

**Abstracts and biographies for the Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum, Friday  
22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015, City University London**

**1. Ahmad AlSalhi (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
'Introduction to the History of the Genre of *Şaut* in Kuwait'**

**Abstract:** *Şaut* (pl. *aşwāt*) is a vocal art of the Arabian Gulf region that features a solo singer with *'ūd* who is accompanied by a *mirwās* (small hand drum). The genre dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is still performed today. Historically, the leading performers have come from Kuwait and Bahrain, and over the years musicians of each region developed their own style, both instrumentally and vocally. Since the 1920s, the form of *şaut* has changed dramatically. Many elements and styles have been abandoned while other new styles have been standardised. Research on *şaut* so far has been dominated by two main trends: a purely historical perspective concerned with the emergence of the genre and a contemporary one concerned with the descriptive aspect of *şaut* performances today. The main problematic of such approaches is that *şaut* is implicitly presented as an unchanged form. What is lacking is a diachronic approach that highlights what is gained and lost in the development of *şaut* genre. In this paper, I aim to fill the void between what has been written in studies on *şaut* and what is actually performed and standardised today. To do so, I will divide the history of *şaut* practice to different periods which cover the development of the genre from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the development of the genre.

**Biography:** Ahmad AlSalhi, on leave from his position as an instructor at the Higher Institute of Music in Kuwait, is currently a PhD candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. Here, he is completing his dissertation entitled: 'The Creativity of *Şaut* in Kuwait and Bahrain'. Over the years, AlSalhi has lectured extensively on *şaut* and other Gulf music forms and has given many radio interviews in the UK, Kuwait, Czech Republic, Egypt and Qatar. He is an active performer, violinist and singer, and is presently a member of Oxford Maqam, an innovative Middle Eastern ensemble in the UK. AlSalhi is the creator and founder of the well-known Gulf music website [www.zeryab.com](http://www.zeryab.com), est. 1999.

**2. Ed Emery (SOAS)  
'The Kurdish Songbook Project 2014-15: The Right to Song and a Model for Radical Ethnomusicology'**

**Abstract:** The Kurds straddle four national boundaries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) plus the diasporas into which war, terror and hunger have driven them. For music, dance and song there are good reasons to fear loss of cultural heritage – the banning of songs and singers, the criminalisation of Kurdish languages, the erosive effect of the globalised music industry etc. In November 2014 we launched a 'Kurdish Songbook Project' at SOAS to film and record Kurdish diaspora musicians and singers and to publish these sound-documents. The work contributes significantly to the growth of a Kurdish cultural profile in the West. But our project has a second critical aspect. War in the four Kurdistans has created violent upheavals of populations, massive internal displacements, and equally massive out-migrations – refugees, economic migrants, asylum-seekers etc. 2014 saw the publication of the *Charter of Lampedusa*, a migrants' charter. However there are three things fundamentally missing from the Charter. We believe that music, song and dance are fundamental human rights, and that this fact should be embodied in international charters – Lampedusa and UDHR. The watchword of aid agencies and governments alike is to enable a re-empowerment of the dispossessed. In this logic, on four occasions we have travelled to migrant camps in Calais, Northern France. In order to prompt moments of musical re-empowerment we have taken with us musical instruments (*'ūd*, *darbuka*, etc) for migrants who have been stripped of their possessions. With remarkable results. This paper draws the lessons of our work and argues

for an interventionist stance by ethnomusicologists, going beyond description and recording, into activities of radical and subversive empowerment.

