

Halim El Dabh

An Alternative Genealogy of Musique Concrète

Fari Bradley

009_05 / 30 November 2015

Liberation as an intellectual mission [...] has now shifted from the [...] domesticated dynamics of culture to its un-housed, decentred, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective then all things are indeed counter, original, spare, strange.

— Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993, p.189

Unless otherwise cited, this article by sound artist Fari Bradley draws from various conversations and correspondence between herself, fellow sound artist Chris Weaver, and composer Halim El Dabh, between May and August of 2015.

I.

The origins of *musique concrète* – electroacoustic music composed of recorded sound – are attributed to Pierre Schaeffer, who coined the term in 1948.^[1] At the time, Schaeffer and his associates were working at the *Studio d'Essai* (Experimental Studio) in Paris. They were exploring ways in which recording technology removed the ties of composition with traditional performance modes, and how phonology brought pre-recorded sounds from the outside world into the recording studio. In his 1948/9 journal, published as the collection of essays *À la recherche d'une musique concrète* in 1952, Schaeffer described the sounds and the way he imagined working with them as a 'symphony of noises'.^[2] He collected sounds from gongs, bike horns, car horns and other industrial and everyday ambience, which he stored at the radio station for use during the reading of plays.

Schaeffer's 1948 composition, *Cinq Etudes des Bruits*, which features cut up sounds recordings from trains, canal boats, coughing, string and other mundane noises, is widely regarded as the first piece of *musique*



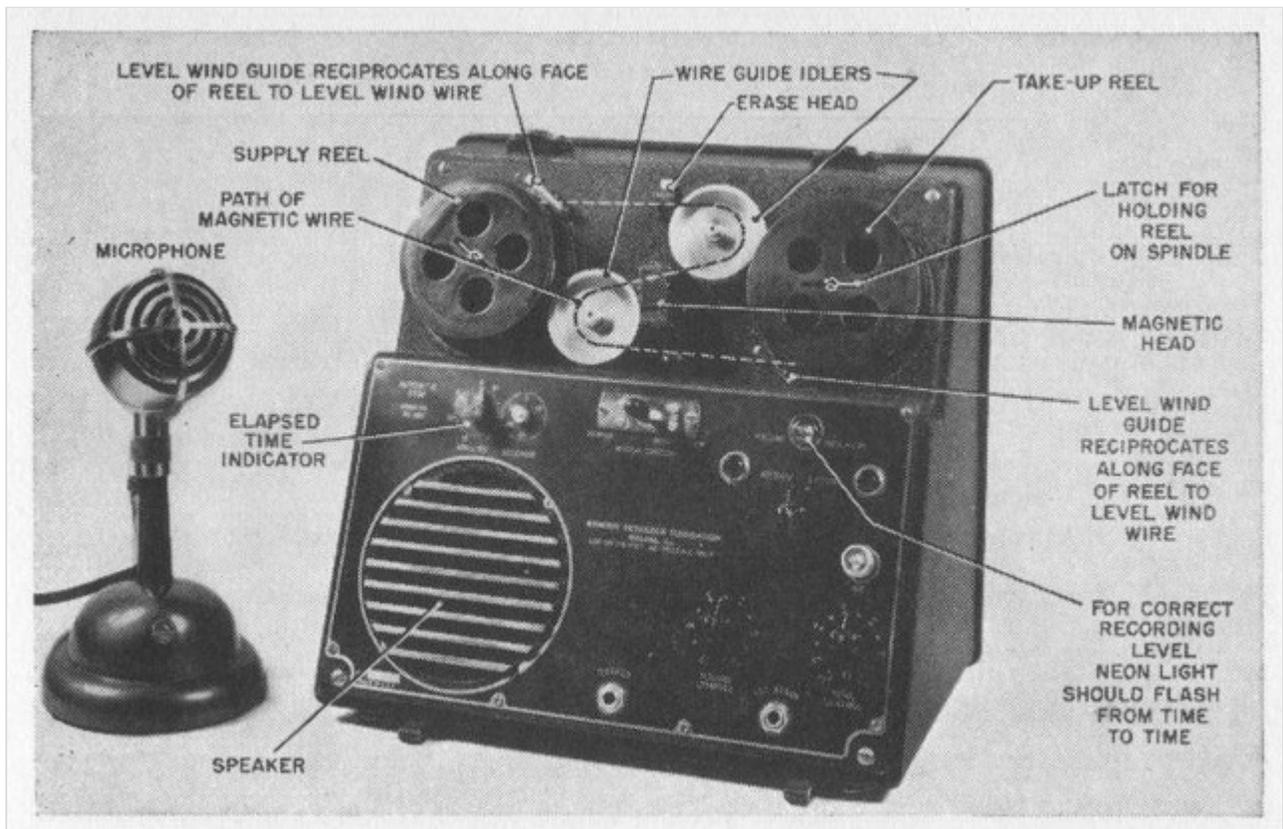
concrète. Yet, four years before Schaeffer created *Cinq Etudes des Bruits*, an Egyptian student in Cairo composed one of the first known pieces of electronic tape music using a reel-to-reel tape recorder. *Expressions of Zaar (Ta'abir al-Zaar)* by Halim El Dabh premiered in an art gallery in Cairo 1944; among the first known work 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 conducting a *zaar* healing or exorcism, a ceremony common to parts of West Asia and North Africa.

