

Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum

Tuesday 20th May 2014

**Music Department, City University London
(in conjunction with the Institute of Musical Research)**

Room AG09, Ground Floor, College Building

Schedule

9.30am Registration

Session 1. Chair: Alexander Knapp (SOAS)

9.45am Antonia Baum (SOAS)
Practising Play and Moving in Time: Musical Performances at an Israeli-Palestinian Reconciliation Gathering

10.30am Miranda Crowdus (City University London)
Collective Trauma, Advocacy, and Intertext in Jaffan Music Communities

Tea/coffee: 11.15-11.45

Session 2. Chair: Laudan Nooshin (City University London)

11.45am Soosan Lolavar (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance)
Stay Close: A Contemporary Music Project Between the UK and Iran

12.15pm Mehryar Golestani (aka Reveal) (SOAS)
Persian Hip-Hop and the Emergence of an Online Iranian Diaspora

Lunch 1-2pm (not provided)

There are a number of food outlets in the university: the main refectory area is in the main building (up to the first floor and along the walkway); café outlet by the main entrance to the College Building; café on the lower ground floor of the Social Science building, the tall building opposite College Building on St John's Street. In addition, Exmouth Market has plenty of food outlets, including the very popular street stalls and is 5 mins walk away to the west of St John's Street along Myddelton Street)

Session 3. Chair: tbc

2pm Film screening, followed by short Q&A. Razia Sultanova (University of Cambridge)
Music of the Uzbeks of Northern Afghanistan (35 mins)

2.45pm Edward Fox (Open University)
Sowt al-Khaleej: A Blues Music of the Persian Gulf?

3.30pm Eliot Bates (University of Birmingham)
Nature - Village - Studio: "Doğa İçin Çal" and the Continuing Legacy of National Folklore in Turkey

4.15 tea/coffee

Session 4. Chair: Alexander Lingas (City University London)

4.30pm Joseph Alagha (Haigazian University, Lebanon)
'Resistance Art' as Soft Power: Hizbullah's Music Bands

5.15pm Stefan Williamson Fa (SOAS/The Sayat Nova Project)
Questioning the Caucasus Barrier: Music and Islam in the North Caucasus

6pm

Drinks reception, Performance Space foyer, lower ground floor, College Building

7pm-8.30pm

Concert in the Performance Space: "Stay Close: Only Sound Remains" showcasing work from Soosan Lolavar's Stay Close Contemporary Music

Project: <http://www.staycloseproject.com/>

The Middle East and Central Asia Music forum is open to researchers, students and anyone interested in the music and culture of the region. In the spirit of fostering dialogue and interdisciplinarity, we hope that the issues discussed at the forum will be of interest to a broad audience, including musicologists, ethnomusicologists and other researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences. In addition, we welcome those working on other aspects of Middle Eastern and Central Asian culture broadly speaking (dance, visual arts, media, film, literature, etc.)

<http://music.sas.ac.uk/research-networks/middle-east-and-central-asia-music-forum>

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

1. Antonia Baum (SOAS)

Practising Play and Moving in Time: Musical Performances at an Israeli-Palestinian Reconciliation Gathering

Sulha (reconciliation) gatherings create ‘festive sacred’ spaces crammed with artistic and inter-religious performances inhabited by a radically diverse population of Israelis and Palestinians with putatively incommensurable identities and desires. The gatherings’ implicit framing of embodied performance as a medium for reconciling difference and inequality is often dismissed by humanities scholars and social scientists, who believe that civil peace and reconciliation initiatives normalise the structural inequalities they ought to resist. Drawing on ethnographic research of a diverse network of Palestinians and Israelis who attend Sulha gatherings, this paper analyses the role of musical performance and practice at the gatherings and the character of music’s power. The data suggests that music isomorphically moves people in time. As a performative medium, its power is not a structural property of being or having, but rather a capacity for action and imagination in the moment that heightens the complex singular experience and potentiality of being human. I propose that logocentric conceptions of emancipation that prescribe resistance produce new rigid norms, whereas performances that pry open the gap between language and lived experience reveal the polyvalence and plasticity of social norms and the possible ways in which they can be practiced, endured, expanded and played.

