

Regards

30 | 2023

Soundtracks of Our Lives: Music-Making and Musicians in MENA Cinema

Opening a Space for the Audience: A Dialogue with Kamran Rastegar about Composing MENA Cinema Soundtracks

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Edition électronique

URL : <https://journals.usj.edu.lb/Regards/article/view/873>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.70898/Regards.voi30.873>

ISSN : 2791-285X

Editeur

Editions de l'USJ, Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth

Référence électronique

RASTEGAR , K., & CHAUDHURI , S. (2023). Opening a Space for the Audience: A Dialogue with Kamran Rastegar about Composing MENA Cinema Soundtracks. *Regards*, (30), 91-114.
<https://doi.org/10.70898/Regards.voi30.873>

DOSSIER THÉMATIQUE :

Soundtracks of Our Lives: Music-Making and Musicians in Cinema of the MENA Region

OPENING A SPACE FOR THE AUDIENCE: A Dialogue with Kamran Rastegar about Composing MENA Cinema Soundtracks

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Abstract | This article is an edited transcript of a dialogue between the comparative literature professor, musician and composer Kamran Rastegar and film scholar Shohini Chaudhuri. While existing interviews and analysis on film composing largely focus on Hollywood practice, this dialogue provides new insights from Rastegar’s experiences of composing soundtracks for independent Middle Eastern cinema – specifically, his collaboration with the Palestinian director Annemarie Jacir. It explores his musical training and background, his roles as composer, music supervisor and musician, the process of film composing, approaches to music in film scholarship, and sound-image relations and musical choices in Jacir’s films *Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003), *Salt of this Sea* (2008) and *When I Saw You* (2012).

Keywords | Film composing, film music, film sound, Middle Eastern cinema, Palestinian film, Annemarie Jacir.

Abstract | Cet article est une transcription d'un dialogue entre le professeur de littérature comparée, musicien et compositeur Kamran Rastegar et la spécialiste du cinéma Shohini Chaudhuri. Les interviews et analyses existantes sur la composition de films se concentrent en grande partie sur la pratique hollywoodienne, mais ce dialogue fournit de nouvelles perspectives à partir des expériences de Rastegar en matière de composition de bandes sonores pour le cinéma indépendant du Moyen-Orient, en particulier sa collaboration avec la réalisatrice palestinienne Annemarie Jacir. Il explore sa formation et ses antécédents musicaux, ses rôles de compositeur, de superviseur musical et de musicien, le processus de composition d'un film, les approches de la musique de film dans l'érudition cinématographique, ainsi que les relations son-image et les choix musicaux dans les films de Jacir, *Comme vingt impossibles* (2003), *Sel de cette mer* (2008) et *Quand je t'ai vu* (2012).

Mots-clés | Composition de films, musique de films, son de film, cinéma du Moyen-Orient, film palestinien, Annemarie Jacir.

INTRODUCTION

A professor of comparative literature at Tufts University, USA, Kamran Rastegar has another life as a musician, producing experimental electronic and instrumental music inspired by Middle Eastern cultures, and as a composer for film and theatre. In March 2023, Shohini Chaudhuri, the guest editor of this special issue of *Regards*, spoke to him about his musical training and background, his process of composing for films in the MENA region, approaches to music in film scholarship and, specifically, his collaboration with the Palestinian film director Annemarie Jacir. The dialogue was based on a set of semi-structured interview questions, which were explored in a recorded zoom conversation, then the arguments were refined through email exchange.

Rastegar's discussion of his practice-based training and formative experiences sheds light not only on how he came to work as a film composer in MENA cinema but also the milieu in which certain transnational, collaborative projects and partnerships became possible. Among other things, he reveals New York in the early twenty-first century to have been a hub for a generation of Palestinian filmmakers, themselves part of a global diaspora, who later become internationally prominent.¹ Existing interviews and analysis on film composing largely focus on Hollywood practice.² In this dialogue, Rastegar provides new insights from his own experiences of compositional practices in independent MENA cinema. Together with Chaudhuri, he explores how the presence, or absence, of music shapes film form. In the final part of the dialogue, they focus on his work with Annemarie Jacir, for whom he became a collaborator on her debut fictional short *Like Twenty Impossibles* (2003) and her first two feature films, *Salt of this Sea* (2008) and *When I Saw You* (2012). To the growing body of scholarship on Jacir's work they add a detailed attention to music.³ Their discussion encompasses an analysis of musical choices and sound-image relations within each of these movies from the perspective of Rastegar's roles as composer, music supervisor and musician.

1- Annemarie Jacir herself resided in Saudi Arabia during her childhood, going back and forth to her parents' hometown Bethlehem, worked and studied in the US, was exiled in Jordan and later returned to Palestine, where she now lives in Haifa. For further details, see JACIR, Annemarie, BAYOUMI Moustafa, GHAZOUL Ferial, WESTMORELAND Mark and DABASHI Hamid, "I Wanted That Story to Be Told" (Interview), *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 31 (2011), pp. 241–54.

2- See, for example, KARLIN, Fred and WRIGHT Rayburn, *On the Track: A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring*, New York: Routledge, 2004. Some exceptions to the Hollywood focus are: KALINAK, Kathryn, *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 91–114, although this relies on secondary sources; COLEMAN, Lindsay and TILLMAN, Joakim (eds.), *Contemporary Film Music: Investigating Cinema Narratives and Composition*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, which contains an interview with the Indian composer A.R. Rahman and an analysis of his work; and COOKE, Mervyn, *A History of Film Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, with one chapter on non-Western scores.

3- Some scholars have, in passing, noted the music in Jacir's films, including BURRIS, Greg, *The Palestinian Idea: Film, Media, and the Radical Imagination*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019, and FADDA-CONREY, Carol, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*, New York: New York University Press, 2014.

ON FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES AND MUSICAL TRAINING

Shohini Chaudhuri: Can you give an overview of your background as it relates to your personal and intellectual concerns, training and work as a musician and academic?

