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Music and Islamic Reform

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MUSIC AND ISLAMIC REFORM

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Music and Islam have not always been on good terms. ¹In many strict orthodox circles of Islam, most things that fall under the Western definition of "music" are considered *haram* (حرام). *Haram* can mean forbidden and not permissible or something like sacred and only accessible by a small group, if not solely by Allah. In this paper, *haram*, will be defined as forbidden unless specified otherwise. ²Though music has never been absent from Islamic cultures, it has never been completely embraced either. The stance on music in the Islamic world, however, is changing along with many other things that were once standard practice or tradition. Music is not only being used to praise Allah, but also to spread ideas about Islam itself around the world whether to fellow Muslims or to non-Muslims. The Islamic world is starting to use music as a tool for peaceful social change and reform.

Though the opposition to music can be very severe, there are exceptions to this disapproval of music. Some monophonic vocal music for special occasions, like festivals, is considered appropriate and traditional. The main type is called *nasheed* (نشيد). This is sung a cappella or with very limited percussion instruments like the *daf*. Even in vocal genres, a professional vocalist is required. Vocal acrobatics and virtuosity are not always praised, however, and the musician is sometimes seen as being selfish or

¹ Scott Marcus, *Music in Egypt: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2007).

² Jon Pareles, "Pop Music; In Islamic Music, a Search for Ecstasy," (*Gale Academic OneFile*).

as taking the attention and credit away from Allah (and becomes *shirk*) if they take too many liberties with a song. There is also traditional chanting of the Qur'an.

The most obvious exception is the *adhan* (أذان) or the call to prayer. Prayer or *salah* (صلاة), is one of the five pillars of the Islamic tradition. Muslims are called to perform their five daily prayers by a *muezzin* (مؤذن), who climbs to the top of the local mosque's minaret and sings over a loudspeaker at different times that are based on the position of the sun. He does this five times a day and sings nearly the same thing each time. Some sects of Islam add their own sections to the call. ³Calls made for Muslims from the Shi'a tradition are slightly different and add a line about ⁴Ali.

⁵الله أكبر الله أكبر
 أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله
 أشهد أن محمدا رسول الله
 حي على الصلاة
 حي على الفلاح
 الله أكبر الله أكبر
 لا إله إلا الله

³ Scott Marcus, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁴ Shi'ite Muslims believe that the Prophet's son-in-law and cousin Ali should have immediately taken that title of caliph and rule after Muhammad's death. Ali did eventually become the fourth caliph but was killed. Many of the Sunni and Shi'a Muslim differences stem from Ali and his family.

⁵ Adhan in Arabic

ʿAllāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar	God is great, God is great.
Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā llāh	I testify that there is no god but God.
Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasūl Allāh	I testify that Muhammad is the prophet of God.
Ḥayya 'alā 'l-ṣalāt	Come to prayer
Ḥayya 'alā 'l-falāḥ	Come to salvation.
al-Ṣalāt khayr min al-nawn	Prayer is better than sleep, [included only in the predawn call]
Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar	God is great, God is great.
Lā ilāha illā llāh	There is no god but God.

This tradition is not about the singer or how skilled he is. Rather, it is about God and the believers. The call is always a solo male voice.⁷ There are three main kinds of calls. The first is fairly mono-tonal and only changes pitch by a whole step back and forth. Very conservative circles tend to favor this kind, since it brings the least amount of attention to the vocalist and instead highlights the repeating words. The other two types are more virtuosic with heavy ornamentation and a more melodic line. Some argue that the higher musicality brings more praise to Allah because it is felt more by the vocalist and the listener. To others, however, this style of singing is considered to be

⁶ Scott Marcus, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*.

⁷ Scott Marcus, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*.

attention-seeking and selfish. ⁸One call is based on ⁹*maqam rast* (مقام راست). A *maqam* (مقام) is a melodic mode in traditional Arab music. ¹⁰The notes that make up this *maqam* are C, D, E[♯], F, G, A, B[♯], C (♯ represents a “half flat”, quarter tone difference). The second is based on ¹¹*maqam hijaz* (مقام حجاز). ¹²In this *maqam* the notes used are D, E^b, F, G, A, B^b, C, D.

