

# 4100 YEARS RE/VERBERATIONS WITH HALIM EL-DABH

INVOCATIONS 23. - 24. 10. 2021

WITH Halim El-Dabh and Leo Asemota (with Agnieszka Bulacik Monika Gabriela Dorniak and Anna Rose) Fari Bradley Saliou Cissokho Tanka Fonta (with Elisabeth Boardman Edem Meier AKAKPO Josep López Raisa Galofre Ki Hyun Park Willy Sahel Lenny Overton-Daiber) Emma Howes and Justin Kennedy Satch Hoyt Hasan Hujairi Timkehet Teffera Mekonnen Yara Mekawei Thokozani Mhlambi Moneyama Ali Moraly Joe Namy Mohammad Rabie Rania Refaat Sam Shalabi Alice Shields Cindy Islam

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In the framework of HERE HISTORY BEGAN. TRACING THE RE/VERBERATIONS OF HALIM EL-DABH. A project by S A V V Y Contemporary funded by Kulturstiftung des Bundes and Deutschlandfunk Kultur, Goethe Institut and MaerzMusik – Festival for Time Issues.

**S A V V Y CONTEMPORARY**  
**THE LABORATORY OF FORM-IDEAS**



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# 4100 YEARS RE/VERBERATIONS WITH HALIM EL-DABH

In this very special year, we continue to honour Halim El-Dabh by thinking, listening, playing, singing, dancing and summoning the voices of vitality as he has been doing for decades in his sonic endeavours. Halim El-Dabh would have turned 100 years old in the past months and would have continued to carry the 4000 years of pyramids, making him 4100 years old.

To celebrate the scope and depth of the work of musician, Pan-Africanist, creative musicologist, seminal composer, and philosopher Halim El-Dabh, and to share the research behind the project **HERE HISTORY BEGAN. TRACING THE RE/VERBERATIONS OF HALIM EL-DABH** we invoke voices, imaginations, pay homage through a two-day-long **INVOCATIONS** of lectures, talks, dance performances, poetry reading, music and sound concerts.

Following the exhibition and performances for Dak'Art 2018, the exhibition and invocations at **S A V V Y Contemporary** and **Märzmusik** in spring 2021, we will continue to unpack the multi-layered texture of his life and practice: his role in establishing **Orchestra Ethiopia**, and collaborating with the musicians who took part in the legendary years of the ensemble; his long-term dialogue with **Martha Graham** and her company through his musical and sonic contribution for the stage, amongst others. Through all, we give our senses to the music, sound, performances, and conversations that are inspired by Halim El-Dabh.

## T H A N K S

Over the last five years, and together with artists, writers, curators, musicians and composers from all over the world, we have been revisiting the work of Halim El-Dabh which spans through the 20th century and was made possible only by the immense generosity and knowledge shared by Halim El-Dabh.

This ongoing research has been built paper by paper, sound on sound, through intensive research and collaboration with those who worked closely with Halim El-Dabh, his friends and family, and various institutions. We would like to extend our warm thanks to **Habeeb El-Dabh**, **Dawn Carson**, **Ron Slabe**, **Grant Marquit**, **Magda Saleh**, **Cara Gilgenbach** (Kent State University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives), **Jan Senn** and **Melissa Olson** (Kent State Magazine), **Nick Patterson** (Music Librarian at Columbia University), **Seth Cluett** (Columbia Computer Music Center), **Oliver Tobin**, **Ellen Graff**, and **Peggy Lyman** (Martha Graham Company), **Alice Shields**, **Thom Holmes**, **George E. Lewis**, **James Vaughan**, **Hasan Hajuri**, **Tommy McCutchon**, **Greg Adams**, **Cecilia Peterson** (Rinzler Archives at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage), **Karen Milbourne**, **Robert Leopold**, **Michael Mason** (Smithsonian Institute), **Colette Lucas** (The MacDowell Colony), **Janet L. Stanley** (Smithsonian Institution), **Jeff Ingram** (Standing Rock Cultural Arts), **Robin the Fog** (BBC Radio 4), **Jeff St. Clair** (WKSU), **Nasri Zacharia** and **B. Lorenzo Roaché** (Harlem International Film Festival (Hi)) and the archives of **Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**, **New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Archives**, and **Howard University Archives**.

**A SPECIAL THANK YOU** to **Deborah El-Dabh** who continues to carry Halim El-Dabh in her ongoing generosity to keep his music, spirit, and legacy alive. Without her guidance and support our collective work would have not been possible.

# SCHEDULE

SATURDAY 23.10.2021

		20:30	Fari Bradley <i>Inside – Outside</i> LECTURE PERFORMANCE
16:00	Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Kamila Metwaly INTRODUCTION	20:55	Fari Bradley and Sam Shalabi in conversation, moderated by Hasan Hujairi PANEL DISCUSSION
ONLINE			
16:15	<i>Halim El-Dabh Speaks</i>	21:15	Leo Asemota with Agnieszka Bulacik, Monika Gabriela Dorniak, Anna Rose <i>Eternity doth wait (Here History Began – Berlin Session)</i> PERFORMANCE
16:30	Joe Namy <i>Sonic No. 7: The Diversion of the Variable</i> SOUND DIFFUSION AND LECTURE	21:45	BREAK
AT SAVVY CONTEMPORARY			
17:10	Yara Mekawei <i>The Mechanism Take One</i> SOUND PERFORMANCE	22:00	Mohammad Rabie <i>Fragile Joys</i> POETRY INTERLUDE
17:30	Aryan Kaganof <i>Unyazi of the Bushveld</i> FILM SCREENING	22:05	Sam Shalabi <i>Footnotes</i> MUSIC PERFORMANCE
18:15	BREAK	22:25	Cindy Islam <i>Mirroring Entropy</i> SOUND INTERLUDE
18:30	Hasan Hujairi <i>Reorienting Maverickism</i> LECTURE		
19:00	Mohammad Rabie <i>Fragile Joys</i> POETRY INTERLUDE		
19:20	Timkehet Teffera <i>Orchestra Ethiopia and the Contribution of Halim El-Dabh</i> LECTURE		
19:45	Ali Moraly <i>Intonations – Genesis</i> PERFORMANCE		
20:15	BREAK		

SUNDAY 24.10.2021

		19:10	Mohammad Rabie POETRY INTERLUDE
16:00	Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Kamila Metwaly WELCOME	19:20	BREAK
ONLINE			
		19:35	Satch Hoyt <i>Black Bedlam</i> LECTURE PERFORMANCE
16:10	<i>Halim El-Dabh Speaks</i>	19:55	Hasan Hujairi <i>Brother Bushra, Brother Bushra</i> SOUND PERFORMANCE
16:15	A Note from Habeeb El-Dabh	20:20	Yara Mekawei in conversation with Ali Moraly moderated by Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock PANEL DISCUSSION
16:25	Thokozani Mhlambi <i>Playing with Tape!</i> ONLINE PERFORMANCE	20:50	BREAK
16:40	Alice Shields <i>In the summer garden, Sappho reads to her friends &amp; A Note to Halim El-Dabh</i> SOUND DIFFUSION	21:05	Mohammad Rabie <i>Fragile Joys</i> POETRY INTERLUDE
AT SAVVY CONTEMPORARY			
		21:10	Saliou Cissokho MUSICAL PERFORMANCE
17:05	Rania Refaat <i>El-Pergola Puppet Theatre</i> LECTURE AND PERFORMANCE	21:35	Emma Howes and Justin Kennedy <i>Pirou-pyro-silo-alouette</i> DANCE PERFORMANCE
17:30	BREAK	22:05	BREAK
17:40	Emma Howes and Justin Kennedy <i>Pirou-pyro-silo-alouette</i> DANCE PERFORMANCE	22:20	Yara Mekawei <i>The Mechanism Take Two</i> SOUND PERFORMANCE
18:10	Sam Shalabi <i>The Psychedelic Footnote</i> LECTURE	22:50	Moneyama DJ SET
18:30	Tanka Fonta with Elisabeth Boardman, Mina Djordjevic, Raisa Galofre, Ki Hyun Park, Edem Meier AKAKPO, Josep López, Lenny Overton-Daiber, Willy Sahel <i>Polyphonic Dialogues with Halim El-Dabh</i> CONCERT		

