Joy Across Distance:
Remediative Explorations of Iraqi Jewish Musicking

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Abstract

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What can be achieved through the present-day remediation of the remaining media traces of early twentieth century Iraqi Jewish musicking? As a result of Iraqi Jewry's emigration-deportation from Iraq in 1951, much of its material culture was lost; this also resulted in a sudden truncation of the various threads of the transmission of intangible culture. The emergence of sound recording technologies in the early twentieth century suddenly enabled the creation of sonic cultural objectivations of Iraqi Jewry's musical life in the Islamic world, a musical life that lost its cultural context, and, with later generations, intelligibility, without Iraq. Two artists of Iraqi Jewish descent, Regine Basha and Dudu Tassa, remediated these sound recordings in projects of cultural discovery that are readily accessible online in the English-speaking world. The results—the album *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys* (2011) and the project *Tuning Baghdad*—are personal creative explorations that are accessible to audiences without existing familiarity with Arab or Iraqi musicking, but they have no pretense of establishing a monolithic sense of what Iraqi Jewish musicking has been or will be. Further, both centre the joy of musicking in their explorations, which resists a "lachrymose historiography" of Iraqi Jewish history and experience.

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Introduction

Culture is larger than an account of the practices that differentiates one group from another: it reflects entire senses of reality by designating, even if only as conceptual ideal, how to act, and because humans are social, how to interact. The semioticians Lotman and Uspensky "[understood] culture as the *nonhereditary memory of the community*" (Lotman and Uspensky 1978, 213, emphasis original). If memory's purpose in its most elemental state is to extend the field of knowledge beyond the experience and lifespans of individuals, cultural practices that persist in memory inevitably contain past feelings for how present life should be. In this way, the interaction between culture and memory enables a generative dialogue across the past, the present, and the future; and the materials of the past are reformed according to contemporary desires of that which is present or to come. Culture is therefore more complicated than the collection of practices born out of the drive to maintain life as it has been known, and becomes an agreement among a collective for the shape that the present—and the past, and the future—should take.

The broadest question with which this thesis is concerned is what becomes of culture in a state of displacement. Displacement shreds some of the logical connection between cultural practice and its implicit ideals for living. When the self-evidence of continuing life as it has been known is lost, a cultural group is directly confronted by the need to remember and the possibility of forgetting. While the division between one from the other is more rhetorical than it is practical, it is by the constructive capacity of remembering that this thesis is guided. Remembering is distinguished from forgetting by the fact that value must be continuously ascribed to the things that are remembered, even if tacitly. What displaced cultural groups are additionally confronted with, then, is the necessity of consciously ascribing value to their knowledge and practices in order to allow remembrance to continue to happen.

For Iraqi Jewry and its descendants, less than twenty five years of recorded music constitutes a significant share of the cultural remains of its millennia in Iraq. The musicking that has generally come to be associated with Iraq by the descendants of Iraqi Jewry was created during the early twentieth century, when sound recording technologies had suddenly made it possible to be heard outside the live context. The music that forms some of the base of the exploration presented here was enjoyed by Baghdadi Iraqis seemingly across confessional and economic boundaries. In taking on the job of playing instruments in the Islamic world, minorities performed because of Islamic theological arguments but also according Islamic aesthetic ideals. This to say that this secular musicking was a product of a larger culture in which differences in affiliation—and the tension that could arise from these—did not demand conclusive resolution. This is also to say that while the vast majority of this music was written and played by Jews, it needs to be understood as Iraqi music. The new, modern style of Iraqi songs was the expression of a singularly Iraqi musical culture from the cosmopolitan creative minds of its two sole progenitors, Saleh and Daud al-Kuwaity. The music of this era had come into existence in a rather unique moment: during a "golden era" of Jewish cultural and political integration in an Iraq under colonial British rule, but also during the rise of a right-wing nationalism that demanded of complex identities their

reductive simplification. The physical media on which these recordings existed, the products of the early recording industry and its commodification of music, were left behind upon Iraqi Jewry's fraught mass emigration and dispossession which culminated in 1951.

Creatives Dudu Tassa and Regine Basha both became interested in the music of Iraq circa 1930-1950 that they encountered in family collections of tape recordings. Basha, the Iraqi-American child of Iraqi Jewish emigrants who had left in the late 1940s, grew up around the music in domestic and private spaces, mostly notably the *chalghis* that her family would attend and help organize: all-night parties of Iraqi Jewish revelry in the means of their shared memory, dancing, musicking, eating, speaking Iraqi Jewish Arabic. Dudu Tassa, who had already established himself in the Israeli rock scene, eventually became curious about the music he had heard in his family home, as well as the stories he would hear about his grandfather being a respected musician in Iraq. His grandfather was Daud al-Kuwaity, and his great-uncle Saleh al-Kuwaity. Basha and Tassa would later embark on their own creative explorations and framings of the music. In 2011, Tassa released the album *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys*, in which he samples and performs his own rearrangements of Saleh and Daud al-Kuwaity's songs. Basha's *Tuning Baghdad* project has been going for almost thirty years, when she set out to document the musical experiences of her father's generation, eventually coming to conduct her own interviews, and even travelling to Israel to record some of the regular musicking sessions held by members of the first generation there. The project is now comprised of her own personal archive along with a multimedia collection of videos, radio show episodes, images, and text made using elements from her archive, all readily available online. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin write that remediation is very simply "the representation of one medium in another" (Bolter and Grusin 1996, 339). Knowing this, it is self-explanatory that Basha and Tassa's explorations are remediative: therefore, this thesis is an examination of the remediative works created by Tassa and Basha.

Historian Salo Baron warned continually of the shortcomings of a "lachrymose conception of Jewish history" that characterizes the historic Jewish experience as governed by misfortunes (Baron 1963, 240). Iraqi Jewry's story could potentially be painted with that tearful brush, given their dispossession by the Iraqi government and the effective deportation that occurred. While the discussion here is on some level about remembrance of the vanished reality of religious and cultural diversity in the old Islamic world, it is above all about the reckoning of individuals with a cultural identity whose existence is not so matter of fact in their time, their age. Maurice Halbwach's *mémoire collective* maintains that even individual remembrances and perceptions are shaped solely by our social being, our capacity to interact with others, whether directly or through the objectivations in which they are reflected, like books or paintings (Erll 2011, 130-31). Halbwachs clearly had a sense for the importance of mediacy to memory, but did not consider how the accessing of information from mediate sources would itself influence individual memory. Direct inquiry of this would arise only with the development of media studies as a discipline throughout the second half of the 20th century (ibid., 130). Analysis of Basha and Tassa's explorations takes place in the light of the strengthened theoretical connection made between the two in the ensuing years.

Basha and Tassa's projects are involved in the remembrance of the musicking of a generation to which they do not personally belong, so one might ask: what do their remediative works, which are publicly available, say about what they want others to know or to remember about Iraqi Jewish musicking? Is there any knowledge that they want to institutionalize as set forms for the future collective remembrance of Iraqi Jewish musicking?
What follows is organized into four chapters. Chapter 1 is a glimpse into Iraqi Jewish life following World War I until 1951. No attempt is made to catalogue the practices of day-to-day life to explain what was lost when Iraqi Jewry lost Iraq. Provided instead is a brief glimpse at the ideological and political forces that found their expression in the changing social position of Jews in Iraqi society. The purpose of this chapter is to undermine simplistic renderings of Jewish identity in the Islamic world: the notion of "belonging" in a complex and rapidly evolving sociopolitical situation fails to find adequate reflection in contemporary identity politics. Chapter 2 introduces two of the more represented forms of Iraqi musicking during that era, the Iraqi maqam and the modern "new style", and examines how the strengths and limitations of recording technology and the 78 rpm shellac disc—an important cultural objectivation in the Iraqi context prior to 1951—shaped overall cultural engagement with music. Chapter 3's focus shifts to engagement with these cultural objectivations in the diaspora, studying the remediative efforts of the aforementioned Basha and Tassa, and additionally—a gift of Basha's work—the musicking of her parents' generation. The conclusion drawn in Chapter 4 from the analysis is that Basha and Tassa's explorations do not try to encapsulate or heritagize a set notion of what Iraqi Jewish musicking has been, is, or will continue to be in the future: instead, they are personal creative explorations into a personal identity that, for reasons (including and not limited to) the cultural and the familial remains magnetic to them. Further, the focus of both their projects is the joy of being present within Iraqi Jewish musicking.

Before continuing on, two definitions must be clarified.

Musicking

Musicking is the name given by Christopher Small to his notion of music as an all-encompassing activity centred on "organizing sounds into meanings" as an alternative to its definition as a thing (Small 1998, 2). Humming to oneself, having something playing over headphones while walking, dancing to a beat that emerges from speakers: these would all be examples of musicking.

Cultural objectivations

Objectivations, as defined in Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, are expressions that exist in such forms as to be "enduring indices of the subjective processes of their producers, allowing their availability to extend beyond the face-to-face situation in which they can be directly apprehended" (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, 49). This is to say that they are the products generated by the mediation of experiences. Texts—whether characterized for their

literary, archaeological, or ethnographic value—buildings, paintings, photographs, sound recordings: these are examples of cultural objectivations with the potential to be further organized into specific structures of cultural meaning. Indeed, the persistence of memory beyond individual experience—and therefore cultural memory on the whole—is impossible without representation, without the objectivation of memory.

Chapter 1: Historical background

1.1 Life in modernizing Iraq: the monarchic period

The 19th and early 20th centuries saw Iraq through remarkable changes to its geopolitical existence and sense of identity. Prior to World War I, the region of Iraq lay in the easternmost reaches of the Ottoman Empire where it was divided into three *vilayets*, or administrative regions. From north to south, these were Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, each with a city named after its *vilayet*. The dominant historiographic narrative is that by this time, the decline of the Empire was well underway, and that Ottoman political actors had begun to look to the West for inspiration.[1]

The *Tanzimat* was a period of liberal reforms that began in 1839 and ended with the instatement of the first Ottoman constitution in 1876. Under these reforms, non-Muslim Ottoman subjects came to be granted legal equality as individuals before law regardless of confessional group belonging. Jews across Europe began to see similar developments during the same century, which is typically referred to as the Emancipation. During the 18th century, the long-standing notion of the *millet* had come to refer to the allowance of the members of a confessional group to conduct matters of personal law within their own courts. This had allowed minorities—of course, the concepts of cultural or religious minorities and majorities are retroactively applied from a contemporary viewpoint—a relatively large degree of autonomy in their day-to-day life, whether religious, cultural, or political. Ottomanism, a *Tanzimat*-era concept of universal subjecthood under a distinctly Ottoman fatherland for all subjects of the Ottoman Empire regardless of religion or cultural identity, marked a critical change in the understanding of culture and belonging in the context of a large, complex, multicultural, multilingual geopolitical entity. Minorities who lived under Ottoman rule had generally accepted their situation because the sultanate was uninterested in the local enforcement of its law; however, nationalist and separatist thinking potentially presented other forms of existence to these groups. Ottomanism and its tenet of universal personhood under a central rule of law was a response to the increasing appeal of self-determination, and an attempt to update the Empire's functionality in an era when the concept of the nation-state was rapidly developing. The Ottoman Empire would not survive long enough to take more than a few steps into modernity, and following its loss in World War I, its former territories were fragmented into new states. Iraq, long eyed by the British for its northern oilfields and its proximity to the British Empire in India, was instated under British mandate as the Kingdom of Iraq (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 1). Faysal I, a member of the Jordanian royal family who had been expelled by the French from the neighbouring (and likewise formed post-World War I) Kingdom of Syria was placed on the throne.