The adhan is a virtually essential part of Islamic culture and yet, is not within the forbidden category of *musiqa* (موسيقى). *Musiqa* is a close Arabic equivalent to the English music, but not exactly. *Musiqa* does not include forms of religious music that are *halaal* (حلال), or permissible. To traditionalists, music has been associated with more sensual pleasures and is not seen as a spiritually productive pastime. ¹³The word *musiqa* usually comes with negative connotations and mental images of sensual Western pop music. Music, much like other forms of art, is seen as a distraction from Allah. Even various religious music or art come dangerously close to being considered *shirk* (شرك). *Shirk* is a form of idolatry that associates a material or man-made thing with Allah and attempts

⁸ Scott Marcus, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*.

⁹ See an example of this call at http://youtu.be/_TdYPuPz7ts

¹⁰ Scott Marcus, *Music in Egypt: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*.

¹¹ See an example of this call at <http://youtu.be/41b3zrmXXGA>

¹² Scott Marcus, *Music in Egypt: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*.

¹³ Kristin Izsak, “Music Education and Islam: Perspectives on Muslim Participation in Music Education in Ontario,” (*Gale Academic OneFile*).

to break the rule of nature that God is the one and only god and nothing is His equal. Instrumental music and instruments in general are especially frowned upon since there are no lyrics to remind the listener of one's love for Allah.

Also in Arab traditional music (secular and Sufi) there is a striving for *tarab* (طرب).

¹⁴*Tarab* is hard to translate, but comes close to being defined as emotion and musical feeling to the point where the mind and body are responding in ecstasy. ¹⁵All musicians strive to achieve this level of musicality in every performance in any genre of music. Some argue that *tarab* brings the performer and the audience closer to God through the collective emotion and ecstasy, but others say that this ecstasy is more sensual and does not remind one of God but of one's own physical wants and needs. ¹⁶This meditative trance state is what several forms of Sufi music are trying to achieve in their rituals and gatherings.

Opinions on music are not always black and white. Some people have no intellectual or spiritual qualms when deciding which music they will listen to and find many genres to be appealing. They do not think that music and Islam are at odds with each other and as long as they are good believers, they can listen to whatever makes them happy at the time. Others will stay away from most secular music and only listen

¹⁴ "Arabic Orchestras in America and Tarab." *Oudman Blog: Arabic Music*, (February 4, 2010).

¹⁵ Jon Pareles, "Pop Music; In Islamic Music, a Search for Ecstasy"

¹⁶ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton, 2008 (Riverboat Records / World Music Network), DVD.

to traditional religious music and modern Islamic pop music. This comes with the argument that as long as one is giving praise to and being reminded of God, it should be perfectly acceptable. Sometimes only music without secular lyrics is permissible. Some Western classical music or classical music of other cultures and countries where believers live would fall into this category. The reasoning for this preference is that as long as one listens with good intentions and does not let it become a distraction from one's beliefs, it is *halal*. Then there are those who firmly believe that music in all forms is *haram*, regardless of genre or intentions one has while listening to or performing it.

¹⁷In Kristin Izsak's article about music education in Ontario, Canada, she states that being a music teacher in a district with so many Muslim converts and immigrants is a difficult job to balance. For many parents, music is *haram* or at best, not a realistic career choice and, therefore, a waste of time. Only if a music credit is required in the school's curriculum will they allow their child to participate. Some parents will even request that the requirement be lifted for their children due to religious beliefs. For the teachers, there must be a balance between being knowledgeable and respectful of the parents' religious beliefs and educating the students about something that they believe to be worth learning. One teacher came up with the idea of showing the parents what goes on in a music class and having some of the kids perform Western classical music at the school's open house. Some of the religious parents were instantly relieved at what

¹⁷ Kristin Izsak, "Music Education and Islam: Perspectives on Muslim Participation in Music Education in Ontario"

they saw and heard. They told the teacher that they did not even know Western music could be like that. Seeing that it was teaching their kids listening skills and other positive lessons and was not the scandalous activity they were imagining, the parents gave their approval to their children to continue with the class.

The debate over music has been ongoing since nearly the foundation of Islam in the 7th century. Though the Qur'an does not say much about music explicitly, it is



daf (David Loram) museumvictoria.com.au

brought up a few times in the *Hadith* (حديث) literature. The *Hadith* is a collection of sayings and stories about or quoted from the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁸In the stories told about Muhammad and his reaction to music, he does not seem to be completely against it. In some instances he even seems to defend it.

Other times, however, Muhammad's

response can be interpreted as indifferent tolerance or reluctant permission. ¹⁹Only one instrument is ever mentioned in the literature and thereby ever approved by the

¹⁸ Oliver Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2014).