At the time, El Dabh had been experimenting with a heavy but portable magnetic wire recorder (a hair-thin steel wire spooled over a recording head) El Dabh captured everyday sounds across Cairo. El Dabh's recorder was borrowed from Middle East Radio (Radio Cairo), a small but well-equipped independent station in which El Dabh edited and re-recorded the music onto magnetic tape. In the production process, he manipulated the playback voltage, speed and direction and constantly shifted the moveable walls of the recording studio – a process that allowed him to manipulate the parameters of the recording and compose the 25-minute piece.

Remarkably, Halim El Dabh's discovery remains relatively unknown, while Schaeffer, 11 years his senior, is widely acclaimed for the discovery of musique concrète. You might call these two independent breakthroughs multiple independent discoveries.^[3] (As in the case of John Cage's 'silent' piece 4'33" from 1952, preceded by Yves Klein's 1949 *Monotone-Silence Symphony* by three years, in which the second and last movement are 20 minutes of silence.)^[4] Both composers were unaware of each other's work at the time, though El Dabh did hear that he had once recorded at the same French studio as Schaeffer on the same day.

In fact, *Expressions of Zaar* was only later understood as a historical milestone, and is still not widely recognized today. Even El Dabh purportedly did not include *Ta'abir al-Zaar* in his early lists of compositions, though even if he had, Schaeffer would most likely still have been considered the godfather of musique concrète, since Schaeffer created the theoretical basis for it. Furthermore, Schaeffer's composed shellac recordings were created in an artistically academic environment, which supported the results of his findings, while El Dabh developed relatively autonomously in Egypt, where he was born and raised. Without the platforms of academia and its concomitant recognition through publishing, or a collective or community to laud and situate the significance of the discovery within the history of the time, innovative acts like El Dabh's easily fall by the wayside. This was El Dabh's situation in Cairo when, alone, he found a means to use field recordings for electro-acoustic analogue compositions. There was no precedent for such music in Egypt.

Even now, despite releasing *Wire Recorder Piece* on Halim El Dabh Music LLC in 2000 and on Sub Rosa in 2006, El Dabh is still omitted from surveys on musique concrète, such as Brian Kane's *Sound Unseen: Acoustmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2014). Musique concrète itself remains a



A Wire Recorder, Armour Research Foundation (Model 50).
<http://www.recording-history.org/HTML/wire5.php>

niche interest. Not many are aware that sampling, audio piracy and sound collage began this way. In cases such as El Dabh's, an incidental innovation can remain overlooked for decades, while the inventor is perhaps not even aware of the significance of his own work. It is this oversight that this essay seeks to address.

II.

