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1. What is the position of music in the OIC – Organisation of Islamic Cooperation – countries? Can we compare it to how it evolved historically?

- Of all aspects that influence cultural norms of different societies, technology is the most unavoidable omnipresence that defines not only the relation of a cultural element of a society with that of other societies, but also the relation of the same cultural element with its own society and even with its own history.

As the OIC is made of 57 members from 4 continents, each different in social, economic, cultural, geographic and historic backgrounds, so it is very difficult to assess the position of a cultural/artistic field among them as a whole. Of course the historic evolution of music on the regions where these countries are located matters greatly, with some cultures being more influential on the regional or even global cultural norms at different points of history, thus being more resilient or resistant toward outside cultural influences. But if we agree on at least some superficial level of globalization, specially in arts and entertainment, then maybe more importantly the historic evolution of each country's socio-economy matters on shaping the current situation of art and culture. For example in Malaysia with relatively free and competitive market, the art sector also has to generate capital to survive therefore leans toward attracting masses and wider investments, whereas in Iranian economy that is heavily subsidized by government the art dwells somewhat differently and could be indifferent to market's reactions, but remains vulnerable on possible political interferences.

In my view religions, Islam or other, are not necessarily and independently culture. In this regard I don't see a significant difference between position of music in Islamic world in comparison with the rest of the world, a mixture of different dozes of the same elements of economy, politics, social norms and historical implications. However, certain elements and practices of religion could directly influence the culture or at least incorporate and create a common recurring theme.

2. We see an abundance of opera houses - in Dubai, Oman, Doha... to name a few. Do you think there is enough original, classical music in Islamic world to fill their calendars?

- The sheer having concert halls and opera houses is auspicious and positive. However such large institutions have to shift their functionality from resembling a museum (with historic artifacts) to a rather current art gallery. I don't think there are too many classical music from Islamic world to fill full seasons, but this could be an advantage to establish a new and vibrant musical legacy.

There isn't a long tradition of opera/orchestral music in Islamic world (compare to Europe for instance) as the art-form isn't indigenous which could be advantageous. Looking at a vast majority of surviving European opera houses

and concert institutions, you see the same tired and old programs over and over, and people really don't find it interesting; such institutions are at best a (social) class show. Having these institutions on these thriving economies is the perfect opportunity to build up a vivid and relevant cultural phenomenon, that does not necessarily conform to the European path of classical music but creates its own life. For this to happen the institutions should be daring and take risks, while not limiting themselves to political or financial agenda. There's no harm on staging Tchaikovsky, Mozart or Puccini but there's certainly harm on just sticking to history and following the exact footsteps of European institutions; just as there's harm on closing doors to other ideas/artists and limiting everything to Islamic world's productions.

3. On the other hand, do composers from the Islamic world find a place in these hallowed destinations?

- It is increasingly difficult for a composer to find his way to the favor of institutions. Orchestras or opera companies as institutions of a capitalistic economy, as it's often the case, have to achieve what is the ultimate goal of a capitalist institution that is to produce capital. For this goal to achieve they follow their agenda which has a wide range of political and business motives, pushed by a net of agents and directors and lawyers and managers and politicians and such.

True that for these companies to sustain the costs of any production/project it's very important to take the wise decisions, but the experience has proven that not always the safest and easiest choice is the right choice.

Composers are never trained gaining necessary skills for running a successful company or a business scheme. On the other hand most of governmental or non-governmental supports for creative projects (that are not already entirely allocated to institutions) are usually limited to support artists/projects from the same country (or specific other nationalities) and let's face it not many of our governments are known for their generosity of supporting independent artists.

In this situation, the only apparent option for composers to reach in higher echelons of institutions is to compromise and reduce/shrink their work. Which in long run has is harms both the artist and the institution.

4. What is needed to support and ensure continued productivity of music in the Islamic world?

- One way could be to install a system of support for the artists and small/medium art projects/units through a network of non or semi governmental foundations. The necessary revenue could come from various social taxes, such as tax on tobacco products or drinks and such. And to leave the doors open for participation of international artists at least on a competitive basis which will benefit the local community and art scene.

In my opinion it is wrong to treat art as a business and let it compete in open market for profit, for the art's product unlike entertainment is not generating revenue but to consolidate the very foundation of society and culture.

5. When comparing to traditions such as calligraphy, falconry, equestrian pursuits, in which it's possible to pursue a career, where do you see music? Is there enough support from the community and the government?

- It is impossible to imagine a human society/community without music for the music touches the very core of our existence; as soon as we are born we start making sounds and we learn sounds affect us in various ways almost immediately, some even say we learn soothing effect of sound even before being born by the sound of our mother's heartbeat or her voice. So for as long as human anatomy is as it is there will be music, and very likely musicians as a trade or profession. However the shape of music or it's profession might, and likely so, change. Not so long ago it was also not possible to imagine a music profession like DJ, or that entire process, production and crew of music making is one guy with his laptop. I'm not sure a profession called composer, or conductor or cellist will exist in 300 years, but I'm quite sure music will exist.

6. What has your career trajectory been like? How has music from your homeland influenced your career?

- Every decision that any person makes, on any given subject/issue of life, has something to do with every single aspect of that person's entire life up to that point. My cultural background is sedimented on every aspect of my life too. I started, at the very late age of 15, by being a pianist and later a contrabassist; so I was basically trained in western classical music culture. But at the time it was compulsory to play a traditional Persian instrument too, so I learned a lot from Persian music throughout my study years in Iran.