¹⁹ Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

Prophet. This instrument is called a ²⁰*daf* (دف) which is a large tambourine-like frame drum.

There are a few *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*) that seem to almost defend music. ²¹In most of the stories, Muhammad likes, allows, or expects music at special occasions like festivals (or *'eid* (عيد) in Arabic) or weddings. ²²In one *hadith*, Muhammad goes to a friend's wedding. He knows his friend likes music and that it is usually the custom at weddings anyway, so the Prophet is surprised to see that there is not any being played. He asked why the music was absent and wanted them to bring in musicians.

²³In another story A'isha, sometimes referred to as Muhammad's favorite wife, enjoys music but her father, Abu Bakr, who later becomes the first successor of the Prophet as the political leader of the Ummah or the *caliph*, openly disapproves. But it is Muhammad who responds to Bakr, not A'isha. This *hadith* is quoted in Oliver Leaman's book, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

²⁴A'isha reported that the the [sic] Messenger of God came to her residence while two female singers were singing on the 'Eid. "The Prophet lay down and Abu Bakr entered and chided her "Satanic musical

²⁰ Hear it played at <http://youtu.be/B0Hlca8p42s>

²¹ Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

²² Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

²³ Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

²⁴ Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

instruments in the presence of the Holy Prophet?" On hearing this God's Messenger turned towards him and said: "Let them".

(Bukhari, No: 907)

Clearly music did not have a good reputation, but Muhammad does not seem to think it is as big of a problem as does Abu Bakr. Again, the Prophet comes to the aid of music in another *hadith* quoted in Leaman's book.

²⁵Umm-i-Salama narrates: A slave girl belonging to Hasan ibn Thabit came to us on 'Eid al Fitr. Her hair was untidy and she carried a tambourine and was singing. Umm-I-Salaam rebuked her. But the Holy Prophet said to her: Umm-i-Salama, let her. Certainly every nation has an 'Eid and this day is our 'Eid.

(*Mu'jam el-kabir*, No: 558)

Music seems to be allowed at festivals, or 'eids, at the very least. Should this mean that music can only be performed during 'eids? In the last *hadith* in *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*, Muhammad, instead of having to defend music, is simply enjoying it.

²⁶And this was because of his reciting the Psalms in a melodious voice. When he would sing it the birds would stop in the air and sang in response to David, as did the mountains. It is for this reason that when the Holy Prophet passed Abu Musa Ash'ari, when he was offering his night prayer, he stopped and listened to his recitation for he had a very

²⁵ Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

²⁶ Leaman, *Controversies in Contemporary Islam*.

beautiful voice. The Holy Prophet said: "Indeed he has been given one of the musical instruments of the people of David." Hearing this, Abu Musa said: "Had I known that he was listening, I would have pleased him more". Abu 'Uthman Nahdi says that he did not find any drum, flute or a reed sound more pleasing than the voice of Abu Musa.
(Ibn Kathir 1982: 187)

None of these quotes seem to allow musical instruments except for the *daf*. However, just because nothing else is mentioned does that mean that only that drum or similar instruments are allowed in music making? Many instruments were not even invented during the time of these stories. Who is to say that everything that comes after Muhammad's time is unacceptable? Both scholars that object and allow music, however, whether in a religious context or simply recreationally, use these *ahadith* as evidence to prove their points of views. For conservative Muslims, there are so many restrictions and limitations on when and how one can participate in music, it is just better to stay away from it entirely unless tradition truly calls for it.

There are whole groups within Islam that oppose the conservative view of music. One notable group that not only permits music but uses it regularly in religious practice are the Sufis. Sufis all over the world use differing styles of music (and even ²⁷dance) in their religious rituals. Some music used in Sufi rituals, called *dhikr* (ذکر), and gatherings

²⁷ See the Whirling Dervishes dance at http://youtu.be/luDklth_mbM

include ²⁸chanting, ²⁹group monophonic (music with a single melodic line without accompaniment) singing, singing with instrumental accompaniment (usually just percussion but sometimes with melodic instruments as well), or ensemble instrumental music. These ³⁰*dhikr* are about remembering God and can take on many different



Whirling Dervishes performing *dhikr* to music
(Ryan Powell) cnn.com

forms. One form is a *sama'* (سما'), which

is a more formal concert. Other *dhikr* musical rituals even include forms of dancing (a prime example are the ³¹Whirling Dervishes of the Turkish Mevlevi Sufi order). Music is performed (usually *Qawwali*) on the death day, or *urs* (عرس), of Sufi saints at their tombs.