Antonia Baum is in the final stages of a PhD in anthropology from SOAS, funded by the AHRC. Her thesis, ‘*Surprising Reality*: performance and reconciliation in Israel-Palestine’ is based on fifteen months ethnographic fieldwork with a social network of ‘peacemakers’ across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. The research accompanied ordinary people from radically diverse backgrounds who gather across geographic, political and social divides in search of “*sulha*” (reconciliation) and peaceful coexistence in – and emanating from - their own lives. Drawing on her former career as a dancer, the research was conducted in four languages: Hebrew, Arabic, English and mimetic practice. The results imply a more flexible and agentic theory of performance that accounts for the play of vibrant and creative strategies performed by the relationally positioned, multiple and emergent subject. Antonia lives, writes and dances in London, and has taught anthropology at SOAS since 2011.

2. Miranda Crowds (City University London)

Collective Trauma, Advocacy, and Intertext in Jaffan Music Communities

This talk is part of my thesis on interethnic elements in Arab-Israeli musical practices, specifically underground musical performance in the urban context of contemporary South Tel Aviv-Yafo, with a particular focus on the Hip Hop group System Ali. This research examines the complexity of the musical oeuvres and actors in local levels, here, the social-spatial environment of the local cityscape in which the music is composed, practised and performed. This narrow scope enables an analysis of how, in the context of ethnic conflict and co-existence in contemporary Israel/Palestine, identity construction and negotiation is experienced in different ways by the different demographic groups physically co-existing in shared urban space. I will examine in particular how narratives of collective post-trauma and musical-lyrical intertextuality shape group cohesion and inform the music-making process.

Miranda Crowds is an ethnomusicologist, educator, performer, writer and mother residing in Liverpool, UK. The majority of her academic research undertaken at Bangor, Cambridge, and City University London explores the complex relationship between urban space, artistic production and performance, ethnicity and cross-cultural interaction.

3. Soosan Lolavar (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) Stay Close: A Contemporary Music Project Between the UK and Iran

Stay Close is a ten-month project exploring contemporary classical music as a means of cultural exchange between the UK and Iran run by composer Soosan Lolavar. Following research periods in Iran and the UK and work with both composers and members of the wider community, Soosan Lolavar produced a new piece of music which combines elements of Iranian and Western musics. This talk will chart the progress of the project over the last year and explain in detail the musical processes that inspired it. A performance of the piece produced as part of this project, entitled *Only Sound Remains*, alongside a range of traditional and contemporary music from the Middle East, will follow the forum this evening.

Soosan Lolavar is a British-Iranian composer, sound artist and educator who works in both electronic and acoustic sound, and across the genres of concert music, contemporary dance, installation, film, animation and theatre. Her work has been performed at the Royal Festival Hall, V&A, National Maritime Museum, ICA, Chisenhale Gallery, LSE New Academic Building, Blackheath Concert Halls, Jacqueline Du Pré Music Centre, Bonnie Bird Theatre, Circus Space and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. In 2013 she was selected as one of two Embedded composers in residence at the Southbank Centre and received funding from Arts Council England, Jerwood Charitable Foundation and Iran Heritage Foundation to pursue 'Stay Close', a ten-month project exploring contemporary classical music as a means of cultural exchange between the UK and Iran. In 2012 she won the John Halford Prize for Composition awarded by Ian Pace and was selected as part of the Adopt a Composer scheme funded by PRS for Music Foundation and run by Making Music, in partnership with Sound and Music and BBC Radio 3. She holds degrees in Social and Political Sciences (University of Cambridge), Musicology (University of Oxford) and Composition (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) and her research interests include the politics of gender and sexuality, post-colonialism and the music industry and postmodernism in electronic musics. She has worked as an Assistant Lecturer at Trinity Laban Conservatoire, leading a course on music, gender and sexuality and at City Lit Adult Education college where she teaches: music appreciation; music analysis and criticism; and opera appreciation for beginners.

