

**Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum
Friday 13th May 2016**

'Soundspaces of the Middle East and Central Asia: Exploring the Intersection of Sound Studies and Ethnomusicology in the Middle East and Central Asia'

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

Venue: City University London, Music Department, Room AG09, College Building, St John Street, London EC1V 4BP

Schedule

9.45am Welcome

Session 1, 9.50am - 11.30am

Chair: Byron Dueck (Open University)

Meri Kytö (University of Tampere, Finland): 'Negotiating the Acoustic Community: A sonic ethnography of a housing cooperative in Istanbul'

Ruard Absaroka (SOAS) 'Sounding Islam in Chinese Central Asia: Methodologies and perspectives' and Rachel Harris (SOAS): 'Islamic Extremism, Song and Dance, and Sonic Territoriality: Contesting the Xinjiang Soundscape'

11.30-11.50 Tea/Coffee

Session 2, 11.50 - 1.15pm

Chair: Hettie Malcomson (University of Southampton)

Rachel Beckles Willson (Royal Holloway, University London) "Isolation wrapped in layers of silence": When an *oud* is a place that narrates'.

Followed by a screening of the film *Telling Strings* (Anne-Marie Heller, Switzerland, 2007).

Lunch (not provided)

Session 3, 2.15pm - 3.45pm

Roundtable: Exploring the Intersection of Sound Studies and Ethnomusicology in the Middle East and Central Asia: Opportunities and Challenges

Chair: Katherine Butler Schofield (King's College London)

Aaron Einbond (City University London)
Jason Stanyek (University of Oxford)
Elizabeth Tolbert (Johns Hopkins University)
Abigail Wood (University of Haifa)

3.45-4.15pm Tea/Coffee

Session 4, 4.15-6.15pm

Chair: Chloe Alagband-Zadeh (University of Cambridge)

Abigail Wood (University of Haifa): 'The Cantor and the Muezzin's Duet at the Western Wall: contesting sound spaces on the frayed seams of the Israel-Palestine conflict'

Stefan Williamson Fa (UCL): 'Loudspeakers and Chains: public ritual and Shi'i soundscapes in Northeastern Anatolia'

Laudan Nooshin (City University London) 'Sounding the City: Tehran's Contemporary Soundscapes'

and Mohsen Shahrnazdar (Tehran Soundscapes Project): 'Tehran Soundscapes Project' (presented by Laudan Nooshin)

The Middle East and Central Asia Music forum has been running since 2007 and 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.). The Forum is convened by Dr Laudan Nooshin, City University London (l.nooshin@city.ac.uk) and Dr Rachel Harris, SOAS (rh@soas.ac.uk)

<http://www.city.ac.uk/arts-social-sciences/music/middle-east-and-central-asia-music-forum>

Abstracts and biographies

Session 1

Meri Kytö (University of Tampere, Finland)

'Negotiating the Acoustic Community: A sonic ethnography of a housing cooperative in Istanbul'

Abstract: This paper examines the dynamics of private and common acoustic spaces in the Çengelköy neighborhood of Istanbul and the ways in which the inhabitants understand, construct, shape and manage private and common acoustic space, i.e., their sonic living environment. The study is a sonic ethnography of the middle-class housing cooperative Ata-2, focusing on how the inhabitants operate as an acoustic community, the types of articulations that this community is made up of, and how it is maintained as routines, expectations and predictabilities. The main argument is based on the concept of domestication of acoustic space, signifying the practices and choices involved in the interpretation and shaping of the acoustic environment that aim to create a pleasant, anticipated, familiar or homely soundscape, including connotations of safety. The acoustic spaces in apartment flats in particular are porous and in continuous flow, consisting of the city as public acoustic space and the private lives of neighbors carried by sound leaking into the interior of homes, regardless of walls. This spatial conflict, together with related cultural codes and values, causes city dwellers to adopt a variety of approaches to both sound and management strategies concerning listening.

Biography: Meri Kytö is an ethnomusicologist and cultural researcher studying articulations of privacy and domestication in urban acoustic spaces. She is especially interested in methods involving sensory ethnography. Her articles have been tackling the soundscape of busking in London, sonic resistance during the Gezi Park protests, apartment acoustemology in Finland, acoustic communities of football fans, and sonic representations of Istanbul in cinema. Currently she is working as a postdoctoral researcher in music studies at the University of Tampere, Finland, in a five-year project on sonic intimacies.