El Dabh quote on sound, interview with Fari Bradley June, 2015:



[Cookie policy](#)

Featuring Stelae of Axum by Halim El Dabh, 2005, glockenspiel.

I travelled a lot even when I was a kid, with the husband of my niece, who used to go to Uganda to the upper part of the Nile to work with it, so I was exposed to sound, I was exposed to different things since I was a child. So the minute you have something in your hand and you've been exposed to many sounds before, automatically you want to produce those sounds.

– Halim El Dabh^[5]

How did El Dabh come to compose *Expressions of Zaar* in 1944? To understand this, we must look back to the decades prior to 1944, when El Dabh excelled as a young student in Cairo, a city which had a huge influence on his work, hosting constant performances of Arabic and European classical music. Cairo was a rich capital surrounded by progressive, creative people: a major destination for European and American theatre groups and orchestras touring the southern Mediterranean.

The El Dabh house was both social and musical, boasting lutes, violins, drums, an accordion that had no keys (like an ancient water organ, the hydraulos) and a piano. El Dabh was in a number of ensembles, collaborating with conservatories and music institutes across Cairo, and taking formal music lessons from the age of 15. He visited Cairo's Joseph Schulz conservatory, the local YMCA in Heliopolis (a district in Cairo with a lively experimental arts scene), and the grand Arab Music Institute, which housed a piano with a 24-tone scale (which El Dabh would later recreate in a performance at the United Nations).^[6]

Of his nine elder brothers, two were a significant influence on El Dabh musically: Bushra and Michael. They pushed El Dabh to compose and improvise, so that by the time he was 11-years-old he was already writing scores, composing his first piece *Misri-yaat* in 1932 on his brother Adeeb's baby grand on which El Dabh experimented, reaching into the strings, plucking, pressing and creating tone clusters. Adeeb, another influence, was a pianist, performing piano during silent movie screenings and frequently on independent radio where El Dabh became friends with radio regular Abdel Halim Hafez, who became a lasting Egyptian pop icon.



Michael, Halim (center), Selim as babies.
Courtesy of Halim El Dabh.

El Dabh later learned the derabucca (goblet drum) and took to finding new and unusual sources for his compositions.

Bushra, 20 years his senior, was an in-road into radio practices, equipment and recording studios. Through him, El Dabh attended the 1932 historic international Cairo Congress of Arab Music hosted by King Fouad I who, being a lute player himself, was an avid supporter of the arts. There, El Dabh met eminent performers such as Béla Bartók and Paul Hindemith and saw wire recorders used for the first time. Copious recording sessions during the conference were overseen by Hindemith, who recorded the concerts for posterity before travelling to Turkey, contributing to the beginnings of the Turkish State Opera and Ballet. Such was the conference's legacy that an awareness of the possibility of recording surged across the city, and companies began importing the latest equipment to meet local musician's demands. El Dabh remembers using makes such as Marconi from Italy, Poussant from Denmark and Telefunken from Germany in that period.

During these years, radio contributed to the renaissance of Egyptian arts taking place at the time, and El Dabh's Cairo was the perfect incubator for his pioneering experimentation with recording and re-recording for composition. On national radio, El Dabh heard Egyptian music, with its dramatic and Foley elements. Egyptian and Indian cinema production was also booming around Cairo at the time with several hundred offices in Cairo producing movies and a lively scene surrounding it. (El Dabh recalls his hands once appearing in a film for which he also made his first score: the movie *Roses and Thorns* (*Azhar wa Ashwak*), in 1946.)