Kamran Rastegar: It's probably useful to begin by saying that I'm a child of a mixed marriage of Iranian and American parents. I was born in the US, but I grew up in Iran for most of my childhood. My family then moved to the US when I was thirteen, during the Iran-Iraq war. Despite my mixed parentage, I had many of the typical challenges that immigrant children experience: not being acclimated to the cultural framework of being a teenager in the United States, having to deal with bullying for being perceived as different, and the specifically toxic animus towards Iranians in the US during that time. Shortly after arrival, I found both an escape and a way to connect to my new surroundings through American popular music. Of course, I'd already been exposed to earlier musicians – at my home in Iran we listened to a wide range of records and tapes, from jazz to classical to Dylan and the Beatles and of course lots of Persian classical music. But there was much that was unfamiliar when I arrived – specifically punk and heavy metal, a knowledge of which was necessary to join in the social world of my middle school. Learning the guitar became part of that exploration of my new surroundings. It allowed me to make friends and become part of a social milieu that was welcoming of me. My interest in music became increasingly academic. In high school, I had a wonderful music teacher who offered a specialized music harmony and theory class which was, for all intents and purposes, a college-level class. At the same time, I was learning about music theory and composition, broadly speaking through analysis of classical music, but also through jazz and my training as a guitarist. After the first couple of years of learning folk guitar and rock guitar, I started studying with a jazz guitarist and so started going further down that route. During my high school and college years, my father began connecting with some of the luminaries of Persian art music who were beginning to tour the US regularly. I was very lucky that he became friendly with Iranian musicians like Hossein Alizadeh, Kayhan Kalhor and Shahram Nazeri and that we even once or twice hosted them and others at our home, experiences which left a strong impression on me.

I went to Hampshire College, where Yusef Lateef, a great jazz musician of his generation, who was interested in transcultural experimentation, was one of the music performance professors. He had an interest in Middle Eastern music, in part because of his conversion to Islam and his relationship with the Muslim world. I pursued what would be considered in American terms now a double major in Middle Eastern studies and musicology, and completed a senior thesis which was titled “Processes of Innovation in Persian Art Music After the Iranian Revolution”, which drew on a wide range of original published materi-

als I obtained from Iran. During that time, I encountered another figure, who would be significant to me, Dwight Reynolds, now a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He was then just finishing his PhD while teaching at Amherst College, a neighbouring college to the one that I was attending. We had a consortium agreement so I could take courses at Amherst. I went over to take some of Dwight's courses on classical Arabic literature. He started a small Middle Eastern music ensemble and he had a room in his apartment in Amherst which was lined with ouds on the wall, and he kindly lent me one to learn to play. As part of his ensemble, I learned a number of Arabic classic and/or folk tunes, and the basics of *maqam* theory from him.⁴ When I made my first trip to Egypt, he jotted down names of music instrument stores in Cairo that he recommended. So, I bought my first oud when I was an undergraduate while studying abroad in Egypt, and began studying it fairly seriously.

I enjoyed learning the oud through the *maqam* repertoire. I'd tried studying Persian *dastgah* music and the setar, but I was fundamentally ill at ease with what I found to be the very rigid and formalized approach that was foundational to the training of the *radif*.⁵ But, in studying Arabic music, I found a more open approach, at least in the way that I started studying it – I studied pieces of the classic popular repertoire (from *samaï*s and *bashrafs* [both instrumental genres] to pieces by Mohamed Abdel Wahab and Sayyid Darwish, and of course Umm Kulthum). The diaspora scene in which I learnt was as much indebted to the possibilities of crossover between the American folk music scene and *maqam*-based repertoire as it was to the more formalized routes of music training that predominated in the “old world”. The former is open, informal, and likely more than a little amateur, while the latter is more closed, hierarchical, and exacting. So, like Persian music, if one wants to study Arabic music in a more formalized way, one often does still need to enter into these more rigid forms of training and the hierarchies they include.

Fast forwarding to my post undergraduate period, I spent about four years in the San Francisco area, where I ended up in the experimental noise music and indie rock scene, playing guitar, learning about recording, and leading a rock band that performed and recorded. I still cherished my oud and practised it pretty regularly. But I had set that aside as my primary interest, really, and I'd dedicated myself to more avant-garde and independent rock music in the American idiom at that moment — the mid-'90s. But ultimately, given my range of interests, I had a sense of alterity within the San Francisco scene, of not being entirely part of

4- *Maqam* is the theory and repertoire of melodic modes in Arabic music. See FARRAJ, Johnny and ABU SHUMAYS, Sami, *Inside Arabic Music: Arabic Maqam Performance and Theory in the 20th Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 266–293.

5- The *radif*, a system of modal scales and melodies, lays the foundation of Persian classical music. Within this system, there are twelve main modal categories, consisting of seven *dastgahs* (modes) and five *avazes* (lesser modes). See SIAMDOUST, Nahid, *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017, p.20.

the community. I think a lot of what I've dealt with is really this tension between insiderness and outsidersness. The indie scene in those days was very white, very parochial in a way.

So, when I decided to pursue graduate studies at Columbia University, I began pursuing the study of comparative literature focusing on Arabic and Persian. In New York, again, music was an opportunity to meet new people and to socialize. The world I fell into there, almost the day after I relocated from San Francisco, couldn't have been more different from the one I had left. I almost immediately was thrust into a vibrant Middle Eastern cosmopolitan diaspora arts scene, where the national distinctions of the region were generally unimportant. Arabs, Turks, Persians and so on all socialized communally. There was also a central focus on Israel and Palestine which involved many Palestinians but also some Israeli Jews (mostly anti-Zionists, or ones at least highly critical of Israel). My focus started shifting much more towards the oud, and to the opportunities in New York for playing in the Middle Eastern music scene in the early 2000s. There was a contemporary art dimension to the cultural scene, networked around the higher education institutions in New York – NYU and Columbia, in particular. And certain independent cultural institutions also were established around the turn of the century, such as Alwan for the Arts and ArteEast. And there I started studying *maqam*-based music more seriously, and I studied with the late Bassam Saba with whom I worked on technique and also improvisation. I would travel for my graduate studies, and often try to take advantage of being in different places by learning from local musicians. I spent a year in Cairo, and there I undertook more formal lessons. And then I spent time in Palestine and Lebanon. In each of these stays, I tried to further my study of music, while in some cases meeting filmmakers as well. I also travelled to Iran for the first time after growing up there, and connected with musicians and the music scene there. I was lucky to find interest for my compositions by an Iranian record label called Hermes Records which released a CD of my compositions in 2003. Afterwards, it wasn't unusual to meet Iranians around the world and to have them tell me they'd heard my music on a CD they'd bought in Iran.

