



MY VOICE, YOUR VOICE, OUR VOICES

Collaborations of Musicians of African
Jewish and Muslim Diasporas in Toronto

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African/Caribbean/Canadian

WALK TOGETHER CHILDREN

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A NEW SPACE

Toronto is a fastgrowing multicultural mosaic and named most diverse city in the world (Flack 2016). Cultures interweave historically, socially, politically, artistically. The appreciation and practise of music can build cultural bridges.





A New Space, A New Song

What prompts

- ❖ a Jewish folk choir to perform African freedom songs and African – American spirituals?
- ❖ A Caribbean-rooted person to perform Yiddish songs and find their own cultural meaning? (Denise Williams)
- ❖ A black Canadian composer to compose a song of peace entitled *Shalom Salaam* ? (Andrew Craig)
- ❖ A Canadian composer to compose a work based on Abrahamic faiths? (David Warrack)
- ❖ the musical fusion of a Persian love song with classical Indian singing (Babak Naseri and Sitar Fusion)?
- ❖ the Palestinian/ Israeli song composition, *Between Darkness and Light* (Hreib and Rosenberg)?

)



Whose music is
it anyway?

Take 1

1994

The production of R&H Showboat in TO is causing some black social activists to revolt against it. Racial tensions are ensuing between these cultural groups in TO

2 Canadians of Black and Jewish backgrounds respectively, collaborating on classical music (lied, opera, chanson etc), are horrified at the situation recalling the coalition of blacks and Jews through decades civil rights movements

Singing as a soprano lead in the TJFC I was asked to provide some selections of black and Jewish music that could be appropriate for an intercultural dialogue session between these groups. Along with Yiddish folk songs, the spiritual, 'walk together children,' I had learned in the TJFC



Music for Social
Activism

Transformative
Framework

FROM AN AUTHENTIC PERSPECTIVE (VOICE
AND AUTHENTICITY – WILLINGHAM)

SPEAKING WITHIN AND WITHOUT THROUGH
SONGS AND ART IN GENERAL

MORE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
APPRECIATION OF RACIALLY TARGETED
GROUPS

BLACK AND JEWISH CONCERTS (BRAHM,
SAM, NINA, DENISE)

WALK TOGETHER CHILDREN CONCERTS
October 2018 (WTC) – LINDA LITWACK AND
SALIMA DHANANI – meetings, artistic
collaborations with professional musicians
and community choir, and creative
storytelling, application of coursework

Literature Overview

Significant research study has been accomplished on the cultural roots and migrations of these peoples and their music; however, authentic dialogues and cultural interrelatedness of these groups are limited due to racial tensions that can exist within and without. This study will take the advantage point of the researcher being an insider and in close relationship with the participants. It can serve as a unique comparison study on these cultures and give a voice to these racialized groups.



Research Questions

From the aspect of being of the African, Jewish, or Muslim Diaspora and living and working and a musician in Toronto

1. How have we come to know, learn and understand music of other cultures
2. What happens when we share and connect music traditions?
3. Where do we go from here?



Purpose statement

The purpose of This narrative study is to restory the experiences and interactions of various Toronto based musicians connected to a cross-cultural concert performance, and other music related artistic professionals, and community musicians of the African, Jewish, and Muslim Diasporas.

The desire is to understand how they locate and identify themselves musically in relationship to their general cultural migrations, transnational and cross-cultural connections, as well as any effects of social, political, and racial unions/contentions/inequalities on their artistic work.

This narrative approach was chosen as as poignant way to use a transformative framework in which the music and stories of the participants can be given more of a voice

Methodology

- ❖ 13 established Toronto musicians of the African, Jewish, and Muslim diaspora, were recruited to participate in this study.
- ❖ They were engaged in either a focused group interview process of 2-6 participants or in individual interviews.
- ❖ Video-recordings and notes of scripted questions on topics related to their cross-cultural artistic experiences were analysed for common themes and statements.
- ❖ Video excerpts from the interviews and also from the WTC concert in October 2018, were created to be presented for the final WLU masters capstone.

