

# Sulayma

## Technical Data

Video HD – 7'24 – Mixed Technique. Arabic with English or French subtitles.  
Sulayma (1959), written by Naufal Ilyas, composed by Antoine Zabita and performed Zakia Hamdan.

## Dialogue (my translation)

*We say that you raised all artists,*  
- Yes

- *we can say that they are all like your children.*  
- Yes

- *You started your career as an actress for the theatre, didn't you?*  
- Yes

- *But we wonder what made you most famous? Being a dancer, a singer, an actress or a theatre director?*

- *When we received Sabah the great singer, she said something we considered strange, yet plausible.*

*She said that for an artist to reach a peak, she shouldn't mix between her feelings and her career.*

*And you stayed at the top for 40 years, didn't you?*  
*Do you agree with what Sabah said?*

- *There was no man for whom you would've abandoned glory and celebrity only to be his wife?*

*"I see that Salma has betrayed me unscrupulously When only yesterday she was of me and in me As if I have not licked her lips  
As if we have not fused and syncked*

*As if I haven't nuzzled with her and hasn't asked more of me As if the night hasn't accepted and told  
Love stories about her and me*

*Sulayma ...*

*You whom I adored after God  
In moments of sadness and of hope Tomorrow when I will die  
And you will sway about the cemeteries, Stand next to my tomb and say  
"I have for long been of you, and you of me, I betrayed you in life without any care  
And I betrayed the sermon of love  
While you were always there  
This is the temperament of outcast beauty Treason is our lineal, so don't blame me"*

## Synopsis

Ara Salma is a romantic monologue written by a man and sung by a woman. In this monologue the poet cries Salma, the unforgettable lover that has betrayed him. When Zakia Hamdan (a woman) sings the betrayal of Salma (another woman) the meaning becomes confusing. Is homosexuality involved? Or did the man poet use a female voice as a vehicle? And if so, why would he do so? Several hypotheses can be suggested and assumed. In my video, I choose to go beyond stories of love and betrayal between a man and woman or between two women, to carry the metaphor further. In this video Salma is not the lost lover

anymore but becomes a former well-known diva that has been betrayed by time. The actress who was adored by the public in the former days, has aged and been forgotten. Today, she looks at herself in the mirror and does not recognize her own image. Time has betrayed her, age has betrayed her, the image and aura of the young actress has betrayed her...

By referring to this new subtext, the lyrics induce new images. And ambiances of glamour, vanity, myth, memory etc. emerge.

## **Statement**

The short Arabic song (in contrast with the long form of the Wasla) appeared in Cairo in the late twenties. The arrival of the cafés-concerts and the talking pictures, that popularized even more the music, made those short forms ever more necessary. Songs had to fit on one disc to be recorded and sold. This practice then expanded to Damascus, Baghdad and later Beirut. The Arab popular song is therefore inseparable from Egyptian films. Movies were the best medium to commercially diffuse these masterpieces. A movie that sold well, had to have a star singer in it. Just like any singer who dreamt of success, had to win a contract at Cairowood.

The "filmed music" (al Musiqua al taswiriya) is the term used to describe the song that played during a movie. Generally, the song was a kind of break where we saw the performer do what he does best, ie sing (often in playback). One can almost say that once the song started, the film narration stopped and the concert began. When the song ended, the plot of the film resumed.

The acting performance of these singers/actors, with few exceptions, varied from average to very poor performance. Few people like Abdel Wahab and Um Kulthum realized they were too bad actors and focused solely on music.

The visual world that is collectively associated with the songs of this period is usually simple: a nice camera frame, beautiful lighting, a singer that swayed elegantly, sometimes an orchestra and very often the inevitable oriental dancer. Although Ara Salma was never used in a film, I chose to interpret it visually, because of its daring lyrics and enchanting melody and interpretation.

As an artist and filmmaker, I want to break the visual clichés and confront these musical gems of the 40's and 60's with reinvented images.

## **End Credits**

A Film by **Shirin Abu Shaqra**  
Visual Effects & Compositing **Thomas Duquet**

Produced by **Fuad Kurani & Shirin 'Abali**  
Coproduced by **Galerie Janine Rubeiz**  
With the support of **Le Fresnoy, Studio National des Arts Contemporain**

With **Caroline Hatem**  
Lyrics by **Nawfal Elias**  
Music by **Khaled Abu al Nasr Singer Zakia Hamdan**

Director of Photography **Sarah Blum**

Assistant DOP **Etienne Blanchard**

Grip **Theo Vanstraevel**

Gaffer **Laetitia Duvert**

Styling **Isabelle Baudry**

Makeup Artist **Pierre Francois Carasso**

Calligrapher **Samir Sayegh**

From the Archives Voices of  
**Layla Rustum & Badi'a Masabni**  
Videos

**Loie Fuller**

**Umm Kulthum**, Sirt al Hobb

**Salah Abu Saif**, Cairo 30

**Paintings**

Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Fall of the Rebel Angels Lucas van Valckenborch, Frühlingslandschaft-Mai

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