Enthused by this climate, El Dabh took part in a listening group from the age of 14, who huddled around a gramophone to hear, for the first time, European avant garde music and spoken word recordings, such as Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), Stravinsky's *Firebird* (1910) and *The Rite of Spring* (1913), and the works of Edgard Varèse such as *Ionisation* (1929–1931). An atmosphere of attentive listening alongside peer musicians and patrons, paralleled with the ubiquitous Egyptian folk music of his environs, allowed El Dabh to flourish. As El Dabh himself notes:

[T]he balconies of the other homes were arrayed about me like a vast arena, with every family waiting expectantly in their boxes [...] at 2am every night I started playing. I had this huge audience in the back of the house waiting for me to play the piano, and of course I did all sorts of sounds [...] I did clusters on the piano and strummed it. I had approval, and audience and appreciation. That kept me playing.^[7]

As a youth studying agriculture at Cairo University, El Dabh emerged locally as an experimental musician with broad interests and professional experience. Working with farmers, he followed in his father's footsteps in agricultural science, a forum in which he applied his own empirical ideas, creating a perfect intersection of thought and experience. El Dabh experimented with sound as a form of pest control, for instance, to keep beetles off wheat, alfalfa and corn crops, by hitting metal against metal, using scraps from a local foundry where farming equipment was forged. He experimented with sound installations consisting of poles buried in the earth, activated by the wind. Holding various beetles, including scarabs, in his hands at close quarters he examined their changing calls and the manner in which light affected them. El Dabh developed his ideas for creating sounds as a form of pest control by copying the insects' own means of generating sound – rubbing their legs together. El Dabh did not see this as a mere passive observation, however, but 'an exchange'. He sensed the beetles' 'vibrations' and was able to innovate based on their design.^[8]



[Parstronix](#)

Halim El Dabh on Sound, Nature and Beetles



[Cookie policy](#)

Featuring the track Experimentations with Sonic Textures, for Cold Pies for Halim El Dabh by Sacha Beazlewitz.

After graduating, El Dabh took a job as an agricultural consultant, which required only brief visits to the fields along Cairo's outskirts. Meandering back home to the Heliopolis district in Cairo, El Dabh would pass through villages, witnessing different traditional ceremonies: 'Music in Egyptian villages changes every ten miles, offering a different musical expression,' which he regularly observed.^[9] Working with nature, frequenting

villages steeped in Egyptian tradition and creating experimental compositions in his spare time, El Dabh developed an interest in both the metaphysical and the mundane. He says of his early compositions that he was hunting for the 'inner sound within.'^[10]

With this in mind, it is quite remarkable how much El Dabh's practice resonates with Epstein's theories. To French film maker and theorist Jean Epstein, the act of listening is a revelatory experience that is hugely enabled and defined by recording. In *Expressions of Zaar*, El Dabh is close to the original Pythagorean veil, the curtain behind which Pythagoras purportedly concealed himself for years while tutoring his students, in order to teach them the effects of acousmatic (unseen). The *zaar* ceremony itself acts as a permeable screen to the esoteric forces with which the ceremony connects. The recorded sounds become a portal into this experience; it contains hidden tones, spatial references and layers, pointing at an identifiable source and destination. As Epstein wrote:

It's across the sound fields of the vast world that we must spread our microphones, searching the fields with sound-sticks and selective filters [...] to hear everything that a perfect human ear hears is merely apprentice work for the microphone. Now, we want to hear what the ear doesn't hear, just as through the cinema we see what eludes the eye.^[11]

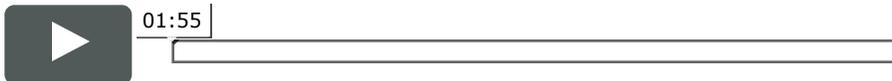
What freed El Dabh from the musical paradigms of the day was his interest in the relationship between Egyptian people and their music, something he would later continue to hunt for as an ethnomusicologist, travelling through 15 countries in Africa. Recording voices and finding electro-acoustic means to synthesize them was something El Dabh continued to explore later. At the heart of this study was, as Epstein wrote and as El Dabh noted himself, to feel what the ear doesn't hear.

III.



Halim El Dabh- EXTRACT - Wire Recorder Piece

from Fari Bradley



Throughout his career, El Dabh maintained his connection with the sounds of the sacred – a thread of interest he holds in common with Schaeffer. A devout Catholic, Schaeffer later went on to found a movement with an interest in the esoteric; the cultural-spiritual nationwide youth group *La Jeune France*, which operated between 1936 to 1940. The group is known to have explored mysticism as one of its founding principles.