4. Mehryar Golestani (aka Reveal) (SOAS) Persian Hip-Hop and the Emergence of an Online Iranian Diaspora

From its emergence, Persian Hip-Hop has been subject to strict government restrictions. The mandatory requirement of a *mojavez* (seal of approval) from Iran's Ministry of Islamic Guidance has forced artists to employ alternative methods, centring on innovative usage of the Internet through social media platforms to release music. Originally employed simply to share sounds, technological advancements mean that social media sites can now facilitate transnational collaborations such as 'virtual' concerts where artists unable to leave Iran are virtually 'streamed' onto a stage. These global collaborations challenge the traditional concept of musical boundaries and have resulted in a new, imagined community with no borders. The evolution of music-related social media sites has now enabled artists to sell music, use an

Internet poll to determine locations for concerts and even request public funding for projects. Music-sharing social media has led to a phenomenon where what started as a worldwide online community of participants has now blossomed into an “online Diaspora”, a self sufficient community with its own identity that does not conform to conventional territorial boundaries. This paper will examine this new identity with reference to Stokes’ (2010) work on cultural intimacy.

Mehryar Golestani is a London based Iranian Hip-Hop artist, ethnomusicologist and writer. He was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1983 and moved to London aged 2 with his parents, mainly to escape the Iran-Iraq war. He was raised in inner city London but has continued to travel back to Tehran regularly. Having links to such contrasting urban environments has provided him with a sense of dual identity for most of his life. At a young age Reveal began performing Hip-Hop music and releasing songs under the artists name "Reveal Poison", and at aged 16 he won the 2000 UK Freestyle Knock-out Battle Rap Championships. He went on to form the group “Poisonous Poets” who were one of the first ever UK Hip-Hop acts to be signed to a major record label. In 2004 he first became aware of the emerging Persian Hip-Hop scene in Iran and he travelled back to Tehran to begin a series of collaborations with the city's artists which would lead to a series of world tours performing. Reveal is currently enrolled on a MMus Ethnomusicology programme at SOAS where he is studying part-time alongside touring, running Hip-Hop Education programmes with young offenders and releasing music.

**5. Film screening, followed by short Q&A. Razia Sultanova (University of Cambridge)
*Music of the Uzbeks of Northern Afghanistan (35 mins)***

In today's world Afghanistan is a hotspot, where for the last thirty years the ongoing war has thrown the country into a deep economic, social and cultural crisis. Since the 1970s the country has lived through a number of invasions and conflicts with various opponents – the Soviets, Mujahedin, Taliban and the Western Alliance, all of which have brought chaos and turmoil to the daily life of its people. The Afghan society is multiethnic in its nature. The aim of this 35 minutes film, based on Dr Sultanova’s original video recordings from Northern Afghanistan, is to demonstrate the authenticity as well as the historical development of the phenomenon of music within the Uzbek communities, featuring famous musicians like Usto Kamollitdin, Tadj, Muhammad, Sabzigul and others.

Razia Sultanova studied for a BA at Uzbek State Conservatory in Tashkent, and went on to study Central Asian classical music Shashmaqam, obtaining a PhD in 1988 from Moscow State Conservatory. Her four books and three edited volumes have been published in Russian, French and English. She has contributed to a number of music encyclopedias such as *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1999, volume 9), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2000) and *The Garland Encyclopaedia of World Music* (2002). She has published 46 articles in peer reviewed journals. She is currently a Visiting Professor of the Moscow State Conservatory and Kazakh National University of Arts. She conducted fieldwork in all Central Asian republics: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan (1996 -2014), Caucasian republic Azerbaijan (1997, 2010), Russia (1988-1992, 2001, 2003, 2012) and research visits to Middle East and African countries: Turkey (1997, 2001, 2006, 2014), Iran (2010), Afghanistan (2006), Morocco (2008), United Arab Emirate (2009), and recently to Inner Mongolia, China (July 2013). Moving to the West (in 1992) she lived in France and Germany before settling in the UK. Razia Sultanova teaches music at all levels, focusing on the role of music and identity, gender, music and performance study. A recipient of a number of grants including Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (1993), l’Institut Français

d'Etudes sur l'Asie Centrale (1996, 1997), Scholarship of the Ministry of Science, Research and Culture of the Province Brandenburg, Germany (1997-1998), the British Academy (2003, 2005, 2008), the AHRC (2004-2008), the British Council (2011-2014), Razia Sultanova is currently working on the new book on "Popular Culture of Afghanistan" which has been commissioned by I.B.Tauris.