SC: It sounds like music is for you a way of finding your place and sense of cultural belonging. You talked about your affinity for the oud, a traditional Arabic instrument, over the setar, a traditional Persian instrument. But is music for you also a place where different cultural elements can interact?

KR: I think that's all true. You're raising an interesting question, which is that I felt constrained by the setar and the oud seemed to open up the possibility of a different kind of relationship. Reflecting on this, some of that was also born of the sense that I had less personal baggage with regard to the oud – mastering the setar would have situated me more firmly within a circle of Iranianness, but I probably was not comfortable fully inhabiting that space. (Interestingly, for a

variety of reasons, since my own turn towards the oud over twenty years ago, there has been an explosion of interest in the instrument in Iran.) Obviously, there are a set of cultural expectations around origin that come with certain cultural practices and pursuits. My own approach is probably born of the fact that I am of a bicultural background. Even in childhood, I'd always experienced this tension about being or not being Iranian enough, and whether you can fully manifest that ambivalence productively in your life. To some extent my answer was to reject the need to live up to a particular standard and to just embrace the split or to pursue these neighbouring cultural idioms as interests that I can feel a certain relationship with. There is something about living with “one foot in, one foot out” that I've been able to nurture in a way that has furthered my own practice.

SC: You've spoken about how you met filmmakers when you went to the Middle East. Is that how you started working as a composer for film, through those encounters with specific individuals?

KR: Well, many of those encounters were in New York City, actually. For example, I met Annemarie Jacir at Columbia; we were both graduate students there. She was in a film class that I was taking called Arab and African Cinema, taught by Richard Peña. During the time I was there, other Palestinian filmmakers also went to Columbia – among them, Sameh Zoabi and Cherien Dabis, both of whom have subsequently had success and acclaim. There were also other excellent Arab filmmakers studying there – for example, Zeina Durra and Tala Hadid. So, at that time, New York City became a locus for a certain set of possible interactions. And those filmmakers and other friends were going back and forth a lot, as their films were being shot in the Arab world and then being produced and/or screened in New York.

ON THE PROCESS OF FILM COMPOSING

SC: I'm curious to know how you go about the process of film composing. In general, with the types of films that you've worked on, have you been brought on board after the film is more or less complete? Or are you involved at the script stage? Do you go and visit the locations?

KR: It seems to me there's a paradigmatic way, which is usually that the composer's almost the last post-production element – unless the director has a sense of a need for some sort of audio element that would be significant to how they might shoot a scene, in which case they might ask for a rough track, or even a fully-developed track, in advance. Luckily, in the few feature films for which I have composed, I've tended to be involved earlier in the process. With *When I Saw You*, the last film that I did with Annemarie, I had a chance to be in discussion with her by email as she was developing the script. I recall that perhaps even while send-

ing me a draft of the script, she shared a set of music tracks that she'd been listening to that she thought were evocative – this was especially important, given that this was a period film. In *Like Twenty Impossibles*, the soundtrack was composed simultaneously with the editing of the film, and we had discussed and developed ideas for the soundtrack from early in the process. I wasn't present when the film was shot but I received a lot of the footage soon after. I knew that there was going to be a checkpoint scene at the beginning, and I had been through those checkpoints, and I wanted to capture the tension and chaos of the checkpoints as they were at that time (now they are quite different, but that's a topic for another time). I had some ideas for how to do that when we started working. Elements were being added and removed, both in the musical and visual materials, as the film came together. And then I knew I wanted a lyrical piece, which became the theme. I worked with Sami Abu Shumays, the violinist, who's one of the paragons of the New York Arabic music scene these days but was just getting started at that point. That was a case in which everything was happening at the same time and, musically, the soundtrack was developed step by step along with the other elements in the post-production. Of course, it was initially simply Annemarie's senior thesis film and was only slated to show at the Columbia Film School thesis screenings, but then was selected for Cinéfondation at Cannes. It didn't win but at Cannes it did receive a lot of very positive attention.

With Annemarie's debut feature film, *Salt of this Sea*, I initially had a concept that really didn't work. I wanted to put together an ensemble of local Palestinian musicians and record pieces with them simultaneously to the film's production. My idea was to take the pieces back and work on them as elements and samples within compositions that I would complete for the film. I did go to Ramallah, and was on set for some of the shooting, and I made a number of recordings with several excellent local musicians. Some of them were pieces that I had composed, and we did a couple of traditional pieces, as well. But, for the most part, none of that material ended up being used. Every time I tried to work up a draft of something based on those recordings to share with Annemarie, she really didn't like it. She was very sensitive about what I would call an "inauthentic authenticity" that would mark the film through the music. At first, I was frustrated but then I realized that I was probably trying too hard to mask my own "inauthentic" link to the film's material — I set aside those recordings and just began to compose materials that were entirely my own, and immediately it all began to work so much better.

SC: Yes, I can see why she might be wary of "ethnic" music for an "ethnic" film.⁶

6- For further discussion of using or avoiding "ethnic" references in soundtracks, see KARLIN and WRIGHT, *On the Track*, pp. 83–99, and Mark Slobin's chapters "The Superculture beyond Steiner" and "Subcultural Filmways" in SLOBIN, Mark (ed.), *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, Middletown : Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

KR: That may be one place where my initial instincts led me wrong. I felt like it was necessary to give the music a veritable link to its narrative context. It's a film about a woman who's returned to Palestine, trying to look for her roots, you know?

SC: Yes. [*Soraya, played by Suheir Hammad, a Brooklyn-born woman of Palestinian descent, arrives in Palestine to collect her grandfather's savings, which she reclaims through a bank robbery aided by her friends Emad and Marwan after learning that Israel has frozen pre-1948 Palestinian assets. The trio then go on a road trip exploring historic Palestine, and discover her grandfather's former home in Jaffa.*]

KR: So I thought I was going to try to evoke this sonically through an interplay between authentic material and digitally-enhanced or composed elements. The producers were also on board and flew me to Palestine to do it. But then, once it was done, it just didn't work in the film. So, the soundtrack is entirely electro-acoustic music that I composed and performed along with a small number of session musicians. There's one scene when they're in the car, trying to get through the checkpoint after they've robbed the bank, where you hear in the background a bit of music on a neighbouring van's radio, and it's a bit of a folk tune from one of the sessions that I had recorded. So one of the only ways that we were able to incorporate any of it was to relegate it to being a song on a car radio! It's funny how on paper sometimes the ideas sound great – it seems like you're going to achieve a certain statement that's useful for the film – but then, in practice, it sometimes doesn't work.