**Biography:** Ed Emery is currently looking for a new home for his PhD on the Arabic and Hebrew dance songs of al-Andalus 1100-1350. Among other things he is the organiser of the Kurdish Songbook Project [www.youtube.com/channel/UCaZTz1AnY7co2fhBHFXY4TA](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaZTz1AnY7co2fhBHFXY4TA); the Maqam Project @ SOAS [[www.youtube.com/user/MaqamProject/videos](http://www.youtube.com/user/MaqamProject/videos)]; and the SOAS Arabic Band [www.facebook.com/arabicmusicsoas](http://www.facebook.com/arabicmusicsoas)

### **3. Michael Ellison (University of Bristol) 'Multiple Traditions, New forms: Transcending East and West in Musical Theatre'**

**Abstract:** As creator of opera and musical theatre that integrates Turkish, Azeri and Western instruments and voices, and co-director of Istanbul's Hezarfen Ensemble, my aim is to produce new works of music and multi-media musical theatre that draw on multiple traditions while going beyond the preconceived forms and limitations of either East or West.

This talk addresses some of the fascinating questions that arise as we attempt to define 'intercultural' or 'transcultural' music, and in distinguishing varying levels or methods of integration than can have been attempted so far, as well as the problems music that actively seeks integration poses for analysts and critical reception. I will address the not-so-obvious yet highly significant challenges of bringing together musicians from diverse backgrounds to create music with a transcultural aesthetic aim, including the fascinating cross-cultural interplay between musicians, score, composer and audiences inherent with each new work. I will discuss my approach to facilitating harmonization, and dealing with different systems of tuning in a way that avoids losing either the character of the makam-based inflections on the Eastern side, or the tonal range of the west. Finally I will address central issues we face when specifically combining musicians coming from diverse oral and written traditions. Musical examples will also be given combining diverse approaches to rhythm and orchestration. Concrete examples will be given from my 2012 opera *Say I am You-Mevlâna* as well as from current and upcoming projects. Ultimately two fundamental questions arise: is it possible to draw on the richness of multiple traditions, yet speak creatively in the present moment? And, more broadly, what insights might it be possible for art to pilot (model) for contemporary society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Biography:** Michael Ellison's composition explores integration of disparate traditions and sonic experimentations in music into meaningful new forms. He has been commissioned by Radio France and the BBC Symphony Orchestra for '*Turkish Concerto K. 219, for Turkish instruments, cello and orchestra*' (2008) and has received awards from the European Research Council (2015-2020) National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), ARIT, and Fulbright Foundation. Further extending his work in integrating Turkish and Western idioms, two new chamber multimedia musical theatre works, on texts of Turkish/Kurdish novelist Yaşar Kemal, with Simon Jones directing, Zeynep Tanbay (choreography and dance), and NohLAB (video) are scheduled for production at the Istanbul Music Festival in 2016 and 2019. Co-founder and co-Director of Istanbul's award-winning Hezarfen Ensemble since 2010, Ellison is a Lecturer in Music at the University of Bristol.

#### 4. Emin Soydas (Cankiri Karatekin University, Turkey) 'Identifying the Ottoman *Tanbur* before the Nineteenth Century'

**Abstract:** The Ottoman Turkish *tanbur*, with a nearly hemispherical body and very long neck, has been regarded as the most prominent instrument in Turkish classical music for about three centuries. It is a fact that it was not so popular before the 18<sup>th</sup> century; however, its identity until that century is said to have remained unclear, due to issues regarding nomenclature, i.e. generic terms used for several instruments, and the lack of sufficient visual depictions. The comments vary from claiming that *tanbur* was an invention of the Ottomans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to arguing that it was not a distinct instrument before the 18<sup>th</sup> century but rather a member of long-necked lutes with a pear-shaped soundbox. In this paper, I will attempt to clarify the history of *tanbur* and demonstrate, by referring to hitherto unnoticed or ignored visual and written sources, that it had been used in Turkish music long before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as a distinct plucked lute and with almost the same structure. I will also discuss the shifting status of *tanbur* among the other instruments in Ottoman musical tradition from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Biography:** M. Emin Soydaş is a faculty member in the Music Department at Çankırı Karatekin University in Turkey. After graduating from the History Department of Boğaziçi University, he completed his MA in 'Turkish Religious Music' at Marmara University. He received his PhD in 'Musicology and Music Theory' from İstanbul Technical University in 2007, with a thesis on the musical instruments at the Ottoman court. He did post-doctoral research at SOAS, University of London, on 17<sup>th</sup>-century Turkish folk songs. His research interests include several aspects of the history of Turkish music, and he has recently worked on a research project concerning *kopuz*, a historical instrument.