The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922 and the Iraqi constitution of 1924 iterated, once again, legal equality for all regardless of religion or cultural group, which was welcomed by Iraqi Jewry (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 4). City dwellers took particularly well to liberal policies instated by the

1 See Kafadar 1997. Kafadar, a former professor of Turkish Studies at Harvard University, highlights how a narrative paradigm of decline has been applied to the historiography of the final three centuries of the Ottoman Empire's existence, and additionally how its application is linked to changing European fortunes.

British in these early years. The 1920s, until Iraq's independence from the British in 1932, saw notable changes to the accessibility of education and employment for Iraqi Jewry. Although a Western-style education had been available as far back as 1864, when the Alliance Israelite Universelle began to open schools in the Iraqi region, beginning with Baghdad, government schools were opened to students regardless of religious affiliation during the 1920s. This provided more socioeconomically disadvantaged children the possibility of receiving a basic education (Bashkin 2012, 69). Further, education at this time strengthened the sense that ease with Arabic as a language was essential to both employment and the development of an integrated, Arabized identity within Iraqi society. Denominationally Jewish schools began to prioritize Arabic instruction and readily hired Muslim teachers (Bashkin 2012, 72, 77). By the end of the decade, there were manifold educational institutions available to Jews: the French-language Alliance, the English-language Shammash, numerous denominational schools funded by tuition payments and donors (including Laura Kedourie School, opened in 1893 as a primary school for girls), and the Iraqi government schools (Bashkin 2012, 85). The secular and language-focused education received by these students, many of whom were to comprise the *effendia*, the urbane middle class, made it possible for them to climb into employment as lawyers, doctors, and teachers. Additionally, the British regime had created a demand for government workers, many of whom were hired from among the frequently bilingual and trilingual Jewish applicants (Bashkin 2012, 60-62). By 1941, Baghdad's Jewish population had grown more than 150% compared to 1919 census estimates (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 4).

Bashkin links the emergence of the *effendia*—and in particular, its secularized nature—to the development and support of an Iraqi Arab identity that united Muslims and Jews under one "territorial unit [of shared] history, geography, and culture" (Bashkin 2012, 8). The appeal to belonging to a defined Iraqi homeland is in some fundamental sense nationalist, just as Ottomanism had been before it despite its stated religious and cultural pluralism. However, the "nonsectarian" flavour of this particular form of Iraqi nationalism is, to Bashkin, uniquely Iraqi (Baskin 2012, 7). The *effendia* had gotten the chance to see, within their lifetimes, the fruits of secularization and Westernization through the expansion of their permissible roles in Arab society, and came to join the ranks of the administrators of the state apparatus.[2] Education played a strong role by placing a love and easy command of the Arabic language as central to an Arab identity in the minds of younger generations. It is unclear, on the other hand, how much secularization happened outside cities. This bears clarification as Iraq's ethnic or religious groups were typically heterogenous dependent on their geographic location. For example, while the majority of Iraq's Jews resided in cities, in the more isolated Kurdish territories in the north, Kurdish Jews maintained their particular lifestyles and customs with little desire to "share the patriotic dream of building the Iraqi state" (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 84). Nonetheless, it appears that among the upper and middle classes during the 1920s, regardless of religious background, there was a tendency towards similar, secularized visions to nationhood. This intellectualized brand of Iraqi nationalism is notable for its disentanglement of culture from ethnicity and religious belonging, a conceptualization of cultural identity which for many reasons—repeated iterations and transmutations of the nationalist turn, for one—is difficult to imagine today.

2 This is not to be confused with becoming part of the elite, which continued to be comprised of Sunnis and those who supported them. On the subject, Bashkin notes that "liberty was practiced without equality", suggesting that for Jews and other non-Muslims in Iraq, there always remained a glass ceiling (Bashkin 2012, 5).

1.2 An increasingly fraught climate for Jews in Iraq: the decade preceding 1951

Studies of archival material of the decades leading up to Iraqi Jewry's sudden mass emigration reveal a convergence of shifting bureaucratic, ideological, social, and political forces that complicate the dominating Zionist and anti-Zionist narratives which characterize Jews as an eternal and essential Other in the Arab world. Bashkin's *New Babylonians* (2012) notes that anti-Zionism had been "a major part of Iraqi national discourse" as early as 1928, and came to be inextricable from the Palestian struggle against the British, with their support for Zionism. Acts of violence against Jews only increased in the years following the suppression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936-39) despite the *effendia*'s general support for the Palestinian cause (Bashkin 2012, 103-4). In Meir-Glitzenstein's *Zionism in an Arab Country* (2004), anti-Jewish popular sentiment is seen as the result of the rise of a right-wing, anti-colonial brand of Iraqi nationalism that linked Jews with British colonial power. In response to this rise, young members of the middle class struggling to find a place in Iraqi society "sought a revolutionary solution to the Jewish problem in Iraq, whether the communist solution or the Zionist solution" (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 213). Bashkin brings attention to the Jews who turned to communism in response to both Zionism and right-wing nationalism, as both of these two ideologies denied them a future in Iraq. Communism was violently suppressed following the Wathba, a series of demonstrations in Baghdad that took place in 1948 in response to the Iraqi government's plans to renew its ties to the British government. Only after its suppression, Bashkin argues, did Zionism begin to gain support: but it ultimately drew only an estimated 2,000 members from a total population of 150,000 Iraqi Jews (Bashkin 2012, 226).

On March 10, 1950, the Iraqi government passed the Denaturalization Law which would mark the effective end of over 2,500 years of Jewish community in Iraq. Since the mid-1930s, Jews in Iraq had experienced waves of severe restriction on their international mobility, especially to Palestine (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 24-25, 162). The Denaturalization Law, in effect for a one-year period, provided the sole legal avenue for Jews to emigrate to Israel on the condition of renouncing their Iraqi citizenship and their right to return (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 24).[3] One year later, the assets owned by those who had already given up their citizenship were frozen and deemed state property. During the year between, the evacuation of the registrants to Israel was slow. By January 1951, only 23,000 had left, with 63,000 still waiting to leave (ibid., 204). The majority of the 70,000 Iraqi Jews who left in 1951 did so within the months of March to June (ibid., 206). For reference, by the end of the Israeli evacuation mission in August 1951, an estimated 123,000-140,000 Iraqi Jews had left with only 6000-10,000 remaining of the original community (ibid., xi, 203; Morad et al. 2008, 7). The numbers suggest a chaotic and unpredictable day-to-day reality in that final year for the portion of Iraqi Jewry that sought to leave.

3 As of May 1946, the departure of Iraqi Jews for Palestine was allowed on condition of the deposit of a bond worth 2,000 dinars (a huge sum of money at this time) as a guarantee that the traveller would return to Iraq (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 24-25). Meir-Glitzenstein (2004) discusses "legal and illegal aliyah" in Chapter 7, pointing simultaneously to the established routes for both methods and the relatively minimal scale at which these journeys were taken.

Both Meir-Glitzenstein and Bashkin point to evidence that the Denaturalization Law had been instated as an exit ticket meant only for political undesirables and the poor (Bashkin 2012, 191; Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 198). However, due to an intensifying climate of insecurity, particularly since 1941 (following the Farhud) and 1948 (the year of the establishment of the modern state of Israel), interest in emigration rapidly gained appeal (Bashkin 2012, 201; Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 203).[4] Jews had been squeezed out of professional, governmental, and administrative positions on all scales, and an increasingly widespread conflation of Jewishness with Zionism antagonized a population that had previously indicated little interest in, let alone support for, Zionism (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 6). The sheer number of registrants, ready to leave but hindered by the slow pace of Israeli coordination for their departure, coupled with the subsequent loss of all assets and livelihood, turned a policy intended for selective emigration into a mass expulsion.

Belongings permitted for emigration to Israel, per person, was as follows: "three summer and three winter suits, one pair of shoes, a blanket, six pairs of underwear, socks, and sheets" (Bashkin 2017, 28). Respondents recount that the emigrants wore their best clothes and all their jewelry for the flight, only to be sprayed with DDT upon arrival (Bashkin 2017, 29; Morad et al. 2008, 54). This highlights two things: the scale of the material life left behind, and the devaluation in the new environment of what little of it had been been transported out. Exempt from the baggage allowance were things like furniture, musical instruments, cooking pots, books, albums of the photographic or sonic kind. There were of course still channels by which Iraqi Jews could transport possessions beyond this inventory, but not in great volume and never in totality.[5] Dispossessed of their assets, they frequently arrived with minimal funds with which to begin their lives in Israel.[6]

1.3 Iraqi Jewry's arrival in Israel

4 The Farhud was an anti-Jewish riot that broke out in Baghdad on June 1-2, 1941, leaving in its wake two hundred Jews murdered and two thousand injured. It is often invoked in histories of Iraqi Jewry as a permanent turning point in attitudes towards a minority that by 1947 comprised only 2.6% of Iraq's total population (Meir-Glitzenstein 2004, 4). It is sometimes referred to as a pogrom, but Shohat warns against "pogromization metanarratives" when looking at the Arab world, which tend to elide the particular cultural, political, and social forces at play (Shohat 2018, 158).

5 An editor's note states that "each traveler was allowed to take 50 dinars [one dinar was equal to about four dollars at that time], a wedding ring, a watch, and a bracelet, though some tried to smuggle gold and jewelry in the one suitcase each that they were allotted. Suitcases were often slashed by the customs agents, and any outlawed valuables were sent back to the synagogue to be retrieved by family or friends. When the inspections became increasingly vigilant, the Mossad paid off police officers and customs officials to turn a blind eye to the contents of the suitcases, often to the tune of as much as 500 dinars per month" (Morad et al. 2008, 95).

6 There appears to be contention across sources about the nature of the 50 dinar amount allowed per emigrant. Bashkin characterizes it as a cheque written by the Iraqi government for 50 dinars which the Israeli government had no desire to cash from their own reserves, citing material in the Israel State Archives from December 1950 (Bashkin 2017, 28, 240). Morad et al. (2008) cites a book written by Mordechai Ben Porat and seems to suggest that the amount could be carried as cash.

Iraqi Jews arrived in Israel as migrant-citizens: newcomers granted full citizenship rights, on one hand, but given almost no priority in the allotment of government resources, on the other. Records and memoirs of the time describe harsh living conditions in transit camps (*ma'abarot*) exacerbated by poor sanitation, inadequate housing and infrastructure, and limited work opportunities.[7] Most Iraqi men were given, upon arrival, physical labour for employment regardless of their prior professions; this was referred to as *'avodat dahak* ("adversity labour") (Bashkin 2017, 45). The sculptor Oded Halahmy came from a well-to-do family and describes the Iraq of his childhood as the "land of milk and honey". On his family's arrival in Israel, he recounts:

> We were disappointed, but we focused and worked hard on building our new lives in our new country from scratch. We were in the *ma'abara* [transition camp] for almost a year. We were the lucky ones. I had relatives who stayed there for six or eight years. […] My father could not practice his profession [goldsmithing] in Israel because he didn't have the network of suppliers and customers, nor the money to buy a shop and the necessary materials. So he performed manual labor on the roads. My older brother, Heskel, earned more than my father by painting lamp posts in the street. (Morad et al. 2008, 55)

Saleh and Daud al-Kuwaity were among those who left in 1950-51's waves of emigration. Saleh's son, Shlomo el-Kevity, reflects:

> My mother and our entire family wanted to make aliyah, and it was clear to him that with the establishment of a Jewish state, things wouldn't be so good in Iraq anymore. So he felt he had no choice but to leave. The authorities didn't let Salah and Daoud take their musical scores with them—the guards took all the scores out of their suitcases. When they got to Israel, they had to reproduce everything from scratch. […] He once told me why Salima Murad, who was also Jewish, didn't leave. She had told my father, "Who will I sing to in Israel? My life is singing, and in Iraq people know me. No one knows me in Israel." My father knew that too about himself: that his musical career ended when he boarded that plane. After all, the most important thing for any artist is his audience. In Iraq he had an audience of millions while in Israel there were just 100,000 Iraqi Jews, all of whom were too busy starting their lives from scratch to have time for luxuries such as music anymore. (Morad et al. 2008, 21-22)

Both accounts highlight the loss of professional and creative identities. An affective dimension to this kind of dispossession is evident in the telling of Saleh al-Kuwaity's story. Saleh and Daud went on to settle in Hatikva, a neighbourhood of Tel Aviv with a strong Iraqi Jewish representation, and ran a shop that sold housewares. They gradually found performance opportunities in private spaces for the Iraqi Jewish community (Morad et al. 2008, 23). Where in Iraq they had played live three times per week on Radio Baghdad—Iraq's sole national radio station for whose establishment they were responsible—the Israeli Broadcasting Authority

7 Orit Bashkin's 2017 *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel* pieces together portraits of the lives of the Iraqi Jewish migrants during their first few decades in Israel. For brevity, an overview of this work is not possible here, but is invaluable for insight into how the rift between "Arab" and "Jewish" came to be cemented through the bureaucratization of basic necessities and day-to-day realities of work, housing, and education.

eventually gave them a single weekly 30-minute slot on their Arabic-language station (ibid., 20, 22).[8] Saleh passed on "stories about his compositions" to Shlomo, but never spoke about his fame, and the brothers never allowed their children to learn to play music, despite their interest (ibid., 23; Gaon 2011, 3:52-4:10).

