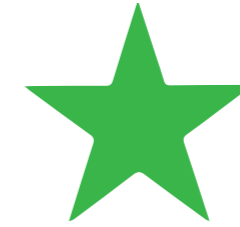




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# THE OMNI- PRESENCE OF OMAR SOULEYMAN

Interview By Erkan Affan



Omar Souleyman has taken the music world by storm with his eclectic mix of musical production and vocals, with Ashuri, Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish melodies and moods all finding their place within his growing repertoire, reflecting the plurality of Levantine heritage and projecting it authentically onto a global stage. He stands with just a few other contemporary artists from the region who have enjoyed mass mainstream attention in Europe and North America — perhaps most notably alongside Lebanese sensations Mashrou' Leila. Of course, this is not reflective of the talent that has been emerging from the region for decades. Rather, it is emblematic of the difficulty for Arab artists to break the European and North American music scenes and their glass ceilings in pursuit of a global audience.

So who exactly is the person under the keffiyeh and Aviator sunglasses? Omar Souleyman was born in the

north-eastern region of Syria, in the village of Tell Tamer close to the border with Turkey (where he relocated to after the start of the devastating conflict in his home country). With a discography and collaborative record stretching ten years and including talents such as Björk, Modeselektor and Kieran Hebden (aka Four Tet), Souleyman consistently finds himself at the centre of detailed reviews and editorials obsessing over his character as he talks on topics such as home and belonging, and steals the hearts of international journalists, musicians and critics alike.

It would be safe to say in 2019, that Omar Souleyman — part time wedding singer, part time international musical star, and full time family man — has cemented himself as a cultural emblem who continues to craft space for forms of music due for recognition on an international stage.



**How would you describe your music?**

My music is very traditional. It is the music of our land, our villages, and our people. It truly is the people's music. It has been passed on and nurtured for a long time, but throughout generations it has changed very little in its message and style.

**Do you feel that this description changes when speaking to a Western audience in comparison to an Arabic one?**

I don't think so. I try to deliver the best of what my people's music and tradition demands of me. Some Arabs have different feelings for it, or it is closer to them. But the Western audience also experiences it with a lot of passion.

**How do audiences react to your music in the Arabic speaking world? Is it different from the rest of the world?**

It really depends where it is. Not all Arabs are close to my kind of music.

**I saw an interview in which Kieran Hebden (aka Four Tet) mentioned that his role in your music was to capture your sound and get it mixed right. He said your music was already fully formed and he wouldn't want to get involved**

**beyond that. How have your experiences been working with non-Arabic producers such as Four Tet in your career?**

This is true and that is exactly how it was. Kieran came to the studio with us and made very good mixes. For the first time, he gave my music a sound that I had always dreamed of it having. I had never worked with any producer before — I always just went out and sang on my own. I'm happy to know Kieran and thankful for what he brought to my music.

**Are there any future collaborations you would like to see between other artists and yourself?**

I prefer to keep my music as original as possible. So no, not at the moment. My new album will have some remixes as always.

**Where is somewhere you have never visited, but would love to perform in?**

I've never been to India, so that's on my list.

**Finally, what would you say for young musicians and artists wanting to follow in your footsteps?**

My story is a combination of good fortune, hard work, the visions of people who are close to me, and so many other things. I'm not sure it's possible to follow in my exact footsteps.