# CONTRIBUTIONS

SATURDAY 23.10.2021

Joe Namy

*The Diversion of the Variable*

SOUND DIFFUSION AND LECTURE

An immersive 6 channel interpretation of Halim El-Dabh's score Sonic No. 7 for solo derebucca

"According to me, rhythm is an inception of a sound Of starlight frictions in the universe materializing to a beat within" –Halim El-Dabh

The drum is a resonant chamber, holding the vibrations of the starlight frictions. This immersive sound piece – an extended interpretation of Halim El-Dabh's Sonic No. 7, section F, the Variable, for solo derebucca – is an attempt to shrink collectively and place your body in the chamber of the heart of the drum, the centre of the minus universe.

We can begin to try and understand rhythm through terms such as meter, accent, duration, syncopation, but in reality, rhythm is the core of experiences. Clock your lungs to tempos true becoming, weave time like a fine mist and hold it in your pocket, keep it deep in the resonant chamber.

JOE NAMY is an artist, educator, and composer, often working collaboratively and across mediums exposing the social constructs of music and organized sounds, such as the politics and gender dynamics of the bass, the colour and tones of militarization, the migration patterns of instruments and songs, and the complexities of translation – from language to language, from the score to sound, from drum to dance.

Yara Mekawei

*The Mechanism Take One*

SOUND PERFORMANCE

Cairo, texts, history, Africa, woman, body, Hatshepsut, the world above me and I shake, the earth picks up my vibrations for others to feel. It's my voice. Sound is not just waves, it's the sensation you feel in every part of your body. It has no boundaries, it has no definite scope. Sound fills the universe, sometimes it starts from you and reaches you through the universe.

From the past, I draw inspiration from the spirit of my ancestors, the makers of this history. On the other hand, I search for my identity, which is sprawled on the borders of

Africa, my femininity in Cairo. I work like a machine, I listen to the motors that operate in my body, coming from Cairo, I listen to history in my memory that I cannot modify.

YARA MEKAWEI is a Cairo-based electronic music composer and sound artist. A prolific artist and scholar, Mekawei's sonic bricolages draw inspiration from the flow of urban centers and the infrastructure of cities. She is interested in the philosophy of architecture, history, and literature. Mekawei implemented the optical transfer from the musical conversation and replaced sound waves with visual forms. Her work is based on sound, a tool of vision, the philosophy of composition is shaped by sophisticated practices that convey messages of abstract dimensions to the public. Mekawei uses research literature on social ideologies in her concepts. She follows her work through a research point of uniting a project and the other, the work shows an intangible aspect of her personality as a woman living in an East African society.

Aryan Kaganof

*Unyazi of the Bushveld*

FILM SCREENING

Kaganof's experimental documentary film, *Unyazi Of The Bushveld*, which opened Pop Shield is a case in point. Essentially a document of Africa's first international festival of electronic music held in Jo'burg in 2005, the film functions as one of Stockhausen's "time bombs": a kind of time machine that blasts open a threshold between different times and spaces to map out a strange new world where African and Western elements of acoustic, electronic and mechanical music sit side by side.

"Unyazi," as organiser Nathaniel Stern explains in the doccie, "is a Zulu term for lightning. With quite spiritual connotations, you know there is no Zulu or Southern African phrase that's non-English for electricity or electronic so when he wanted to say something in an indigenous language having to do with electronic music unyazi was the best he could come up with." Here we are lost in translation, flung into a "holey space" constructed out of thresholds between worlds, a cinematic rabbit warren where lightning is harnessed as electricity, men merge with machines and the ghost of Sid Vicious is resurrected through a virtual collaboration between Karlheinz Stockhausen and Ladysmith Black Mambazo channelled by South Africa's infamous Kalahari Surfer, Warrick Sony.

ARYAN KAGANOF is a South African independent filmmaker, visual artist, novelist and poet, who explores

provocative and politically charged subject matter. Born in 1964 as Ian Kerkhof, he left South Africa for the Netherlands at nineteen to avoid conscription into the South African army during Apartheid. Before enrolling in the Netherlands Film and Television Academy in 1990, he worked for the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement, while also writing for international publications and programming jazz for pirate radio stations. He won a Golden Calf (Best Feature) for *Kyodi Makes the Big Time*, a self-produced 16mm production shot in 14 days while still a second-year student. In 1996, he pioneered the use of digital video as a feature film medium with the transfer to 35mm of *Naar De Klote!* (Wasted!) and went on to direct the first Japanese film utilizing this process (*Tokyo Elegy*, 1999). His on-going music research project the African Noise Foundation performed as part of the Badilisha Poetry Festival at Spier in December 2009 features Zim Ngqawana, Mantombi Matotiyana and the Kalahari Surfers and many others.

Hasan Hujairi

*On Reorienting Maverickism and the 3,000-Year-Handshake*

LECTURE

Hasan Hujairi reflects on his research questioning what is known within some circles as the maverick tradition. Although the maverick tradition generally lionizes American composers working against convention (yet operate within the European tradition), Hasan looks into why this tradition generally excludes composers belonging to different lineages and of different cultural backgrounds. Those questions are the result of a series of conversations Hasan had with Halim El-Dabh in 2014.

HASAN HUJAIRI is a Bahraini artist, composer, and writer. His work often explores the notion of the outsider, confronting (historiographic) superstructures, and the nature of constructing narratives within time. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in music composition from Seoul National University (South Korea), where he researched reorienting the narrative associated with the maverick composer tradition to be more inclusive of composers working outside the Western classical music tradition. He also holds a Masters of Economics from Hitotsubashi University (Tokyo, Japan) in economic history and regional economics, and wrote his thesis on the significance of conceiving the Gulf region in both its littorals within a Braudelian historiographic framework.

Mohammad Rabie

*Fragile Joys* (title from a poem by Mona Kareem)

POETRY INTERLUDE

Rabie will read excerpts from his latest novel *History of Gods of Egypt*, as well as poems by Iman Mersal, Mona Kareem and Carol Sansour.

Mohammad Rabie is an Egyptian writer and editor who currently lives and works in Berlin. His debut novel, *Kawkab Anbar* (2010) won the first prize in the Emerging Writers category of the 2011 Sawiris Cultural Award competition and was published in a French translation by Actes Sud under the

title *La Bibliothèque Enchantée*. His second novel, *Year of the Dragon*, was released in 2012, and his third novel *Otared* was published in 2015 to much critical acclaim and was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2016. It was published in its Swedish translation by Alhambra in 2019. His fourth novel *The History of Gods of Egypt* was published in 2020. Rabie is currently working on his forthcoming novel project *You are Here*.