#### 5. John Baily (Goldsmiths University of London) 'Playing the *Dotar* in Torbat-e Jam, Iran'

**Abstract:** The city of Torbat-e Jam is 25 miles from the border with Afghanistan. It is the site of the *mazar* (shrine) of the Sufi master Sheikh Ahmad-e Jam (1048-1141). The shrine is unusual in that the *dotar* (a long-necked lute with two metal strings) is played there in Sufi rituals; this type of *dotar* is regarded as a spiritual instrument. Across the border in Herat the 2-stringed *dutar* underwent significant morphological changes between 1950 and 1965, passing through 3, 5 and 14 stringed versions of the instrument. During my fieldwork in Herat in the 1970s I rarely encountered the 'original' 2-stringed *dutar* but I was keen to analyse its right hand performance technique. Investigation of *dotar* playing in Torbat-e Jam promises to throw new data into the ring. In 2004 I found a thriving *dotar* scene in Torbat-e Jam. Because of its spiritual nature the Iranian authorities had allowed this tradition to continue at a time when many other kinds of music were prohibited. The texts of songs published on audio cassette in Iran are of a spiritual nature, such as '*Sheikh Ahmad-e Jam*', '*Nava'i*' and '*Nabi*'. The accompanying *dotar* plays at a very steady tempo with a highly developed and complex right hand technique; the same pieces may be performed as instrumentals. The extent to which contemporary performance on the *dotar* informs us about performance on the *dutar* of Herat 65 years ago, when processes of transformation began, needs to be critically assessed.

**Biography:** John Baily is Emeritus Professor of Ethnomusicology and Head of the Afghanistan Music Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London. He holds doctorates in experimental psychology and ethnomusicology, and is trained in anthropological filmmaking. Baily has taught at The Queen's University of Belfast, Columbia University and Goldsmiths; most of his research has been on the music of Afghanistan. He is the author of *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Musicians in the City of Herat* (1988) and *Songs from Kabul: The Spiritual Music of Ustad Amir Mohammad* (2011). His latest monograph *War, Exile and the Music of Afghanistan. The Ethnographer's Tale* will be published by Ashgate later this year.

## 6. Stephen Wilford (City University London)

### 'Between Thames and Sahara: Representations of Algerian Music in Contemporary London'

**Abstract:** The French invasion of Algeria in 1830, and the subsequent 132 years of colonial rule, gave birth to a particular strand of orientalism. French artists and writers, as well as the colonial authorities, habitually depicted Algeria as the alluring but dangerous 'exotic other'. Since national independence in 1962, many Algerian artists have responded by openly critiquing such stereotyping and patronising portrayals of their country and culture. However, in recent years the language and imagery of orientalism have reappeared in the promotional materials produced by Algerian musicians in London. Members of the city's diasporic population have reappropriated orientalism and, through processes of auto-exoticism, employed the cultural capital that it embodies to attract non-Algerian listeners. At the same time, orientalism has also been evident in the publicity for musical events aimed at Algerian audiences, throwing into question the intentions of such depictions of Algerian culture.

This paper investigates the motivations for such auto-exoticism, asking whether the reappropriation of orientalism is stimulated solely by commercial interest, or whether there are more complex and meaningful processes involved? Drawing upon my ethnographic work with Algerian musicians in contemporary London, I consider the place of mimesis and alterity in the reappearance of orientalism, and examine the ways in which exoticism is shaped and actively manipulated through the agency of the city's Algerian diaspora.

**Biography:** Stephen Wilford is a PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at City University London, where he is completing his thesis under the supervision of Professor Stephen Cottrell. His work investigates musical performance and reception within the Algerian diaspora in London, with a particular focus upon issues of identity and mediation. He is also interested in ethnographic film and the study of music technologies. He previously studied at Goldsmiths (University of London), Leeds College of Music, and the University of Aberdeen.

