IV UskoMus symposium: "Music and Islam"
10 November 2016, 11am–5pm
Cultural Centre Stoa, Helsinki

ABSTRACTS (IN THE ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Ayhan Erol (Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir & Music Archive JAPA, Helsinki)

The Glocality of Islamic Popular Music: The Turkish case

Like Islam itself, Islamic music provides a new anchor for the self and thereby creates an "imagined community" that reinforces social ties among people who do not know each other but who share the same dreams and spiritual attachments. The repertory of Islamic pop artists and the sonic design created in their albums symbolizes the identity of different generations enculturating in situations of rapid change. There are obvious differences between Islamic pop music in a certain region and contemporary Islamic music scenes in the world of the Islam. At the same time, however, there are many similarities and overlaps between them, including a sharing of local facilities and resources and a crossover of musicians, audiences, sounds and Islamic beliefs and practices.

According to Robertson (1997), it is the term 'glocalization' which, in its original connotation, means 'a global outlook tailored to local conditions', that better sums up the inter-relations of the global and the local, although the main propositions of glocalaization are not too different from the main arguments of a sophisticated version of globalization. In this context the term 'glocalization' a portmanteau of globalization and localization means the simultaneity or co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies.

While musicians are concerned with building up an audience-base for Islamic pop within any location, they also aspire to attract listeners elsewhere. Islamic pop music in Turkey is a part of the "glocal" Islamic pop music scene. Thus it is possible to see Islamic music in Turkey "a hybridization between local and global" music practices. Here I discuss how a closer look at "Islamic pop music" made in Turkey provides an analytical tool for understanding the complexities of Islamic identities in the global/local nexus. Close readings of some commercially recordings illustrate how songs may imagine and embody multi-dimensional Muslim identities. The presentation will be accompanied by supporting audio and visual examples.

Mikko Viitamäki (University of Helsinki)

The transformative power of music in Indian Sufism

Casting aside the reservations expressed by certain religious scholars about the permissibility of music in Islam, the masters of the Chishti brotherhood embraced this art form as a potent

ecstatic and meditative technique. This paper focuses on the attitudes of eighteenth-century Chishtis towards the use of music in the practice of Sufism.

Eighteenth century was the formative period for many aspects of Indian culture, not the least for the music. Musical instruments (e.g. sitar, tabla) as well as musical genres (e.g. khayal) that dominate the present-day North Indian art music emerged during that period. Simultaneously, a leading Sufi master Kalim Allah Shahjahanabadi (d. 1730) and his followers articulated the approach of the Chishti brotherhood to music. Their approach was considerably less reserved than that of their predecessors, and it was marked with an acute consciousness of the developments in the contemporary musical scene. The Sufis' heightened interest in music probably also contributed to the emergence of qawwali music in the form we know it today.

Based on the Persian and Arabic works of Kalim Allah and his followers, this paper explores the Sufi masters' conceptualization of the transformative power of music as well as their views on how to use it in advancing the spiritual evolution of Sufi disciples. Far from merely juggling the pre-existent theoretical concepts inherited from earlier authors, the approach of the eighteenth-century Chishtis is based on practical knowledge acquired through guiding disciples.

Idriss El-Thalji (Fadlansson Finnish Jordanian Friendship Association ry)

The movement and development of musical instruments at early Islamic age: the case of Kantele

The evolution of Islamic music started in the early Islamic period with help of the nations of new lands e.g. Levant, Persian, middle Asia, Egypt. The evolution was very noticeable, especially in the Umayyad period. However, it has rapidly developed in the Abbasid period and several musical instruments moved into Middle East and the actual development started. The ancient eastern sources e.g. Alfarabi books highlighted the movement and development of several musical instruments: one of these instruments was called "Elshah-roud" which can be considered as the ancestor of Kantele and Qanun. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the journey of the musical instrument, Kantele, at the early Islamic age based on the ancient eastern sources and with brief review of the commonly known etymological theories of Kantele. The pre and post-Islamic schools of thought together with the political and social atmospheres of that age are also illustrated. This critical scrutiny of ancient eastern sources illustrates that the Kantele was invented jointly in the Turkic and Nordic climes. The political changes which were followed by emigration and emergence of new communities could impact the social life and perception of music. The relation between the permissibility of music and the emergence of new communities is explained. As part of the life style, the discussions about music permissibility appeared in such periods e.g. Siege of Baghdad and Damascus by Mongols (One of the eras of Muslim scholarship opined that music was strictly forbidden), thus negatively influenced the musical development. In summary, the strategic depth of Kantele with the understanding of the permissibility evolution of music can be used as an effective example to co-develop music in a more sustainable way as for the eastern immigrant communities in the Nordic counties.

John Millar (Aalto University, Helsinki & Nefes)

A Secular but Experientially-based Glance at the Terms Islam, Faith, No-self, and the Ney – with Links to Pedagogical Innovation

This paper attempts an irreverent and secular exploration into the nature of being, or rather into what it is not, critically but affectionately touching on some controversial terms.

The large swathes of humanity that have attained a good or excessive material standard of living would seem to be in something of an existential crisis, as well as being the unwitting stewards of an environmental crisis that is having a disproportionate impact on the even larger swathes of humanity that have not attained even a moderate material standard of living. Even if we can engineer our way out of the present global supply- demand imbalance, at some time we must face the fact that the unchecked consumption and trashing of natural resources at a greater rate than they can be replenished is materially unsustainable, is demonstrably a path to suffering at all levels of living experience, and will require much deeper human development and transformation than engineering alone can deliver.

The pedagogical implications of this are considered.

The paper considers a secular interpretation of the term Islam. Faith, a seemingly a ubiquitous human trait, is explored in terms of its positive and negative traits. No-self, a term that may refer to anything from a dogma to a useful technique, is explored with reference to several contemporary initiatives. All three are considered in terms of the metaphor and actuality of the Ney flute.

A hypothesis is playfully offered that may help in reorienting the concept of the 'good life' and augment already positive developments that are manifesting in teaching. This does not negate the seriousness of what is being discussed, but acknowledges that while passion and open-curiosity are essential, kicking up a storm about something that never had any existence whatsoever is a rather futile process.

Jonas Otterbeck (Lund University)

The Awakening of Islamic Pop

Awakening is a pioneering Islamic media company formed in 2000 in UK. Self-described as 'faith-based', the company produces Islamic Pop music that has made it big. This paper will address the history and musical products of Awakening and further invite to an interpretation of the phenomenon stressing issues like masculinity, the ethical self, consumer society and theology, and the interconnectedness thereof.