This active interest in the ethereal and sublime, concurrent with the hyper-modern technical advances of the time that heralded in the new digital era of today, is where a connection between Schaeffer and El Dabh is located. The onset of electronic music was a period that author Allen S. Weiss described, in the early nineteenth and twentieth century, as an era of spiritualist manipulation of electric waves in the ether, that were 'destined to merge with the psychic waves of the departed, such that electricity would permit contact with the after-world,'^[12] To Weiss, the psychic energies conjured by electricity replaced the 'animal magnetism' of the previous age, defined by 'mesmerism'. As Henry Adams (1838–1918) describes in the *Education of Henry Adams*:

Nothing better expresses the difference between ancient and modern paradigms of aesthetics and ontology, where the rapidity and excitation of electric power serves as the new symbol of a body now ruled by technology, without divine interference.^[13]

El Dabh used studio techniques to illustrate this movement from the physical world as represented by the earthly voices, to an acousmatic world as represented by the ghostly diffusion of sound. The *zaar* composition, *Wire Recorder Piece*, while containing elements of melody sung by the women conducting the *zaar*, is in fact an abstraction of traditional sounds, or one of humanity's oldest sounds: the voice. The unique tension that the

piece achieves between the voice and electronics can be compared to the radiophonic works of playwright Valère Novarina. Weiss points out that Novarina's radiophonic works 'instantiate this recorporealization of the human voice', something with which El Dabh continued to experiment, 'all the while achieving a disquieting grafting of mechanical, electric, and electronic possibilities onto the strictly human potentials of sound recording and transmission – an artificial transmutation of respiratory patterns and vocal intonations.'^[14]

Across El Dabh's entire body of work, knowable objects and sounds take on extraordinary features, be it an orchestra of 1,000 drums, or a glockenspiel played and muted selectively until it becomes something other than that which we knew to be. *Expressions of Zaar* exemplified this through the way that El Dabh captured the sounds of the world around him – machinery, scrap metal, traditional singing – and turned them into notes with which to compose a musical piece.

The moveable architecture of the Cairo radio studios El Dabh used gave his work its timbre by allowing the creation of highly effective reverberation, thus turning the studio into an instrument in its own right. In the case of *Expressions of Zaar*, an echo chamber, a re-recording room, and electronic machinery with adjustable voltage controls, all allowed manipulation of the equalization, over-layering and enhancing tones in the women's voices and diminishing selected tones.^[15] By tuning various sound-emitting devices, El Dabh filtered out harmonics and eradicated their fundamental tones. Strangling and pulsing the electrical feeds, he discovered, would change the speed and created rhythms. Recording these back onto the wire recorder at first and then reel-to-reel tapes, the voltage manipulation would remain a preferred method for El Dabh throughout his career, even when he later had the option of working with Moog synthesizers.

But for El Dabh, the nature of innovation in *Expression of Zaar* transcended technicalities, in that the work involved gaining access to parts of Egyptian society mostly closed to men. El Dabh did this by, he says, requesting special access while he and his friend disguised themselves as women so as not to stand out, hiding the 15-kilogram recorder under their disguises. El Dabh recorded the women chanting onto the portable wire recorder (there are other noises during a *zaar* and he recorded many different *zaars*, but only the sounds selected for *Expressions of Zaar* remain). In doing so, he transformed a device used for interviews and street reporting into a musical source, thereby creating a window into music from the streets. For El Dabh, this interrogation was about exploring the 'body sounds' that 'we emanate.' That he found a way to express these answers through this composition was, to the artist's mind, his greatest achievement.^[16]

This is where El Dabh differs from Pierre Schaeffer, who used shellac discs and phonographic equipment to both play back and record his first composed piece of musique concrete. The tape that El Dabh used instead of the shellac was, as Schaeffer noted, too expensive in France at the time.^[17] How El Dabh was able to afford tape before Schaeffer could, points largely to an affluent Cairo, ruled by a King who distributed funding to the film, recording and broadcast industries during a late 30s–40s economic and artistic boom across Cairo. The advent of electronic mediums created sudden access to manipulations of the timeline, successions of sounds could now be cut up and rearranged after being performed. This new realm of post production also offered the composer the possibility to change the nature of timbres of the recorded sounds, something which had already been achieved to an extent on celluloid film. This is what El Dabh was actively thinking through at the time, inadvertently working within Schaeffer's definition of musique concrète by positing natural sounds as a

montage.