Timkehet Teffera

*Orchestra Ethiopia and the Contribution of Halim El-Dabh*

LECTURE

Timkehet Teffera's presentation attempts to provide a glimpse of Halim El-Dabh's long life journey related to the period he spent in Ethiopia from 1961–1964. Despite his short stay in Ethiopia, Halim El-Dabh did not only conduct ethnomusicological researches, gave lectures at the Addis Ababa University, set up the Center for Creative Arts in 1961, he also created Orchestra Ethiopia, the traditional music ensemble that played a pivotal role in introducing the assets and values of the country's traditional music and culture for about a decade. Thanks to Halim's relentless efforts, for the first time in history Orchestra Ethiopia's musicians entered the stage to entertain their audiences and to raise cultural awareness. The groundwork of this enthusiastic ethnomusicologist and musician had great impact on Ethiopia's traditional musical landscape that was observed in the period to follow.

TIMKEHET TEFFERA, an Ethiopian musicologist, studied at Humboldt University Berlin (1988- 1999) and successively obtained her Bachelor (1990), Masters (1994) and PhD (1999) specializing in Ethnomusicology. Her research centered on musical practices in Ethiopia. Apart from her BA and MA, Timkehet's PhD thesis focused on a comprehensive documentation of wedding customs in the central highland regions of Ethiopia resulting from her fieldwork in the area (1997) and published in 2001 as a book. Widening her research area, Timkehet conducted studies in East Africa as a fellow of the German Research Association and affiliate of the Martin-Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg from 2004–2007. The book titled *Aerophone im Instrumentarium der Völker Ostafrikas*, published in 2009, is an outcome of her field research in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan. Timkehet produced more than 150 scientific articles and books in various languages, which have been imperative in promoting the musical landscapes of Ethiopia in particular and East Africa at large.

Ali Moraly

*Intonations – Genesis*

LECTURE PERFORMANCE

Coming from the Middle East implicates an eternal return to it. Being born and raised either in Syria or in Egypt results in a psyche that always hovers around the notion of genesis.

The cradle of civilisations, the birthplace of religions, where early agricultural societies emerged, where the first alphabet was invented, and where the first music score was found. Such hypotheses have shaped the discourse, by injecting the comforting belief that it is here where history began and shall end.

Reflecting upon the life, music and thought of Halim el-Dabh, the performance examines the contrapuntal relations between origin and origination along with the history of the region. It observes how the theme of genesis has formed a centre of gravity around which self-reassured culture orbits, while being interrupted with continuous strokes of a self-determined individual, in order to break loose and explore the universe.

**A L I M O R A L Y** is a violinist, composer, educator and writer based in Berlin. Born in Damascus, Syria, where he studied at the Higher Institute of Music. He holds a Masters degree from the University of Music in Karlsruhe, Germany (Musikhochschule) and was commissioned by documenta14 in Kassel, the theatre of Oldenburg and **B A C H** fest in Tübingen. He performed in the Middle East, Europe and the United States. Former member of the West-Eastern **D I V A N** co-founded by Edward Said (1935-2003) and Daniel Barenboim. He writes opinion pieces, treatises and reviews on arts and culture for various publications in the Arab world.

Sam Shalabi  
*Footnotes*

**S O U N D P E R F O R M A N C E**

“Halim El-Dabh was one of those rare singular souls whose life and work moved too quickly and gracefully to ever be captured by any ‘isms, movement, trend or market... I was lucky and honoured to make music and a friendship with him,” says Sam Shalabi.

The audio piece *Figment Of A Date* is a sonic memento of the week that Sam Shalabi spent with Halim working on music and spending time with him in Montreal. In its essence, it is not so much “about” music, but tries to express the strange, loving and ancient/futuristic soul of Halim, and how it was such a touching and transformative privilege to be in his presence. However, in this performance Sam is aiming for something different: he is interpreting a few of Halim’s early pieces (*It is Dark and Damp On the Front, Layla and the Poet*) for solo oud. This is connected with Shalabi's early Free Jazz “standards” interpretations for solo oud and he is aiming to extend this idea to Halim’s music while wondering: “I think, Halim would appreciate it.”

**S A M S H A L A B I** is an Egyptian-Canadian composer and improviser, living in Montreal, Quebec. Beginning in punk rock in the late 70s, his work has evolved into a fusion of experimental Arabic Music that incorporates traditional Arabic, Shaabi, noise, classical, text, free improvisation, electronics and jazz. He has released 6 solo albums, 6 albums with Shalabi Effect, a free improvisation quartet that bridges western psychedelic music and Arabic Maqam and 4 albums with Land

Of Kush (an experimental 30 member-orchestra, for which he composes). He has appeared on over 60 albums and toured Europe, North America and North Africa. Recent projects include albums with Dwarfs Of East Agouza, a Cairo based trio with Alan Bishop and Maurice Louca. Albums with Karkhana, a group featuring members from all over the Middle East and collaborations with vocalist Nadah El Shazly, Oren Ambarchi Angel Bat Dawid and a quartet with Brahja Waldman, Liam O'Neil and Morgan Moore. He has also composed music for over 20 films in North America, Europe and The Middle East.

Fari Bradley and Sam Shalabi in conversation,  
moderated by Hasan Hujairi  
**P A N E L D I S C U S S I O N**

Leo Asemota  
*Eternity doth wait*  
**P E R F O R M A N C E**

Performed with Agnieszka Bulacik, Jördis Hirsch, Monika Gabriela Dorniak,  
Instruments built by Rafal Lazar

Leo Asemota advances his “Workbook for Exploring The Sonic Cosmologies of Halim El-Dabh” with a new arrangement for utterance and group singing, adapted from the recording *Here History Began* by Georges Delerue and Halim El-Dabh.

**L E O A S E M O T A** is an Edo native. He has places of residence in London, England and in his birthplace Benin City, Nigeria.

Mohammad Rabie  
**P O E T R Y I N T E R L U D E**  
See above.

Fari Bradley  
*Inside – Outside*  
**L E C T U R E P E R F O R M A N C E**

Fari Bradley will be presenting a performative reading on integrity.

**F A R I B R A D L E Y** is an Iranian, London-based sonic artist with a musical background. Using found materials and hand-made electronics, Bradley’s research-led practice involves sculpture, installation, live performance and broadcast. Both her solo and joint practice as duo Bradley-Weaver involve sound and radio commissions from the likes of London Architecture Week, the V&A Museum, South London Gallery, Art Dubai, Venice Biennale, the British Council and Frieze Projects. Bradley-Weaver’s artworks have been exhibited in solo shows such as “Close to Karachi”, Edge of Arabia, London, 2016 and “Systems for a Score” at Tashkeel, Dubai 2015. Group shows include “Metropolis”, Lahore Biennial Foundation, Karachi, 2015 and “A Burgeoning Collection”, Maraya Arts Centre, Sharjah. Radiophonic works have broadcast on Clocktower Radio, NYC, on Radiokunst, Germany and as commissioned series for Sharjah Art Foundation.

Bradley's solo works have had solo shows including “Hearing on Mute”, wednesday, London, 2019, Strangelove Festival, Folkestone, 2017, “Stitches to Save 9 With” at The Mine Dubai, 2016, “The Art of Nuisance”, Doyce Street Studios, 2015, and “Gone with the Wind”, Raven Row, 2011. At arts-radio station Resonance104.4fm Bradley has broadcast weekly since 2005. Her research platform [www.sixpillars.org](http://www.sixpillars.org) included a residency for five artists from Iran in the UK. Bradley has completed several major residencies and published in *Oxford Handbooks*, *Ibraaz*, *The Wire*, *ArteEast*, *Canvas Magazine*, with music released on Ubuibi, The Wire and The Vinyl Factory.