³²An *urs* is the day the saint was wedded to and became one with Allah in death. One can consider an *urs* to be an 'eid, so perhaps music could be acceptable here in an orthodox view? If orthodox belief was more open to the idea of saints (which they

²⁸ Deborah Kapchan, "Learning to Listen: The Sound of Sufism in France." *The World of Music*, (Vol. 51, no. 2. 2009).

²⁹ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

³⁰ S.R. Burge, "Music, Mysticism, and Experience: Sufism and Spiritual Journeys in Nathaniel Mackey's *Bedouin Hornbook*," (Project Muse, 2013).

³¹ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

³² Adam Nayyar, *Qawwali* (Islamabad: Lok Virsa Research Centre, 1988).

believe is getting too close to *shirk* as well), then perhaps this Sufi celebration of uniting with Allah and its music would be more widely accepted within the Muslim world.

Sufis even cross a line with their religious lyrics and poetry by making them very sensual and using a passionate romantic relationship as a metaphor for their relationship with the Beloved, God. For some of their rituals, only instrumental music is used and no lyrics are necessary to express their devotion for the Beloved (Allah).

³³One Sufi named Hazrat Inayat Khan wrote in his book *The Mysticism of Sound and Music* that music is "the divine art." He goes on to say that "we may certainly see God in all arts and in all sciences, but in music alone we see God free from all forms and thoughts." *Tarab* is an important part of many forms of Sufi music. During some *dhikr* the point of the music is to bring the listeners to the meditative trance state that is seen as getting close to Allah.

Sufis are the mystics of the Islamic world and their particular style and practices have been controversial within the *Ummah* (Muslim world community). Some Sunni and Shi'a Muslims do not consider Sufism to be a legitimate form of Islam. This being said, it should also be noted that many Sunni and Shi'a Muslims do not consider each other's form to be a legitimate expression of their religion, either. To be a Sufi, one must be part of a chosen brotherhood and be a follower of a Sufi master. Each school of Sufism is unique in its own way, but there are commonalities running through them all

³³ Hazrat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).

over the world. ³⁴Consistent gatherings to participate in musical *dhikr* are very common wherever they are. The stereotype that the West generally seems to have about Sufis is that they are more liberal and more open to other religions. As a result, Sufism has become more interesting to the West.

People's views and opinions of music are changing in the Islamic world because of new interest in Sufism in general. Some Islamic countries, like Morocco and Senegal, have been adopting more Sufi beliefs and Sufi leadership has even been incorporated into their governments. The West has found a more liberal friend in Sufism more so than in other Muslim groups. Sufism has gained some notice through its many forms of music, and Sufi musicians have recently become more popular world wide. Sufi music from several different countries has been recorded and is being sold in CD stores and online. Through this new-found popularity and acceptance, Sufism's passion for art, tolerance, and spirituality have been exposed to global audiences.

The Sufi *qawwali* genre, for example, has become very popular in India and Pakistan. ³⁵*Qawwali* has been used quite a bit in ³⁶Bollywood movies as love songs between the hero and heroine, making this genre more secularized and more accessible to a nonreligious audience. The most famous *Qawwal* (performer of *Qawwali*) was the

³⁴ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

³⁵ Kamal Salhi, *Music, Culture and Identity in the Muslim World: Performance, Politics and Piety* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³⁶ See a Bollywood qawwali number at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ympP0yNOpnA>

late ³⁷Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan from Pakistan. He helped spread *Qawwali* all over the world through his live performances and recordings. *Qawwali* is a style that usually includes a lead singer (similar to a jazz bandleader), one or two other talented main singers, and a chorus to sing backup and provide rhythmic clapping. Instruments included are a variety of percussion instruments as well as a harmonium (which looks like a tiny piano and sounds similar to and is hand pumped like an accordion). ³⁸*Qawwali* lyrics are passionate love poems representing the Sufi's relationship with Allah, the Beloved. Sometimes different verses or poetry from different poets or saints are used as tropes in the middle of the pieces. ³⁹The songs start slower and softer but pick up in tempo and energy as they progress. The bandleader reads the audience as they perform and adjusts accordingly in order to get the



Qawwals playing harmoniums
(Shalalae Jamil) caravanserai-arts.org

maximum response from the crowd. ⁴⁰Ideally the listeners should all be in the *tarab*

³⁷ See him perform at <http://youtu.be/D9Ui2deAKr8>

³⁸ Adam Nayyar, *Qawwali*.