8 Ezra Aharon was an Iraqi musician who had arrived in Palestine in 1934 and worked as the director of Arabic-language broadcasting in Israel/Palestine for roughly thirty years until 1969. Despite familiarity with Iraqi music, his personal preference for the Egyptian mainstream style meant that Iraqi music received minimal airplay (Warkov 1986, 19).

Chapter 2: The Iraqi Jewish musicking of Iraq

The scope of what is examined in this section is tightly limited to artists and genres explored by Basha and Tassa. The musicking is primarily Baghdadi, likely the result of its being a major and long-lived cultural nexus. Incidentally, two-thirds of all Iraqi Jewry lived there, comprising a third of the city's population (Morad et al. 2008, xiii, 4). One is the art music genre, the Iraqi maqam (*al-maqam al-iraqi*). The other is the Iraqi "new style"—influenced by the "mainstream" genre developing in Egypt and Lebanon at the time, themselves shaped by the commercialization of music—of which Saleh and Daud al-Kuwaity were the pioneers (Warkov 1986, 12).[9] These two genres were musicked, mediated, commercialized, and consumed across community boundaries (see Garvey 2020; Hassan 2008; Warkov 1986).

2.1 The Iraqi maqam

The Iraqi maqam is the urban art genre of Iraq. The use of the term *maqam* in Iraq is different from that of other parts of the Arab world where it refers to a melodic mode or scale. The Iraqi maqam is a vocal repertoire in which the vocalist, either a *qari al-maqam* (a reciter, a more prestigious role linked with Quranic erudition) or a *mughanni* (a singer, one of less prestige due to its association with more secular music) improvises or works with a poetic text (Warkov 1986, 28). The Iraqi maqam can exist in either religious or secular contexts (Hassan 2001, 341). Performance happens in a principal musical mode, after which that maqam takes its name, and are composed by the performer—although "practitioner" feels to be a more appropriate term (see Garvey 2020).

Its structure can be roughly conceptualized as follows. A given maqam is pieced together using empty musical sections that function like "containers" to be filled with parts considered appropriate to it: existing melodies, improvisation, or borrowings from folk, rural, unrelated ethnic styles, and so on. Some of these containers must be placed a specific place in a specific maqam, while others do not (Hassan 2008, 120). The text used in the maqam is also often linguistically diverse, allowing the use of literary or colloquial Arabic, Iraqi Turkmen, rural and Bedouin dialects, or the dialects of cities like Baghdad and Mosul (ibid., 121). Of the fifty-three maqams identified in the repertoire, thirty-three use the literary *qasida* form of poetry; the remaining twenty use the colloquial *mawwal* (ibid., 121). In this genre, the performer is also the composer, roles between which division is common in Western musicking. The impression one is left with is of an expressive form where the filling of each container and the assembly of the whole happens according to an aesthetic sensitivity that is cultural, both learned and innate, duplicated and innovated. This is a genre defined by its demand for a deeply cultural sensibility, a

9 The phrasing of "Iraqi new style" is straightforward but evocative of the general musical situation at the time. The musical innovation of these brothers had been never before seen in Iraqi music, and because of the sudden interruption of their creative trajectory, it continues to stand as perhaps the single largest.

learnedness on the part of the practitioner who must know how to create wholeness, balance, and beauty through the form.

Transmission of the maqam typically takes place in two stages and begins without a direct master-apprentice relationship. In the first stage, the apprentice undertakes self-study through the imitation and emulation of a master practitioner. This happens in secret, and often over many years: the apprentice discreetly attends performances, gleaning knowledge on technique, sound, and aesthetics as an attentive member of the audience (Hassan 2001, 342-43). In the second stage, the apprentice begins performing, having developed skill and a personal repertoire. The first performance is a critical moment: the apprentice's admission as an insider to the social world of maqam, even their entire artistic future, relies on the reception of this performance. This is the moment of revelation as to the master that the apprentice owes the cultivation of his creative identity. The master might even initially reject the apprentice, only gradually coming over time to offer support, and even may never provide any formal instruction to the apprentice (ibid., 343).

From a Western perspective, the didactic indirectness of this kind of musical education might make it difficult to consider it such: what kind of musical skill is being transmitted if it is perceived and performed by an eager student from an unintentional teacher? The apprentice's ear and sensibilities almost seem to take on primacy as the aspects that control the development of technique in the absence of a demonstrative teacher, and even more so if one considers the sheer willfulness and desire required of an apprentice to learn discreetly and somewhat unsupported. Institutionalized instruction in the Iraqi maqam first arose in the 1950s, but with evident deficiencies, struggling to convey through a curriculum the vastness of the musical knowledge available in the genre's traditional social setting (Hassan 2001, 344-45). The form seems to strongly resist systematization, most of all that of visual transcriptive form. Robert Simms, a Western enthusiast, undertook a project of transcribing and collating a repertoire of the Iraqi maqam, noting the difficulty of transcribing a single recording whose transcription would "often [change] from one listening to the next" (Simms 2004, 5). While the difficulty of transcription lies in the essential limitations of any notation system, this difficulty does highlight the central place of listening to the Iraqi maqam. More accurately, Iraqi maqam requires its practitioners to develop a refined capability to perceive, internalize, and then to express sound according to an aesthetic sense that is at once collectively negotiated and highly individual.

Vocalists are typically Muslim, although in Iraq there were well-regarded Jewish vocalists like the *qari* Hisqil Qassab (1899-1969) and even Daud al-Kuwaity himself, although he came to be best known for his work as a composer (Warkov 1986, 11).[10] Secular maqam allows the vocalist to be accompanied by musical instrumentation. The traditional *chalghi al-Baghdadi* ensemble was typically comprised of Jewish instrumentalists on the *oud* (lute), *qanun* (plucked dulcimer), a bowed stringed instrument like the *kemenje* or the violin, along with percussion and a singer (Ben-Mordechai 1992, 12; Warkov 1986, 12).[11] Hassan states that the instrumentation traditional

10 Hassan suggests, following examination of an undated biographical monograph by Jalal al-Hanafi "that goes back to 1983", that there was a great diversity of Arab Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Kurds represented among practitioners of the vocal repertoire (Hassan 2008, 124). Reference by a few sources has been made to the Al-Kuwaitys as having great knowledge of and expertise with the Iraqi maqam (Dori 2022, 290).

11 The word "*chalghi*" can also refer to the kinds of Iraqi Jewish gatherings that this ensemble might have played at.

to the *chalghi al-Baghdadi* is actually the *santur* (hammered dulcimer) and the *joza* (the Iraqi four-stringed spike fiddle) accompanied by two or three percussive membranophones, linking instead the *oud*, *qanun*, and *ney* (reed flute) to the modern Egyptian-Levantine ensembles (*al-takht al-sharqi*) (Hassan 2001, 341).

2.2 The al-Kuwaity brothers and the Iraqi new style

Saleh (1908-1986) and Daud al-Kuwaity (1910-1976) are often credited as the sole innovators of the modern Iraqi style of music that emerged from their careers in Iraq. Saleh and Daud's father, Ezra, was a fabric merchant with family origins in Basra, and moved to Kuwait during the early 20th century, where his children were born (Dori 2022, 69). Sometime around 1918 to 1920, between the ages of ten to twelve, Saleh and Daud's uncle, returning from a business trip, brought an *oud* and a violin from India as gifts which they began to play with apparently little familial resistance (ibid., 70-71). The brothers received some lessons as children in Kuwait from Khaled al-Bakr, an *oud* player who taught them songs from the Gulf by ear (ibid., 71). Saleh repeatedly claimed that he and his brother never received formal musical instruction. Dafna Dori, in her book on the Al-Kuwaity brothers which appears to be the most comprehensive exploration of their cultural and social backgrounds, songs, and musical influence to date, clarifies that Saleh's assertion might be the impression left by learning in "[ambiguous spaces serving] for both performance and teaching" (ibid., 72). Leaving Kuwait in the late 1920s with their immediate family, the brothers began composing music for the female singers of Basra's modern nightclubs before moving on to the flourishing music scene of Baghdad (Dori 2022, 82, 95-97).

During performances of Iraqi maqam cycles, "light" songs called *peste* (pl. *pastat*) would be played as interludes following one maqam to clear the air, mood-wise, before moving on to the next: this was a flexible repertoire of "popular, urban, folk or religious and even old cabaret songs" (Hassan 2008, 121). Before the establishment of a modern Iraqi style, *pastat* comprised part of the corpus of material that fell outside the form of Iraqi maqam genre. A connection, it seems, in the social role of *pastat* and the songs of the Iraqi new style that followed can be drawn: before the emergence of modern Iraqi songs in the 1930s, ensembles that played music outside the Iraqi maqam would perform *pastat* and songs from Egypt (Dori 2022, 91). These were both lighter styles than the Iraqi maqam: shorter, metrical, and concerning lighter subject matter. Dori links the development of the Egyptian mainstream style and the Iraqi new style, noting that the modernization and westernization of Egypt "preceded a similar course in Iraq" (ibid., 257). Mediated cultural imports from Egypt in the form of films and discs arrived in Iraq throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, feeding a growing popular desire for music that was felt to reflect the dynamism of the modern era. It is difficult to comprehensively identify traits of the new style without repeatedly pointing to obvious differences from the music that had come before: self-contained, relatively short songs; innovations in use of refrains, instrumental interludes, and more broadly, song structures; lighter lyrical subject matter, love and romance figuring large; divergences in the use of vocalists, for example, female vocalists, or soloists where a chorus might be expected and vice versa. Perhaps the key aspect to recognize is that the

new style's departure from the forms of music that had come into being before it indicate a shift in attitudes towards the cultural and social roles of musicking.