But where Schaeffer strove to fracture and foreshorten the aural landscape of the everyday until it became an incoherent narrative that reaches abstraction in juxtapositions, El Dabh sought a certain unity. 'With the electric magnetic, I feel that I am everywhere. I am with the creases of sound waves and of vibrations riding the tapestry of time,'^[18] he explains. For him, the achievement was not in his use of electronic equipment, but in his discovery of a new sound: 'Suddenly, without the fundamental tone, I found an entirely [new] expression of the sound, I exposed a different sound by eliminating parts of the components. This is how I created *Expression Of The Zaar*: by overlapping the overtones.'^[19]

Later works by El Dabh, such as *Aria for Strings* (1949) and *String Quartet No. 1: Metamorphosis and Fugue* (1951) hint at the size, dynamics and penchant for measured frenzy that would come to signify his avantgarde work. The confluence of strings suggest El Dabh's ease at composing with dissonance, which he considered clashes, or tone clusters, that generated vibrations through the unconventional choices of clustered notes. He called this compositional technique 'heterophony' or 'heteroharmony', an approach based on the use of the friction of tones in a desire to achieve unison.^[20] These sounds develop in his later works, for example *The Pomegranate Concerto* (2007) for double bass, sax and string quartet, and hark back to the untrained voices of the *zaar*.

In 2005, El Dabh was commissioned to compose *Signals And Connections*^[21] using only his own voice for the American Music Center in New York, which could be heard only over the telephone until he later released it on his own label in 2009^[22]. This shows his continued sonorous investigations of the unique relations between topography, history, language, and experience established by audio montage that began with *Expressions of Zaar*. Both pieces use the mundane as source sound but edits it to draw the listener into another realm. The edits provided a move away from a specific sounding object (in both cases the voices, all pure points of sound) to a manner of hallucinatory gauze, with its cathedral-like acoustics and continual field. In the years following its invention electronic music would, both in film and on radio, always signify the 'other', the otherworldly, the interior or fantastical ethereal realm, rather than the mundane.

By contrast, Schaeffer's work was very much defined by the progress of the time and the changes in the aural landscape brought on by industrialization and ideas of expanded arts. El Dabh's approach was more aligned with French filmmaker Jean Epstein's influential theories on phonogénie: an approach to listening more deeply. Epstein wrote of an 'epiphanic being', which appears through the physical transduction of sound. He pointed out that in film, emotional drama does not come from the plot and said that it should in fact be marginalized in favour of more abstract depictions of events. To some extent, El Dabh's editing marginalizes the main narrative of *zaar* and its setting. Instead he puts voices at the centre rather than words, as El Dabh says: 'sometimes they were hieroglyphics.'^[23]

El dabh's use of electronics and studio architecture to explore the ethereality of the ceremony itself, create a manner of psychoacoustics specific to himself, and thereby makes the experience of the ceremony more real than its own immediate superficialities. El Dabh's career has been just as innovative in its ethnographical treatments, which is how he came to be considered by cultural and music ethnographers as Africa's most

important composer. El Dabh has created a legacy and this can be seen in the way he describes the process of his work as a 'generation':

I called the process a 'generation' because the first generation is kind of crude. When you do this you must work through generation after generation. I tracked the tapes from one generation on the wall. I lined them up in groups until the whole wall would be covered with generations of tape. I could come to the wall and pick them up as I wanted to and mix them again. By the time I came to four or five generations of interaction I began to feel comfortable. In the first generation, you could hear the raw sound of the instrument; to finish you have to go deep into the sound.[24]

IV.