³⁹ Adam Nayyar, *Qawwali*.

⁴⁰ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

induced ecstasy state, whether that means people are randomly dancing around or



feeling it more internally in their seats.

Some Sufis have crossed over into more modern music as well. Two examples are the Senegalese singer

⁴¹Youssou N'Dour and the Turkish

artist ⁴²Mercan Dede. Both artists use traditional instruments and new modern sounds

to create a more hybrid music. ⁴³Dede even has a Sufi

dancer come on stage while he performs. These artists

not only push for the acceptance of music, but also

advocate multiculturalism and tolerance. Dede has a

more meditative instrumental sound. Many of his

songs are longer than average and have a traditional

flavor with some modern mixing. The

instrumentation is more traditional of Turkish

Sufi music and includes the ⁴⁴ney (an “end-



Mercan Dede playing the *ney* (Yagmur Kizilok) mercandede.com

⁴¹ See him perform at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2F7SIBuPRE>

⁴² See him perform at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXNg6q_F4Gs

⁴³ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

⁴⁴ Eliot Bates, *Music in Turkey: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011).

blown reed flute”), violins, the *oud* (a “short-necked fretless plucked lute with eleven strings”), the *bendir* (a framed drum), and other percussion. Dede then mixes in electronic sounds to add a new twist. Most songs are slow, Middle Eastern minor sounding, and quite long. N’Dour’s most famous album is *Egypt*.⁴⁵ This album is “about Islam as a force for peace.”⁴⁶ Youssou’s signature sound is mballax which is a Senegalese dance style.⁴⁷ This Sufi artist’s “music has been political and socially conscious, ranging in topic from birth control to democracy to clandestine migration.” He has performed all over the world, including at music festivals. These two artists are expanding the exposure and influence of Sufi beliefs and traditions through their music.

Another group that has been accepting music is the Islamic youth (or sometimes just the young at heart). Many young Muslims all over the world have stepped up and become music artists in the name of reform and tolerance. In general, these newer bands and artists have adopted a more western sound. This music that is being recorded can be more in the style of rock, pop, metal, alternative, hip-hop, etc. Each artist, however, has their own personal style within a genre of music depending on their home country, their native musical traditions, and the issues they want to address in their songs.

⁴⁵ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

⁴⁶ Fiona McLaughlin, “Youssou N’Dour’s *Sant Y’allal Egypt*: A Musical Experiment in Sufi Modernity,” *Cambridge Journals*, (Volume 30, no. 1. January, 2011).

⁴⁷ Fiona McLaughlin, “Youssou N’Dour’s *Sant Y’allal Egypt*: A Musical Experiment in Sufi Modernity,” *Cambridge Journals*

Sometimes Middle Eastern scales (with more western tuning) and techniques are used in western styles. English, or a combination of English and the singer's native language is used in these tracks. Artists from Middle Eastern diaspora in European countries will not only use their native European language but also use Arabic phrases or *surahs* (verses) from the Qur'an. Some artists record some of their more popular songs in several languages to impact a larger number of people.

⁴⁸Maher Zain's religious song *Mawlaya* illustrates this newer Middle Eastern style pop sound. It uses both English and Arabic, and includes traditional and modern instruments. Even his singing style is a combination of Middle Eastern scoops and heavy ornamentation and the West's pop singer voice. ⁴⁹The Kordz, a Lebanese rock band, also have a song called *Last Call* that shows how a Western style like rock can sound more fitting for a Middle Eastern audience.

⁵⁰Some of this new Western influenced music tries to tackle political issues and current events in the Middle East, while other selections talk about Islamic traditions. Some of the new music is more modern worship music, but is still in a way about reform and tolerance. Some artists are mixing old and new music styles upsetting both those who forbid music and some of those that use music in sincere practice. Because Western music genres have a negative connotation in many of these countries, orthodox

⁴⁸ Hear *Mawlaya* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY2eP_Hceq4

⁴⁹ Hear *Last Call* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmneEGqP5C4>

⁵⁰ Kamal Salhi, *Music, Culture and Identity in the Muslim World: Performance, Politics and Piety*.

groups are not easily won over by the artists who are bridging the gap between Western music and Islam. Though some musical groups in Islamic countries do not even consider religion or religious issues, they accidentally find themselves on the opposing side of the debate against conservative Muslims.