Ruard Absaroka (SOAS)

'Sounding Islam in Chinese Central Asia: Methodologies and perspectives'

Rachel Harris (SOAS)

'Islamic Extremism, Song and Dance, and Sonic Territoriality: Contesting the Xinjiang Soundscape'

Abstract: These two papers present some of the ongoing work on the 'Sounding Islam in China' project hosted at SOAS. The multi-disciplinary project attends to the Islamic soundscapes of contemporary China, using multi-sited ethnographic research to explore the nature of religious practice, meaning and power, and the ways in which they are sonically negotiated within society and in relation to the state.

Ruard Absaroka considers questions of methodology – collaborative research and sound walking – from the perspective of a field visit to Urumchi, capital city of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in summer 2015, and provides a sense of the diversity of the 'Islamic soundscape' of this city.

Rachel Harris draws on the methods of digital ethnography to explore the recent anti-Islamic extremism campaign in the region, arguing that the promotion of 'song and dance' is part of an on-going struggle over bodily practices and habitus directly linked to the territorialisation of Xinjiang.

Biographies:

Ruard Absaroka is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies. His doctoral dissertation focuses on urban musical geographies and networks in Shanghai. His current research interests also include the impact of digital technologies on informal, independent musicking, ethnographic methods and multi-sited fieldwork, ethnographic film-making, sound studies, the music business, Jazz, club cultures and Critical Realism. He has conducted secondary research while working as an assistant on the AHRC Research Network/Leverhulme 'Sounding Islam in China' project. This has involved workshops in Shanghai and Urumqi and fieldwork trips: to Linxia and Lanzhou in Gansu Province, and in Xinjiang, China. He leads the SOAS Chinese Music Ensemble and co-founded the London Xiqu Chinese Opera Network. He is an active musician based in London.

Rachel Harris is Reader in the Music of China and Central Asia, at SOAS, University of London. Her research interests include global musical flows, identity politics, gender, and ritual practice. She is the author of two books on musical life in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and co-editor of three books, including 'Gender in Chinese Music', and the ethnomusicology text book: 'Pieces of the Musical World'. She currently leads the Leverhulme Research Project 'Sounding Islam in China', and is preparing a new book manuscript 'Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam'. She is also involved with outreach projects relating to Central Asian and Chinese music, including recordings, musical performance and consultancy.

Session 2

Rachel Beckles Willson (Royal Holloway, University London)

“‘Isolation wrapped in layers of silence’”: When an *oud* is a place that narrates’.

Abstract: One of the archetypal soundscapes of the Arab world develops through the Islamic call to prayer, but another grows from the sound of the *oud*. Although the *oud* may also invoke broader regions and specific countries – Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt and others – since at least the mid-nineteenth century it has been understood by many as a marker of Arab culture and identity.

Through an analysis of music composed by Palestinian Kamilya Jubran, this paper explores ways in which aspects of sound-making involving the *oud* may be situated and interpreted. *Suite Nomade* is a 3-movement setting of Bedouin texts for voice, oud, double bass and string trio. My reading contextualises it in Palestinian genealogies and points to its multiple nature as an expression of rupture and disconnection, an affirming of new connections, and a challenge to the categories through which the various fault lines are understood.

The paper will include extracts from *Telling Strings*, a documentary film by Anne-Marie Haller (2007) featuring Palestinian musician Kamilya Jubran.

Biography: Rachel Beckles Willson is Professor of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London, where she also directs the Humanities and Arts Research Centre. She has published widely on music politics of the 20th and 21st Centuries, most recently in her monograph *Orientalism and Musical Mission: Palestine and the West*. She is currently holder of a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship entitled ‘Reorientations: Migrations of a Musical Instrument’.