Cindy Islam  
*Mirroring Entropy*  
**S O U N D I N T E R L U D E**

Using interview clips from Halim El-Dabh's conversations as the basis for discovery, sound artist Cindy Islam will invite the listening body into a space where sound becomes a conduit for spiritual and scientific understanding. Through glitching, looping, rotating and reflecting sound Cindy Islam will play on versions and inversions of anarchic connectivity. Creating and generating sound from order creates unified disorder, through the very act of listening our energies disperse and systems dissolve into chaos. Audience members are invited to listen and move, in and out of time with unsynchronised sounds and noises.

**C I N D Y I S L A M** is a pseudonymous artist of Iraqi descent based in Glasgow, UK. The artist creates different identities as a way to dodge the celebrity status afforded to some artists. The artist splits their time working in the care sector as a social worker and being a sound artist. Using sound as material, Cindy Islam sculpts, morphs and shapes vibrations to generate soundscapes and performances. At the core of the pieces is a belief that listening is an entry point toward healing and that sonic geography has the power to reconnect broken lines of lineage. Warped and woven into this vibrational resonance is a constant critique of what it means to be an artist and how artistic labour is related to material reality and change.

**S U N D A Y 2 4 . 1 0 . 2 0 2 1**

Thokazani Mhlambi  
*Playing with Tape!*  
**O N L I N E P E R F O R M A N C E**

For Here History Began, Thokozani Mhlambi is exploring his teenage fascination with tape. He is creating something touchable, therefore, believable. He is deeply interested in people’s responses to him shouldering a radio set while walking the streets. Through this performance, Mhlambi is responding to El-Dabh who was playing with tape in the northernmost parts of the African continent. Mhlambi felt that he needed to respond in relation to his own context and history at the continent’s southernmost tip.

**T H O K O Z A N I M H L A M B I** is not your usual musician. Not only does he play the cello, sing and compose his own songs, but Mhlambi uses his art and exhibitions in order to convey African stories/philosophies. Born in Madadeni,

KwaZulu-Natal, after fulfilling music studies in South Africa & Sweden, Mhlambi received his PhD in Music at the University of Cape Town. In South Africa, he has showcased work at leading platforms such as the National Arts Festival, Baxter Theatre, Soweto Theatre and the State Theatre in Pretoria – where he drew audiences from all walks of life. He has also been a visiting lecturer at universities. f.ex. in Finland (Jyvaskyla), Brazil. He has had opportunities to perform and speak in places such as New Orleans, São Paulo, Maputo, New York and Vancouver. In 2021, Mhlambi’s rendition of Lizalise Idinga Lakho by Tiyo Soga (from his debut album *Zulu Song Cycle*), was featured in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 2020, Mhlambi was selected as an Artist-in-Residence at Cité International Des Arts in Paris, supported by the Institut Français. He used the time to connect with artists from different parts of the world, and more specifically the African continent, and to develop new creative work. In 2019, he collaborated with revered Chinese visual artist Dachan, in a live performance/installation at the Zeitz MOCAA Museum in Cape Town. As a Postdoctoral Fellow in Archive & Public Culture at the University of Cape Town (UCT), his research interest are in the archive of “early African Intellectuals as Composers”, which includes the likes of Enoch Sontonga, John & Nokutela Dube, Reuben Caluza, to mention a few. He also has an interest in precolonial African artistic-crafts specialists and the implications thereof for regional mobilities in Africa.

Alice Shields  
*In the summer garden, Sappho reads to her friends & A Note to Halim El-Dabh*  
**S O U N D D I F F U S I O N**

**A L I C E S H I E L D S**’ music is described as “intense, richly scored” (*New York Times*), which “holds the listener spellbound” (*Musical America*) and as “luxuriant, eerily supernatural” (SRUTI, India). One of the pioneers of electronic music, she creates cross-cultural electronic and acoustic operas, music for fixed media, instruments, voice, dance, theater and film. Her work is influenced by non-Western forms of music drama including Japanese Noh Theater and South Indian Bharata Natyam, and has been performed by the New York City Opera Vox Festival, Akademie der Künste (Berlin), Venice Biennale, Arangham Dance Theater (India), Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, NYC-Electroacoustic Music Festival, Dance Alloy (Pittsburgh), Association for the Promotion of New Music and Iktus Percussion. Shields received the Doctor of Musical Arts in music composition from Columbia University, has served as Associate Director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center and Director of Development of the Columbia University Computer Music Center, and has taught the Psychology of Music at New York University. Current activities include the Oct. 26–28, 2021 world premiere livestream and concerts of “The Wind in the Pines – after the climate catastrophe” for soprano and six instruments by the Eurasia Consort at the National Opera Center, commissioned by Chamber Music America and based on Noh Theater as well as an APNM Masked Music Commission for solo flute for flutist Sarah Carrier and a new electronic piece for modern dance video (2021) by choreographer Mimi Garrard.

Rania Refaat

*El-Pergola Puppet Theatre*

L E C T U R E A N D P E R F O R M A N C E

R A N I A R E F A A T founded her El-Pergola Puppet Theatre in 2011 consisting of a group of 15 young men and women dedicated to the cause. She is the scriptwriter and director of all productions. El-Pergola Theatre's productions aim to raise awareness of social, political and legal aspects in Egypt. Since 2018, El-Pergola has also been active in Germany. Rania wrote a number of plays, stories, and essays. She has published two books called *The carpet of stories* and *what a shame* in Arabic, English and German. She received a number of awards such as best actress in a production (*The Prisoner*), which she wrote and presented. As a lawyer, she created initiatives for fighting harassment and used a mix of art and law to serve this objective. As a result of her diverse activities and their influence on society, she has received the “Sitat Award” in 2014, which is dedicated by the Cairo Center for Development to the most influential women in Egypt, as well as the “Creativity Shield”, a prize awarded by the Creativity Center in the EL-Mahalla EL-Kubra to the most influential female artists in society. She was invited to speak at TEDx Cairo Women 2015.

Emma Howes and Justin Kennedy

*Pirou-pyro-silo-alouette*

D A N C E P E R F O R M A N C E

(a combination of the words: pirouette, pyrotechnics, silhouette and the French-Canadian children's song "Alouette" (pronounced [alwet]) about plucking the feathers from a lark.)

Inspired by composer Halim El-Dahb`s approach to improvisation in music/dance as a mechanism for uplifting the world's frequencies, Emma & Justin propose an open score to respond to the synesthesia of pneumatic and chromatic sound. Approaching these vibrational intentions, they will invoke Halim's notations in effervescent recycling and sampling of his music and colour/drawings. They will illuminate a centrifugal yet cyclonic cypher, recorded in sand-steps while introducing an “equestrian horse-back-ward-spiral-spider hustle in order to quickly shift one`s perspective” that aims to complicate (deconstruct) and rearticulate gestural influences implied by the etymology and application of a “pirouette”. Rewriting a sampling of movements through a process of revisitation may include strobo-wiggling, tilt-a-whirl soft-side-step swirling, POV-quick-switch, sideways spiralling and airy fluff poetry in the joints cos we are dancing on concrete.

Costume: Don Aretino

Composition and mix: Ethan Braun

Sound: pirouette

Crossing into the Electric Magnetic

© 2001 Halim El-Dabh

Released on: 2001-03-04

E M M A W A L T R A U D H O W E S , born in Toronto, Canada and living now in Berlin, works as a translator between

movement and form. Informed by dance and visual art, their interdisciplinary projects are guided by observations of bodily and material gestures, with a focus on the development of an expanded choreographic practice. In their live and sculptural installations, movements oscillate between “soft-head banging” and classical gestures of rhetoric while engaging themes ranging from peripheral vision to paradox. Drawings, in the form of graphic scores for performances, lay at the foundation of their practice. These consist of compositions representative of stages in the development of a work, from concept and intention to depiction and effect. Recent productions include: *Vorglühen*, OUT NOW, Uferhallen, Berlin (2021), *UNFURL the jukebox musical: a shareable cypher*, Montag Modus, Radialsystem, Berlin (2021); *CAMming: Collective Auto-mythologizing for the CAMera*, ImPulsTanz, Vienna (2021); *Глас*, Frontviews, Berlin (2021); *UNFURL: a lucid science fiction*, 11th Berlin Biennale, Gropius Bau, Berlin (2020); and *Some Murder Theatre in Here*, Volksbühne Grüner Salon, Berlin (2020).