The first presentation of El Dabh's works was held at All Saints Cathedral in Cairo in 1949, and included the very timely 1948 piece based on the war in Palestine, *It is Dark and Damp on the Front*.^[25] At the time, Egyptian soldiers were involved in the fighting, and this experimental solo piece for piano resonated with the multinational and local audiences that heard it. After this performance, the US embassy cultural attaché asked El Dabh to repeat aspects of it at the Oriental Hall of the American University in Cairo. The attaché was so impressed with El Dabh that he even filled in El Dabh's Fulbright application, and despite failing the English part of the exam, El Dabh was selected from over 500 other applicants. He arrived in the USA in 1950, where he continued to experiment with tape and composition.



Halim El Dabh and a balafon.
Courtesy Bob Gluck.

El Dabh said that at the time, while the people of Cairo supported him, helped him carrying equipment, listening to him play and spurring him on to compose, no one actually engaged with him creatively. Thus, the journey to USA was in a way a natural choice for him. He carried Cairo and all his formative years with him, building on these experiences in his ethnographic research as an (often unelected) representative of Africa in the USA. As a composer, his music as much as it was a translation of the unseen into sound, acted as a bridge between African and Arab music, and the avantgarde he was surrounded by in America.

Although he has returned to Egypt many times, El Dabh spent much of his life in the USA, where there were 'hardly any Egyptians at the time'. Ironically, his migration to the USA brought him home creatively, for in his hometown he was working in a manner of exilic energy (exiled from a creative community of peer composers) on what was a solo mission. There, El Dabh worked as Stravinsky's aide during a concert, attended the University of Denver (where he had a grant to study English), honed his skills in The University of New Mexico honing in counterpoint and composition. He received two Fulbright scholarships and a scholarship at Berkshire

Music Centre Berkshire, Lenox, Massachusetts in 1951, a scholarship for a degree in Composition at the New England Conservatory, then a Masters of Fine Arts at Brandeis University in 1954. In 1958, he received a small grant to experiment at the newly formed electronic music studio in 1958 from the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center.^[26] He composed for Martha Graham and collaborated with other tape pioneers such as Otto Luening, co-founder of the Columbia Princeton Electronic Music Centre in New York City, in pieces such as *Diffusion of Bells*, tape, and *Electronic Fanfare*, tape, both between created over the period between 1962 and 65.

In the United States, El Dabh's work expanded in several directions, for example his contemporary classical piece *Symphonies in Sonic Vibration: Spectrum No. 1*, 1951, for which he strapped bongo drums to a piano, was used in the 1967 film by Don Levy starring Helen Mirren,



Halim El Dabh performs on the piano.
Courtesy of Mike Hovancsek.

Herostratus. He received two Guggenheim fellowships (1959 and 1961), then held a faculty position at the Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1962–64), and Howard University, Washington, D.C (1966–69). From 1969 through 1991 El Dabh was a member of the faculty of Kent State University and, from 1979, co-director of Kent State Center for the Study of World Music. Amongst other accolades he received the 1990 Cleveland Arts Prize. In May 2001, El Dabh received an honorary doctorate from Kent State University, and another in 2007, from the New England Conservatory. Many of his operas, symphonies, ballets, concertos and orchestral pieces, theatre scores, chamber and electronic works have been performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, the Cairo Opera House and the Edinburgh Festival, in Amsterdam, Athens, London, Paris and Rome and in concert halls and churches throughout northeast Ohio.

Now in his mid-90s, El Dabh continues to compose, connecting both his past and present, straddling not just geography but also the pre-digital and the digital ages. And though the Egyptian public did not hear most of his works until 2002 when he returned to Alexandria, he says he has

carried Cairo – the people, the terrain, the sounds – with him. At a 2008 performance of his commissioned piece *Symphony for 1,000 Drums* by 1000 players at Fort Collins, Colorado, for the Peace Corp's Anniversary celebration, El Dabh addressed the crowd in an introduction to the performance. He expressed a theme that had formed the core of much of his own philosophy, which connected his present to his past, straddling not only different geographies, but also the pre-digital and the digital ages. Within the context of his cultural heritage, El Dabh referred to in his introduction as a survey of human attention. He expressed an animism that characterises not only early Egyptian early, but also the framework within which *Expressions of Zaar* had been composed; with the idea that there is no separation between the spiritual and physical (or material) worlds. El