I know that one of my biggest interests in my music is to create a musical experience, and not tunes to be heard or listened to. In retrospect this is probably the very similar to what I experience(d) when listening to a religious mourning chant or an Adhan recitation. The biggest difference between European music and Eastern music (or non-European music, whose roots aren't somewhat originated from European traditions or its resurgence) is this mysticism, this direct and naked contact with the music itself in Eastern cultures; whereas in European traditions music is an object presented to an audience for a purpose. You are always separated from the music, there is usually a stage or a place for music, and listeners react to music for example with dancing.

In eastern cultures everything is a lot more ecstatic and sensory; it's an experience rather than a performance, it's a matter of life (and death). There is no separation between performers and audience, you all are part of music. If you ever attend a funeral for example in Iran, or similar Islamic ceremonies you could feel it, which is very different than, say, a church choir. Musical cultures of far east are quite similar too, mystic and sensory stimulating. Not that

European classical customs and traditions are necessarily bad or worse than the non-European ones, but they are somewhat different.

7. How receptive is the world industry to music from your region? Have you seen a resurgence in interest recently?

- There has definitely been a growing interest among the people and audience of music, not the least for a fresh air and different music that could come outside of European traditions of music making. After all what we all study and try to reproduce as classical music, is a tradition of a very small part of the world with less than 10% of world's population. The craft may be mastered in some aspects within European traditions, but what to create with this craft is very personal.

The industry however tries to catch on, maybe as an attempt of being politically correct. There are growing number of projects featuring exclusively or partially on music from seemingly different sources than usual programs. With grandioso or exotic titles such as *making peace through music* or *music from middle east* or *orient-oxidant* or such. I am skeptic however of genuinity of these efforts in oppose to usual publicity stunts and political correctness to get more budget. And how music industry and institutions would embrace new concepts or new ideas from outside. I'm not an advocate for positive quota in art if all else is fair and square, which is never the case! At any case the change never comes from industry and they could only adapt to it for survival.

8. When studying or composing, do you find that most of your audience is from your region or global?

- Almost never. My first and only performance (of my compositions) in my home country took place only a couple of months ago. There is a big thirst and interest for contemporary art and music at least in Iran, I have seen it several times and got very fascinated by it: packed convert halls of most attentive audience for very hardcore contemporary European music pieces! However composition as a career or job, that is not songwriting or film music, is virtually non-existent in our region.

The concept of an artistic music performance still very new in our region similar to most parts of the world. But exactly because this is a new phenomenon to our region the interest, energy and passion for artistic music is unique and I'm sure it will get more and more attention.

9. What does music lose if it's not appreciated fully in its own context? For instance, for literature one would argue that language and nuance both suffer if the audience is always foreign, viewing the work as exotic.

- This may be the greatest advantage of music, that it knows no boundaries and requires to education. We all can experience the music and perceive the sounds regardless of our backgrounds.

The truth is that music is a man-made/artificial but ecstatic craft, and even though it may have theorised and advanced within European academic culture, similar to medicine or astronomy or other sciences, any human can appreciate, enjoy and/or react to it.

10. You have studied in Tehran and then performed in noted international institutions. How difficult or easy is for a talented young person from OIC countries to pursue music as a career? What are the avenues available - teaching, performing, research?

- Unfortunately having a career in music, specially composition, is very difficult and particularly difficult if you are foreign to the country and culture in which you aspire to work. A career in composition is very much like entrepreneurship, it is essential to have a unique and special craft, but it is far from enough. You have to keep finding new and creative ways to present your work. Having a career itself is a full time job and needs constant investment, regardless what that career is. It's very tough, the best start is maybe to study in an international place just so to make contacts and enter music communities.

The challenges of getting a spot as a composer from an Islamic country/background, are similar to any other Muslim expat of any profession, with the big difference that the evaluation of a composer's portfolio is not as easy and readily available as that of an engineer for example. In order to get any performance/opportunity you need to have a great portfolio, samples and references; and in order to have any work sample you need to have performances, so it's like a vicious circle.

Teaching and research positions are also generally administrated through some large institutions/academies, each having their own agenda and struggle to survive. Plus the number of positions existing for music is absolutely disproportionate to vast number of yearly music graduates. What most artists eventually do is to form their own communities and directly produce their own works and find their audience. Being independent rather than trying to enter big institutions' game. In a way this maybe the way future of art will be, and perhaps for the better. Artist facing directly the people, no middle man between, like an artisan shop. After all the reason someone becomes composer is not the gold or glory, but a deep yearning for music, and if you truly believe in what you do and do it wholeheartedly other people will appreciate it too.

11. How did the MATA concert come about? What was the entire process like for you? And if you don't mind sharing this, how does a composer get paid for something like this?

- I had a performance of another piece at MATA festival a couple of years ago and a couple of other performances in New York, so the team of MATA were familiar with my work. I think I've been fortunate in my career to be somewhat recognised in music communities with a certain kind of music that

incorporates acoustics and psychoacoustics, emotions, intonations and such phenomena. MATA is quite unique in that they have an open call for their festival performances and everybody could send their sample works for an international jury to choose from.

How a composer survives is a mystery! You don't get paid from performances. If you have a publisher, they might sell or rent the performance material and give a small percentage for a performance; but again it's a practice many composers don't do as it makes being performed even more complicated and there's really no money on it, unless you have some major edition as your publisher and they get large orchestral or opera pieces and only a handful of composers in the world are the lucky ones to join the club! If you have a copyright protecting partner, again depending on the type of performance you might get very little remuneration too, but US performances usually are excluded and if you have a publisher this goes to them, and again it's staggeringly small fee!

The main income of a composer is by getting commission for a new piece; so when you see famous composers only write big orchestral or opera works because there is a large fee for that, and usually several institutions are involved to finance the project, it's a little bit like making a movie. But anyway you have to be part of this whole system in order to get such commissions and again, only a select few have that luxury.