardins Musicaux Cernier and Biennale Bern. The acclaimed Swiss film director Sabine Gisiger (Dschoint Ventschr, Swiss Broadcast Corporation DRS) has made a documentary movie about the project 'Ya Sharr Mout' and the life of Mahmoud Turkmani. The film was shown on Swiss TV (Klanghotel) in September 2008. In 2010 the film won the Award for Best Portrait at the International Festival of Films on Art in Montréal (Canada). The CD (Live in Beirut 2007)/ DVD (documentary and concert film) 'Ya Sharr Mout' was released in October 2008 on the German Label Enja Records.



## Ensemble

Composition/oud/guitar: Mahmoud Turkmani (Lebanon/Switzerland)

VJ/video turntableist: Michael Spahr (Switzerland)

Vocals: Rehab Metawee (Egypt) or Nisreen Hmaidan (Lebanon)

Qanoun: Saber Abdel Sattar (Egypt)

Violin: Khaled Oweida (Egypt)

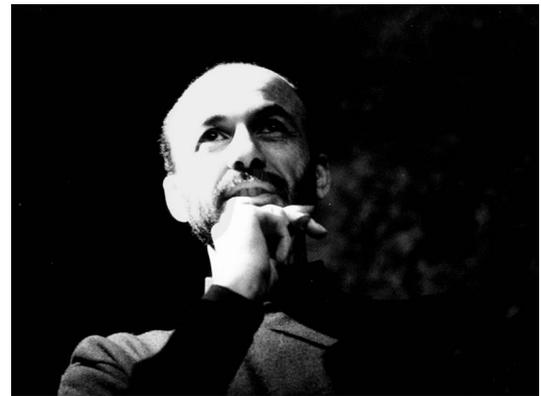
Percussion: Amr Moustafa (Egypt)

Double bass: Ahmad Osman (Egypt)



## Mahmoud Turkmani

The innovative guitarist, composer and oud player Mahmoud Turkmani is considered as a renovator and bridge-builder between contemporary Western-classical and Arabic-traditional music. Mahmoud Turkmani who was born in 1964 in Northern Lebanon studied from 1984 to 1989 classical guitar and composition at the Moscow Academy for Music. After his graduation he continued his studies at Oscar Ghiglia (1989/90, Conservatory of Basle, Switzerland), Juan Carmona (1991/92, Flamenco Programme, Andalusia) and Stephan Schmidt (1994-97, Conservatory of Berne, Switzerland).



Stephan Schmidt encouraged him to develop his own musical language. It took Mahmoud Turkmani several years to devise his own musical world which, based on his own multicultural background, found its unique form and expressiveness. At present, Mahmoud Turkmani teaches classical guitar and oud at the Conservatory of Berne. He is the founder of the guitar quartet "Ludus" which has issued a compact disc ("Nuqta") with ENJA Records, Munich/Germany ([www.enjarecords.com](http://www.enjarecords.com)) in December 1999. Further discs were released by ENJA Records in 2002 /"Fayka", 2004 /"Zakira" and 2008 /"Ya Sharr Mout".

Mahmoud Turkmani performs as a soloist (solo, duo, trio etc.) in various European cities and in Arab countries. Since 1994 Mahmoud Turkmani has composed works for well-known artists and ensembles such as Keyvan Chemirani, Barry Guy, Patricia Kopatchinskaya, Conrad Steinmann, Matthias Ziegler, the Trio Aspekte, the Erato String Quartet, the Eos Guitar Quartet, the Berne Symphony Orchestra and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra. In the multimedial project "Ya Sharr Mout" Mahmoud Turkmani experiments with video, word and sound.

Currently, he is working on a composition about the book "Liliths Return" by the Lebanese writer Joumana Haddad.

(more information: [www.mahmoudturkmani.com](http://www.mahmoudturkmani.com))

## Michael Spahr (VJ Rhaps)

Michael Spahr (VJ Rhaps) is an artist, film maker and historian.

Michael Spahr was born in 1973 in Bern (Switzerland). From 1986 until 1993 he went to Gymnasium Bern-Neufeld (middle and high school). In 1989/90 he did a foreign exchange year at the Fort Bragg High School in California, USA. He studied history, philosophy and media science at the University of Bern and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Master of Arts, 1998). During and after his studies he took classes in audio-visual art and filmmaking (Algemeen Cultureel Centrum Amstelveen, film history at the University of Amsterdam, Hardware Hacking Workshop HKB Bern). Since 1998 he works professionally with audio-visual media. He worked as camera man, editor, assistant director, producer and videojournalist for Dutch and Swiss TV stations (Endemol, Kanaal7, RTL5, Telebärn). Since 2003 he is an independent artist and filmmaker.



As an artist he creates interactive film backdrops for theatre, produces live visuals for music acts and makes moving pictures for literary and art performances. He turns his video art ("Moving Stills") into so-called "Frozen Films" (high resolution prints). As filmmaker he directed and produced several documentary films, short fiction, animation movies, experimental web videos and music video clips. As a promoter he worked at Reitschule and PROGR Bern. From 2004 until 2006 he worked at the multimedia agency Optickle, which he co-founded. 2007 he travelled around the world.

At the moment he works on the project "GLOBOCITY", which has been awarded with the KUNSTSCHUB prize by Atelier Worb. He collaborates with the Lebanese composer and musician Mahmoud Turkmani on the audio-visual performance „Ya Sharr Mout“ („Oh, Evil, Die“/“Son of a bitch“) and with Thomas Burkhalter and Simon Grab on the scientific multimedia art performance „Sonic Traces From the Arab World“. He is a member of the international music network *norient* and the space rock band Blues Horror Brigade.

Michael Spahr lives and works in Bern, Switzerland.

(more information: [www.rhaps.com](http://www.rhaps.com))

## Nadia Tuéni

Nadia Tuéni (1935-1983) was the author of numerous volumes of poetry and received the Order of La Pleiade, the Prix Said Akl, and other awards. The languages of Rimbaud, Lautréamont and surrealist poetry have had a decisive influence on Tuéni's work. But she also owes a great debt on the Arabic side to the Lebanese avant-garde poets who, in turn, influenced by surrealism contributed to what has been called 'a revolution of poetic language.' Her work merges with the poetic and political landscape of her country. Like many Lebanese writers, Tuéni was active in political circles, particularly after the war in 1967.



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