6. Edward Fox (Open University)

Sowt al-Khaleej: A Blues Music of the Persian Gulf?

Sowt al-Khaleej means 'Voice of the Gulf.' It's a style of music that originated in Kuwait in the late nineteenth century and developed mainly in Kuwait and Bahrain but also in what is now the UAE, Oman and eastern Saudi Arabia. Sowt is a social music, played in a group setting by a singer/oud player, a drummer and a participating audience who sing choruses and perform intricate handclapping. I use the analogy of American blues music because, like American blues music, it emerges fully formed at about the same time as Sowt. Both styles also emerge at roughly the same time as the appearance of the commercial recording industry, enabling the music to be spread as much by recordings as by direct oral transmission. Both are musics reflecting hard living, longing, lost love. Both can be played either 'high' or 'low': either performed by a band with multiple instruments and elaborate arrangements in a public setting, or in a small social setting with a single (stringed) instrument. Like blues, its various forms of existence invite arguments about what is authentic and what is not. (The answer lies in the taste of the beholder.) I will discuss my encounter with this music during recording trips to Oman (1990) and Bahrain (earlier this year).

Edward Fox teaches creative writing at the Open University. He has a Master's Degree in Middle Eastern Languages & Cultures from Columbia University. www.edwardfox.co.uk

7. Eliot Bates (University of Birmingham)

Nature - Village - Studio: 'Doğa İçin Çal' and the Continuing Legacy of National Folklore in Turkey

Doğa İçin Çal, literally 'play for nature', is a crowd-sourced video series featuring hundreds of amateur and professional musicians ostensibly playing or singing for environmentalism. This highly acclaimed, corporate-sponsored video series quickly went viral after its initial segment was aired online in 2011. Discussion on social media sites has tended to highlight the ecopolitical valence of the project, which builds on a legacy of Turkish rock/pop artists giving benefit concerts for environmental causes. But the specific political valences of the project are unclear, and in many regards *Doğa İçin Çal*, with its uncontroversial folksong repertoire and absence of any ethnic language songs, is quite conservative.

I argue that the series is perfectly 'natural' with regards to Turkey's nearly ninety-year history of state-driven national folklore projects. These projects resulted in a national consciousness of local and regional cultural differences that came to affect everything from personal identity to the very material that comprises the core repertoire of recorded music in Turkey. Rather than a radical departure from nationalized folklore, *Doğa İçin Çal* serves to 're-map' Turkish nationalized folklore onto both the Turkish Republic and Turkish diaspora. It also maps the practices and spaces of the recording studio onto this geography, especially the hierarchical division-of-labor and wholly atomized manner that characterizes recordings made in Turkey. This re-mapping has a peculiar sociopolitical valence, however. Rather than suggesting that

Turkish villages are coming together for change, the depopulated nature of every clip obliterates the very 'hearths' (*ocak*) from where these songs allegedly came. My talk uses the video series to reassess the ninety-year history of state-sponsored folklore, and fifty-year history of *Unkapanı*, the heart of the music industry located in Istanbul.

Dr Eliot Bates is a scholar specializing in the emergence and development of digital music technologies, and the transformations to instrumental performance practice that accompanied the adoption of computer-based recording techniques. An ethnomusicologist by training, he has conducted over three years of field research in Turkey, and is the author of *Music in Turkey: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (OUP, 2011) and articles on acoustic instruments, aesthetics, studio architecture, and the emergence of an industry for Anatolian minority language popular musics. He is currently completing a monograph entitled *Digital Tradition: Arranging and Engineering Traditional Music in Turkey* (OUP, 2015). Eliot is a Lecturer in Ethnomusicology and Popular Music Studies at the University of Birmingham (UK), and following his PhD studies at UC Berkeley he was an ACLS New Faculty Fellow at Cornell and taught at the University of Maryland, College Park. In addition to his scholarly interests, for twenty years Eliot has been a performer and recording artist on the *oud*. Most recently, his duo The Big Bumble Bees (with organist Baby Dee) released their debut album (on vinyl, of course) through Tin Angel Records.