SC: Despite the recordings that you did with Palestinian musicians in Palestine for *Salt of this Sea*, it seems in most cases the music has been recorded by you back in the States. Is that right?

KR: I was living in Edinburgh, actually, when *Salt of this Sea* was produced. With *When I Saw You*, I was living in Beirut and recorded it there. And, ultimately, the manner of recording the film is very budget dependent. *Like Twenty Impossibles* I literally recorded in my bedroom in New York, and finished it on a laptop; we had no budget at all. Then, for *Salt of this Sea*, we had a small budget and I turned my whole flat in Edinburgh into a recording studio. All the musicians ended up being people living in Scotland – they were all friends of mine who were playing music with me there. The wonderful violin on a few pieces in *Salt of this Sea* is Paul Anderson. He's an anthropologist teaching at Cambridge now, and he was a post-doc at Edinburgh then. I called up a Swedish friend of mine who had experience in professional recording, Karle Odegaard. He showed up with a suitcase filled with recording equipment. We sound-proofed a few rooms in the flat and then recorded everything over a few days. *When I Saw You* is probably the most professional experience in the sense that there was a more liberal budget: I was able to hire session musicians; I recorded in a higher-end music studio in

Lebanon; I brought in a couple of players from the symphony orchestra to play the string parts.

SC: How much time do you get to do this work, generally?

KR: It's usually really rushed. I've heard that from other composers, too – there's always a sense that the producers have a deadline that they want to meet to get a submission to a festival or something like that. Everything else has run over time, and the composing always ends up being “You have six weeks. Oh no, you only have two weeks!” And, suddenly, you're up all night trying to finish wrapping things up. We were always on a tight schedule. Again, music composition is usually one of the last elements and it's often a bit hurried because of that.

SC: You mentioned that *Like Twenty Impossibles* you did on a computer. Do you do a lot of your composition on a computer?

KR: Yes, when I was in college, and then in the period that I was in San Francisco, I developed my recording skills, although I began by working mainly in eight- or sixteen-track analogue tape recording, before the digital revolution really hit. After a couple of disappointing experiences of trying to record in professional recording studios, I preferred to control my own recordings, so I studied the fundamentals of studio recording. As home recording started to become more effective, and as computers became the main tool for them, I moved in that direction. In San Francisco I remember being given a pirated copy of Pro Tools and then in New York I was able to get a copy of Ableton Live, which remains the centerpiece of my digital recording suite. I find Ableton Live to be really conducive to my way of working. So, all my work is framed around the use of the computer as the main destination for a variety of sounds – both acoustically-recorded and digitally-produced – and there I edit, orchestrate, sound-process, and mix everything. I retain a certain romantic notion of a kind of pure recording — the ideal of a single, high-quality tube microphone, a great tube preamp, a vintage mixing-board and an analogue tape recorder to record on – but I hardly practise it anymore. As my work has progressed, I'm increasingly invested in working within the architecture of digital recording as a method.

SC: How do you see the difference between making music – pure music, if you like – and composing film music? By pure music, I mean standalone pieces that don't become film soundtracks.

KR: I sometimes call my pieces “soundtracks” and “imagined soundtracks” because I feel like the process that I use in most of my recordings is not too dissimilar, whether it's for a film or not. And, frankly, much of what I've released that was not on a soundtrack may have originally been written for a film but didn't make the final cut. Either way, the process itself leads me to adopt a cer-

tain set of parameters for my practice. Again, I love to just pick up the oud and play a *taqsim*, and I can do a fair job of it.⁷ I have a lot of respect for, and I listen to a lot of recordings of, musicians who perform that kind of music. Somehow, in my own practice I've always gravitated towards exploring the limits of the manipulation of sounds and the processing of sounds – especially as I've become more involved in the recording side of things – and using those tools towards a certain philosophy of orchestration. I'm very interested in the layering of sounds, and the way in which sounds can appear and disappear when combined with new elements within a mix, and then reappear in other modulated forms. I'm very obsessive in orchestrating and mixing my pieces. Notwithstanding the type of instruments that I may choose to use for a certain film project, most of the tracks that I've released have usually been reworked a great deal after the live instruments have been recorded. But I hope that this is not apparent – my end goal is for the pieces to sound organic and not to draw too much attention to their own laboured process. As part of the process, I'll spend many hours remixing the pieces and working on the orchestration. There's a kind of analogue to that in my work as an academic, which involves an obsessiveness about writing and editing. But, with music, I could wake up in the morning and spend all day until night-time, just remixing a piece or two and be totally happy in that moment. It's a transcendent experience for me. So, in the same way that the social experience of music, performance and improvisation can lead you to this other space and you lose yourself, I can also have that experience while working on mixing a piece of digital music.

SC: Are there any uses of music in the films of others that you admire or draw on as influences?

KR: Not very consciously. Obviously, I watch a lot of films, and I know what I like and don't like, but it's not like I've focused on people's careers or trajectories, or that I've tried to theorize the way that certain directors use music. I think I avoid that out of a fear of its affecting my own love of composing. I have a wonderful colleague who teaches at Tufts, Kareem Roustom, who has done some great soundtracks for films from the region – very different from the kind of composing that I do, but I love his work. I'd cite him as someone who's doing fine soundtrack work and really focusing on it, as part of his broader dossier. I don't know if there are a lot of people from the region who see themselves operating as soundtrack composers as a significant part of their identity. Kareem is one of the few people who could fit that bill. Most of them are either, like me, studied dilettantes, or accomplished musicians who are almost accidentally added to a film as a composer. Some higher budget films from the region don't use composers that are from the region. I don't have numbers, but I've noticed that a certain

7- A *taqsim* is a melodic improvisation, regarded as a way of demonstrating a performer's talent in Arabic musical tradition. See RACY, A.J., *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 95.

amount of the European co-funded films use European soundtrack composers. I presume it's because they must devote a certain amount of their budget to nationals from the countries that are funding it. So, they often dedicate the soundtrack money to someone that checks off a need on the production side. These composers may employ musicians that are from the region as session players. But again, my impression is that there are not very many composers from the region who specialize in soundtrack work exclusively – likely it's just not as possible to build a career around soundtrack composition.

