

life as is

الحياة كما هي

如韻人生

*The Blending  
of Ancient Souls  
from Syria and China*

عصام رافع Issam Rafea, عود Oud

高虹 Gao Hong, 琵琶 Pipa

1. Walking the Distance 4:11

سِير المسافات  
紅葉舞歸程

2. Summer Rain 3:42

مطر صيفي  
仲夏急雨

3. Undercurrent 3:23

وضع راهن  
靜水流深

4. Up and Down 3:55

هيك و هيك  
逐春風

5. Hidden Dance 6:42

رقصة في الخفاء  
弦語思舞

6. Life As Is 5:50

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7. Homesick 4:04

الغربة  
思鄉

8. Chasing Butterflies 4:26

ملاحقة الفراشات  
踏弦尋蝶

9. Chance Encounter 6:04

تلاقي الصدَف  
偶遇

10. Heavy Heart 4:38

قلب مُثقل  
悠悠我心

11. Childhood 3:22

الطفولة  
童趣

12. Short Film 5:27

فيلم قصير  
浮生剪影

-55:44-

Improvisations by Issam Rafea, Syrian oud, and Gao Hong, Chinese pipa

Issam Rafea and Gao Hong met in the spring of 2017 at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, where Gao Hong teaches and directs the Carleton Global Music Ensemble. Issam was an artist-in-residence during the spring term, and Gao Hong invited him to teach her students about Arabic music. At the end of the term, she suggested they go into a studio to record some improvisations just for fun. To their surprise and delight, they immediately bonded as soon as they started to play. Their improvisations were so cohesive that it seemed as if they had worked together for years. They recorded in one long session that went from early afternoon through late evening. They played without any rehearsal (besides each bringing to the session a lifetime of listening, instrumental mastery, and a passion for communication), and completed each track in a single take. Of the 28 tracks they laid down, 12 were selected for this album.

Both artists come from lands going through political strife — Issam Rafea living through the recent war in Syria, and Gao Hong growing up during the Cultural Revolution. Now, they continue to pursue their musical visions in the United States. They both are performers and composers and love to improvise, just like they have had to navigate their lives to survive. They both use their hearts to play music, and both believe that music needs to come from their souls and deepest feelings. Hence the title — *Life As Is: The Blending of Ancient Souls from Syria and China*.

*Life As Is* is a reflection of both of their lives. It is their life stories, as reflected in the track titles. Both of them “Walking the Distance” to America to follow their dreams. They recorded their music on a rainy summer day, and even though they didn’t talk about what “Summer Rain” should sound like, they shared the exact same feelings. Their lives have not always been easy, and that is expressed in “Undercurrent” and the uncertainty of their lives in “Up and Down”. But even in their darkest hours, they still remained optimistic and hopeful, as if there were a “Hidden Dance” soon to appear in their lives. Sometimes, living so far away, they get “Homesick” and have a “Heavy Heart” as they miss their homelands and families, but they keep working hard and chasing their dreams as in “Chasing Butterflies”. And they are thankful for the music they have made together in their “Chance Encounter”. They share their happy “Childhood” stories in their music. So many wonderful stories, but they realize life is so short, just like a “Short Film”. This is their life, these their tales – “Life As Is”!

*Music speaks to the heart, across language, across conflict.*

*Music unites nations from far and wide!*

Producer: Paul Dice  
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