Music and Islamic musicians are not only fighting against those who say that music is not permitted but also against many other social and religious issues. The Sufis, though they tend to keep to themselves, have become more popular and are spreading ideas of love, tolerance, and spirituality around the world. By simply following their own traditions or upgrading their out-of-date ones and doing things differently than most conservative circles of Islam, they are challenging the norms of the whole religion. Muslim youth, whether on purpose or just as a side effect of their work and success, are tackling things like women's rights, racism, the tendency for some to look down upon converts, violence in the name of Islam, Islamophobia, multiculturalism, interfaith issues, and many additional controversial subjects.

More recently, women musicians are joining bands along side their male counterparts or forming their own without any men involved. Some women have even started solo music careers. This change challenges women's roles in society and makes people question what they are allowed to or want to do. ⁵¹Sometimes however, it is not the presence of women but the obvious absence of them that is surprising. For many

⁵¹ Mark Levine, "Muslim Metal." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (Vol. 54, no. 43).

women musicians or female music fans, simply participating in a concert in any way can be a risk to their personal safety. Many new female groups or solo artists are coming from Middle Eastern diaspora living in Western countries who were born and raised Muslim and are having their sincerity questioned by those that think that the West has simply corrupted them. Others are converts from countries where Islam is not the majority. These female artists are being called fakes and illegitimate. Several musicians get hate mail ranging from severe insults to death threats for their heresy. On the internet, various forms of music media are always under scrutiny from more conservative Muslims. Under YouTube videos of nearly any genre of newer Islamic music, are comments that wish to remind all listeners that music is *haram*.⁵² Sufi women have been very involved with⁵³ music and *dhikr* all over the world. Perhaps other Islamic women see the female Sufi dancers and performers and wonder why they feel that they can not express themselves and their love for Allah in this way.

⁵⁴Sami Yusuf is a British Muslim singer and song-writer. Many of his songs are in the worship style, a genre that he has named⁵⁵ "Spiritique." Yusuf has become one of the most popular Muslim artists in the world. Though many have accused him of leading good Muslims astray by his cleverly disguised yet warped Islam, his success

⁵² Deborah Kapchan, "Learning to Listen: The Sound of Sufism in France." *The World of Music*.

⁵³ *Sufi Soul: The Mystic Music Of Islam*. Directed by Simon Broughton

⁵⁴ See him perform at <http://youtu.be/qpYVyEoXEGs>

⁵⁵ Sami Yusuf, "Sami Yusuf Official," (2015).

demonstrates that many do not share this negative view. Besides his message of deep devotion and love for Allah, he also has two other topics he likes to highlight in his songs and interviews: charity work and interfaith communication. He even created an organization, called ⁵⁶Spiritique Foundation, that, according to its Facebook page, “sponsors and supports faith-based and interfaith-related projects and initiatives” including charity projects. Because of his success through his music, he now has a lot of influence. During interviews Yusuf discusses social issues and concerns of his that are not always appropriate to address in his genre of music.

⁵⁷For the World Interfaith Harmony Week, Sami Yusuf recorded a “world interfaith anthem” call *The Gift of Love*. In the music video people of several different religions (including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism) are shown together. It was filmed in Jordan and Jerusalem, places that are significant to more than one religion. The song focuses on love being the commonality that we all share. It even includes a Latin Christian chant of Mark 12:31 “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” and a translated saying from the Prophet Muhammad “none of you truly believes until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.”

⁵⁶ “Spiritique Foundation,” (*Facebook*).

⁵⁷ See the music video at <http://samiyusufofficial.com/giftoflove/>

Sami has written and recorded songs for charity as well. His songs ⁵⁸*Hear Your Call*, ⁵⁹*Silent Words*, and ⁶⁰*Hope Survives* are examples of this. ⁶¹According to Sami Yusuf's webpage, *Hear Your Call* was written for the "Save The Children's emergency relief efforts in Pakistan" in 2010. All the money made from purchases of the song went to help the estimated 20 million flood victims in Pakistan, says Sami's website. *Silent Words* was recorded for Syrian families who were forced to flee or relocate due to violence. ⁶²The partnership between Sami Yusuf and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in 2013 was called Live Feed Syria. ⁶³WFP and Sami Yusuf came together once again in 2014 as Live Feed Philippines to aid the victims of Typhoon Haiyan that hit in November 8th, 2013. Using music for charity helps spread awareness of the tragedy or suffering of others and helps get donations directly. Sami Yusuf's popularity alone can get attention for the cause. Music itself is easy to spread and share as well, whether it is to family and friends in person or through various forms of social media online. Also, offering a song for purchase makes donating easy and more enjoyable. People buy music from iTunes or other online music stores all the time, so