ON MUSIC IN FILM SCHOLARSHIP

SC: It seems to me that there's relatively little attention to music in scholarship on MENA cinema. There are ethnomusicologists who write wonderfully about music in Egyptian cinema or Iranian cinema, but very few film scholars who really pay attention to music.⁸ Is this because music is a specialism that film scholars, whose skills tend to be narrative or visual-oriented, don't feel equipped to comment on?

KR: I've not had a chance to think much about this, but it occurs to me that Film Studies seems to prioritize, broadly speaking, two general approaches where music is concerned. One is a reaction to the centrality of melodrama, as the par excellence form of narrative in modernity. Music often works as the engine of the melodramatic experience that conventional cinema often presents. That goes back to early cinema, and it's very present in Middle Eastern cinemas – for example, if you watch the classics of Egyptian cinema. This cinema has a relationship to popular song, which itself is quite melodramatic. Music becomes a central emotive element, part of the machine of melodrama, and I think film scholars tend to just take it for granted as so much part of the norms, in the same way that continuity editing is, that it almost doesn't merit comment. Among film scholars there may also be a certain disdain for the nature of that kind of film music that results in its omission from analysis.

The other approach resonates, broadly speaking, with a reaction against soundtrack music as a key element in film at all – an attitude that is quite powerful in less mainstream, but often more critically-lauded cinema. From the Third Cinema manifesto to the Dogma 95 manifesto, one can find a deep suspicion around the soundtrack, so much so that it sometimes is explicitly prohibited or proscribed – so great is the concern that a soundtrack will move the film towards melodrama. As a result, sometimes the music is so diminished in its role within the atmosphere of the film that it requires a heightened awareness to

8- See, for example, STOKES, Martin, "Listening to Abd al-Halim Hafiz" in SLOBIN, Mark (ed.), *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008, and NOOSHIN, Laudan, "Windows onto Other Worlds: Music and the Negotiation of Otherness in Iranian Cinema", *Music and the Moving Image* Vol. 12, No. 3 (2019), pp. 25–57.

even note it, or to consider its significance. Film studies scholars might adopt a similar suspicion and, even where music is incorporated, they may consciously or unconsciously exclude it from the centre of their consideration. Between those two poles, I think film scholars tend not to pay attention to music unless it seems so obviously necessary to have to speak about, like the last scene of *Beau Travail* (1999) –

SC: When the protagonist starts dancing, alone, to “The Rhythm of the Night”.

KR: Yes. *Beau Travail* has a pretty rich and varied soundtrack, but I’m fairly certain that it’s not been much discussed, other than the last scene. So, when music is incorporated discursively in that way, you will find scholars to be interested. But, broadly speaking, we’re generally simply not trained to think about soundtracks. And, in particular, I think the first category, that of melodrama, is very hard for us to theorize or to study seriously.

SC: Yes, and I think there’s a tendency – I’ve done this myself – to assume that music either reinforces or contradicts the images. But that’s just such a simplification of the role of music. Music serves all sorts of needs. I heard you’re writing a book on Elia Suleiman. Does music come into that at all?

KR: It’s absolutely central to his filmmaking. He doesn’t make use of soundtrack composers for any of his films, other than for a few seconds of scored music in his first film, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*. But there’s so much music in his films, and he’s obviously very concerned about it. There’s a scene in a bar in New York in his most recent film, *It Must Be Heaven* (2019), which uses a wonderful Sabah Fakhri song, where an Arab man stands up and just begins dancing. It’s not as drawn out as *Beau Travail* but it’s a similar moment. Suddenly, with the music you’re transported to another world. It’s mirrored in the last scene of that film where Suleiman’s character has returned to Palestine and sits in a club watching young Palestinians dance ecstatically to “‘Arabiun ‘Ana” by Yuri Mkradi. In that moment his character finally finds peace being a Palestinian. But, in both moments, it feels almost impossible to capture the range of evocations and emotions that are provoked by the music.

SC: Music has that ability to open out, even in closed, oppressive film worlds. And because silence is so crucial to Suleiman’s films, with their lack of dialogue generally, music and the soundtrack carry a lot.

KR: And it resonates differently for different audiences, which is interesting because his music is so referential. For example, in the fishing scene in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996), where the men are in the fishing boat, and they all start singing a Mohamed Abdel Wahab song. That’s one case where Suleiman doesn’t use the original – it’s performed by the actors. It’s just so evocative of a

lot of things. How do you even begin to describe what the evocations are? You start to realize there are layered experiences, memories, and so forth, that are all encoded in the song for someone who has grown up within a context in which Abdel Wahab is a cultural anchor. The scene makes me think of Abdel Wahab's mournful persona, his acting in his first film, *The White Rose* (1932) – how he stands in for the hopes of a modern but also rooted form of cultural discourse, and so many other things. For another viewer, the resonances would be different.

SOUND-IMAGE RELATIONS AND MUSICAL CHOICES IN *LIKE TWENTY IMPOSSIBLES*, *SALT OF THIS SEA* AND *WHEN I SAW YOU*

SC: As we discussed, you became a regular collaborator with Annemarie Jacir, having worked with her on *Like Twenty Impossible*s, then again on her first two feature films, *Salt of this Sea* and *When I Saw You*. I'd love to talk in detail about your work in each of these films.

KR: I'd be delighted to talk about them, if you'd like.

SC: You have quite modest ensembles in your soundtracks, so they're quite pared down. It's a small group of musicians. Often the oud is a solo instrument, or the guitar. The music frequently seems to be evoking a locale; you talked about tensions at the checkpoint that you wanted to convey in *Like Twenty Impossible*s, a story about a crew travelling to a film shoot in Palestine. That film really does emphasize sound, from the "prologue" where the main character – like Jacir, a Palestinian director with American citizenship called "Anne-Marie" – reminisces in voiceover on the freedom of riding in a car as a child. The checkpoint scene that follows is obviously a contrast to that. There's a lot of non-synchronous sound in the film, either as voiceover or separated from the actors, like the scene just after, when Anne-Marie and Rami, her actor from the West Bank, converse; we don't see their lips move, we only hear their voices. When the crew are stopped by Israeli soldiers at a surprise checkpoint along the detour they take because the West Bank-Jerusalem checkpoint is closed, Rami and the sound recordist (a Palestinian with an Israeli ID) are ordered out of the van and detained for breaching rules that prevent West Bank Palestinians from going to Jerusalem and Israeli citizens from going to the Occupied Territories. With the sound recordist separated from the rest of the crew, the sound volume is relative to distance from him. When, at the end, the director is forced to leave, the sound drops altogether as the van pulls away – sound and image coming apart as Palestinians in the process of making a film are disconnected from each other. There seems to be a self-reflexive play with sound in that film, drawing attention to sound as an element.