## 7. Sam MacKay (City University London)

### 'A Shared History? North African Musical Heritage and the Public Sphere in Contemporary Marseille'

**Abstract:** For several decades following World War 2, the Marseille neighbourhood of Belsunce was home to a vibrant and shifting culture of musicians, venues and labels often specializing in *chaabi* and *rai*. While this 'lost scene' has never informed dominant narratives of local history, the organisation Phocéephone is now working to raise awareness through radio shows, exhibitions and DJ sets. Concentrating on two recent events at which Phocéephone presented DJ sets, this paper considers aspects of how North African musical heritage is remediated and mobilised in contemporary Marseille. The first event was held at a major new cultural institute, MuCEM, and was focused on the history of North African musics in France. A karaoke session took place in which audience members sang songs by Lili Boniche, Idir and other artists who migrated to France during the 20th century. The second event was held by local underground promoter Data, in the back garden of an apartment block, with Moroccan *lotar* player Lahcen Akil performing traditional songs from the High Atlas region.

What can these events tell us about postcolonial relations in the porous, contested city? Drawing on interviews with producers and audience members, I argue that in both events music helped facilitate what Habermas terms 'centres of sociability', spaces in which Marseille's public sphere might be renewed, albeit around a particular set of ideological concerns. While MuCEM demonstrated the potential of urban heritage, following Cohen (2013), for the "strategic performance of cosmopolitanism", Data sought to absorb the Maghreb into the discursive and physical space of underground music culture.

**Biography:** Sam Mackay is a doctoral student at City University London, supervised by Professor Stephen Cottrell. His AHRC-funded research focuses on music, representation and urban change in Marseille, taking Marseille's recent experience as a European Capital of Culture as a point of departure. He studied for an MA at City University and previously at the University of Edinburgh and the Université d'Aix-Marseille.

#### 8. Polly Withers (University of Exeter)

##### **"I'm not a Palestinian musician, I'm a musician who happens to be Palestinian": Negotiating Nationalism in Popular Musics in Palestine'**

**Abstract:** This paper explores the ways that nationalisms are negotiated both in and through youth popular music in the Palestinian context. It highlights the multiple and at times contradictory relationships between this musical field and different narratives of nationalisms, arguing that musicians' representations change according to audience. I question Jameson's (1986) claim that cultural production in non-metropolitan spaces functions as "national allegory", whereby the story of the individual is used to tell the story of the nation; as well as scholarship that positions cultural production in Palestine as preoccupied with the (re)production of national thought and praxis (eg Bernard, 2013). Historically, the struggle for national liberation has indeed dominated Palestinian cultural production. Now, however, in a moment of general disillusion with the Palestinian Authority's failed state-building project, critiques emerge and cultural production tells several stories, not only of one sort of nation, and one form of nationalism. However, whilst artists may discursively situate themselves as part of, but not subsumed by, the national when they perform to local audiences in Palestine; this logic is inverted when their performances travel to Europe, or when they are playing to foreign audiences (in Palestine). In these latter contexts, musical performers often appear *primarily* as embodied national subjects.

Using ethnographic material collected in ca. 60 interviews with young musicians of translocal music, audiences, producers and event organisers in this 'alternative' music scene; and participant observations at concerts, gigs, parties, bars and raves in Ramallah (West Bank), Haifa (Israel) and Amman (Jordan) during thirteen months of fieldwork in 2012 and 2014, I show how musical actors oppose being represented under the metanarrative of the nation. Critiquing the nationalisation of cultural production, they emphasise that they *happen to be* from Palestine (Maysa, singer, interview 26/06/2014), refusing to reduce their complex subjectivities to one: that of being Palestinian. Nationalism is identified with, but it does not function as the sole base on which a politics of identity takes shape. Instead, the multiplicity of political subjectivity is stressed. Whilst actors do articulate concerns about the future of the Palestinian community, these centralise around the notion that the struggle for Palestine is not a national but an anti-colonial struggle, focused on decolonisation of space as well as mind. The critique of these young agents therefore stands in contrast to political agendas at the elite level that call for the establishment of an independent state on the 1967 borders.

