

# Karnak

Friday, October 19, 2001, 8 pm  
Zellerbach Hall

André Abujamra, vocals and guitar  
Marcos Bowie, vocals and trumpet  
Hugo Hori, vocals, saxophone, and flute  
Juliano Beccari, keyboard  
Edu Cabello, guitar  
Mano Bap, bass  
Kuki Stolarski, drums

Tonight's program will be announced from the stage  
and includes one intermission.

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and the Zellerbach Family Fund for their generous support.

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Karnak was founded in 1992 and is Brazil's most eclectic musical export. The São Paulo-based band's inimitable sound is a virtuosic and multi-textured blend of Brazilian, North American, Caribbean, European, African, and Middle Eastern influences. This gives rise to songs that successfully throw a faux-Russian opera rave at a bossa-nova, or turn an overt reference to Prokofiev into a Celtic-inflected, Afro-pop groove.

In *The New York Times*, Neil Strauss characterized Karnak's songs as filled with sudden changes and multiple layers of meaning. The group is not so different from its founder, André Abujamra, who says, "I like information. I'm a folder man . . . like folders on the Macintosh computer. I'm a folder with many folders inside. I have many folders inside those folders, and then those folders have many folders."

Under Abujamra's direction, the group combines Native American flute with classical harpsichord, and Arabic melodies with samba. The cross-pollination goes on to include swing, maracatu, punk, township jive, Tuvan throat singing, rap, Baroque, and techno to create compositions that prize expression over identity.

Abujamra, at the time an accomplished film score composer, founded the band after experiencing what he calls a transcendental epiphany at the temple of Karnak in Luxor, Egypt. Success was nearly immediate for the new band, as Brazilian critics voted Karnak's self-titled debut CD one of the 15 most important Brazilian albums of the past 30 years. Typical of Karnak's trademark eclecticism, this initial CD featured music that bounced from Arabic reggae, to African samba, to soaring operatic vocals, to Russian folk funk—all sung in a mix of Portuguese, English, Arabic, and a unique, international type of Babel.

The band is the art-rock peer of several contemporary Brazilian musicians who value transcending traditional cultural borders. Such eclecticism came naturally to Abujamra, who says, "My influence is the city where we live, São Paulo . . . the most mixed city in Brazil: there are Japanese, Portuguese, Italian, and Arabic influences. Then we get the axé music from Salvador in the north, the samba music from Rio, and I used to listen to Kiss, Queen, Madonna, Frank Zappa, and Brazilian guys like Caetano Veloso and Hermeto Pascoal. So in Karnak, we aren't mixing. It's already been mixed in our heads for us."

Abujamra credits Spike Jones and Les Luthiers, an Argentine group that uses homemade instruments, as some of his original influences. He also says that in founding the band, he wanted to explore some of his favorite sounds, which include explosions, backing vocals, and orchestral music.

But the band's influences move far beyond the audible. Says Abujamra, "Many of our influences don't come from music. There's an old woman who lives in a very small village near Olinda. She doesn't have any teeth, and she smiles and says hi. That's our influence."

Karnak's high spirits in performance and recordings transcend more than cultural boundaries. The happy music has a tendency to obscure sadness and tragedy, according to Strauss in *The New York Times*. He writes, "If the band is

funny, it is funny like the mime Marcel Marceau, using the mask of a clown to better delineate tragedy.” Abujamra says of the group’s lyrics, “If you listen to the simple poetry, we are sad people. We’re not funny. We don’t think funny stuff. We sing of very painful things.”

It is a message that is understood universally. In 1998, Karnak headlined the Montreal Jazz Festival and was the final act in the five-day Brazilian Music Festival at New York City’s Summerstage. Since the release of its third recording, the band has performed at Brazilfest in Paris and has been touring throughout Brazil, including an appearance at the new music festival at the Espaco Cultural Sergio Porto in Rio de Janeiro. Strauss, covering the festival for The New York Times, called Karnak, “one of the best bands to emerge from Brazil in the last decade.”

Karnak’s performance at Zellerbach Hall is part of its California debut. The group’s third recording, *Estamos Adorando Tokio* (“We Are Loving Tokyo”), is available from Net Records ([www.netrecords.com.er](http://www.netrecords.com.er)).

For more information, visit Karnak’s website at [www.karnak.com.br](http://www.karnak.com.br)