The brothers moved to Baghdad from Basra in either 1929 or 1930 (Dori 2022, 95). In composing, they drew from a knowledge many styles of music—Iraqi, Egyptian, Ottoman, Persian; maqam, popular, peste, rural, likely some Western art repertoire—and readily navigated between different cultural aesthetic senses to create, in Dori's opinion, a uniquely Iraqi form of modern music. It seems that the Al-Kuwaitys were strongly driven by their musical impulses, as voracious listeners that could readily integrate knowledge from the music they came into contact with, then reshaping that knowledge through their musicking. They worked as songwriters and composers for other performers, including the iconic Umm Kulthum and famed Iraqi-Jewish singer Salima Murad, the latter of whom reached out to collaborate with the brothers within a year of their arrival in the city (Dori 2022, 95). They were willing to take on the new roles available to professional musickers created by the general emergence of the modern style in the Arab world, which gave them outlets for their prolific creative drives.

2.3 Mediation at the birth of commodified sound recording

In a photograph taken at the recording studio used at the 1932 Cairo Congress of Arab Music, the seven musicians of the Iraqi delegation form a line that very slightly arcs around a single microphone (see Figure 1). It is placed on a small table as to sit roughly-chest level with the seated musicians, and strongly resembles the Western Electric 394-W condenser microphone, seated atop a small wooden box likely housing a pre-amplifier.[12] It is possible they had all sat nearer to it while recording and pushed their chairs back for the camera. They are dressed in suits —an intentional decision to Westernize their appearance overseen by one of the leaders of the group, the 29 year-old *oud* player Ezra Aharon (Katz 2015, 330). The walls are seemingly hung with appliqued or embroidered textiles, given how they seem to sag and ripple, and the floor is layered with rugs. The respected *qari* Muhammad al-Qubbanji (1901-1989) sits in the centre, slightly to the microphone's left. All musicians except for Al-Qubbanji are Jewish. Attendees of the conference included "Berlin school ethnomusicologists (collectors and comparatists), the Orientalists (historians), the folkorists (collectors), and finally the Arab composers, musicians, theorists, instrument makers and very few scholars" (Sawa 1993, 107). Al-Qubbanji was known in the Iraqi maqam world as a musically cosmopolitan innovator, and represented the genre's rejuvenation (Garvey 2020, 73). The Congress's recording committee had actually intended to seek out "folk" or "rural" music for documentation, which was generally denied by the Arab musicians who arrived with their urban traditions (Dori 2022, 292). British technicians oversaw the Congress's recording sessions (Sechehaye 2021, 179). Recordings from these sessions happen to be available for listening online: a track titled "Toi qui es beau comme Joseph" is attributed to

12 This conclusion is based on a visual identification with images found online along with information found on an amateur researcher and enthusiast's website (Vintage Microphone World 2021). Given the goals of the Congress (to document Arab musical traditions and discuss the trajectory, present and future, of Arab music's encounter with modernity) and the technical quality and clarity of the recordings, it is unthinkable that the older carbon microphone technology would have been used for such an event.

the “Ensemble of Muhammad al-Qubbanji and ‘Azzuri al-‘Awwad [Ezra Aharon]”. Upon clicking play, the qanun plays two notes before the rest of the instrumentation falls into line with a simple descending melodic introduction. A hush falls; the pitched instruments settle into a quiet, expectant roll. Al-Qubbanji’s voice comes in with a nonmetrical vocal improvisation similar to the style of *layali*. At first, the instruments closely follow his melodic progression; then, here and there, the *joza* begins to spiral away from the rest, asynchronously echoing his phrases back to him. When the mood of the improvisation briefly intensifies and darkens, the *qanun* and the *oud* begin to echo him, as well, in two non-simultaneous waves that follow after one another an octave apart.[13] The technical quality of the recording is remarkable, rich: changes to Al-Qubbanji’s mouth position while steadily holding a pitch are discernable, the instruments remain audible across a fairly broad dynamic range, and the character of the room is evident in the feeling of physical space in the sound. One might even say that there is *presence.*

13 This is often referred to as heterophony and is heard throughout the Iraqi delegation’s recordings (Racy 2010, 6-7). According to Amir ElSaffar, it is distinctively present in the style of Iraqi Jewish instrumentalists and is heard infrequently post-1951, if at all (Basha n.d.e, 37:00-38:03).

Figure 1. The Iraqi delegation of musicians sent to the 1932 Cairo Congress of Arab Music seated in a recording studio. From left to right, Yusuf Pataw (1886-1976) (*santur*), Abraham Shleh (*daff*), Ezra Aharon (1903-1995) (*oud*), the *qari* Muhammad al-Qubbanji (1901-1989), Yusuf Zarur (1901-1986) (*qanun*), Saleh Shummail (1890-1960) (*joza*), and Yehuda Shammash (1884-1972) (*dumbuk*) (Belkin and Seroussi 2024, 4; Katz 2015, 330; Warkov 1986, 15). Katz notes that "[t]his group was lauded as the best performance group at the Congress" (Katz 2015, iv). (Reproduced from Warkov 1986, 15, Figure 1.)

The relative clarity of the 360 recordings published from the Congress was only possible because of the invention of electrical recording six years earlier. Its predecessor, mechanical recording, had relied on using a large horn to collect the sound, transferring it via a diaphragm to a stylus whose vibration would inscribe the sound onto a physical medium (e.g. metal foil or wax cylinders). The frequency response of this method was highly irregular, meaning that many of the components of a sound that give it its distinctive tone or timbre would not be represented in the final product. Because it relied on physical vibration, only the loudest sounds tended to register—but too loud and the stylus would jump out of the groove during recording. Electrical recording wrapped the collection of sound (via a microphone to convert sound into an electric signal which would be subsequently amplified) and the inscription of the material medium (in this case, a wax

master disc etched using a magnetic cutting head whose position was modulated by the electrical signal) into one system (Maxfield and Harrison 1926, 500-501). The wax master would then be electrotyped, a process similar to electroplating, as to create a metallic negative called a matrix using which discs could be stamped out of shellac. The resulting recordings were still direct-to-disc as they had been with the mechanical phonograph, meaning that the master was etched while the performance took place and therefore that there would be no way to later edit or engineer the recording before producing copies from said master. However, the smoothness and the range of the frequency response curves associated with electrical recording was a breakthrough for audio clarity. Much of this was due to the invention of the condenser microphone in the same laboratory, which was fairly evenly sensitive across a larger range of frequencies unlike the earlier carbon microphone. This distinction is clear in the contemporary uses of either technology: the former is frequently used to record orchestras because of how well it can pick up the sound of the room, while the latter is found in older telephones, the source of the tinniness they are known for. A relatively high standard of audio quality could now be expected of the technology that had created the industry that brought mass production and commodification to the sense of hearing.

It must be noted that there is no work of literature on the history of recording in Iraq in the style of, for example, Christopher Silver's *Recording History: Jews, Muslims, and Music across Twentieth-Century North Africa*. Silver drew from national and institutional archives as well as those associated with the former music conglomerate EMI, in addition to having access to more informal collections of shellac discs out of which he himself began to build a digital archive (Silver 2022, 16-17; 257-58). Baidaphon was a subsidiary of the German Lindström, which was sold to the Columbia Graphophone Company in 1926 and then to EMI in 1931, so it is possible some pertinent material still exists in archives related to any of these (Gronow 1981, 269; Mohammadi 2011, 121).[14] Regardless, it may no longer be possible to assemble a similar scale of information about the Iraqi context given the suddenness and near-totality of Iraqi Jewry's dispossession of its material culture in tandem with the 20th century's more general cruelty to the geographic nation of Iraq and its citizens.

The introduction of short-form, commercialized mediation to the long-form, improvisational, and participatory musicking culture then dominant in Iraq and much of the Arab world demanded fragmentation of the cultural style. A glaring shortcoming of the 78 rpm format is its length: each of the Congress recordings is less than 4 minutes long. In a live setting, the performance of a single maqam can take close to half an hour; entire performances cycles incorporating many maqams with lighter songs in between can run several hours (Abu-Haidar 1988, 129). The profitability of recording was immediately apparent as the technology moved away from the phonograph and domestic use to consumer goods (Sterne 2003, 213-14). In Egypt (whose modern cultural goods strengthened the influence of mass media in other Arab countries) recording fees, and on occasion royalties, became a significant income stream for artists, encouraging them to adapt to the medium (Racy 1978, 48). The Al-Kuwaitys, who had listened to Iraqi and Egyptian

14 Started around 1907 by the Lebanese Christian Bayda family when they finally found a German company to record and press their discs in Berlin, Baidaphon made their recordings with the help of recording engineers from Europe who would regularly travel through the Arab world (Gronow 1981, 270; Morad et al. 2008, 15). They had also recorded the Al-Kuwaitys as young musicians (Morad et al. 2008, 15).

discs in their youth, became professionals of the recording world in their late teens to early twenties, evidently amenable to the format of short, pre-composed songs.[15] Record companies strategically travelled far and wide to record music that would diversify and cultivate new markets (Gronow 1981, 251). Knowing this, it becomes evident how personal or cultural prejudices would affect what musicking might be chosen for recording. An account dating to 1928 from Oscar Preuss, an agent for Odeon, displays an aversion to the Arab vocalist's comportment during performance, the expressivity of the audience, the use of quarter tones, and the length and intensity of the performances (which he additionally alleges were fueled by stimulants and alcohol). In Pekka Gronow's words, sometimes agents "could not themselves know which artists and what tunes to record, even if they auditioned artists and visited locations where music was performed" because of their disconnection from the local culture (Gronow 1981, 273). Further, while the actual recording was typically local, European manufacturing seems to have dominated in this era, adding the complications of transport into the mix.[16] For example, 16 of the original 376 matrices produced from the Cairo Congress recording sessions were lost on the way to Manchester for pressing (Sechehaye 2021, 179). It is evident how the recording technologies of this time were not passive captors of sound as much as sculptors.

Discs quickly became valuable to musicians as educational and creative resources, not only for musickers of the modern era like Umm Kulthum and the Al-Kuwaity brothers, but also for practitioners of the Iraqi maqam (Danielson 1997, 27; Dori 2022, 72-73). This may seem potentially unexpected in the case of the Iraqi maqam, an improvisatory genre where discs might even take the place of a living master (Hassan 2001, 343). Simms writes:

> This is a local manifestation of the larger tradition of clandestine acquisition that extends at least through Iran, Central Asia, and North India, where it is often known as *poshte parde* (listening from "behind the curtain"). […] In the tradition of Iraqi *maqām*, no less a figure than Yusuf Omar made diligent study of the recordings of Mohammed Qubanchi early in his training; in this case the admiration became mutual. Omar openly acknowledged the importance and efficacy of recordings in the process of transmission (Kojaman 2001, 74). (Simms 2004, 3)

This is simultaneously surprising and yet completely not. Yusuf Omar (1918-1987) and Muhammad al-Qubbanji are considered two of the greatest maqam reciters perhaps in all history; it seems remarkable that recordings would have a role in musical transmission with such talent. Mediation, because it produces a usable material objectivation of sound, completely suits the Iraqi maqam's culture of covert learning. A recording can be played repeatedly, and passed around and shared among would-be practitioners. It serves as an external repository of musical memory, and a potential source of unexpected encounters. No longer is the moment of live performance the only place to encounter the Iraqi maqam: the most enthusiastic student can practice all day (in secret!) and later attend a performance at night.

15 For example, there is a disc released by Odeon that dates to 1928 featuring "the ensemble of Saleh and Daud, sons of Ezra" (Dori 2022, 75). The Al-Kuwaitys moved back to Iraq this year, to Basra (ibid., 81).

16 The only explicit reference to local manufacturing in the Arab world that I have found among my cited sources took place in Egypt in association with the company Mechian (see Racy 1976, 43-44).