Dabh expressed this by telling the audience that we have 'many gods who have been served very well', pointing out that the feminine aspect of the divine (which he no doubt experienced in nature and in music) had been neglected for many centuries. In his introduction to the symphony, he invoked the goddesses of his homeland; Isis who was also the goddess of agriculture, as love and compassion, Ma'at as the balance in this universe and Oshun as 'the water that nourishes us'. For El Dabh, the natural connection within his works, which he invokes through vibration, is to what he describes as 'the reality of what it is to be a human being'. He went on to describe every single person in the audience as a vibration 'We are all one,' he implored: 'we have forgotten that.'^[27]

[1] Pierre Schaeffer, *A La Recherche D'une Musique Concrète* (Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 1952).

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] 'Multiple Discovery', *Wikipedia*.

[4] Peter Dickinson, 'Reviews of three books on Satie', *Musical Quarterly* 75.

[5] Halim El Dabh, online interview with Fari Bradley and Chris Weaver, July 2014.

[6] 'Cairo Conservatoire', *Wikipedia*.

[7] Astronauta Pinguim, 'Interview with Halim El Dabh,' Astronauta Pinguim website, 1 December 2013, <http://astronautapinguim.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/interview-with-halim-el-dabh.html>.

[8] Halim El Dabh, online interview with Fari Bradley and Chris Weaver, July 2014.

[9] Nimet Habachy, 'On 90th Birthday, Egyptian-American Composer Expresses Concerns for Homeland', *WQXR*, 3 February 2011.

[10] Thom Holmes, *Early Synthesizers and Experimenters*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2008), p. 156.

[11] Jean Epstein, 'The Cinema Continues', in *French Film Theory and Criticism. Vol. II.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) p. 67.

[12] Allen S. Weiss, *Experimental Sound & Radio* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 11.

[13] *Ibid.*, p.6.

[14] *Ibid.*, p.2.

[15] Astronauta Pinguim, *op cit.*

[16] Halim El Dabh, online interview with Fari Bradley and Chris Weaver, July 2014.

[17] John Dack, 'Pierre Schaeffer and Music Concrète', *Full of Noises, Lecture*, 2013. Singal Films Project Space, Barrow-in-Furness, 27 July 2013.

[18] Astronauta Pinguim, *op cit.*

[19] Halim El Dabh, online interview with Fari Bradley and Chris Weaver. July 2014.

[20] see: The Official Website of Halim El Dabh and Halim El Dabh Music, <http://www.halimeldabh.com/>

[21] Halim El Dabh, *Signals and Connections* (2009).

[22] Robert Siegel, 'Hold, Please and Enjoy the Music,' NPR website, 28 July 2005, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4775688>

[23] Halim El Dabh, online interview with Fari Bradley and Chris Weaver, July 2014.

[24] Astronauta Pinguim, *op cit.*

[25] Thomas Burkhalter and Kay Dickinson, *The Arab Avant-Garde Music, Politics, Modernity* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), p.173.

[26] Denise A. Seachrist, *The Musical World of Halim El Dabh* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003).

[27] Introduction to *Symphony for 1,000 Drums* (2008).

TAGS

Egypt

Sound

Cairo

Biography

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fari Bradley

Fari Bradley is an Iranian-born broadcaster and sound artist. An active member of London's acclaimed Resonance104.4FM experimental radio station since 2004, she has performed live in museums and galleries (e.g. British Museum, National Portrait Gallery). Bradley DJs experimental dance music at festivals such as

Glastonbury and Exit Festival, Serbia and on air at Resonance104.4FM.

[FACEBOOK](#)

[TWITTER](#)

[INSTAGRAM](#)

[E-NEWSLETTER](#)

[RSS](#)



Initiated by the
[Kamel Lazaar Foundation](#)

C