8. Joseph Alagha (Haigazian University, Lebanon) 'Resistance Art' as Soft Power: Hizbullah's Music Bands

I study the cultural politics of the Lebanese resistance movement Hizbullah by discussing the shifts in religious discourses on art and entertainment, the reception of the pious art productions by various audiences, and the ways in which Islamic ethics are translated into aesthetic forms. Hizbullah rejects the notion of 'art for the sake of art', and employs a specific genre of Islamic art commonly referred to as 'art with a purpose', 'art with a noble mission', or 'resistance art'. Resistance art is ideologically motivated art, which aims at rectifying individuals and reforming society by portraying art as pious-moral productions that are in line with Islamic values, norms, and religious sensibilities. It is 'clean art' that portrays good deeds, as distinguished from bad deeds that characterize indecent or 'lowbrow art'. Resistance art deals with political and social issues as well as the themes of justice, jihad, sacrifice, and patriotism. Hizbullah promotes resistance art via its specialized NGOs: (1) *Risalat*: 'The Lebanese Association of Arts' that is concerned with performing arts; and (2) *Ibda'* ('Creativity') that deals with plastic arts. In this presentation, I confine myself to performing arts, in particular Hizbullah's music bands and its orchestra as manifestations of soft power.

Joseph Alagha – Professor of Political Science at Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon – is the author of four peer-reviewed university press books: *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring* (2013); *Hizbullah's Identity Construction* (2011), *Hizbullah's Documents* (2011), and *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology* (2006), the last three published by Amsterdam University Press. Alagha is a prolific writer on Islamic movements and the democratization and liberalization processes in the Middle East and North Africa. His current research deals with political mobilization and performing arts in the Middle East, especially the relationship between soft power and resistance art. Contact details: jalagha2001@yahoo.com or joseph.alagha@haigazian.edu.lb

9. Stefan Williamson Fa (SOAS/The Sayat Nova Project) Questioning the Caucasus Barrier: Music and Islam in the North Caucasus

The music of the South Caucasus has been much celebrated worldwide. Polyphonic vocal music, *mugham*, *aşiq* and *duduk* traditions are all included on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage and they have been well documented by both international and local ethnomusicologists. These so called 'national' traditions are however contested, not only because of a shared cultural history that goes beyond the borders of the present day nation states but also because of the incredible diversity of the region which is so often ignored. The Caucasus is home to over 50 distinct ethnic groups and more than 100 different languages are said to be spoken in the region, which includes 3 indigenous language families; as expected this diversity is transferable to the region's music. Despite this the music of the North Caucasus (which is made up of several republics that form part of the Russian Federation) has attracted almost no international attention despite its rich and varied musical heritage.

The Sayat Nova Project was founded in 2012 as an attempt to counterbalance the unequal presentation of music in the region by seeking new ways of engaging with these diverse musical dialects. Building on current ideas on soundscapes in the Islamic world, I will discuss some of the current trends in Islamic musical practice in the Northeastern Caucasus, drawing attention to the diversity of practices within this sphere through illustrations from my own recent fieldwork amongst Dagestani and Chechen communities in Georgia and Azerbaijan. I will also highlight some of the ways in which online collaborative ethnography can be employed to engage with music and musicians in conflict regions.

Stefan Williamson Fa graduated from the University of Edinburgh with an MA in Social Anthropology in 2012 and is currently completing an MMus in Ethnomusicology and Turkish at SOAS, University of London. In 2012, whilst living in Tbilisi, Georgia, he co-founded The Sayat Nova Project, a non-profit independent initiative which aims to promote the musical diversity of the Caucasus. In November 2013 a compilation of the Project's field recordings, 'Mountains of Tongues: Musical Dialects of the Caucasus' was released internationally. He has worked at museums in Scotland and Gibraltar and has explored his passion for traditional and experimental forms of music by learning plucked instruments and curating musical events. Stefan's research interests extend from the Mediterranean to East Turkestan as well as music and sound in the Islamic world more broadly.