The relationship of 78 rpm sound recordings to the extended live performance form and its surrounding audience culture, with its informal norms of behaviour, is less promising. The Iraqi maqam's composite form suggests that the mediation of its separate parts might not be fatal to understanding the larger enterprise. On the other hand, because of its improvisatory composition and performance by the practitioner, contact with the continuous thread of the unique aesthetic sensibility that runs through the entire performance is crucial for refining one's own. On the pre-mediation path of transmission, the most important place for the apprentice to be is in the audience. A disc enables the apprentice to study in isolation; but if the success of a would-be practitioner depends entirely on being accepted and celebrated by the audience, a disc simply cannot accustom one with the particular character of the local, contemporary prospective listeners. This is to say nothing of the myriad other experiential riches of the live musicking context that cannot be explicitly assigned didactic utility, for example the influence of participating in a kind of "collective effervescence" that resembles Racy's "ecstatic feedback model" (Racy 1991, 23).

The shellac discs explicitly contain sonic information, but only disconnected glints of cultural information. In this era of musicking, the cultural information associated with the genres of the Iraqi new style and the Iraqi maqam suffused daily life. In the new economic model created by the recording industry, a mass audience that would purchase musical commodity goods was needed in order to generate profit for the recording companies: regardless of other influences, listener tastes were the ultimate deciding factor of what was produced for the market. Discs that were the product of aforementioned record agent prejudices or the monetary incentive for musicians to adapt to short recording times stood trial before popular ears. Even unprecedented musical innovations needed to be alacritously received. Simply put, the media of a time is a product of its time. Despite all the concessions needed to be able to use early sound recording technology, its resulting objectivations were still inevitably of a cultural nature. The issue is that the significance of these fragments of cultural information could pass entirely unregistered when encountered in isolation from other modes of cultural contact. Their relationship to the mediated product is like a reflection in a mirror, an image that itself possesses no essential materiality. When the object—the material source depicted by the reflection—disappears, so does the reflection, and the mirror does not remember the object. No trace is left of it, no memory.

2.4 The Jewish role in Iraqi musicking

Islamic theology has long wrestled with music's role in human spiritual life. Sonic expression in the religious context of course has a less ambiguous relationship to Islam: but what of musicking for music's sake? Music might have been considered essential to human cultural life among the Sufi elite, but Islamic scholars who viewed it with suspicion characterized it as a diversion away from spiritual life and towards sin (Otterbeck and Ackfeld 2012, 230-31). This tension was generally resolved by leaving musical roles to non-Muslims, at least on the question of playing instruments, as vocal performance was able to take on some prestige. Jews came to be heavily—if not almost exclusively—represented among instrumentalists, especially in Baghdad (Warkov

1986, 10). Class and physical ability also influenced for whom professional musicking was felt appropriate. For example, musical talent was recognized and cultivated in students educated at a Jewish school for the blind, but Warkov notes that up until its establishment, there had been no other "alternative to familial endogamy for music education" (Morad et al. 2008, 20; Warkov 1986, 10, 28).

Iraqi Jewry's mass emigration left a vacuum for instrumentalists that for the first time in Iraq's history needed to be filled by Muslims. Shlomo el-Kevity maintains that two Iraqi Jewish families (the Pataws, who played the *santur*, and the Basuns, who played the *joza*) were not allowed to leave Iraq, presumably despite having already registered to leave, until they had passed on their knowledge to Muslim students (Morad et al. 2008, 22). Amir ElSaffar, an Iraqi-American jazz musician who began to learn the maqam repertoire and the *santur* in his twenties, notes that while the instrumental traditions of the Iraqi maqam might have survived until today, detailed knowledge of technique and melody was lost with Iraqi Jewry's departure (Basha n.d.e, 37:01-38:15). Depending on how old the then-dominant tendency was of instrumentalists to learn and transmit their skills only within the family, the trove of musical knowledge in that family would have been refined over generations of musicians of varying talents and temperaments who had all been cultivated from a young age. This would have been nigh impossible to transmit to students in a rushed, forced educational relationship. In Israel, the emigrant generation did not, it seems, initiate transmission of their knowledge to their children, given the absence of a scene of younger maqam practitioners there (Basha n.d.e, 38:27-38:38). For many reasons—personal affective distance, Israeli cultural norms and prejudices, dramatic changes to work and family life as well as sources of income, the difficulty of sourcing and making instruments—the Iraqi maqam no longer had a place in daily life.

Chapter 3: Remediation in the diaspora

The intention of the following analysis is to examine the remediative use of the extant musical objectivations of Iraqi Jewry, the recordings of the music made and enjoyed by the emigrant generation. The two artists whose works will be examined are the musician Dudu Tassa (the grandson of Daud al-Kuwaity) and the artist, curator, and "cultural producer" Regine Basha, whose childhood experiences of Iraqi Jewish musicking made way for her project *Tuning Baghdad*. Tassa has sampled, rearranged, and performed his own versions of songs by the al-Kuwaity brothers, releasing a series of albums over the years: *Dudu Tassa and the Kuwaitys* (2011), *Ala Shawati* (2015), and *El Hajar* (2018). On Basha's bashaprojects.com webpage for *Tuning Baghdad*, she states that it had begun as an archival project but "has since grown as a music narrative through many formats including the original documentary website, a radio show, live concerts, and an audio-visual presentation in collaboration with Michael Rakowitz's *Dar Al Sulh*".[17] For the sake of brevity, the analysis of Tassa's work will be limited to his 2011 album and the documentary about its making, *Iraq n' Roll* (2011), directed by Gili Gaon. Basha's work is of particular interest because it simultaneously engages with her recollection of growing up in the Iraqi Jewish diaspora and the telling of the story of her parents' generation and their suddenly diasporic life. *Tuning Baghad* is a document of her own processing of this cultural identity, but also centres the cultural being of a generation that is increasingly no longer present to speak for itself.

The emigrant generation will be referred to as the first, their children as the second, and their grandchildren as the third.

Family collections of cassette tapes seem to have served as early inspiration to both Basha and Tassa. Broadly, these cassettes held recordings of the music enjoyed by the generation of Iraqi Jewry that had personal memories of Iraq, the first generation to leave.[18] In a video recording made of one of Basha's Tea Salons in 2018, Basha scrolls through footage of her father's hands as he operates a cassette player, recounting that he stored his cassette collection in the bathroom, which was "his music studio" (Basha 2018, 11:40-12:08). A bathroom is a less than ideal storage space due to the heat and humidity, a fact further emphasized if one regards this collection as a unique repository of information: while duplicable and technically comprised of pieces of music available elsewhere, the cassettes are the product of personal networks. Many Iraqi Jewish families maintained private economies of distribution for cassette recordings of music, or even of parties, where not only the music but the happening of the occasion is audible, dubbing copies and gifting them (Basha 2018, 08:58-09:37). The theme of slightly unceremonious storage is

17 *Dar Al Sulh*, or *Domain of Conciliation*, was a restaurant opened by Iraqi Jewish-America artist Michael Rakowitz in collaboration with Ella Shohat as an installation in Dubai May 1-7, 2013, as stated on Rakowitz's professional website, michaelrakowitz.com.

18 In Episode 1 of the Tuning Baghdad radio show, Basha features a track from "an unmarked cassette tape that I found in my father's collection" (she surmises that the recording might be of the Syrian-Egyptian Farid al-Atrash). She goes on to mention that it is common for Iraqi Jewish music enthusiasts (presumably mostly of this first generation) to have a large cassette collection that they share with each other "worldwide" and that is non-exclusive to music made in Iraq or by Iraqi Jews (Basha n.d.a, 30:58-31:22).

found in the narrative of Tassa's early encounters with the music of the Al-Kuwaitys: media coverage from over the years describe the tapes as being kept in a trunk or a bag in his parental home (Hird 2019, 01:00; Ivry 2014, 03:08).[19]

Basha and Tassa both describe having felt, at younger ages, a kind of distance from Iraqi Jewish musicking and sound that seems at once affective and epistemic. Tassa links his childhood embarrassment of the Arab music that his mother played at home and, more broadly, of the Arabic language to a widespread cultural stigma that, in 2019, he felt had been stronger 30 years before (Hird 2019, 01:26-02:18).[20] In *Iraq n' Roll*, Tassa repeatedly expresses that the music feels difficult to understand for present-day listeners, including himself. He makes reference to having only reached a level of comfort with the music over the year prior despite years and years of listening (Gaon 2011, 08:34-08:47; 47:02-47:08). Similarly, Basha recalls disliking the Arab music her father played when she was young, and as a result of never having been taught to understand Arabic, absorbed both into "that department of 'forbidden sounds' in [her] brain" (Basha 2011, 67). In the same essay, she notes the protectiveness and secretiveness shown by her parents of their cultural identities when interacting with the larger public sphere (68). Elsewhere, she jokes about having had to have overcome "resentment for being dragged from party to party at this young age" presumably before the possibility of relating to her early experiences of Iraqi Jewish sound could be re-established (Basha n.d.a, 02:05-02:19). Basha is straightforward about growing up aware of her cultural otherness "both at home and in Californian culture" (Basha 2011, 67-68). Without belaboring the point, among the themes present are the internalization of competing cultural norms; the inner tension that that creates, and its outer expression; and the difficulty of the full actualization of one's liminal identity. Simultaneous feelings of discomfort, curiosity, and appreciation seem to have something to do with the drive to further investigate the Iraqi Jewish musicking Tassa and Basha had personally come into contact with.

3.1 Dudu Tassa: crafting musical collaboration and performance

The cover of *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys* (2011) jogged from memory, mostly misremembered, the album art for Franz Ferdinand's *You Could Have It So Much Better* (2005), sharing in common little more than the use of a black-and-white photograph with sans serif font on a slight diagonal. Tassa's album art is an alteration of a photograph of the Iraqi Radio Ensemble taken in 1938, with Daud al-Kuwaity seated far left in the front row and Saleh al-Kuwaity standing in the centre-back, smiling slightly (see Figure 2). Graphic design choices are are applied over top in pink. There appears to be two versions of the album cover: one in Hebrew and Arabic for the original 2011 CD release on an Israeli record label; and another used for both a 2011 limited edition vinyl release, also in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as an English and Arabic reissue in 2024.

19 Tassa's uncle, Shlomo el-Kevity, notes that he (el-Kevity) keeps the largest collection of recordings by the Al-Kuwaitys outside Kuwait and Iraq, where there are likely to be larger; but it is unclear if his collection is primarily on cassette or if it also includes 78 rpm discs or other memorabila (Morad et al. 2008, 24).

20 This early troubled, aversive sense is phrased as a general reality for the descendants of Arab Jews growing up in Israel; for one such memoir, see Shohat (2004).

Figure 2. The Iraqi Radio Ensemble in 1938. Saleh al-Kuwaity stands in the middle of the back row, Daud al-Kuwaity at the left of the front row. The *qanun* player Yusuf Zarur sits beside him. (Reproduced from Dori 2022, 136, Figure 16.)

The CD art uses a burst of pink diagonal lines arranged in rays over the background of the photo to emphasize the six performers centred in the photograph. The name of the album is written in majuscule sans serif font on a banner placed across the bottom quarter of the image, over top of the knees of the performers in the first row. The vinyl release album art seems, on the other hand, to de-emphasize the musicians. The rays in the background are gone, and the contrast of the black-and-white photo has been increased to the point of washing out some of the finer details of the performers' faces and instruments. Somewhat strangely, pink bars have been placed over the eyes of the performers, which is typically seen as an anonymizing—or even depersonalizing—technique in photos that have been originally taken for identification purposes. The album name banner stretches across the top fifth of the photograph, above the heads of the performers. On the 2024 reissue, a rectangular pink tag on the bottom right declares that the album features a bonus live track featuring Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead fame, by this point a longtime collaborator of Tassa's.