Interview Questions

1. HOW HAVE YOU COME TO ENGAGE IN THE MUSIC OF OTHER CULTURES THAN YOUR OWN?
2. IN IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCES FROM YOUR OWN CULTURAL PRACTICES HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR REACTIONS?
3. WITHIN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT MUSICAL STYLES HAVE INFLUENCED YOU TO THE POINT OF EMBODIMENT?
4. COMMENT ON ANY RACIAL MARGINALIZATION, INJUSTICES OR STEREOTYPING YOU MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED IN YOUR WORK.
5. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WISH TO ADD THAT WILL HELP TO CLARIFY YOUR COMMENTS?

Question #1

How have you come to engage in the music of other cultures than your own?

Music handed down aurally – Non-Formal

- The existence of many cultural styles – culturally Indigenous mixed with colonial styles
- In the community from childhood- multicultural and musically fluid environments, mentors, direct transmission – Salima, Sam, Waleed, Noam, Leela, Carlos, Deep
- School
- Media – radio – the existence of many cultural styles due to colonial capitalism (classical, contemporary soul, R&B, rock & roll, from Beatles, Otis Redding to foxtrot and Schubert)

Question 1 cont'd

Music learned with training – Formal Learning

- Western culture studies – piano lessons etc , Brahm, Leela, Nina
- Iranian traditional music – Babak

What is my 'own' cultural music in TO's cultural mosaic?

indigenous, colonial, many other cultures

Question #2

In identifying differences from your own cultural practices, how would you describe your reactions?

- ❖ Only understanding being an 'other' in a culturally-dominated society (Noam)
- ❖ Learning the music of one's own cultural background in the new world (Brahm, Sam)
- ❖ The music culture is huge (Brahm)
- ❖ Music can be used to unite (Brahm) or music can be used to diversify and control (Noam)
- ❖ Desire to learn and take pride in learning the music of other cultures first hand (Salima)
- ❖ Excited to not only learn other culture's music but also to understand the meanings and practices (Carlos)
- ❖ I frequently hear my music in other cultural music and wonder how it got there (Sam)
- ❖ I hear my music in most if not all cultural music because of the African rhythmic foundations (Waleed)

Question #3

Within your experience, what musical styles have influenced you to the point of embodiment?

- ❖ Classical Music – adopting classical music of many cultures (Brahm, Babak)
- ❖ Jazz - the free form and fluidity of the style is appealing to musicians (All)
- ❖ African Styles and rhythms (Amina, Carlos, Leela)
- ❖ Multi-unified and Mash-ups (Amina)
- ❖ The music passionate to our mentors and teachers and intimately handed down (Noam)

Question #4

Comment on any racial marginalization, injustices or stereotyping you may have experienced in your work.

- ❖ Mis-representation – rituals have tradition and meaning (Waleed)
- ❖ Racial hypersensitivity
- ❖ Racial insensitivity - stereotyping
- ❖ Expectations to perform certain stereotypical ways (Waleed, Noam, Sam, Nina)
- ❖ Intercultural racism among the diaspora (Salima)
- ❖ Inequalities in hiring, remuneration, positioning
- ❖ Not stopped by 'No' and needing to be independent
- ❖ Leveraging and misrepresentation of 'borrowed' cultural styles
- ❖ From borrowing to taking
- ❖ Governmental ignorance - eg 'world music' categories (Waleed, Carlos)
- ❖ Stamped and Marginalized (Nina)
- ❖ Dislike/Hatred (Amina, Clifton)

Question #5

Is there anything else you wish to add that will help to clarify your comments?

- ❖ Hybrids good but fear of loss of authentic traditional styles (Salima)
- ❖ Music like any other art form would trace migrations, history, politics – multicultural influences for hundreds of years “Global Capitalism”
- ❖ Educating communities in the outskirts (Salima)
- ❖ Don’t accept ‘no’ - Not relying on the system but helping to transform it (Clifton)
- ❖ Music is a unifier (Brahm)
- ❖ Music can be used to divide and control (Noam)
- ❖ ‘World Music’ category is meaningless and should be changed to ‘Toronto Music’



MY DIALOGUE

New songs are created through cultural interpenetration, bringing new dialogue spaces, cultural understanding, and social ease (Jewish-Muslim, Black-Jewish, Black-Muslim)

WHOSE MUSIC IS IT ANYWAY?