J U S T I N F . K E N N E D Y is a Berlin-based dance/vocal artist, teacher and DJ originally from St. Croix, US Virgin Islands. With a playful and collaborative approach, their research evolves from experiences and analysis of trance dance and its further translatability into workshops, science fiction operas, durational dance installation and film. In 2006, they earned a BA in Dance and Ethnic Studies from Wesleyan University and in 2013, an MA in Choreography from HZT Berlin. Justin's notable projects of late include: *Vorglühen*, OUT NOW, Uferhallen, Berlin (2021), *UNFURL the jukebox musical: a shareable cypher*, Montag Modus, Radialsystem, Berlin (2021), *UNFURL: a lucid science fiction*, 11th Berlin Biennale, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2020), and *Some Murder Theatre in Here*, Volksbühne Grüner Salon, Berlin (2020). They have performed intimately with and for Emma Waltraud Howes, Balz Isler, Ligia Lewis, Louis Vuitton, Tino Sehgal, Adam Linder, Liz Kinoshita, Jeremy Shaw, Josh Johnson, BODYSNATCH, Faustin Linyekula, Jeremy Wade, Peaches, Wu Tsang amongst others.

Sam Shalabi

*The Psychedelic Footnote*

L E C T U R E

Sam Shalabi will, in a synoptic fashion, discuss the ideas he outlined in the text “The Psychedelic Footnote” while further detailing what he feels, in a positive sense, is the kind of “Lineage” or “Tradition” a psychedelic footnote might belong in. In the text he discusses Halim El-Dabh in relation to a few other artists who belong in this Tradition (Judee Sill and “Blue” Gene Tyranny, as well as others) and what are the grounds for them “belonging together”.

Tanka Fonta

*Polyphonic Dialogues with Halim El-Dabh*

C O N C E R T

Performed with Elisabeth Boardman, Mina Djordjevic, Raisa Galofre, Ki Hyun Park, Kathrine Leung, Josep López, Lenny Overton-Daiber, Willy Sahel

The air Halim El-Dabh sucked into his infant lungs was laced with sound. The scent of roses lingered at his nostrils as he exhaled, and frequencies dripped from his ears as he watched his mother sever petals from their thorny stems, turning them into jam.

The Great Persian poet Hafez wrote: "What is the root of all these words? One thing: Love. But a life so deep and sweet it needed to express itself with scents, sounds, colours that never before existed."

To Tanka Fonta, working on this project has been a profound undertaking, a thematic exploration and an inspirational entrance into alternative multidimensional knowledge(s) and systems of the African registry of human history. As such, this performance is an invitation for the audiences and the artistic creators to enter into a frontierless universes of inspiration and intuitiveness, a world of things and non-things, all of which are interconnected through harmonic vibrations. Opening the doors into El-Dabh's world is equally an insightful journey into the mythologies and methodologies of worlds of deep time, which are embedded within the infinite repositories of the universal experience as well as the collective mind. We are invited to explore the universe/s of visible and non-visible phenomena, the philosophies of music in ways that trigger different sensibilities of sound vibrations and light frequencies. This moment where the ocean of non-time disappears or re-appears into an emergence of a polyphonic dialogue.

T A N K A F O N T A was born in the highland region of Cameroon in west-central Africa where he pursued his formal educational studies. He has pursued a wide variety of interests in the arts, music, cultures of the world and education. He has also conducted extensive independent research into contemporary, folk and traditional African music. A prolific author, composer, performer, multi-instrumentalist, poet, researcher and scholar of traditional African music, Tanka Fonta has also been actively engaged in other professions. As a visual artist, he exhibited at galleries in Cameroon, Canada, USA and Germany. With over a 100 published works for orchestra, small and mixed ensembles, quartets, trios and for solo instrumentation, some of his recently published works include *Incantations of a Bantu Mask*, *Visions & Ideograms*, *Themes & Variations of an African Dance in G Major*, *Elation of the Gods I*, *Fulani Flute Dance*, *Drums & Faces of the Night*, *The Birth of Dawn & The Initiation Dances I*. He has featured in the documentary film *African Brush Strokes*. In addition, he is a frequent performer in numerous festivals, concerts and has appeared in Vues D'Afrique, Coup de Coeur festivals in Montreal, du Maurier Jazz festival and many others.

K A T H E R I N E L E U N G is a dance artist of mixed Scottish and Hong Kong Chinese descent. With her background in theatre and dance, she completed her Master's in Performance Design and Practice at Central Saint Martins, UAL and her Bachelor's in Performing Arts at London Metropolitan University. She has since made independent works and has devised original productions collaboratively with artists across various disciplines. Her most recent choreographic work “Code” was performed at Ada Studio as part of “Reinkommen on Screen” and was later shown as part of Soundance Festival

Berlin 2021. Currently living in Berlin, she continues to find inspiration in collaborations, exploring the role of the moving body in different forms of performative art.

W I L L Y S A H E L presents a groovy music rooted from the region of Moissala in southern Chad in central Africa as a bass player, guitarist, singer. A fusion inspired by the rhythms Klaag and Sai' with Soul and Jazz, singing in Mbaye, his mother tongue, and eight other languages: Songhai, Hausa, Mina, Fongbé, Mooré, Chadian Arabic, French and English. A melodic and groovy music with an extraordinary energy that invites you into his universe from the first to the last note of the show: The Willy Sahelmusic! From Chad to the World! Willy Sahel has traveled across sub-Saharan countries, from the center to the west, sharing through his music and his lived experiences. He has been internationally recording in West Africa , Europe & South America (Brazil) with musicians from twelve countries. Through his texts, he is urging Africans to preserve the environment, the values related to education in general, and its access for women in particular.

E L I Z A B E T H B O A R D M A N is a modern and baroque violinist from Seattle, Washington, USA. In 2013, Elizabeth completed her Bachelor of Music degree at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London, where she studied with Violist Matthew Jones. While there, she also received masterclass tutelage from Maxim Rysanov, Helen Callus, Rivka Golani, and Illan Schneider. In 2010, she was awarded the Bank/Kurtz Viola Prize. As a founding member of the Trafalgar Trio, she has taken part in numerous chamber music concert series throughout England. In 2013, Elizabeth was selected to be a part of the K12 collaboration project with the Krakow Academy, performing as the violist of the chamber orchestra in Britten's War Requiem in Poland. Elizabeth completed her Master of Music at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, studying with the esteemed Jodi Levitz. During this time, she also developed a love for historical performance and baroque music, studying baroque viola with the world-renowned baroque violinist Elizabeth Blumenstock. In 2017, she won the SFCM Baroque Concerto Competition and had the opportunity to perform the Telemann Viola Concerto with the SFCM Baroque Ensemble. She performed with the American Bach Soloists Festival and also with the American Baroque Orchestra. She currently works and resides as a freelancing violist and teacher in Berlin, is the singer-songwriter for electro-pop band White Night, and is about to release her first solo pop album as artist Ela Ira in 2022.