The art style for this 2011 album diverges from that of Tassa's previous eight albums, which all comprise of photos of him with a simple text insertion of his name and the name of the album. The full project's name after which the album is self-titled is Dudu Tassa and the al-Kuwaitys, following a common naming convention stating the main musician and the name of their backing band (e.g. Neil Young and Crazy Horse). It could be surmised that it bothered neither Tassa nor his record label that, without a focus on his solo artist persona, some potential listeners might overlook the album. The intended overall message, if somewhat inscrutable, is in the key of "out with the old, in with the new". One of the strongest cultural touchstones for an album cover featuring a diagonal pink banner with text on it is, of course, 1977's *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* by the English punk band Sex Pistols. The aesthetic of punk is rough, technically straightforward often to the point of being crude, and irreverent. This is not to say that the intention was to present *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys* as a punk album, but rather that this one accidental quotation of an existing social form proclaiming the necessity of de(con)struction to build anew—punk—might resonate, even if only subconsciously, with some listeners.

Only four songs of the album's ten directly sample musical recordings by the Al-Kuwaitys: "Dalina", "Ya Nabat Al-Rehan", and "Walla Ajabni Jamalak", which features Daud al-Kuwaity as the lead vocalist, and "Ruchi Tlifat" which samples a violin improvisation that was likely played by Saleh al-Kuwaity in the original.[21] "Samaai Lami" opens with a sample of Saleh al-Kuwaity speaking. Digitizations of all four of these musical recordings are readily available online and it is possible to identify the time ranges of the samples taken from them by listening. Although the majority of the album is not remediative in the strictest sense in that most of them do not employ samples, it can be argued that the album is strongly so. Bolter and Grusin write that "because all mediations are both real and mediations of the real, remediation can also be understood as a process of reforming reality" (Bolter and Grusin 1996, 346). Tassa, in rearranging the songs, is treating them with a remediative logic, as if he was cutting up a photograph and using it to make a collage. The fact of his then performing them without including direct re-presentation of the original songs—to continue the metaphor, proceeding to paint a picture of the collage—does not disqualify the remediative logic from being the case. It is unknown which recordings or songs had originally piqued Tassa's interest in coming to learn to play and rearrange the songs, or where these came from (it very well may be the cassettes in his parental home), but those directly sampled on the album seem to be recordings made at the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) in the 1960s. This is a conjecture based on the length of the digitizations found online. "Dalina" and "Ruchi Tlifat" are too long (roughly 8 to 10 minutes long) to have been recorded to discs, and although "Ya Nabat Al-Rehan" and "Walla Ajabni Jamalak" are an appropriate length to have taken up two sides of a 78 rpm disc, each 3 to 4 minutes long, there is no telltale silence, well-timed musical conclusion, or other shift in the noise floor discernible in the middles of either of these songs where the first recording could have been concluded and the second commenced. The inclination, then, is to assume that these recordings were made to magnetic tape on a reel-to-reel machine, further supported by the fact that Daoud's voice can be heard on these recordings and is known to have sung more frequently during the brothers' Israeli career. Tassa is also seen to collect reel-to-reel recordings from the archives of the IBA in *Iraq n' Roll* which very well could be the Al-Kuwaity recordings of the highest technical quality available for him to work with.

21 See appendix for links to recordings of all the songs on the 2011 album, as well as digitizations of the Al-Kuwaity songs and, where not available, related recordings.

Between the cover and a quick glance at the song lengths, it is safe to say that this album was intended as a rock remediation of the Al-Kuwaity recordings. The opening track, “Dalina”, is based on an 8 minute and 34 second recording of the same name, but itself spans only 3 minutes and 55 seconds. Tassa’s “Dalina” grabs snippets from all over the Al-Kuwaity recording, the temporality of the original recording deliberately disrupted (see Table 1). The Al-Kuwaitys’ “Dalina”, in terms of total running time, is dominated by Daud’s vocal improvisation, but in Tassa’s, the focus is shifted to the melodically catchy call-and-response led by the female vocalist. The original recording is present throughout the track as a substrate, and is overdubbed with newly recorded electric guitars, drums, bass, and other effects. Evidently, the project’s intention is not to simply compress the original musical information of the Al-Kuwaity songs but, again, to re-present the sound of one genre through another.

Table 1: Location of Al-Kuwaity samples from “Dalina” used in Tassa rearrangement of same name

Timestamp in Tassa’s	Timestamp in Al-Kuwaitys’	Notes
00:00-00:16	01:30-01:40	This duo of notes played in unison by the ensemble opens the Tassa song, but follows two vocal parts in the original. The duo of notes are sampled twice, with the percussive roll playing out fully only on the second round.
02:13-02:45	02:52-03:12 01:50-01:59	These two *ney* samples have been composited together into a solo or break in the Tassa song. In the original, the *ney* shadows and alternates with Daud’s vocals.

Similarly, the second track, “Ruchi Tlifat” opens with a solo violin played by Saleh al-Kuwaity which is found at 01:35 in the IBA recording. The original song, at 10 minutes and 21 seconds long, can be broken into roughly four distinct melodic parts which can each be assigned a letter based on the order in which they appear. Figure 3 illustrates the differences between the song structures of the two. Parts B, C, and D have been given underlying chord progressions in Tassa’s version that are obviously not present in the original: but this had not been done with Part A. Speaking loosely and in terms of the feeling or atmosphere created by the chord progressions in each part: the song structure seems to begin with the unresolved question of B, setting into the internal resolution of C only for the question to re-emerge even more urgently in D. The pleading tone of D descends into the resolved resignation of C once again: and then comes the complete suspension of A, which resolves only when it lands on the first note of B. Part B does have a significant role in the original, but it is Part A that seems to be its “landing place”, as all the instruments come together and revisit it throughout the song as an ostinato. In Tassa’s version, A

is used just once as a centrepiece, incidentally featuring a *ney* played by Albert Elias (1927-2014) during the album's recording sessions.[22]

The Al-Kuwaity brothers' "Ruchi Tlifat":

A	B	(I)	**A**	B	C	B	C	**A**	‖D	C	B	**A**‖X2	(I)	D	C	B
	instr	viol		solo	solo	chor	chor		solo	solo	chor		vox	solo	solo	chor

Tassa's "Ruchi Tlifat":

--sample of (I) violin-

B	B	B	C	D	C	**A**	B	C	D	C	break	B/2
instr	instr	solo	solo	solo	solo			solo	solo	solo	instr	solo

Figure 3. A comparison of the song structures of the Al-Kuwaity and Tassa versions of "Ruchi Tlifat". The ostinato has been put in bold for clarity of reading. (I) indicates an improvisation: the first is on violin, and the second vocal. Instr: instrumental. Solo: solo vocal performance by the song's vocal lead. Chor: vocal chorus. Break: an instrumental break of a different form than heard before elsewhere, but resting in the same tonality as Part A.

Tassa's "Ya Nabat Al-Rehan" follows the general flow of the original. Two repetitions of the vocal refrain for which the song is named are followed by an instrumental version of the verse, which is then repeated with Tassa's solo vocals taking the melodic role previously filled by the violin. A prechorus that melodically resembles the refrain closes out the solo vocal section of the song, whereupon the basic structural cycle of the song repeats as the refrain begins once again. To rephrase, the song is generally structured as a cycle of chorus-instrumental-verse-prechorus. "Ya Nabat Al-Rehan" is unique on the album as it is the one track where both Tassa and Daud al-Kuwaity are both featured as vocalists. The first audible sound on the track is the crackle of what sounds like a dusty vinyl record coming to life on a turntable, with Daud's voice coming in clearly over the vocal ensemble that then begins. After one repetition of the chorus, Tassa's voice takes the place of Daud's over top of the continuing sample which, as with "Dalina", forms the substrate of the song's opening beneath newly recorded instrumentation. The soft crackles and pops of surface noise clear as the instrumental concludes and the song enters its verse. Two layers of "movie magic" are at work here. The one solo instance of the chorus performed in the original by Daud seems to have been layered with an ensemble instance: in the original recording, Daud's voice is not clearly audible among the vocal ensemble. Also, the surface noise has likely been added in for effect. It is not audible in the digitized Al-Kuwaity version posted online in 2010, meaning that if the surface noise was real and some kind of very particular damage happened to the digitized IBA tape sampled in the Tassa track, it would have had to have been effectively during the album's recording process. It is not audible in the conclusion of the track, when

22 Elias was a professional musician in Iraq and emigrated to Israel in March 1951, playing with the Al-Kuwaity brothers there (Dori 2022, 354).

Daud's sampled voice returns, meaning, again, if it was genuine, it would have had to have occurred in a very specific way. Barring this possibility, the affected surface noise of an analog medium opening onto the clean, high-production-value sound of a rock musician working in the mainstream music industry seems to comment on the gulf created by the passing of time between non-intersecting lived realities. Tassa and Daud's voices, in never overlapping, seem to occupy not only separate musical spaces in the recording, but separate ontological ones. Daud's voice, reaching through the static, enables Tassa's fresh take on the song to emerge. His voice then returns to close the song accompanied by newly-recorded piano, as if Tassa's arrangement, which had taken control of the song, had chosen to glance back, perhaps in gratitude or homage to a past that it makes no pretense of reviving in its existing form.

Iraq n' Roll provides some insight into the production and recording process of the album. The album was made using technologies and conventions of mainstream commercial recording culture: digital recording and editing, multitracking, overdubbing, instruments and vocals recorded in isolation. Although multitrack recording did exist during the Al-Kuwaity brothers' lifetimes, it likely would have been superfluous to them. Nahum Aharon, a member of the first generation who worked as an editor and as curator to the Arab recording library at the IBA from 1962 to 2012, briefly corroborates this in the film, describing the recording environment that the Al-Kuwaitys would have encountered at the IBA as belonging to "different times", recorded live off the floor with no conductor or sheet music to indicate which musician would come in when (Gaon 2011, 07:54-08:34). The recording techniques used by Tassa and the people who played for the album are by definition remediative because they took the older medium—single-track, uneditable recording—and multiplied it and made it malleable by digitizing it. The older recording setup—an ensemble that performs together—has not only been multiplied, but fragmented. Every performer is recorded, at least in theory, as if they comprise a whole, complete performance, but also in a moment of isolation from the larger musicking that is being created.

Yet the musical universe that the album seems to belong to is nonetheless highly social. Carmela Tassa, Dudu Tassa's mother and Daud al-Kuwaity's daughter, sings on "Eshrab Kasak Withana", which feels particularly special knowing that she had at one point dreamed of becoming a singer (Gaon 2011, 04:14-04:37). Berry Sakharof (born 1957) and Yehudit Ravitz (born 1956), each featured on one track of their own, are not members of the Iraqi Jewish diaspora but established mainstream Israeli musicians of the same generation as Carmela. The comparison between the two parties is poignant, knowing that many of the second generation children of the Al-Kuwaity family expressed interest in learning to play instruments or to sing and were actively barred from doing so by their fathers.[23] The aforementioned Albert Elias is the sole musician of the first generation recorded anew for the album, but is also seen to speak to Tassa in *Iraq n' Roll* as an elder statesman of the professional music world in his own right. For example, he remembers Tassa's grandfather as "youthful in soul" and popular with women, telling Tassa not to "miss out", apparently on the fun of youth and women, while he is still single (32:00-32:06; 35:29-35:51). Also in the film, Tassa's uncle, Shlomo el-Kevity, is shown helping him figure out the original lyrics of the Al-Kuwaity songs from their recordings, and engages Tassa in philosophical questions about what it culturally means to engage in a project like the making of this album.

