

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON - SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY
INSTITUTE OF MUSICAL RESEARCH

MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA MUSIC FORUM

Friday November 6th, 2009

Music Department, City University London

Performance Space (Lower Ground Floor),
College Building, St John's Street, EC1V 0HB
(nearest tube Angel, northern line)

PROGRAMME

Registration from 9.30am

9.45am - Welcome

Session 1 - 9.50 - 11.30am

Chair: Annabelle Sreberny (SOAS)

Julian Harris (Oxford University)

The Role of Music in the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979

Laudan Nooshin (City University London)

'Green is the Colour ...': Musical Responses to the 2009 Iranian Presidential Elections

11.30am – 12noon tea/coffee

Session 2 - 12noon – 12.50pm

Chair: tbc

Thomas Solomon (University of Bergen)

"The Girl's Voice in Turkish Rap": Gender and Vocality in the Music of Ayben

12.50 – 2pm Lunch break

2.15-3.15pm, Performance Space

Piano Recital

A Journey Through the Piano Music of Iran

Tara Kamangar

<http://www.tarakamangar.com>

3.15 – 3.45pm tea/coffee

Session 3 – 3.45 – 4.35pm

Chair: tbc

Leili Sreberny Mohammadi (UCL)

Home and Away: Music Listening and the BBC in Iran

4.45-6.30pm, Screening of *The Glass House* (2008), a film by Hamid Rahmanian and Melissa Hibbard.

Abstracts

Julian Harris (Oxford University)

The Role of Music in the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979

On the 16th January 1979 Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (king of Iran) fled his country. It was an act that conceded his regime's impotence in the face of 'popular' mass-uprisings against both cultural policies of imposed Western 'modernity' and the vivid disfigurements caused by rapid industrialisation. An Islamic state was forged from the volatile fallout, trusted to ease crises of identity and restore the connection between an alienated people and state apparatus. Under the Ayatollah, all music was banned except for the revolutionary songs, *surūd-e enqelabi*. In this paper I will investigate whether these songs simply reflected the revolutionary climate or provided an active stimulus. I will argue that Khomeini and his Islamic government represent a continuation of a historical monopoly on music that has favoured Islam, one that strategically harnessed a Muslim sensitivity for sound in regions of widespread illiteracy. I will also show that music from Shia mourning rituals united social groups and facilitated opportunities for the expression of discontent infused with the conviction of divine legitimacy. Finally, an analysis of the *surūd-e enqelabi* provides evidence for the jostling of alternate visions of the future within a tumultuous revolutionary space and uncovers one crucial factor for the slick consolidation of the Islamic Republic.

Thomas Solomon (University of Bergen)

'The Girl's Voice in Turkish Rap': Gender and Vocality in the Music of Ayben

Ayben is a Turkish rapper from the neighborhood of Üsküdar in Istanbul. She made her first professional recording at the age of 17 in 1999. After a hiatus of several years during which she worked on her rapping technique, she re-emerged on the Turkish hip-hop scene in 2004, and since then her career has steadily developed. She has gained wider visibility outside the underground hip-hop milieu after several high-profile duets rapping with prominent Turkish female pop and rock musicians, and an appearance in German-Turkish film director Fatih Akın's 2005 documentary about Turkish popular music, *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*.

While women's issues (such as the harassment of women on the street by men, and the double standard applied to Turkish women's behavior as opposed to men's) is only one of the many subjects she raps about, Ayben is very aware of her status as the most visible female rapper in Turkey, and the potential this visibility has for making alternative subjectivities available to her audience, especially her female fans. Her overall artistic project specifically includes the goal of making space for women within the very male-dominated Turkish hip-hop scene. This goal is made explicit in the slogan "Türkçe rapin kız sesi" ("The girl's voice in Turkish rap"), which she has used in several songs, and which also appears on posters and other promotional material used on her website ayben.net.

This paper draws on ethnographic research on Turkish rap in Istanbul between 2000 and the present to explore issues of gender and subjectivity in Ayben's life and her music. The paper makes particular use of material from an interview I conducted with Ayben in November 2006, quoting extensively her own words about her experiences in negotiating, on the one hand, expectations that others in her community (including her family and people in her Istanbul neighborhood) have of her as a young, Turkish, Muslim woman and, on the other hand, her choice to be a rapper and performer on stage in public. I also consider the development of Ayben's rapping style between 1999 and 2006 through brief discussion of some of her songs, showing how she developed her particular rapping technique, characterized by high-speed delivery, dense rhyme structures, rhythmic play, and complex relationships between the poetic lines of her text and the musical phrases in the

instrumental backing tracks over which she raps. This analysis of the poetics of Ayben's rap performances provides a background for further interview material in which Ayben herself describes her quest to find her own voice by developing her own rapping style.

This paper thus integrates biographical material and a discussion of Ayben's rapping style to show how she has found and developed her voice, in both the senses Dunn and Jones (1994:1) identify: the metaphorical sense of reclaiming her experiences through performance and asserting herself as a self and subject rather than an object and men's other (Abu-Lughod 1991:140), and the more literal sense of specific aspects of her physical performing voice as a rapper.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing Against Culture." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox, 137-162. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Dunn, Leslie C. and Nancy A. Jones. 1994. "Introduction." In *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, 1-13. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Leili Sreberny-Mohammadi (UCL)

Home and Away: Music Listening and the BBC in Iran

This paper examines tastes and trends in the music listening habits of young Tehran residents. I explore the multitude of practices employed to obtain and distribute music in the culturally restricted environment of the Islamic Republic. I then seek to identify the role of the BBC Persian service radio music broadcasts in taste-making amongst these young people. A key finding is that the participants in this project inhabit a rich cultural landscape. Nevertheless, it is one in which there are significant tensions in the relationships between the youthful audience, and diasporic music producers and programme makers who address them. The musical preferences of these young Tehranis also reveal much about their identity choices as the post-revolution generation. Through in-depth analysis of the focus group material, trends and tensions surrounding questions of identity, modernity and cosmopolitanism are revealed and explored in this paper.