J O S E P L Ó P E Z was born in Chiclayo, Peru. From the beginning, music played an important role in his family. At the age of six, he began his musical education and at the age of eleven he received his first guitar lessons through his father. In 2006 he started studying classical guitar at the Carlos Valderrama Conservatory in Trujillo. During his first years of study, he won 1st prize in the Belhaven Competition for Young Musicians and 1st prize in the Northern Peru Region Lions Club Guitar Competition. From October 2014 to July 2019, he studied with Eugenia Kanthou at the Hanns Eisler Academy of Music in Berlin. There he will complete his Master of Arts degree in 2019. In the process, he was supported by the

STIBET Scholarship from 2015 to 2016 and the Deutschland Stipendium from 2016 to 2017, and has been a scholarship recipient of "YEHUDI MENUHIN Live Music Now" since June 2016. In addition to his solo activity, he regularly performs in duo with the Israeli guitarist Guy Woodcock.

E D E M M E I E R A K A K P O ( M E I E R E D E N ) , from Togo, is a choreographer, dancer and director of the New Star Dance Company (Togo), dancer of the Urban Dance Team "Team Recycled" (Germany) and DanceCoach at TanzZeit Meier Eden excels in a variety of dance styles ranging from hip - hop and Breakdance to Neoclassical, Contemporary and Afro dance. He was a choreographer at "STAL" (Studio Theatre d'Art de Lome), an opportunity that allowed him to participate in the staging of plays with actors such as Joel Ajavon (Togo), Junior Esseba (Cameroon), Armel Roussel (France), Xavier Lopez (Holland).... to work. In 2017, he again won the first prize for the best choreography at the 10th edition "Afrik'Art Festival" in Benin. And finally, he was requested by his country, Togo, which he represented at the "Jeux De La Francophonie" in July 2017 in Cote D'ivoire. In August 2017, Meier Eden came to Berlin (Germany) as a choreographer with a TanzTheater piece collaboration with Anne Tismer: "DAVE" by Eddie Murphy to the Thikwa Theater. A piece that was presented at the "Grenzlos Kultur Festival" in Mainz and then at the "No Limits Festival" in 2017. Also in 2017, he performed as a dancer alongside the company of Gintersdorfer / Klaßen in the production "Humiliation is not the end of the world" at the "Sculpture Projects" in Münster. Then he appeared at the "Berlin Art Week festival" play at the "No Limits Festival" for the production "Visit Of The MadWoman" with the company HELMI; he appeared in the play " Fous de Danse " by Boris Chamartz; and after an audition with the National Urban Dance Team of Germany "Team Recycled", an urban dance company with which he has represented Germany in several national and international competitions.

Mohammad Rabie  
P O E T R Y I N T E R L U D E

Satch Hoyt  
*Black Bedlam*  
L E C T U R E P E R F O R M A N C E

During his lecture performance, Satch Hoyt will address amalgamations of Black sonics from about the 15th century to the present as well as the ways in which sound documents and informs culture.

S A T C H H O Y T is a spiritualist, a believer in ritual and retention. A visual artist and a musician, his diverse and multifaceted body of work – whether sculpture, sound installation, painting, musical performance, or musical recording – is united in its investigation of the “Eternal Afro-Sonic Signifier” and its movement across and amid the cultures, peoples, places, and times of the African Diaspora. Those four evocative words (a term coined by Hoyt) refer to the “mnemonic network of sound” that was enslaved Africans’ sole

companion during the forced migration of the Middle Passage. It was, and is, a hard-won somatic tool kit for remembering where you come from and who you are – and maybe, where you’re going – against all the many odds. Of Jamaican-British descent, Hoyt was born in London and currently lives in Berlin. Having also spent time in New York, Paris, Mombasa, and Australia’s Northern Territory – all points on the many-sided and ever-expanding star that is the African Diaspora – he is an intimate observer of the sites of convergence where the Diaspora comes together to sing, shout, and be, reflecting itself to itself. Employing the shared tool kit to connect, express, and commiserate across centuries and oceans, Hoyt taps into aural and oral echoes as well as into those retained in the historical and material record.

(Written by Rujeko Hockley for the catalog *Prospect 4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, 2017)

Hasan Hujairi  
*Variations on Brother Bushra, Brother Bushra*  
S O U N D P E R F O R M A N C E

In *Variations on Brother Bushra, Brother Bushra*, Hasan revisits his piece created for HERE HISTORY BEGAN. The original project began with a search for traces of Halim’s brother, Bushra, who had a major formative influence on Halim, and whom Halim spoke fondly of during interviews with Hasan. During the research process, Hasan came across a number of texts written by Bushra EL-Dabh throughout the 1930s for *Al-Majalla Al-Jadeeda* (or *The New Journal*), which was published in Cairo. All the texts were essays, with the exception of one of them, which reads like a short story. The result was the original version of *Brother Bushra, Brother Bushra*, in which Hasan reads Bushra’s short story “Aho Al-Hubb” (translates roughly to This Must be Love) in one sitting with no prior preparation or redos of any mistakes. In this piece, Hasan will be playing back the original reading, while introducing some audio processing, along with traces of spectral resonances extracted from a newly finished oud made for Hasan in Germany.

For bio, see entry on Saturday

Yara Mekawei in conversation with Ali Moraly,  
moderated by Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock  
P A N E L D I S C U S S I O N

Mohammad Rabie  
P O E T R Y I N T E R L U D E

Saliou Cissokho  
M U S I C A L P E R F O R M A N C E

Saliou Cissokho was born in Zinguinchor Casamance, Senegal. He grew up in the Cissokho Jali family, where the tradition of playing the kora is passed down from father to son. At first he decided to study at the university in Dakar, also at the request

of his mother, but the tradition of the kora did not let him go. Even before his studies, he had also started playing the kora, and in the end, Saliou Cissokho devoted himself entirely to the tradition of playing the kora and the history of the griots.

His musical path led him to Barcelona in 2006. Here, Saliou Cissokho founded various music projects and played together with international musicians and artists. Throughout Spain he played in countless bars, clubs and various festivals, including Delta Sound Festival, Barnafrica Festival, Mercé Festival. Since 2012, Saliou Cissokho now lives in Hamburg and successfully continues his musical path throughout Germany and beyond. Besides his concerts, Saliou Cissokho gives workshops and lectures about the kora and the tradition of the griots in West Africa.

Emma Howes and Justin Kennedy  
*Pirou-pyro-silo-alouette*  
D A N C E P E R F O R M A N C E

See entry for Sunday

Yara Mekawai  
*The Mechanism Take Two*  
S O U N D P E R F O R M A N C E

See entry for Saturday

Moneyama  
D J S E T

M O N E Y A M A was inspired by the Bass Gang family when she took a shot at the decks in 2016. Honing her craft since, she has become a favorite as one of Berlin’s most consistent party starters and a resident of St Georg Club. Not one to pose, she lets her positive energy and skills do the work, treating the crowd with the newest trap sounds, throwback R’n’B or Hip Hop jams. A vibe that didn’t go unnoticed for long and landed her gigs all over in Germany’s clubs, Splash! Festival, two Boiler Room shows, Bread and Butter as well as to Cannes, France.



# MOVING ON WITH WORDS, SOUNDS, TRANSFORMATIONS AND ARTICULATIONS, WITH, ON, THROUGH HALIM EL-DABH BONAVENTURE SOH BEJENG NDIKUNG

For the past half-century, visitors to the Giza plateau in Egypt have entered a mystical realm through a supernatural soundscape that has become synonymous with the pyramids. This sonic space titled “Here History Began” was produced by Halim El-Dabh, who also composed one of the earliest pieces of electronic music known to date, “Taabir El-Zaar” (1944), which launched a wave of experimental electronic music flourishing until today. El-Dabh legacy – if anything – is persuading us to bend time, re-mixing history — fast-forwarding, pausing, rewinding, forwarding again, and stopping, almost as if physically spinning on a turntable through temporalities, sonic methods, sonic geographies, (un)timing time and “extending the same mix based on repetitions and recirculations of the same thing”.<sup>1</sup> S A V V Y Contemporary has commissioned contemporary artists, composers, and performers to produce sonic, visual, installative and extra-disciplinary works to pay tribute to, to reflect on, and to get inspired through Halim El-Dabh over seventy years of work.