23 Shlomo el-Kevity recounts asking his father for permission, as a child, to buy a guitar with money he had earned at a summer job. His father responded that if even if Shlomo bought a guitar with his own money, he, Saleh al-Kuwaity, would break it (Gaon 2011, 16:13-16:27).

Tassa refers to Iraqi Jewish musician Yair Dalal as “the bridge between me and my grandfather” through the mentorship, guidance, and knowledge he has provided (Gaon 2011, 26:15-26:28). Dalal, who belongs to the second generation, as well, makes a point echoed by el-Kevity: “anyone who doesn’t have a cultural past can’t create a cultural future” (ibid., 26:47-26:55). Even if the goal is to create an entirely new listening experience from the songs of the Al-Kuwaitys, it inevitably takes place in community, looking both back and forward in time.

Table 2: Breakdown of personalities present on tracks on *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys* (2011), numbered according track listing on album

Personalities present	Track numbers and titles	Notes
featuring Tassa as vocalist	2) “Ruchi Tlifat” 3) “Ya Nabat Al-Rehan” 6) “Tadini” 7) “Wein Ya Galub” 8) “Samaai Lami” 10) “Wein Raich Wen”	Tassa and Daud both feature as vocalists on Track 3. Tassa performs only non-verbal vocalization on Tracks 8 and 10 that is fairly deeply buried in the mix (i.e. not the focus).
featuring guest vocalists	4) “Eshrab Kasak Withana” 5) “La Trib Anu Utruch” 10) “Wen Raich Wen”	Lead vocalist on Track 4 is Carmela Tassa, Dudu Tassa’s mother. Lead vocalist on Track 5 is Israeli rock musician Berry Sakharof. Lead vocalist on Track 10 is Israeli musician Yehudit Ravitz.
sampling Saleh al-Kuwaity’s violin or voice	2) “Ruchi Tlifat” 8) “Samaai Lami”	Saleh’s violin is sampled on Track 2. His speaking voice is sampled on Track 8.
sampling Daud al-Kuwaity’s voice	1) “Dalina” 3) “Ya Nabat Al-Rehan” 9) “Walla Ajabni Jamalak”	Tassa and Daud both feature on vocals on Track 3.

The 2024 reissue is on World Circuit, the record label known for internationally releasing music by the Buena Vista Social Club, a group of purportedly previously-unknown Cuban musicians

"discovered" and assembled by American guitarist Ry Cooder and the head of World Circuit. Others with releases on the record label include the Malian musicians Ali Farka Toure, his son, Vieux Farka Toure, Toumani Diabate, and the Congolese band Mbongwana Star. Regardless of Tassa's (or his record label's) intentions for the marketing and release of this first album, its popularity with international audiences outside the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) seems to have seen it settle into the category of "world music". A year before the reissue, the same record label released a collaboration between Tassa and Greenwood called *Jarak Qaribak* (which translates roughly to "your neighbour is your friend"), an album on which singers of Arab origin sing love songs from a country bordering their own (Hochman 2023). In media coverage of the album, Tassa and Greenwood are emphatic that there was no political meaning in this album, which was intended as an exclusively musical exploration of Arab sound (Hochman 2023, Taysom 2023). It brings to mind the notion of the postvernacular use of language, a phrase coined by scholar Jeffrey Shandler to describe the performative use of a language, "often privileging non-semantic qualities of the language" (Erez and Karkabi 2019, 300). Erez and Karkabi eloquently capture the relationship between the availability of Arabic to Israeli Jews, even of Arab descent, as a cultural signifier, and the position of Arab identity in Israeli society, which continues to hold:

> The decline of the peace process and the disillusionment that accompanied it resulted in the collapse of a set of cultural assumptions which had underlined this process and dominated liberal discourse since at least the 1990s. One such assumption was that an increased familiarity with Arabic language and culture is a natural counterpart to—and conduit for—political reconciliation. The collapse of this paradigm meant that the meaning ascribed to cultural practices (by and for Israeli Jews) invoking Arabic language and culture was to some extent 'up for grabs'. No longer monopolised by the politics of 'co-existence', the sound of Arabic has become culturally available in new ways: both as an aesthetic resource and as a marker of Mizrahi-Jewish heritage. (Erez and Karkabi 2019, 299)

Erez and Karkabi discuss Tassa's 2011 album as well as *Iraq n' Roll* in their article in the context of the use of the Arabic language as an expressive tool without a semantic understanding of it, but *Jarak Qaribak* exhibits a somewhat related logic. The aestheticization of the Arabic language in music heavily and inevitably shaped by Western references (Greenwood mentions Kraftwerk, the groundbreaking 1970s German electronic band in a press release) allows it to take on this nebulous moniker of "world music" because a knowledge of the Arabic language, as well as the aesthetics and history of music in the Arab world, is not required to enjoy it.[24] This then permits the claim of apoliticism to be made. This is not to discount the personal nature of the creative path taken by Tassa, but merely to point to the logic by which his explorations of Iraqi music might have come to be popularized even among listeners who do not have the knowledge necessary to connect with the music on culturally "thick" terms.

In *Iraq n' Roll*, Yair Dalal expresses appreciation for how Tassa is "searching for his roots without predetermined patterns, which makes him a very special artist" (Gaon 2011, 26:32-26:44). This is

24 See BMG (2023). This is presumably the source of the mention of Kraftwerk widely repeated in media coverage of the album.

in a sense possible because Tassa seems to hear voraciously with the ear that he has, even while he is trying to develop its capacity to understand the Arab musicking of his heredity. Tassa delights in experimenting with the music of the Al-Kuwaitys. He laughs when he sees his uncle Shlomo's incredulous first reaction to his rock rearrangement of "Dalina", who in turn says that it will appeal to younger audiences (Gaon 2011, 30:00-30:30). He listens to the 10/16 beat of the *jurjina* rhythmic cycle and hears the more relatable groove (for contemporary, Western-tempered listeners) of 5/4. He listens to the Al-Kuwaitys' "Walla Ajabni Jamalak" and joyously hears reggae (Gaon 2011, 23:45-23:51). His ear is of a Western musician, the majority of his formation through jazz and rock, but the eclecticism of the meeting of this Iraqi Jewish musicking and Tassa's musical background is generative because of the sheer range covered between the two. His personality comes through in the music first and foremost: there is no particular attempt made to educate listeners on the Iraqi Jewish past, much less to defining a general future for Iraqi Jewish musicking.

Also present in the film and in media coverage of his *Al-Kuwaitys* project is a narrative not just of returning to his roots, but redeeming the self-alienated family lineage. Tassa describes in a podcast how his mother would put on her father's music while cleaning the house and sing and cry "for her father's legacy, nearly forgotten in Israel and Iraq" (Ivry 2014, 05:03-05:21). The joy of the performance shown at the close of *Iraq n' Roll* is particularly moving, then, as Tassa's mother finally has a chance to personally share her father's music with an audience. Though no one uses these terms for it, it feels like the soothing of an otherwise irreversible cultural wound.

3.2 Regine Basha: a self-aware multimedia portrait of the first generation

Basha's *Tuning Baghdad* project began from curiosity about the Iraqi Jewish diasporic culture in which she had grown up, which led her towards her own research outside of the sources of knowledge available within her immediate reach. Her "archive", as she calls it, is highly heterogenous, "collected from unofficial sources like anecdotes, personal memoirs, mixtapes, dinner conversations, YouTube threads, blogs, cellphone grabs, and discussions with musicians" (Basha 2020, 14:28-14:40). This indicates a mix of mediums, including and likely not limited to recorded sound, whether of musicking or banter; photographic images and video stills; digital videography and digitized analog video; text of all forms. Only portions of this personal archive are available online: six audio episodes of the radio show *Tuning Baghdad on Clocktower Radio,* and four video chapters posted on the Tuning Baghdad website, in addition to two digital video recordings of the Tea Salons, Basha's storytelling sessions aided by audiovisual presentations of her own making.

Tuning Baghdad on Clocktower Radio takes the form of an audio recording-focused show—as opposed to an interview- or discussion-heavy one—with fairly short descriptions or reminisces interspersed between longer stretches of uninterrupted audio. The recordings of "Walla Ajabni Jamalak" and "Eshrab Kasak Withana" featured in Episode 1 ("Radio-Active") and of "Ruchi Tlifat" in Episode 6 ("Seeking the Maqam") of the radio show all match the presumed IBA

recordings used by Tassa.[25] However, Basha also features recordings of nonprofessional musicking in her productions. Episode 2 (“Tuning In”) focuses on her own first-hand mediations of Iraqi musicking sessions organized and attended by the first generation. She describes these as “snapshots” complete with “tuning, talking, clapping, laughing, coughing, performing" (Basha n.d.b, 01:24-01:38). Music with a closer connection to Jewish ritual life (which she notes might also be common to the larger Iraqi cultural setting) is played in Episode 4 (“Ceremonials”). Additionally, Episode 5 (“The Santoor”) features an interview of and performance by the Iraqi-American maqam duo Safaafir recorded in-studio for the radio show. Multiple generations of media are used, and a range of perspectives reflected on the musicking of the first generation, including some non-Jewish, as is the case for the ElSafaar siblings of Safaafir and Hamid al-Saadi (born 1958), a contemporary Iraqi maqam practitioner who emigrated to the United States in 2018. The heterogeneity of her audio sources is evident in the assemblages audible: an interview, an in-studio performance, but also noncommercial, unproduced audio like the aforementioned snapshots or even live recordings of professional performances of artists like Umm Kulthum or Nazem al-Ghazali, as in Episode 3 (“Life of the Party”).

The sense of the gradual erosion of intelligibility seems subtly evident throughout *Tuning Baghdad* in a few ways. One level is that of the physical medium. If Basha had discovered her father’s collection of cassettes and videotapes after finishing her graduate studies in the early 1990s, some of the video footage would have already been around twenty years old. Basha’s website for the video chapters, tuningbaghdad.com, has a small image gallery of sixteen unique video stills. Three thematic groups of meaning can be identified. The first is personal significance: the people depicted in the images (or their things, as for the stills of the strings of Avraham Salman’s *qanun*) having a significance to Basha or people of the Iraqi Jewish diaspora that might be unknown to many viewers, especially those outside the group. The second is technology: one image is a close-up of a man’s hands holding a handheld portable cassette tape recorder, and another is of someone playing the violin with text over top that states, “CONTINUE ON TAPE NO. 3”. The third is physical decay. In one still, a man seems to be singing into a microphone, but the specifics of his features are indistinguishable, and the entire image has been coloured by fine horizontal stripes of yellowish green and pink, artifacts resulting from the degradation of the tape over time. Artifacts of decay crop up in yet another still where the silhouette of a man in a suit and tie is coloured in by a vertically oriented rainbow of colours, all set against a noisy black background accented by splotches of equally noisy green blue, white, and yellow. These show the character and age of the format they are taken from, sometimes conveying no information about their content as much as their current state. Basha’s choice to occasionally focus on this reality may be to remind the viewer of the fragility of physical mediums of remembrance: without any explanation of the image (e.g. “Disintegrating VHS tape of Basha House party circa 1983”), it may be so opaque as to convey no cultural meaning whatsoever, highlighting instead the loss and irretrievability of information (Basha 2012, 23).