Session 3

Roundtable: Exploring the Intersection of Sound Studies and Ethnomusicology in the Middle East and Central Asia: Opportunities and Challenges

Aaron Einbond (City University London)
Jason Stanyek (University of Oxford)
Elizabeth Tolbert (Johns Hopkins University)
Abigail Wood (University of Haifa)

Biographies:

Aaron Einbond’s work explores the intersection of instrumental music, sound installation, field recording and technology, bringing the spontaneity of live performance together with computer interactivity. Recently Chicago-based Ensemble Dal Niente released his portrait album *Without Words* on Carrier Records, and SWR Experimentalstudio produced his Giga-Hertz prizewinning *Cartographies* for piano with two performers and electronics for the 47-loudspeaker Klangdom at ZKM in Karlsruhe. He teaches Music Composition, Sound, and Technology at City University London and is Co-Artistic Director of Qubit New Music Initiative with whom he curates and produces experimental media in New York.

Jason Stanyek teaches at the University of Oxford where he is Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology and Tutorial Fellow at St. John’s College. His research on improvisation, on music technology, and on Brazilian music and dance has appeared in a range of publications. Currently, he serves as general editor for Bloomsbury’s new series *33 1/3 Brazil*, an offshoot of their long-running *33 1/3* series, and as co-editor (with Julian Johnson) of the Cambridge UP journal *Twentieth-Century Music*. He is a founding editorial board member of the journal *Sound Studies* and convenes the Seminar in Ethnomusicology and Sound Studies at the University of Oxford.

Elizabeth Tolbert is Professor of Ethnomusicology at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University with a joint appointment in the Department of Anthropology. She is currently a Research Affiliate at the Centre for Music and Science and a Visiting Scholar at

the Faculty of Music, Cambridge University, and a Visiting Fellow at Wolfson College. Her interdisciplinary theoretical interests and publications cover a broad range of topics, including music and evolution, feminist theory and gender, music and language ideologies, ritual and music cognition. She has done fieldwork in Finland, Karelia, and at the Peabody Conservatory, Maryland, USA.

Abigail Wood is Senior Lecturer in Ethnomusicology at the University of Haifa and co-editor of *Ethnomusicology Forum*. She completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge and taught previously at the University of Southampton and SOAS. Her research focuses primarily on musical life in contemporary urban spaces, from new Jewish musics to the reflection of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the contested soundscapes of Jerusalem's Old City.

Session 4

Abigail Wood (University of Haifa)

'The Cantor and the Muezzin's Duet at the Western Wall: contesting sound spaces on the frayed seams of the Israel-Palestine conflict'

Abstract: Alongside the golden Dome of the Rock, which hovers above them, the huge limestone blocks of the Western Wall are among Jerusalem's most visually iconic sites. Serving historically as a site of Jewish prayer and lamentation, and of continued tension between Jews and non-Jewish authorities until the conquest of the Old City by Israel in the 1967 war, the Western Wall has long been a consensual icon of Jewish religious and national life. Yet seemingly at odds with the unitary historical narratives and visual imagery within which this site is constructed in the popular Israeli imagination, an array of heterogeneous practices continually disrupt and re-order this site. In this paper, I explore the soundscape of the Western Wall plaza as a Foucauldian 'heterotopia', a dense symbolic space which mirrors and refracts discourses of the surrounding society, and where the politics of presence, proximity and voice—on an individual, communal and national level—are both built into the physical location of the space, creatively embodied and contested by the individuals and groups who come there to pray. Moreover, if the plaza serves to contain this contestation within a bounded physical and visual space, acoustically this space is porous. The Western Wall stands on a physical border line in the Israel-Palestine conflict; the sound of the call to prayer from the al-Aqsa mosque directly above leads to sonic juxtapositions which invite troubled reflections on the nature of space, proximity and 'belonging' on the fractured seamline of the conflict.

Stefan Williamson Fa (UCL)

'Loudspeakers and Chains: public ritual and Shi'i soundscapes in Northeastern Anatolia'

Abstract: Northeastern Turkey is home to a sizeable Azeri Shi'a minority community. Separation from other Shi'a communities and the ban on Shi'a mosques, educational institutions and public ritual during the early years of the Turkish Republic weakened the observance and religious traditions in the region. Over the last three decades wider sociopolitical changes in the country have led to the rise in public processions on the day of Ashura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the battle of Karbala and central historical moment shaping Shi'i cosmology and identity. Through an analysis of public Ashura commemorations in Kars, as a sonic event, the paper will examine the movement of Shi'a ritual from the private to the public sphere during this period, as well as outlining the combination of local, national and transnational sounds which illustrate the nature of Shi'ism in Turkey today.