⁵⁸ Hear the song at <http://www.samiyusufofficial.com/pakistan/>

⁵⁹ Hear the song at <http://www.samiyusufofficial.com/syria/>

⁶⁰ Hear the song at <http://www.samiyusufofficial.com/livefeedph/>

⁶¹ Sami Yusuf, "Pakistan Flood." *Sami Yusuf Official Page*.

⁶² Sami Yusuf, "Silent Words," (*Livefeed Syria*).

⁶³ "Live Feed Philippines." *Live Feed Philippines. JWT Kuwait*, (November 8, 2013).

using that as the donation method makes it simple and more appealing. Simply getting something, in this case a song, for donating is also more incentive to give money.

⁶⁴Poetic Pilgrimage is one group in particular that is trying to push the limits in more ways than one. They are a female hip-hop duo originating from the United Kingdom. ⁶⁵After a lot of soul searching and research, Muneera Rashida and Sukina Abdul Noor converted to Islam and decided to write and perform music. ⁶⁶The two women, however, have received a lot of backlash from the Islamic community not only in the UK, but from around the world. They have gotten a lot of flak for being women musicians, musicians in general, converts, British or Jamaican, Muslims or any



Poetic Pilgrimage performing saddahaq.com

combination of these labels. Even when the group tours with other bands or rappers they have been met with close-mindedness. ⁶⁷In the documentary made about them, called "Hip Hop Hijabis,"

the group has to decide whether to perform as usual or to just recite their lyrics as poetry instead of as music at a particular venue. Because the other groups on tour

⁶⁴ See them perform at <http://youtu.be/z1orCqZg4SA>

⁶⁵ Muneera Williams, "Hip-Hop Hijabis Challenge Stereotypes." *Aljazeera*.

⁶⁶ Neha Dwivedi, "'Allah Isn't Sexist,' say Poetic Pilgrimage, the Hip Hop Hijabis Duo." (*SaddaHaq*).

⁶⁷ Mette Reitzel, *Hip Hop Hijabis*. Multimedia video. (25 min. Witness, 2015).

consisted of all male performers, they did not have to consider whether their music would be appropriate or not. Moonier and Sukina have also been accused of not being legitimate Muslims, because of their background or because of their choice of career in the music industry. ⁶⁸Also shown in the documentary are times when Poetic Pilgrimage is hired to perform for a religious gathering or group yet the audience seems surprised and displeased.

Not only has Poetic Pilgrimage and their music been met with criticism from Muslims, but also non-Muslims as well. Islamophobia is more obviously present when one wears a hijab (the scarf head covering) in public. When they perform for non-Muslims and come on stage in hijabs, the audience is shocked. One of the members of Poetic Pilgrimage says, ⁶⁹"There have been many occasions where people would stare with their mouths open for literally two to three songs, before they realise [*sic*] that they are actually enjoying themselves." Despite all the harassment and challenges, the hip-hop duo has had to endure, they are adding to the Islamic global female voice by continuing to do what they love and attracting fans.

⁷⁰Yusuf Islam, formerly Cat Stevens (famous for songs like *Wild World*, *Peace Train*, and *Father and Son*), converted to Islam in 1977. ⁷¹Cat Stevens was a very

⁶⁸ Mette Reitzel, *Hip Hop Hijabis*. Multimedia video.

⁶⁹ Neha Dwivedi, "'Allah Isn't Sexist,' say Poetic Pilgrimage, the Hip Hop Hijabis Duo."

⁷⁰ Yusuf Islam, "The Life of Yusuf Islam and How He Became a Muslim" By *Turn to Islam*, (February 27, 2013).

⁷¹ See him perform at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFuU1bJbSwI>

successful musician from a very young age. His conversion was slow and gradual as he read the Qur'an and studied the religion. ⁷²When he officially embraced Islam and became a Muslim, he changed his name to Yusuf (after the Qur'anic/Biblical character Joseph) and he decided that he needed to give up his musical career. He had heard from several people that he considered to be spiritual mentors that music was *haram*. He auctioned off all of his guitars and gave the money to charity. As Yusuf grew in his faith and became more integrated into this new world he had joined, he discovered that music and his personal talents could be used to educate, inspire, and bring peaceful change.