KR: It's key to it. That entire paradigm of the film, with the use of the film crew, and then the separation of the sound and image, was inspired by Jafar Panahi's *The Mirror* (1997). Do you know that film?

SC: Yes, the little girl on the bus who, mid-way through the story, looks directly at the camera and refuses to be in the film.

KR: The girl leaves the bus and she has a microphone on –

SC: So we can hear her, even when the camera loses sight of her.

KR: Annemarie wanted to experiment with the allegory of the breakdown of a film production and found in Panahi's film a model, albeit with a different political emphasis – it was a way to explore the dismantling of Palestine. *Like Twenty Impossibles* is fundamentally about dissolution in the end – everything falls apart. But, after the opening scene, the film's credit sequence presents a very dense space, where everything is together but in totally the wrong way. It's a checkpoint: people are lining up, the soldiers are standing about, and the cars are in a traffic jam, and everything is intense. We move from that density at the beginning to the dead silence that ends the film as the van drives away and the credits start to roll. The power of the film comes, I think, from that move from density and complexity to total silence in the end. I knew that the beginning was going to be about collision and tension. So, I asked for the crew to send me the raw location audio that they collected while they were filming at the checkpoint. We had about twenty minutes of raw audio, if I recall correctly. I started listening to it for organic percussive elements. The static of the soldiers' walkie-talkies caught my attention and so I began to loop it. You'll hear it in the film – it's looped as a percussive element. That repetition cues something unnatural about to begin. In other words, it's not documentary-like anymore, as it appears at the start. And then, when the piece comes in, you're moved into a different way of looking at the footage – at least, that was the aspiration. And then the entire piece is very layered musically, but, within the layers of the music, I again use the diegetic audio while looping it to create these percussive cycles that are mixed into the drum percussion, which is itself also highly processed. All of those elements are built up to a crescendo to match the intensity of the checkpoint, itself as a way to speak about the Israeli occupation as a dense, sprawling, intense system of control.

SC: With *Salt of this Sea*, the opening seems to function as an epigraph to the story. It starts with haunting ambient music with an oud and a chorus, over black-and-white archive footage from 1948, of bulldozers demolishing homes and Palestinian refugees leaving by boat.⁹ As the visuals segue from black and

9- Jacir says she obtained this Nakba archive footage from Israeli state archives. See JACIR et al, "I Wanted That Story to Be Told" (Interview), p. 250.

white to present-day colour images so, too, does the music seem to indicate a shift of temporality by gaining a modern beat. The opening musical theme is later reprised, layered over images of more bulldozers and the construction of the Separation Wall. I was wondering whether the music is expressing an ongoing Nakba?

KR: Yes, it's one of those sequences where the soundtrack is also, in part, a work of sound design.¹⁰ To connote the Nakba musically is too fraught an endeavour. The danger would be to aspire to an emotional comment that is obviously insufficient. This is not a unique challenge; many traumatic historical episodes are difficult to represent.¹¹ So I thought that it would be better to keep the musical element subdued – evocative but restrained. And, yes, we wanted those scenes to speak to one another: the historical footage at the beginning and the present-day footage of home demolitions. The music helps to establish the continuity of an ongoing Nakba. I remember performing that melody a few different times, and trying to record it in different ways. I ended with an approach to play the tones very simply. I don't use any ornamentation, which is hard to do on the oud, just by the nature of how the instrument is usually played. But, again, I wanted it to be emotively restrained. And where the violin is playing the melody, it also plays it without vibrato, in a very dry and restrained way.

SC: I think it's very subtle, actually. I first saw *Salt of this Sea* a few years ago, in what were probably not the best viewing conditions. But now, viewing the film again, I see how subtle it is in its political communication, having thought it wasn't very subtle before.

KR: I understand what you're saying. There's a balance that in certain conditions may be difficult to appreciate, which centres on the character of Soraya. I think some audiences sometimes are challenged by Soraya's anger and her passion. She's not necessarily meant to be "likeable".¹² She's someone who wears the injustice that was done to her family on her sleeve, a person who's caught within

10- Traditionally, the film industry has treated the areas of sound effects, dialogue and music separately in postproduction, and the roles of composer, sound designer and sound editor have remained "professionally distinct" although these worlds are becoming increasingly blurred due to digital storage and manipulation of sounds. See KERINS, Mark, "The Modern Entertainment Marketplace, 2000–Present", in KALINAK, Kathryn (ed.), *Sound: Dialogue, Music and Effects*, Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2015, p. 143.

11- For an argument about the "unrepresentability" of the Nakba in Palestinian cinema, see MASSAD, Joseph, "The Weapon of Culture: Cinema in the Palestinian Liberation Struggle" in DABASHI, Hamid (ed.), *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema*, London: Verso, 2006, p.43. The claim of "unrepresentability" has been applied to different historical traumas, paradigmatically the Holocaust; for a clear overview, see ROTHBERG, Michael, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000.

12- Jacir has discussed the casting of Suhair Hammad and the reception of her character in several interviews, including "I Wanted That Story to Be Told" (op. cit.) and "Salt of this Sea – Interview with Director Annemarie Jacir and Ossama Baward" (2009) [online], link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCwkHWiIqEc>

a certain history and driven by her own experiences. She isn't meant to serve as a heroine, but beneath her anger there is a kind of fragility that does invite an emotional connection from the viewer. I've certainly spoken to others who also have said that they did not initially connect with the character, but sometimes it took a second viewing to better understand her and her emotional world.

SC: I think that the music works well in handling the events of the Nakba. When Soraya and Emad are camping in the ruins of Emad's ancestral village, Dawayima, they are found by a history teacher; he brings his Jewish students to climb in these "ancient ruins", where they can "learn about their roots" and "how we turned this biblical land into life again", a narrative that elides the Palestinian history of the landscape and how the Nakba happened through forced expulsions. However, instead of explaining this, the music as Soraya and Emad hit the road again allows the audience to reflect on that moment. It has an ambiguity that gives a space for interpretation, as opposed to forcing an interpretation on the audience. And similarly, at the end, when a final title comes up – "In remembrance of the Nakba and in particular the Dawayima massacre" – it's as if the music is there to give the audience a space for them to take that in, as opposed to just telling them.