Born in Cairo, Egypt in 1921, Halim El-Dabh studied agriculture and practised in the field. He attended the first international ethnomusicological conference, The Congress of Arabic Music (Cairo, 1932) where

he witnessed Bella Bartók and Paul Hindemith, among others. He emigrated to the USA to study at the University of New Mexico and the New England Conservatory of Music after turning down his scholarship at Juilliard. He was a University Professor Emeritus of African Ethnomusicology at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, and has also taught at Howard University. As a creative ethnomusicologist, he has researched in Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, as well as in the African Diaspora – Brazil, Jamaica, and the USA. El-Dabh has written for African instruments and African themes and his works in opera, symphony, ballet, orchestra, chamber and electronic music are inspired by African and Asian cultures. Denise Seachrist in her postscript questions, like Akin Euba, why El-Dabh has been omitted from “virtually all past and current general music history and literature textbooks for music majors and non-music majors alike,”<sup>2</sup> especially taking into consideration the fact that El-Dabh had already attained prominence in the New York musical scene the 1950s, studied with Aaron Copland, Irvine Fine,

collaborated with the likes of Otto Luening during his work at the legendary Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center (upon its founding in 1959 where he composed the unique electronic music piece “Leilya and the Poet”), worked briefly for Igor Stravinski, composed and performed with the likes of Alan Hovhaness, played with Henry Cowell and John Cage and composed for Martha Graham, Ralou Manou, and others.

How could someone like El-Dabh vanish into oblivion? A man whose legendary 1949 composition “It is Dark and Damp on the Front” already brought him international recognition before he received formal music training, whose “Sound and Light of the Pyramids of Giza,” composed in 1959– 60 still plays daily at the Great Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, who travelled the African continent meeting the likes of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Haile Selassie, and collected sounds and instruments from around the continent and the diaspora. As Tommy McCutcheon points out in his interview with El-Dabh from 2016: “It is difficult to look at any area of avant-garde music-making that he [El-Dabh] was not at the very forefront of, in some way or another, at some point in his career [...]. Since an excerpt of his 1944 work ‘The Expression of Zār’ was released on CD in 2000, as ‘Wire Recorder Piece’, he has increasingly gained credit for being perhaps the first composer to use the techniques that Pierre Schaeffer would later [in 1948] formalize as *musique concrète*.”<sup>3</sup> As Fari Bradley describes, “‘Expressions of Zaar’ (Taabir El-Zaar) by El-Dabh premiered in an art gallery in Cairo 1944; among the first known works ever composed by electronic means, and also the first intended for electronic presentation. Based on recordings of women chanting at an Egyptian healing ceremony, a sound perhaps as prevalent in 1940 Cairo as canal boats were in Schaeffer’s Paris at the time, ‘Expressions of Zaar’ played out on a magnetic tape recorder (a shorter composition of the work became known as ‘Wire Recorder Piece’, 1994). The resulting sound, rather than a premonition of Fluxus montages of the machinery of industry and travel as Schaeffer’s had been, was the melded overtones of combined female voices.”<sup>4</sup> What are the mechanisms by which El-Dabh was excluded from the canon, and “what might prevent that ongoing work of agnosia from deleting the future memory of the black avant-gardes with which I aligned myself?”<sup>5</sup> as Kodwo Eshun underscored during S A V V Y Contemporary’s focus on yet another composer negated by past and future history. Following is an excerpt of a conversation between Halim El-Dabh and Kamila Metway, on April 7th, 2017 which sheds some light on the composer’s life, his background and his being.

<sup>1</sup> Josh Kun in his lecture on Border Atonalism, during S A V V Y Contemporary’s I N V O C A T I O N S on Julius Eastman, 2018.  
<sup>2</sup> Denise Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Tommy McCutcheon “Unlimited Americana: A Conversation with Halim El-Dabh” (June 1, 2017), *Music and Literature* Retrieved January 2018, from [www.musicandliterature.org/features/2017/6/1/unlimited-americana-a-conversation-with-halim-el-dabh](http://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2017/6/1/unlimited-americana-a-conversation-with-halim-el-dabh)  
<sup>4</sup> Fari Bradley, “Halim El Dabh. An Alternative Genealogy of *Musique Concrète*,” *Ibraaz* (009/5, 2015), <http://www.ibraaz.org/essays/139/674717249719021568>.  
<sup>5</sup> Kodwo Eshun in his lecture “Unbinding Eastman”, during S A V V Y Contemporary’s I N V O C A T I O N S on Julius Eastman, 2018.

# EXCERPTS OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN HALIM EL-DABH AND KAMILA METWALY

*Anecdote 1. Skype call begins. Metwaly cannot make her camera work, El-Dabh on the other side of the screen can only see her cat, thus decides to tell her stories as she tries to fix this technical problem.*

“You know, during my birthday ceremony this year we celebrated Bastet. People remembered the ancient Egyptian Bastet. I visited the Bastet statue in the north of Zagazig years and years back in the temple of the cats which is still there. Cats have a healing energy, they are very special, they create an energy in the body that rearranges things into place. It is almost like the people of the Zaar, they do almost the same thing with their voices and singing, it seems that it is something that Ancient Egypt also enjoyed and understood – this source of energy and we have to catch up with it.”

*Anecdote 2. After a lengthy conversation about Egypt, the sound of Cairo, about El-Dabh's background and upbringing, the move from the Abu Tig area to the big city as a child, and the first time he experienced the notion of clusters in composition he says:*

EL - DABH : Do you understand now that this interview will turn into a book that will be 400 pages long if we keep it at this pace of detail?

METWALY : I would love that to happen, I am very curious.

EL - DABH : This was around the time when I was sixteen years old, I went to the conservatoire at that time. Yes, that was very special. Behind my brothers' house which was located on Kholafa street – a pretty narrow street in Heliopolis (where my brother had his grand piano). Every time I went there, I would find a lot of people waiting for me outside the house. They would open their windows and their verandas and all they would want to listen to was me playing, so I would do clusters while playing the piano. I experienced the clusters as a part of my surroundings. When I played the piano, I wanted to include the audience in my piano playing and not compose music as an isolated event. My intention was and still is to include the listeners into the experience of music-making, this is very different from including the audience in a performance. Rather, it is something that happens simultaneously when you compose.

ELSEWHERE METWALY ASKED EL-DABH ABOUT HIS DETERMINATION TO USE (NOW KNOWN) “EXTENDED” TECHNIQUES FOR PIANO, ABOUT THE INCEPTION OF THIS IDEA OF GOING BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF AN INSTRUMENT. HE DESCRIBES ONE OF THE EARLIEST COMPOSITIONS HE HAS MADE THAT HAS BEEN CHANGED, AMENDED, AND REWORKED OVER TIME.

EL - DABH : “Misreyat” (meaning the many Egypts) is a piece that connects me with Egypt, and I don't want to finish it. I wrote my first piece on the piano when I was eleven, so definitely I was interested in making music. I haven't really ever finished it because it connects me with Egypt. I just kept developing it over time, this piece is about me growing up in Egypt (...). I also performed this piece or a version of it in Alexandria at the opening celebration of the Library of Alexandria. I mean this is me and Egypt fighting back and forth and I don't want to complete it, so I keep holding it. Some pieces I don't want to finish and I want to leave them exposed to change, and “Misreyat” was one of them.