Yusuf Islam has since recorded new albums and toured once again. ⁷³Through his music, he has educated non-Muslims about Islam and discouraged Islamophobia as a former popular Western icon. He has also pushed for the acceptance of music and has inspired youth to join in this form of expression and communication. ⁷⁴The fight for reform in Islam and human rights in Islamic countries has interested Yusuf as well. He has tried to become a spokesman for peaceful change through his songs and interviews. ⁷⁵*My People* was written for the people of Egypt and others during the uprising in Arab

⁷² Yusuf Islam, "The Life of Yusuf Islam and How He Became a Muslim" By *Turn to Islam*

⁷³ Yusuf Islam, "The Life of Yusuf Islam and How He Became a Muslim" By *Turn to Islam*

⁷⁴ Yusuf Islam, Interviewed by Riz Khan. *The Music of Revolution*. YouTube video, 25:02, (February 25, 2011).

⁷⁵ Hear the song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0KbtPoVHD4>

countries in 2011. It was recorded with voices sent in through the internet from all over the world.

Many Islamic communities around the world have been hosting festivals that are either dedicated to cultural or spiritual music, or that simply celebrate Islamic culture in general and music artists are invited to perform and participate. The focus of these festivals ranges from cultural music from the local diaspora's origin country to more traditional sacred music or Western style Islamic artists. The Bradford Festival includes a Mela day. ⁷⁶This Mela is a celebration of South Asian arts and culture. Much of the South Asian population in Bradford is Muslim, so Islamic musicians are called in to perform. Musicians from both the Sufi brotherhoods and the global Islamic youth perform at these cultural festivals throughout the world. These festivals not only help change the over all outlook on music in the Islamic world, but are an effect of current change that more moderate to liberal Muslims are causing.

One of these festivals is the ⁷⁷Fes Festival of World Sacred Music. This festival takes place every summer in Morocco. ⁷⁸The message and spirit of the festival, as quoted from the website is "...that of interfaith dialogue through music, the creation of a culture of peace encouraged by globalisation [*sic*] and respectful of ethical and spiritual values". Not only do religious artists and groups come to perform and share

⁷⁶ Kamal Salhi, *Music, Culture and Identity in the Muslim World: Performance, Politics and Piety*.

⁷⁷ Sidi Ala Khayat, "Fes Festival."

⁷⁸ Sidi Ala Khayat, "Fes Festival."

their music with a diverse audience, but musicians from many genres, countries, and faiths also come to participate. Events like this festival and others like it are contributing to reform and attitude change even if they are not directly related to reform movements or promoting specific doctrinal deviations. If followers question one traditional belief, they open the door to argument in all other traditions and norms.

Music has been used as a promoter of peaceful social change in many different settings, times, and countries. Now in the Islamic world musicians are, whether on purpose or by accident, using it to join into the conversation of reform and self reflection. Music is a way that people know things. It is a powerful tool to spread information, emotions, messages, and ideas. Information, through music, suddenly becomes easier to remember and more enjoyable to absorb. Because music today is recorded and semi-permanent, the information and opinions it contains are easily accessible and convenient to store and retrieve. All one has to do to get to the idea in a song is go online to a music website, YouTube, or iTunes and press play. One can even look up the lyrics to a song, including translations. Online Islamic reformers are using music as a weapon against conservative extremist ideals and violent conditions. It is a public forum for new traditions and growth. The Internet has been crucial for public access of these songs and albums. Music not only informs, but also has the power to inspire people into action. It brings people together and allows them to feel the emotion of the music as a collective group.

Islamic musicians are making their voices heard all over the world. Through their music and new found influence, they are slowly making a difference in this diverse religion and beyond. People and groups like Sami Yusuf, Poetic Pilgrimage, Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), Mercan Dede, and Youssou N'Dour are pushing for social change and religious reform. Sufis are also helping to shift attitudes within the *Ummah* and the West with their own more passive methods. Change is being encouraged and shown by the many music and cultural festivals that are held globally. Music is personally very important to me and I feel that positive reform in any faith tradition is not only good, but healthy and necessary for the religion's growth and survival. Music is a facilitator and a symptom of reform and change.

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