Biography: Stefan Williamson Fa is a PhD candidate in the department of Social Anthropology at University College London. He is interested in the role of sound in Islamic ritual and religious expression, particularly in Anatolia, Central Asia and the Caucasus. His PhD research focuses on genres of religious recitation and mourning in the Azeri Shi'a community of Northeastern Turkey, for which he is currently completing a year of fieldwork in the city of Kars.

Laudan Nooshin (City University London)
'Sounding the City: Tehran's Contemporary Soundscapes'

'Standing on a flat rooftop in north Tehran on a summer's evening I am immersed in sound: the strains of the call to prayer echoing from local mosques; a rock beat from a passing car; the call of birds circling the mountains; a distant ringtone; the low-level hum of the city below.' (Fieldnotes, 2015)

Iran's capital city is a vibrant metropolis, cradled in the foothills of the Alborz mountains, and the country's political and cultural centre for over 200 years. During this time it has experienced exponential growth from a small town to a city of more than 8 million. Particularly significant was the period of Pahlavi rule (1925-1979) during which an extensive programme of urban expansion led to the destruction of historic buildings seen as symbolizing the regressive traditionalism of the preceding Qajar monarchs. The Pahlavis envisioned a city that was modern, Western-facing and secular. Their discourses promoted the idea of modernity as incompatible with tradition and the resulting tensions are still felt in many areas of Iranian life.

Drawing on recent fieldwork in Tehran and on the writings of scholars such as Matt Sakakeeny and Abigail Wood, this paper examines the city's changing soundscapes and explores a number of questions concerning the relationship between sound and the urban environment: how does sound shape, and how is it shaped by, the urban context? How are contesting claims over urban space negotiated through sound? And how does sound acquire meaning in relation to both public and private, live and mediated experiences?

Biography: Laudan Nooshin is Reader in Ethnomusicology at City University London, UK. Her research interests include creative processes in Iranian music; music and youth culture in Iran; music and gender; neo/post-colonialism and Orientalism; and music in Iranian cinema. Recent publications include *Iranian Classical Music: The Discourses and Practice of Creativity* (2015, Ashgate), *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia* (ed. 2009, Ashgate) and *The Ethnomusicology of Western Art Music* (ed. 2013, Routledge).

Mohsen Shahrnazar (Tehran Soundscapes Project)
'Tehran Soundscapes Project'

Abstract: A city is inseparable from its sounds. This has aroused much interest in humanities and social sciences. The urban soundscape is a part of human sound heritage that completes the cultural puzzle of the general population of each era, and features human characteristics of certain geographical locations. Thus, with its all-round and comprehensive presence in human societies, the soundscape of a city can per se be a telltale sign of the environmental conditions present in those societies. It can furthermore signify the rate of development or recount historical, social or cultural aspects of its origins. These account for the fact that urban soundscapes have been put under scrutiny in many scientific fields and subspecialties. Social theoreticians, historians, linguists and scholars in science and technology have all shown interest or been involved in soundscape studies. Anthropologists, likewise, have reviewed a great range of topics related to sounds, leading to the birth of what we may today call the Anthropology of sound. Can a soundscape provide researchers with different data than those yielded by conventional field methods? By hearing sounds, can we be informed of the cultural reality of the space in which those sounds are produced? Can we elaborate on the symbolic and internalized nature of the sounds around us? Tehran Soundscapes Project seeks to find answers to these questions by insisting on the cultural geography of the city of Tehran.

Biography: Mohsen Shahrnazar is Director of the Department of Sound and Music at the Iranian Institute of Anthropology and Culture (IIAC). He has an MA in Anthropology and has pursued research studies and documentation in the field of music, contemporary history and popular culture. Shahrnazar has published a number of articles in social studies and music history focused mainly on the social changes in music as an interdisciplinary practice. He has also made a number of documentary films on ethnography, music, portraiture and the history of Iran.