CUT TO TWENTY MINUTES LATER INTO THE CONVERSATION, WHEN EL-DABH DESCRIBED HIS WORK WITH PIANO IN NEW YORK WHICH INSPIRED VLADIMIR USSACHEVSKY AND OTTO LUENING TO INVITE HALIM EL-DABH TO THE COLUMBIA MUSIC CENTER TO EXPERIMENT WITH THE RCA SYNTHESIZER (1958-1961), HE COMMENTS :

EL - DABH : I started taking out the strings of the piano, tied them with other strings, stretched them over the wall of the library, as I continued to be interested in the transformation of sound. And when I was doing that, visitors would come into the library and two of them were Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky, and they thought who is this crazy guy doing that, dismantling a piano, stretching the strings of the piano on the wall (laughs). They realized that I was changing the sound of the piano, stretching it and they invited me into Columbia Music Center.

METWALY : How different is the music of the streets in Egypt from music in concert halls and the theatre?

EL - DABH : The music and the living energy has different layers of knowledge, kind of like the pyramid when it used to be covered up by sand, where you have to uncover it to know what lies beneath, like Abu Simbel

when it was totally covered with sand and they only discovered what is beneath very late which was a whole temple. I have experienced this event myself when I went there and saw the changes and the developments taking place at the location. So my point is, the traditions are so rich on different levels, of course, there is the popular music of Cairo which came with the radio such as Om Kalthoum, Abdel Wahab, Abdel Halim Hafez... in a city like Cairo there is a whole different tradition of music which is still there I believe and kind of goes on by itself noticed or unnoticed I am not sure. I should have time to come to Cairo one day and rediscover what I did there. In Sharqeya, for instance, I have experienced highly developed music.

Some of the most theoretical rich people, for instance, live in Sharqeya. It is really very rich and very diverse. I travelled quite a bit in Sharqeya and I discovered a lot of things there; all those experiences have contributed to how I make music today. I mean the diverse traditions of the people of Sharqeya understand the theoretical base of their music as well as the physical base of their music, it is really an amazing culture. There are many villages there – which we call Falaheen – and their people know that they have an inner understanding of the theoretical base of the music they play, even though they do not know how to read and write but they do have that, they did have that. I should dig out a few presentations I did about that subject; in Russia for instance. I had a choice to make it in Russian, French, English, and Arabic and because they used to speak Arabic in Samarkand (which was back then a part of the Soviet Union). I chose the Arabic language, I should have the presentation somewhere.

HALIM EL-DABH COMMENTS ELSEWHERE THAT :

I think that the thing that was interesting to me during one of those travels was when I thought to use sound like pest control. I experimented with that and used some scrap metals, other materials, and hung them on polls. So when the wind would blow, and shook some metal scraps, they produce noise and that would create an electromagnetic field that would distract the tiny beetles from eating the vegetables. I felt that maybe I could create a sound field that would discourage them from attacking the crops. I was involved in the sound at the field, the sound of the wind that would blow in the field, the different changes in the temperature that would affect the sound of the field and the surrounding of the animals and insects, all that I found really fascinating.

METWALY: HOW ELSE WERE YOU EXPOSED TO INTERESTING SOUNDS?

EL - DABH : I went out to the local ceremonies during my travels that also contributed to a lot of

exciting sounds that I have experienced such during my visit to Asyut. When I went to Bawit village, which is located at the edge of the desert, I remember the people of the village had this tradition of celebrating the day when Napoleon's soldiers were kicked out of Egypt. According to tradition, they would put something like fat or oil on top of turtles, because the area was rich with turtles back in the day. In the times of Napoleon and the French occupation, the French soldiers were apparently scared because they thought there was a hidden army that would come after them. The villagers had put many candles on top of the turtles' hard shell to scare the Napoleonic army. They would go out at night and the turtles then looked like pretty strange and scary creatures, that was what the people of the Banwit would tell me. It is very exciting to discover things like that, it contributes to the innovation and the tradition of the people to continue and this of course was important to my music, all these strange changes and transformations. And transformation is a very major thing – the ability to transform from one character to another.

M E T W A L Y : In 1932, your brother Bushra took you to the Congress of Arabic Music. You were only 11 at that time and it was the first time you saw a wire recorder. What made you interested in it?

E L - D A B H : Well, my life's craziness, I think. My life was involved in so many things, my life and I are constantly in transformational energy. When I made clusters on the piano, I had no experience, the sound I created gave me experience. Sound to me was physical as well as audio, but it was also visual. I remember when my mother made jam out of roses I could hear the roses from the jam, I could feel the roses, and the vibration of the colour. Those things made me understand that there is a way to write music using colours because of the frequencies and the vibrations that stimulate the mind into a different stage of understanding and hearing with colour vibration and frequencies. So when I kept visiting the Middle East Station to hear my brother play the piano there or would go just hang around in the studios, I was exposed to this equipment that the studio owned and then my interest in the transformation of the idea of spirit and physical being was introduced to me when I started visiting Zaar ceremonies. There, I saw those people dancing, moving, drumming and singing. I witnessed a whole world of transformation that was taking place in front of me that shook me and I wanted to know more about it by recording the ceremony and eliminating something from it. Like when I recorded myself playing the piano and eliminated the fundamental tones of the material I was playing, it would give me a different result at the end. Whether I hit the very bottom parts of the vibrations with piano keys or the high parts of the middle, they have different qualities of vibrations. The essence of transformation made me think of elimination and addition. After I met Bartók, which was a period of time in which Egypt was

going through a renaissance in music and recording technologies were introduced, Egypt at that time was bubbling with music, people were interested in music right and left.

I became interested in the recording machines and the availability came from the Marconi Company and Telefunken among many other Danish, Italian recording companies that we suddenly had access to. A lot of industrial machines were being poured into Cairo, we started getting flooded with all this equipment actually because of the Congress of Arabic Music. It generated a very unusual energy in Egypt and that energy became the reason why I felt that I wanted to experience the idea of recording and the idea of time transformation. One day I recall, I was in the Middle East Radio and I saw what they had equipment and I said: "Can I borrow some of the equipment and use it?" they were very supportive of me using the equipment and using the radio station for my work. It had movable walls, so I could move the walls as I ejected sound in a chamber. I moved the wall to change the vibration, to change the echo, reverberation, electric energy, the voltage control. I was really screaming (out of happiness)! Suddenly, I had all the very exciting changes available at hand, I couldn't believe how many changes I could do.

M E T W A L Y : There are still a lot of questions to follow in this interview, but I am thinking since we have been talking for two hours already, would you like to take a break?

E L - D A B H : Yes and you are at midnight right now. I think I should be practical about it even though I am only 4096 years old as Deborah would say.

D E B O R A H E L - D A B H : Four thousand is for the pyramids.

## MORE INFORMATION

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S A V V Y Contemporary—The laboratory of form-ideas is an art space, discursive platform, place for good talks, foods and drinks—a space for conviviality. S A V V Y Contemporary situates itself at the threshold of notions of the West and non-West, to understand and deconstruct them. S A V V Y Contemporary has realized a kaleidoscope of art exhibitions, performances, film screenings, lectures, concerts, readings, talks, dances. S A V V Y Contemporary has established a participatory archive on German colonial history, a performance arts documentation centre, a library, a residency program, as well as educational projects with schools. The art space engages in its neighborhood's history and socio-political realities which are entangled with the reflections and discourses of the project.

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