KR: It speaks to the fraught nature of representation around Palestinian issues. When people are debating them, with some being critical of Israel and others more supportive, oftentimes the pro-Israeli side might resort to an accusation of the other side being too emotional. I've also seen that happening in discussions around race in the United States. The oppressed class is always being told: "Stop being so emotional". And, "be more likeable", as if to say, "Your anger is turning us off". It's not attractive to give voice to that anger, but it's important to realize that it's there. So, it's not about a facile act of humanizing Palestinians. It's about encountering their pain and anger on their own terms. But then, also, not to overlay it – that would push us too far into melodrama. The music is trying to assist in this balance. So, you're right that there are moments in the composition where I'm trying to lead us in a different direction from emotionality or raw anger, by opening up a space rather than overdetermining how the audience encounters the emotions at play.

SC: There is a link between music and identity in the film, especially in terms of Palestinian rap.

KR: Yes, of course that's in no small part because of Suheir Hammad. Hip hop had to be part of it, because Suheir is a child of hip hop and New York. It was also the moment when DAM, the hip hop band from Palestine, was becoming internationally recognized.¹³ And it just seemed necessary to connect those

13- The topicality of DAM is further shown by Jacqueline Reem Salloum's documentary *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2008) charting the rise of Palestinian hip hop, released at the same time as *Salt of this Sea*.

things. Annemarie had the idea of using a Marcel Khalife song, “Bahriyya”, in the film. The song was composed in support of a fishermen’s strike in Lebanon, but the lyrics are ambiguous enough to also evoke the idea of seafaring and struggle, and to link it to the expulsions by sea that were part of the Palestinian experiences of 1948. We decided to produce a hip-hop track using “Bahriyya.” I managed to get Marcel Khalife on the phone and explained the idea to him, to sample his song in a new track by DAM. He seemed a little puzzled about what I was saying about sampling his song, but his only question was, “This is a Palestinian film, right?” And I said, “Yes”. He said, “Anything for Palestine!”¹⁴ So, he signed off on the rights, without even asking for a payment, but I don’t think he quite understood what we were proposing to do. I met with Tamer Nafar [*a member of DAM*], and the guys from DAM were really into it. I’m not a hip-hop producer, so I worked with the producers DJ K-Salaam and Beatnick – I think Suheir was the one to make that introduction. As it just so happens, K-Salaam is also Iranian-American. Although I didn’t know him before, we established a rapport on that account. I sent them the Marcel Khalife song and they sent back a couple of samples of different directions the beat could take. We discussed it and then they polished off one of their ideas and sent me the tracks. I then used the beats they had produced to structure the song. DAM were touring so we scheduled a day for them to do the vocals at a studio in Paris, and then I put it all together for the final mix. So, it was an interesting process. And it speaks to a certain moment in transnational Palestinian cultural production, when Marcel Khalife, who was a major figure with his renditions of Mahmoud Darwish poems from the 70s and 80s, connected to DAM, the preeminent Palestinian cultural figures of that moment, through beats produced in the US, vocals recorded in Paris, and the final mix finished in Scotland! I think something very special came of that collaboration, and the resulting track, which we used in the closing credits of the film, is something that I still get excited by listening to.

SC: There’s another track by DAM, “Ya Sayidati”, that Emad listens to in the car towards the end. He’s got the radio tuned to a channel that’s playing that song when he’s arrested by the police. It echoes a previous scene when the trio have just completed the robbery, and are trying to pass a checkpoint disguised as Jewish tourists. Emad, in the nick of time, retunes the radio to a Hebrew channel. Music seems to be what picks you out and identifies you as “other”, but also, if you’re lucky, allows you to “pass”.

KR: A theme that runs through *Salt of this Sea* is the arbitrariness of the racial regime in Israel in which being “Arab” or “Palestinian” is essentially read through cultural cues. Music was one way to signal the arbitrariness of the system of difference, which allows some people through a checkpoint while preventing others from crossing. I myself, in my visits to Palestine, observed this so many times.

14- Marcel Khalife is a Lebanese musician, renowned among other things for championing Palestinian rights.

SC: In *When I Saw You*, music and musicianship play prominent diegetic roles, which is a way of marking the film's musicality. Through the story of a boy, Tarek, and his mother, Ghada, displaced in a Jordanian refugee camp after the 1967 war, it's about a Palestinian community in exile.¹⁵ Desperate to return to Palestine, Tarek runs away and is adopted by the fedayeen at their training base on the Jordanian border. When they've lost their homes and are living with basic amenities, music – being portable – is one thing exiles still have. At the fedayeen base, music builds solidarity amongst the multiracial group of fighters who gather in the evening, with a professional musician, Ruba Shamshoum, singing a song she composed for the film, “Ya Layl La Trouh” (“Oh, night, don't go”), with accompanying guitar and percussion. Later, they sing and dance to a 1930 resistance song, “Min Sijn Akka” (“From Acre Prison”).¹⁶ The music segues into the next scene of daytime training, changing status from diegetic to non-diegetic. The film weaves this song into its own narrative of resistance in the face of the 1967 setback. There's even a scene where Tarek learns to play the oud, taking a lesson from one of the fedayeen. He strums on the oud, then mouths into the soundhole, peering into it and listening to the echo. At the end, Tarek and Ghada are captured in a freeze-frame running towards the barbed wire fence that separates them from their homeland while the Israeli patrol is out of sight. The film leads us to this point, with a closing oud solo, leaving the audience to imagine what will happen to them. Again, music enables that moment to stand out, but also open up space for the audience.

KR: In *When I Saw You*, music plays a role in exploring how Palestinian identity was shaped through the militant struggle, in relation to other international developments, as part of the Third World awakening of the period. Tarek is learning that his life's meaning will come through resistance, and one expression of that is through music. He looks into the oud as if to find some missing element of his identity.

SC: One purpose of music in this film seems to be describing a community. It put me in mind of Mark Slobin's argument that film music performs the role of an ethnomusicologist, giving “sonic substance” to a place, its people and their lifestyle.¹⁷ It also acts as a temporal marker with period pop songs.