TAKE 2

1. How have we come to know, learn and understand music of other cultures

Formally and non-formally

Formal – Brahm, Nina, Noam, Leela, Babak (Jewish, Muslim)

Non- Formal - Waleed, Deep, Sam, Carlos , Amina, Clifton (African)

Community music learner – Salima (Muslim/East African)

WHOSE MUSIC IS IT ANYWAY?

TAKE 3

2. What happens when we share and connect

Unity

Understanding

Strength

Divide

Power plays

Misrepresent

Rob

Lose? Eg Blue-eyed soul

<https://hughsroomlive.com/event/soulsville/>



“They don’t
like the ‘Afro-
Saxon’”
Clifton Joseph

We like it when you do it ‘your way’ in
other words, ‘your cultural way’ better
which is often very stereotyped



“Global Capitalism” Noam Lemish

Music like any other art form would trace migrations, history, politics, and multicultural influences for hundreds of years - under the influence of “Global Capitalism”



WHO'S MUSIC IS IT ANYWAY?

TAKE 4

3. Where do we go from here?

REPRESENTATION – SHERIDAN COLLEGE

INCLUSION

OPPORTUNITY

EDUCATION

HONOURING 'ANOTHERS' ART

NEW NARRATIVES (STORIES)

TRANSFORMING PRACTICES

BALANCE POWER

THE DIALOGUES MUST CONTINUE



WALK TOGETHER CHILDREN

A Cross-Cultural Concert Celebration featuring the music of African, Jewish and Muslim Diasporas

Musicians, Dancers, Poets, Community Choirs Jubilate Singers and Common Thread directed by Isabel Bernaus, Indigenous Singer/Songwriter , Visual Artist

www.denisewilliamssoprano.com/walktogetherchildren

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OTHER RESOURCES

<https://diasporadialogues.com/about/>

Diaspora Dialogues (DD) supports diverse writers to turn their craft into a career through mentorship, professional development and opportunities to publish and present their work.

For fourteen years, DD has helped writers tell their own stories, in their own voices.

Our focus is on the development of both artist and audience, and on working toward redefining the “mainstream” in the arts sector, and ensuring it is as diverse as the country itself.

LITEARTURE REVIEW P1

Migration, Solidarity, Social Status

Interconnections and Cultural Understanding

Sharing diversity through songs- This promotion of cultural understanding and integration through contemporary multicultural music education is explored in Joseph's article relating to teacher education (Joseph 2018).

Commonalities in the Black Jewish and Muslim musical styles and practises

RELATIONSHIP TO CODED SPIRITUALS - Beckerman's article on the history of a niggun captures many common elements of the 'coded' nature of Jewish folklore lullabies which told stories carrying hidden meanings of experienced loss of home, loss of freedom, imminent loss of life (Beckerman 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW P2

Influences, Transnationalism, and Cultural Music Fusion

The adoption of new music styles with old music cultural roots are revitalizing cultural identity, cultural stability and promoting the rise of cultural folklore to mainstream stages; A new Jewish culture Klezmer music from European ghetto roots revitalized and fused in jazz New York (Unger 2015)

transnational sound of South- Asian, Muslim affiliated punk band Kominas (Hsu 2013) and cultural stability “Not only does this allow for the symbolic expression of a particular vision of and claim on Iran’s future, but through the act of performance, such a vision becomes a possible reality” (Randall 2005)

NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT TO GIVE VOICES TO THESE MINORITY CULTURES – NEWS OF HATE CRIMES AND RACIAL injustices INCREASING

CURRENT/RECENT NEWS

Police-reported hate crimes targeting blacks, Jews, Muslims on rise: StatCan

BY THE CANADIAN PRESS (Lang , 2018)

Posted Nov 29, 2018 11:41 am EST

Last Updated Nov 29, 2018 at 5:30 pm EST



DONNA DONNA

Yiddish folk song - Lyrics by Aaron Zeitlin, music by Sholom Secunda, (1940/41)

On a wagon bound for market

There's a calf with a mournful eye

High above him flies the swallow

Winging swiftly thru the sky.

Refrain:

How the winds are laughing

They laugh with all their might

Laugh and laugh the whole day through

And half the summer's night

Dona dona, dona etc.

