**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY**

**INSTITUTE OF MUSICAL RESEARCH**

**MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA MUSIC FORUM, 6th December 2012**

With the support of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology and the Centre for Music Studies, City University London

The Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum was established in 2007 to provide an opportunity for those researching the musics of the region to meet and share their work with others. The Forum meets twice a year, usually in Senate House.

The first meeting of the 2012-2013 academic year was held on Thursday December 6th 2012 at Senate House. The chair for the first session was Carolyn Landau (King’s College, London). The first speaker Simone Tarsitani (Durham University), presented a paper on Musical and linguistic variations of Islamic panegyrics in eastern Ethiopia. This was based on findings from his research undertaken in 2011-2012 and included close analysis of religious songs, manuscripts and locally printed religious texts collected during fieldwork. He compared two main repertoires in Ethiopia, one centred in Hara and the other among the Oromo communities in rural Ethiopia close to Hara. He argued that linguistic and musical variations in the religious hymns provide some insight into processes of adaptation and historical transmission of religious practices in the area. The second speaker, Miranda L. P. Crowdus (City University London), also discussed musical adaptation processes but in a different cultural context, Tel Aviv in contemporary Israel The title of Miranda’s paper was ‘Transforming Ethno-religious Barriers through Collective Rap: Palestinian-Israeli Music and Tel-Aviv-Yafo Underground’. She explained that both Israeli Jewish and Israeli Arabic males and females were performers in this underground musical group. Their music and songs drew on a mixed linguistic heritage, Hebrew, Arabic, English, and Russian and synthesised a wide range of musical genres from klezmer, hip hop, pop, rock and classical As such their music was hybrid, post Zionist, post nationalistic. Miranda argued that this music reflected not a political reality but an aspiration for change, pointing out that cultural identity questions loom large for young Israelis, both Arabic and Jewish. The chair for the second session was Martin Stokes (King’s College, London). The final speaker of the morning was Owen Wright (SOAS) whose paper titled Music theory in Mamluk Cairo also dealt with variations in musical practice albeit from a different historical period. This paper exemplified how historical documents, newly come to light can undermine previously respected theories. Owen discussed in detail a treatise by Ibn Kurr written during the Mamluk period in approximately 1350. Close analysis of the content revealed variations in rhythmic patterns from those found in the Systematist theorists from Baghdad who had mapped out a Grand Tradition of music in the Mamluk period. Wright commented on how modern and recognisable Ibn Kurr’s manuscript would look to a student of music theory today.

The chair for the first afternoon session was Anna Morcom (Royal Holloway, University of London). Nina ter Laan (Radbound University Nijmegen, The Netherlands) was the first speaker. Her paper, ‘The Street as a Stage: Music and Islamic Activism in the Moroccan Arab Spring’, addressed questions about changes in the musical repertoires of the illegal Islamist group Jama’a al ‘Adl wal-Ihsane. After the uprisings and the formation of the February 20th movement, she noted three shifts in the music of Jama’a. The lyrics became political, departing from traditional Islamic religious content; performance sites changed from private religious ceremonies to the streets; and the audiences were different. Nina noted however that the musicians themselves saw the ‘new’ lyrics as being on a continuum which was integral to the religious lyrics of the past. The second afternoon speaker was Stephen Wilford (City University London). His paper was titled ‘“In our culture poets have more power than politicians”: The Lives, Deaths and Legacies of Lounes Matoub and Cheb Hasni’. Stephen explored the mythology and legacy of these two singers, both assassinated during Algeria’s bloody civil war (1991-2002). After Algerian independence from France in 1962, Stephen described the development of an arabisation process, the construction of an Algerian identity in which the singer Hasni was active. He was shot in Oran in 1994. Matoub, part of the 1970s Algerian diaspora in Paris, was shot a few years later in 1998. One effect of their assassinations is a legacy of suspicion, and conspiracy among the Algerian community in London which has led to a dispersed diaspora.

The chair for the second afternoon session was Laudan Nooshin (City University London).This was a screening of John Baily’s new film’ Return of the Nightingales’ which documents the recently established National Institute of Music in Afghanistan. In the discussion which followed the film, John explained that the teaching of western music at the institute was not a form of cultural neo-imperialism, but that a heritage of western art music started in the 1920s with military bands resulting in a music school with western-trained Afghan musicians in the 1970s had all been lost in 1992 under Islamism. The institute has the support of the UK-based SEMPRE (Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research) and John has acted as cultural ambassador to Afghanistan on their behalf. The children were seen learning the *rubab* as well as western musical instruments and notation. John pointed out that all children had to play some Afghan music.

The chair for the third afternoon session was Veronica Doubleday (University of Brighton). The speaker was Sara Manasseh (Independent scholar. The title of her paper was ‘Shbahoth: Songs of Praise in the Babylonian Jewish Tradition-From Baghdad to Bombay to London’. Sara traced an Iraqi Jewish heritage of these paraliturgical hymns going back two and a half thousand years. Until the twentieth century, they were sung unaccompanied by instruments at festive occasions both at home and at the synagogue. During the twentieth century recordings had been made which found a market among diasporic communities. The richness of the heritage draws upon many intricate complex adaptations and transmissions of Shbahoth among the Iraqi Jewish diasporic communities in locations as far flung as Bombay and Shanghai. Sara pointed out that in the poetry and music of host countries to the Jewish diaspora there were shared features to be found in Shbahoth. Melodically, Shbahoth uses the same range of modes as Iraqi Arabic song.

The day was brought to a close with a short recital of Shbahoth by Sara and a book launch for her new book with CD *Shbahoth-Songs of Praise in the Babylonian Jewish Tradition: From Baghdad to Bombay and London* ( SOAS Musicology Series, Ashgate Press).

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