KR: We sorted through collections of psychedelic music from the region from the sixties, and chose some pieces that were either included in the film or used to inspire aspects of the film. There's that period dimension you mentioned, to

15- The Six-Day War (1967) is also known as *al-Naksa* (“the setback”), referring to Israel's defeat of Arab nations (Egypt, Syria and Jordan) and occupation of Palestinian lands previously under Jordanian and Egyptian control, including the West Bank and Gaza; it added to earlier losses of Palestinian territory during the Nakba (“disaster”) of 1948 when Israel was created.

16- The song “Min Sijn Akka” commemorates three men who were executed by British colonial forces for participating in a 1929 uprising about the Buraq wall in Jerusalem.

17- SLOBIN, Mark, “The Steiner Superculture”, in SLOBIN, Mark (ed.), *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008, p. 4.

root the story to that time. Thinking about place, there are musical elements in the film pertinent to the quote that you've cited about ethnomusicological commentary, but they were either by performers in the film or people brought in to add some of those elements. They play an important role.

There's one set piece that I composed for that film, which is "Leaving the Camp". While in *When I Saw You* we decided to use the music more sparingly and more atmospherically, having a more musical and lyrical piece for that scene seemed necessary because it was the actual starting point of the story (even though it's around twenty minutes into the film). After this preamble of showing life in the camp and the difficulties – the grinding hopelessness of the situation – that decision Tarek makes to leave is transformative. It's a decision that opens you to adventure and to a hopeful future. So, I wanted to do something that was sweet, melodic and moving. It self-consciously contradicts the musical practice in other parts of the films that I've done, which is more about opening up a certain space of reflection. In the rest of the soundtrack, there are several pieces that, again, almost fall between sound design and soundtrack – just drones of strings that are then manipulated, and so on.

SC: So, as well as creating the original score, you acted as music supervisor, selecting pre-existing tracks?¹⁸

KR: There's a lot of back and forth in all these collaborations. I don't even remember if I'm credited as music supervisor for that film or not. Annemarie shared a mixtape with me, saying "these are things that I've been listening to".¹⁹ Then I sent a few things back that those made me think of or would say, "listen to these". Then the conversation moved to "Can we get this song for the film? Or is there something similar that can work?" There's a scene in *Salt of this Sea*, when Soraya goes to Jerusalem before robbing the bank, for which Annemarie had sent me an M.I.A. song just as a cue. This was just before M.I.A.'s breakout album *Kala* (2007). The song had just the right staccato, edgy feel, and it worked so well when we dropped it into the rough edit. So at first we thought – could we just license this song? But getting the rights to it totally failed; we couldn't afford what they were asking. So, I ended up starting again. I composed a completely different piece. It's also very staccato. There are some hints of the influence of M.I.A. there, but it's very different. So that's an anecdote of how sometimes you begin with a music supervisor role – trying to get rights to use an existing song – and then you end up just writing a new piece of music for the scene.

18- Usually, a music supervisor oversees the use of music in a film, helping to select suitable music (including what credits call "additional music") and negotiating with record companies and songwriters for permissions. For a useful account of music licensing processes and the music supervisor's role, see WENTZ, Brooke and BATTAGLIA, Maryam, *Music Rights Unveiled: A Filmmaker's Guide to Music Rights and Licensing*, New York: Routledge, 2018.

19- Mixtapes, or what the industry commonly calls "temp tracks", play a key role in music planning. They are a "wish list" for the soundtrack.

SC: Among the sixties tracks that we hear in *When I Saw You*, there's the song called "The Seventh Veil" by Nai Bonet that opens the film, when Tarek is being chased by other kids and a truck arrives with new refugees. And there's another sixties track, "Opa Kukla", to introduce a group of young men and women in brightly-coloured sixties fashion who encounter the runaway Tarek when their car breaks down. For the additional music, did you have to compromise with what you could get the rights to?

KR: Those tracks are part of a couple of compilations of 1960s Orientalist music by bands formed by recent or second-generation immigrants that were largely active in the US. It was much simpler to obtain the rights to these than dealing with the big publishing companies that represent major popular artists.

SC: Do you mean Orientalist in that it culls influences from Eastern music, inspired by hippie and exotic interest in the Middle East and India, and creates its own pastiches?

KR: Yes, we were trying to draw in these 1960s countercultural connections. There was an aspiration to get a Rolling Stones track. I ended up contacting the publishing company that owns the rights to the earlier Rolling Stones catalogue. We even had a connection through Danny Glover (who was one of the film's producers) to Mick Jagger's agent and we were told that Mick wanted to help but that he had no say over the earlier catalogue. To use something later would have been anachronistic and so we tried to work with the publishing company. They asked for information about the production of the film, and so we sent them the relevant materials, and they just didn't want to talk about it after that. I can't be sure, but it seemed very likely to have been a political thing. That said, getting the rights to use popular songs for a small indie film is always difficult – especially when dealing with the large publishing companies. But we made do with the pieces that we were able to get. And I think it works now that those evocations are there.

SC: It brings us back to music as a space where different cultures mix. Music in film is clearly related to these questions of cultural identity and political resistance; it enfolds all these things into itself.

KR: Maybe that brings it back also to my own place as a composer, trying to harmonize these different elements – a bit of the Stones, some contemporary art music, electronica, the oud ... In my work the moments that are best, in my mind, are those when all of these find a certain balance.

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ملخص | هذه المقالة عبارة عن حوار تم تحريره بين أستاذ الأدب المقارن والموسيقي والملحن كامران راستغار والباحثة السينمائية شوهيني تشودري. تركز المقابلات والتحليلات الحالية حول تأليف الموسيقى للأفلام بشكل أساسي على نمط هوليوود، بينما يقدم هذا الحوار أفكاراً جديدة من خبرة راستغار في تأليف الموسيقى للسينما المستقلة في الشرق الأوسط - خصوصاً تعاونه مع المخرجة الفلسطينية آن ماري جاسر. تستكشف المقالة هذه تدریب راستغار وخلفيته الموسيقية، وأدواره كملحن، ومشرف موسيقي وموسيقي، وعملية تأليف الفيلم، ومقاربات لموسيقى الأفلام في النقد السينمائي، والعلاقات بين الصوت والصورة والاختيارات الموسيقية في أفلام جاسر مثل: «كأننا عشرون مستحيل»، «ملح هذا البحر» و «لما شفتك».

كلمات مفتاحية | تأليف الموسيقى للأفلام، موسيقى الأفلام، صوت أفلام، سينما الشرق الأوسط، فيلم فلسطيني، آن ماري جاسر.

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