Taking in the entire oeuvre of *Tuning Baghdad* as a whole reveals how Basha plays with multiple representation to tell the rather ineffable story of the first generation. The editing of her video chapters is straightforward, unaffected: simple splices of video clips with occasional text frames of white sans serif type on a black background. Her storytelling style in the video of the Tea

25 These are also the same as the digitized versions provided in the appendix.

Salon at the SITE SANTA FE arts centre is likewise straightforward and conversational. There is a sense that her way of presenting the material is intended to allow it to breathe, and perhaps to encourage viewer-listeners to come to understand her family's story—and the story of that first generation—to the extent that they are capable, and through their own engagement. In Episode 2, while introducing the musicking sessions, she plays with the notion of immediacy by stating that the listener will be able to hear the sessions just as she had been able to when she was physically present (Basha n.d.b, 01:38-01:44). The following stretches of audio are, again, clipped but otherwise unedited, which helps to create a feeling of immersion, especially with one's eyes closed while listening, entering into the reality of that moment. The audio, it turns out, is sourced from video recordings she had made of said sessions: the audio of the musicking session that the radio show episode opens with is shown in its visual form briefly in Chapter One ("Audiotopia") of the video series (Basha 2017a, 05:54-08:04). In this short clip, the physicality of Elias Sasha's *oud* playing is visible: he moves his head and raises his eyebrows with the emphases he plays. Basha's camera swings over to the vocalist as he comes in, and his physicality is now also visible. Further, it becomes clear that perhaps half of the participants are women, one of whom is seated next to the vocalist, playing a dumbuk. Obviously, different mediums re-present different realities, and because gender is inscrutable from audio in many cases (and unreliably heard even in cases where it might be), one might have listened to Episode 2 imagining a room of older men, no one younger than, say, seventy. The imagined room might have been a room in a spacious home, instead of the fluourescent-lit elementary school classroom caught on camera. That said, video is not necessarily better or truer for its added visual element, as seeing, like every other sense, is not objective.

The presence of women in these spaces of concentrated, focused collective musicking is important to mention because of the prohibition of women entering such spaces during Iraqi Jewry's lifetime in the Islamic world. Another key piece of Basha's project is the *chalghi*, the Iraqi Jewish diasporic all-night parties of cultural revelry, food, and music that her parents were often involved in the planning of. Basha notes:

> Wherever we were based or travelled to—Los Angeles, London, Tel Aviv, New York, Mexico City, even—versions of these familiar parties would happen. It was always the same food… the same music, the same jokes, same blessings for the children to marry, and community gossip and laughter in the kitchen. When I found all this material years later, I realized that I had found the only evidence of Iraqi Jews fully in the their skin. (Basha 2020, 01:09-02:12)

Recalling the general conservatism of the social norms of life in Iraq, though, one realizes that while the parties might have been the same from London to Mexico City, they would not have happened in the same form in Basra or Baghdad. In a clip introduced as "Gatherings at the Dead Sea" in the "Audiotopia" video, a woman attending the party sings "Ya Dala Dalla", a song from the 1970s by the Lebanese singer Sabah, while women enthusiastically dance in their seats and sing along (Basha 2017a, 08:02-09:31). Here, Basha edits with a stronger narrative intention: as the music continues, short clips of women dancing, seemingly at other points during the same party, are interspersed with footage of the musicians. They seem to be dressed without much regard for anything other than their own styles and comfort levels. These parties might be

construed as acts of recreation, of re-enactment of what the first generation had in Iraq, but this would be to ignore the fact of the assimilation into their new host cultures that had been required of them. It might be that they are creating something anew, comprised in part of the Iraq that they lost and missed, and of the continued joy of loving the music and culture that they did. In a way, it is a rewriting of their final years in Iraq, and the embodiment of an idealized state where being part of an integral whole is never difficult.

Chapter 4: Joyous musicking past, resilient present, unknown future

On the English-language side of the Internet, *Tuning Baghdad* and the albums of the *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys* series are two of the only contemporary creative projects that directly work with the music and the sound associated with the generation of Jews who left Iraq throughout the late 1940s to early 1950s. This is to say that, for those outside the diasporic group, they might be among the first points of contact they have with Iraqi Jewish musicking and their larger history. What, then, do these projects have to tell such an audience about Iraqi Jewish culture and identity, or its future? What does it mean to engage in remediation in the context of Iraqi Jewish musicking, and what can one create through it?

One comes away with the impression that the two projects are not intended as steady-state storage forms for the Iraqi Jewish musicking past: they are personal creative explorations that have resulted in public expressions made with minimal pretense of defining what a future for Iraqi Jewish musicking or the telling of its story might look like. The former might be because those were the forms that their creators, a professional musician and an art curator, were familiar with, mixed with a desire to tell a story that would over time lose all those who could remember it, the first generation. The latter is somewhat more complex. In researching the music enjoyed by the first generation, it quickly became clear that continued remembrance of the Iraqi Jewish musicking of the early twentieth century would be no easy feat because of how interdependent it was with larger Iraqi society. When Iraqi Jewry was placed in the emergent social and political deadlock that resulted in their dispossession, Jewish instrumentalists of the Iraqi maqam lost what is arguably the most indispensable part of their musical practice: their audience, a body which they themselves had also been a part of. In Israel and elsewhere, they lost the cultural circumstances that would have allowed them to continue speaking Arabic, and therefore to pass the language on to following generations. In light of just these two realities, it becomes clear that the continued transmission of the Iraqi ear that had still been possessed by the first generation would have been effectively impossible. To those not completely immersed in an Iraqi musical culture from youth, Iraqi musicking has an incredibly high barrier of entry. Further, wrapping up the musical and cultural knowledge required to deeply engage with early twentieth century Iraqi musicking into a fixed, heritagizable package is at odds with the larger musical culture which had a relatively stable form that changed gradually but was nonetheless cosmopolitan as a rule. It seems that Basha and Tassa, as most of their generations, grew up with enough continued exposure to the music to know that they did not know enough to understand or it enjoy this musicking in the same way that the first generation did. Although didactic indirectness is culturally normative to the Iraqi musicking world, the sonic bounty that would have enabled learning in such a way no longer exists for Iraqi Jewry, given its diasporic state. This actually positions Basha and Tassa well to tell the story of Iraqi Jewish musicking to larger society, but the story is difficult to tell, so Basha and Tassa have had to explore without quite knowing where they would find themselves.

A concrete sense of Iraq itself seems to evade both artists, which likely speaks to the Iraqi Jewish reality more than anything. For the first generation, the severance from Iraq, their entire cultural lifewater, was so sudden and total; and following that, all three of the generations felt enormous pressure to assimilate into their new cultural surroundings. The question that Basha in particular seems to pose is: what is this Iraq that continues to bring us together, even if I have not seen it with my own eyes? The Iraq present in Basha and Tassa's works is inevitably an abstraction because of the ineffability of the relationships of their parents' and grandparents' generations with it. However, the ultimate irrepressibility of the joy of musicking runs like a river through both of these works. Emotion spills over in instants of connection through the music of the Al-Kuwaitys in *Iraq n' Roll*, which better informs how to listen to this first album: as an emergent creative personal journey, as a sense of re-established communicativity that took patience to approach and which arose almost as a surprise. The musicking presented in Basha's many mirrors and windows into a culture of Iraqi Jewish appreciation for its cultural traces consistently buzzes with joy, and from effectively every perspective, Jewish or not. One memorable moment in Episode 3 ("Life of the Party") is at 9 minutes and 25 seconds during a recording of Umm Kulthum performing "Alf Leyla Wa Leyla" live. A man in the audience completely loses his head in joyous excitement over the performance, and the audience laughs.[26] Another favourite moment is the aforementioned performance of "Ya Dala Dalla": the clips of dancing and rejoicing creates such a driving energy as to make it seem that the party must still be going even now. What is notable about these two songs is that they were written and performed in the 1960s and 1970s, after Iraqi Jewry's departure from Iraq. The association of the first generation with the cultural output of the Arab world did not end when they left Iraq: obviously it still continued, because this was what they loved and knew even if experiencing it in Iraq was no longer possible. Thus, while narratives of alienation and exile tend to persist—and do have a great deal of truth to them—there is an irrefutability to the joy in what one loves. From an outsider perspective: perhaps in addition to intentionally invoking or "tuning into" Iraq, the first generation was simply allowing the kind of cultural magnetic polarity that Iraq had created in them to continue to draw them together. Even if more tenuously for following generations, the existence of Tassa and Basha's explorations suggests that that polarity is still present.

26 At least, one hopes that this is what is taking place; it is not possible to say without a command of Arabic.

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Appendix: recordings related to and featured on *Dudu Tassa and the Al-Kuwaitys* (2011)

Song title and link (Tassa)	**Song title and link (Al-Kuwaitys and others)**	**Notes on recordings by Al-Kuwaitys or others; song length comparisons**
Dalina https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGy2pQvuXoE	Dalina https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d_gPWgax48	Daud as vocalist. Version used on 2011 album. Al-Kuwaitys: 8:34 Tassa: 3:56
Ruchi Tlifat https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB3z7ukjjm8	Ruchi Tlifat: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYfaD_Y0nUw	Daud as vocalist. Al-Kuwaitys: 10:24 Tassa: 4:26
Ya Nabat Al-Rehan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqJknCgviXs	Ya nab'at il-rihan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaHTppwRE8w "Ya Nabat Elrichan – Magam Lami (Judeo-Iraquienne / Yair Dalal)": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S6U22K44BI	Daud as vocalist. Version used on 2011 album. Al-Kuwaitys: 4:16 Tassa: 3:29
Eshrab Kasak Withana https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boUbvy_siX8	Ishrab kasak: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbKjA4GhKDI	Daud as vocalist. Al-Kuwaitys: 5:12 Tassa: 5:00
La Trib Anu Utruch https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwqbk0ftGwU	Trib Ani U Truch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fabse0JrBCY	Male vocalist, possibly Daud. Al-Kuwaitys: 5:17 Tassa: 3:39

Tadini https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiLY3npL4Eo	Taadhini https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_6_9s3emuM	Composed by Saleh and Daud al-Kuwaity in 1936; one of two songs, the other being "Wein raih wein", that Saleh al-Kuwaity expressed having composed together with his brother (Dori 2022, 220). Daud as vocalist. Al-Kuwaitys: none Tassa: 3:12
Wein Ya Galeb https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mm-yvstfSgw	None online of the Al-Kuwaitys. Winn ya galub, Yusuf Omar. Seems to be a recording to tape instead of shellac disc. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZ_jRb4zwqc Winn ya galub, Muhammad al-Qubbanji. Video recording of black-and-white television broadcast. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwm0xA9Ngt8	Authorship inconsistently attributed to Saleh al-Kuwaity (Dori 2022, 231). There is an instrumental break in the Yusuf Omar recording, but the al-Qubbanji recording has a long vocal break in the middle instead. Al-Kuwaitys: none Tassa: 3:17
Samaai Lami https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWeQdL2iT7k	None online of the al-Kuwaitys. Yair Dalal / UNIVERSAL LOVE ORCHESTRA: Samai Lami by Saleh al-Kuwaity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rD842x3rwIo	Instrumental composed by Saleh al-Kuwaity using the Ottoman sama'i rhythmic cycle—"a novel pursuit in early twentieth century Iraq" (Dori 2022, 152). Al-Kuwaitys: none Tassa: 4:30
Walla Ajabni Jamalak https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUYkA08wh1I	Walla ajabni jamalak: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybw7INieV10	Daud as vocalist. Version used on 2011 album. Al-Kuwaity: 6:22 Tassa: 4:59

Wen Raich Wen https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o48cZ40hPUg	None online of the Al-Kuwaitys. Ween rayeh ween, performed by Zakiyya George (1900-1961), an Iraqi singer (Dori 2022, 180). Seems like a 78 rpm recording due to the shift in the noise floor at 3:19 as well as the conveniently timed musical conclusion there. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTwKrVssFjk	Composed by Saleh and Daud al-Kuwaity in 1936; one of two songs, the other being “Taadhini”, that Saleh al-Kuwaity expressed having composed together with his brother (Dori 2022, 220). Al-Kuwaity: 6:37 Tassa: 4:53