However, when performing in non-local spaces and/or to non-local audiences, the emphasis musicians place on the complexity of their political subjectivities is removed. Whether performing in Palestine under the tutelage of foreign cultural sponsors, or in London at Palestine solidarity events, such host organisations (re)nationalise these cultural producers, using the signifier of 'the Palestinian' to frame them to their audiences. This is paradoxical, as art in such non-local spaces functions as marketable product, rather than as anti-hegemonic critical process and discourse, as it does when situated more locally (see also Toukan, 2010).

**Biography:** Polly Withers is a PhD Candidate in Middle East Politics at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter. Her PhD research provides a gendered analysis of popular musics in Palestine, and is funded by the ESRC. Her broader research interests lie in Gender Studies and Cultural Studies.

**9. Veronica Doubleday (Visiting Fellow, Goldsmiths University of London)  
'Recent Social Changes Reflected in Female Music-Making in Afghanistan'**

**Abstract:** The past 35 years of conflict have seen enormous social change within Afghanistan, and the opening up of music to multiple influences from outside. Focusing on female music-making in private and public contexts, this presentation examines various new developments: themes of protest expressed in traditional forms of singing, the adoption of new instruments by girls in educational projects, and the assertion by girls and young women of their right to perform in public arenas such as televised music competitions and school concerts.

**Biography:** Veronica is the author of *Three Women of Herat* (1988), a narrative ethnography based on her research on the lives and activities of women in Herat in the 1970s. There she learnt to perform Afghan music, working mainly with the female professional musician Zainab Herawi. Her involvement with Afghan music is ongoing, and she has given many concerts of traditional Afghan music, singing and playing the *daireh* (frame drum), accompanied by her husband John Baily. Other relevant publications are an article on gender and Middle Eastern frame drums, work on *chaharbeiti* Persian-language folk poetry (*Ethnomusicology Forum*, 2011), and a biographical chapter about Zainab Herawi (in Hellier ed., 2013).

**10. Merav Rosenfeld (Universities of London and Cambridge, St Edmund's College)  
'A Short Summary of a Long History: The Paraliturgical Song of Jews Originating in Arab Countries'**

**Abstract:** For many centuries Jews in Arab lands celebrated non-liturgical occasions with Hebrew poems sung mostly to melodies adapted from secular Arabic songs. These paraliturgical songs (s. PLS) are steeped in Arabo-Islamic influence. During the early 1950s, after most Jews left Arab lands, new songs were created and performed mostly in Israel by Arab-Jewish artists and their Israeli-born offspring. Following drastic political and socio-cultural developments in the 1980s, the PLS became a symbol of the renewed identity of Israeli Arab-Jews. The paper explores various aspects and characteristics of the PLS, including its Arabo-Islamic cultural features, suggesting that they also characterise the identity of its poets, musicians and carriers, both in the past and at present. The PLS is introduced here as a living tradition which preserves memories, carries the past into the present, and evolves alongside the changing circumstances of its guardians. The paper argues that for this reason the PLS has gained its role in recent years, as a symbol of the modern Arab-Jewish identity in Israel, which combines the Arabo-Islamic cultural past with the European-Israeli present while holding both in a strong sense of Jewishness. Based on both written collections of the genre, published at various periods by different communities, and my recent fieldwork in Israel, this paper presents a fascinating historical account of more than one thousand years of the rich and vibrant tradition of Middle Eastern Judaism within Arabo-Islamic settings, which continues to be central in Arab-Jews' life until the present day.

**Biography:** Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad (PhD, University of Cambridge) is an Early Career Research Associate at the Universities of London and Cambridge (St Edmund's College). Her field of specialization, publications and teaching focus on traditional, contemporary, religious and secular Middle Eastern music and its interaction with issues of identity, nationalism and Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations.