

# *Music of the Whole World*

Series 3: presentation # 2 –  
Wednesday, December 5, 2007.

## **Islamic Choral Music & Aboriginal Music: Unique Bridges** - presentation and study materials

edited by Moshe Denburg from contributions by  
Hussein Janmohamed & Russell Wallace



**Artwork, called 'Bismillah Raven', by Sherazad Jamal**

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## Islamic Choral Music & Aboriginal Music - study materials

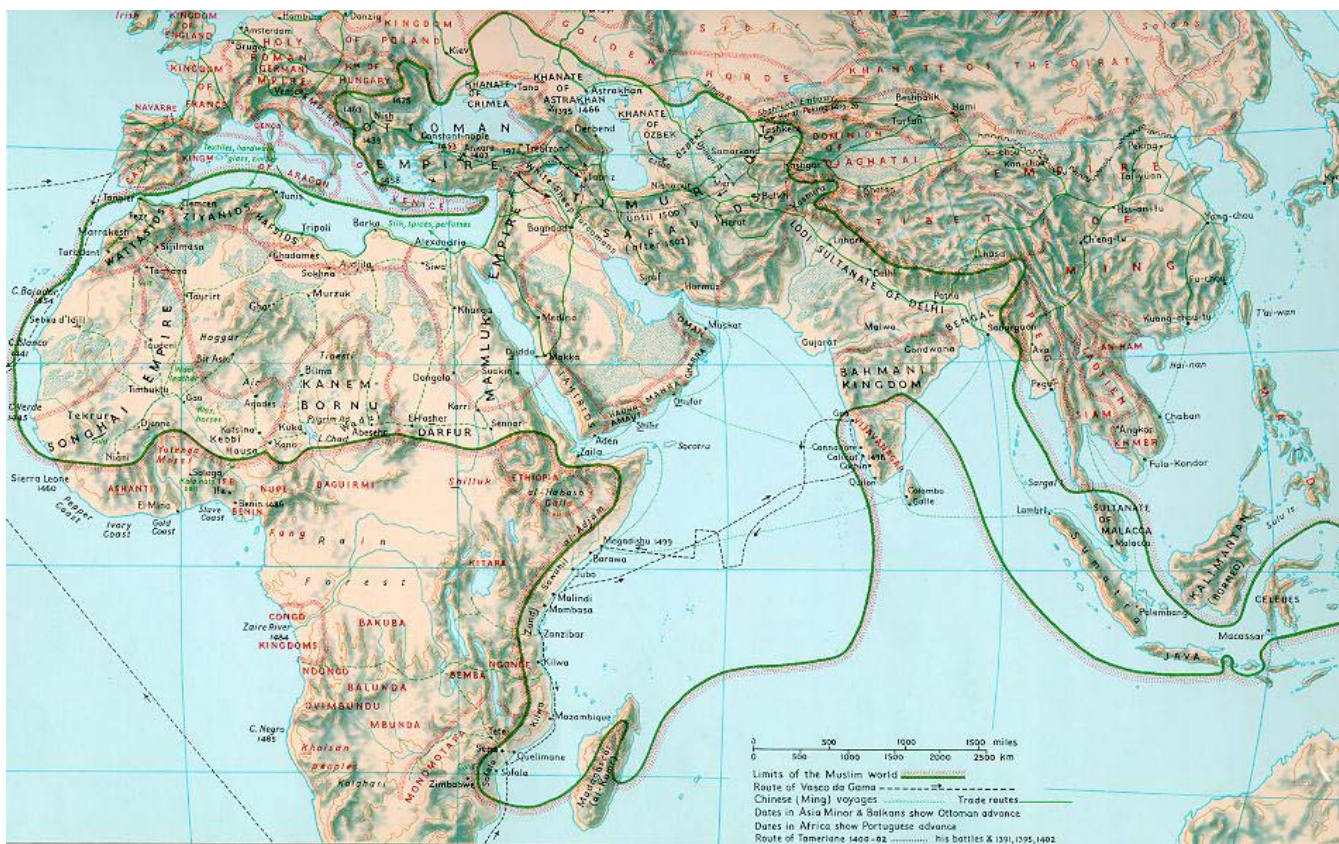
### A Brief Note about Islam

Islam is one of the world's major religions today, its adherents, numbering between 1.3 and 1.8 billion, reside in over 70 countries all across the globe. At root, the faith asserts its belief that Muhammad (570-632; also pronounced *Mohammed*) received revelations from God, and that these revelations were written down in the Qur'an (also pronounced *Koran*), the scripture that forms the basis of Muslim belief and identity.

The basic bi-partite credo of Islam is:

- a) There is no God but Allah;  
and,
- b) Muhammad is the messenger of God.

The term *Islam* derives from a root word meaning peace and submission, in other words, a Muslim is one who acquiesces in, or submits to, the will of God. A Muslim person tries to live his/her life according to the teachings and the spirituality of the Prophet Muhammad, whose essential message is considered as one of God consciousness (*taqwa*) and service to the rest of creation.



Map of the Islamic World, ca. 1500

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### Music in Islam

Music and musicians play a vital role throughout the Muslim world. From Indonesia, through South and Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, music serves not only as entertainment for various Muslim communities, but also as a way to express devotion and reinforce common values and traditions. Whether bringing listeners closer to Allah, sustaining cultural memory through epic tales, or strengthening the bonds of community through festivity and celebration, musicians are central to the cultural life of Muslims throughout the world.

The Sufi and other esoteric traditions of Islam manifest their beliefs through diverse forms of devotion ranging from ecstatic movements in dance to meditative exercises in quiet solitude. These acts of devotion seek the promise of enlightenment which offers a divinely-graced vision, moral clarity and all encompassing love. Enlightenment in these esoteric traditions speaks of a dissolution of the very self in a union with the divine that words cannot easily convey and thus music, poetry and dance become critical forms of expression.

- from the program notes to the Ismaili musical presentation in 2007 called, *A Mystical Journey*.

### Devotional Music

1. **Adhan** - the call to prayer.
2. **Salat** - cantillations of daily prayers;
3. **Recitation of the Qur'an** - modes and melodies (*qirat*) utilized to recite holy scripture;
4. **Nasheed** - devotional songs, traditionally sung without instrumental accompaniment, or sometimes with the accompaniment of percussion instruments only.
5. **Music for Public Religious Celebrations** - known by various names, and connected with various events on the Islamic calendar, such as:
  - *Mawlid* (for the birthday of Muhammad);
  - *Ta'zieh* (a Shia celebration in honour of Imam Hussein);
  - *Manzuma* (Ethiopian songs with a moral lesson);
  - *Madih Nabawi* (Arabic hymns praising the prophet Mohammed).

### Sufi music

1. **Zikr** - the repetition of the attributes and remembrance of God. Can be a capella or involve instrumental accompaniment. Some sufi orders include the rhythmic movement of whirling dervishes.

"Another effect of this repetition is that the word is reflected upon the universal Spirit, and the universal mechanism then begins to repeat it automatically. In other words what man repeats, God then begins to repeat, until it is materialized and has become a reality in all planes of existence."

- Hazrat Inayat Khan - *Suggestions by Word and Voice*, Summer 1926

2. **Devotional songs**, which are not strictly part of a worship service, are often performed in public. These concerts have acquired various forms in various Muslim countries, and are called by various names, such as:
- a. Mehfil-e-Sama (Turkey)
  - b. Qawwali (India and Pakistan)

### Islam and Music

Within contemporary Muslim societies, there is occasional debate concerning the role of music in a Muslim's life and in expressing spirituality. Though music has always been cultivated in one form or another in a variety of Muslim traditions, the debate still lingers on. The reader who wishes to do more research into the matter can begin with the bibliography below.

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### **The Lil'wat Nation**

The **Lil'wat Nation** or the **Mount Currie Indian Band**, is located in the southern Coast Mountains region of British Columbia. It is a member of the Lillooet Tribal Council, which is the largest grouping of band governments of the Stl'at'ímc people (aka the Lillooet people).

"Lil'wat", which is the origin of the post-colonial name for all St'at'ímc peoples (aka the Lillooet people), is from a St'at'ímcets word referring to a variety of wild onion, one of the local indigenous food staples. The name became applied to the town that is today's Lillooet in 1860, when the population of the town petitioned the chiefs of what are now the Upper St'at'ímc and the Lil'wat for the right to use the name, which was viewed as more harmonious than the town's former name of Cayoosh Flat.

- quoted from the citation on Wikipedia: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

### **Lilloet Music**

by Russell Wallace

What is Salish\* music? We can look at music as being an extension of the culture, language and environment. Salish singing and dancing is drawn from the earth. The reason is, and this is pointed out in most of the creation stories, Salish people come from the earth, and emerge from the dark waters. This is where the voice and the dance come from, the song's resonance comes from the chest and the dance, especially the men's dance forms, is low and close to the earth. In the Lil'wat language, the word for aboriginal people is "uxwam'meequa" (sic) which literally means "people of the earth". This is how we define ourselves and other aboriginal groups.

Landscape plays an important role in the way songs are composed. On the coast you see mostly water and really have no need to interact with the mountains for sustenance. The songs would be low in key and would not venture very far from the initial note. However, inland you have many mountains and you would choose places to live that are high enough to see any travelers coming and must travel over them to trade or to gather the necessary foods for survival. The songs for the interior people should then begin high and work their way down in pitch. This is an oversimplification of course but it does apply to a lot of traditional Lil'wat songs.

The forms of the songs can differ in each cultural group. There is a lot of repetition and concentration on melodic (rather than harmonic) forms to carry a song, however there can be parallel harmonies associated with a song. The harmony is usually assigned by gender, the women would sing a part that is higher in pitch than the melody but runs parallel to it. There are a lot of vocables (words that have no specific meaning but are a major part of the singing, each cultural group has them and they are different from coast to coast). Vocables are generally made up of vowels that play a significant part of the given language. An elder once said that the creator likes vowels because they make a good a sound and they can make a song come to life through the voice.

\* Salish is a large language group that includes Lillooet (aka St'at'ímcets)

### **Gatherings**

a composition by Hussein Janmohamed and Russell Wallace

#### **Background**

As Canadians in a global environment, we are faced on a daily basis with achieving a society that engages in a truly pluralistic process, continuously exploring and synthesizing new ways of thinking about peace, harmony and co-operation among peoples. As we work towards building healthy communities and

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unified societies, we acknowledge the need to unify communities in a way that allows individuals and communities to be proud of, nurture and cultivate their own unique difference and expression, while fostering knowledge and understanding of others' based on a shared universal humanistic value system.

Canada has a long history of diversity. Even before contact with Europe, the lands which we call Canada had many different voices and expressions. Aboriginal people, although separated by geography, language and traditions, have a strong connection with environment and this is how we recognize each other. In my language (Statl'imx of the Salish group of languages) we identify ourselves and other aboriginal cultural groups as "uxwam'meequa" (sic), which translates literally to "people from the earth."

**"O humankind We [God] have created you male and female, and made you into communities and tribes, so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest amongst you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing of you. God is All-knowing and All-Aware." (Quran 49:13)**

Similarly, the Muslim Ummah (community) is diverse in its interpretation of the faith and is spread across the world resulting in diverse cultural expressions separated by geography, language and traditions. However, as the above verse from the Qur'an suggests, "the divine purpose underlying human diversity is to foster knowledge and understanding, to promote harmony and co-operation among peoples," and to "envisage a world in which people, regardless of their differences, are united by their devotion to God <sup>1</sup>."

Therefore, it seemed fitting that since Canada itself is also built on many indigenous and immigrant voices, that there be new choral works that bring together and enable expression of these diverse voices through song. As communities of people join in singing, they learn how to listen, how to blend, how to work together to create harmony. The richness of the sound, the beauty of the full complement of vocal lines resonating together becomes a metaphor for a willingness to respect, understand and celebrate cultural, personal and political difference as well as to cultivate and sanctify human relationships reflecting the oneness (unity) of the universal spirit. Enlarging our view of and learning more about the diverse global community, also inspires new and meaningful ways to connect our own authentic expressions with our contemporary Canadian experience.

### **The Composition**

Russell Wallace and Hussein Janmohamed bring together their equally diverse/pluralistic cultural heritages and life experiences in this new choral work. The work focuses on shared values communicated and represented through musical expressions, ideas and concepts inspired by and drawn from their own cultures. Musical material includes a slow introduction (evoking a call to gathering, call to prayer, or Alaap in the Indian music tradition), chant like recitation evoking ceremonial songs, repetition of key words or phrases (evoking a Zikr or remembrance rooted in Sufi traditions), simple melodic and rhythmic figures, call and response figures (common modes of expression evoking leadership, guidance, respect of elders), layering of sounds and harmony (evoking a sense of growth, strong roots, new experiences), all brought together in a Western choral music context.

The piece uses common structures and forms found in musical expressions that connect both Russell and Hussein to their communities and peoples. An example is the call to prayer or invitation to gathering for an important event – for a common purpose. This is the springboard for the composition. The title, *Gatherings*, and the form of the piece reflect elements of social and ceremonial gatherings in both Russell and Hussein's communities. Eg. Call to Gather, Pronouncement and Giving Thanks, Celebration/Feasting, Goodbye, Giving thanks, Reflection.

<sup>1</sup> Asani, Ali S. "On Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Quran." *The American Scholar*. Volume 71, no. 1 (winter 2002), pp. 52-60.

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The bridging and unifying of these musical ideas allows the composers to explore a synthesis of music that is a representation of a truly Canadian voice and a new contemporary expression of their identities without compromising the integrity of either composer's unique background, and expression. The new work embodies a richness of harmony and texture that results from the unification of traditions and peoples, and aims to be a catalyst for understanding how individuals and communities can be better versions of themselves through interactions with other peoples and nations.

This composition, therefore, acknowledges the consonance of the pluralism that is at the very heart of who each composer is, and aims to provide an appropriate and relevant contemporary expression that also “resonates in the Canadian collective consciousness.”

### **Islamic Choral Music**

by Hussein Janmohamed

Increased contact between peoples in a global environment makes it necessary for individuals and communities to engage in pluralistic processes to honor and nurture multi-layered experiences, while fostering harmonious dialogue. Growing up as a South Asian Ismaili Muslim in Western Canada compelled me to find ways to reconcile my own unique experiences – the Canadian with the Muslim for example – and bridge them with the experiences of others. Gratefully, choral music emerged as a unifying medium. The feelings of community, unity and spiritual connection evoked through choral music aligned with similar feelings during congregational recitation of *Ginans* (a tradition of religious poetry amongst Ismailis) and *Zikr* (remembrance).

This awareness eventually dovetailed into VIMYC's (Vancouver Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir) exploration and inquiry into how to give voice to the spirit of our culturally diverse Canadian Ismaili Muslim community. Would we sing folk, popular and social songs or would we also include devotional music rooted in our heritage? Did 'Islamic Choral Music' exist? What would that mean? Would that even be possible? Would we simply add harmony or the layering of multiple vocal lines onto a *Ginan* or *Zikr*? Or would we need to create new spiritually inspired compositions? What would be acceptable and appropriate? How would the elders respond? These and many other questions, often complex and challenging, opened up transformative pathways to navigate the expression of our cultural traditions through choral music.

As we traversed these pathways, we became aware of how the multiple vocal parts were metaphors for individuals and communities working together to honor, understand, and celebrate differences; and how the musical harmonies resonated a spirit of unity, brotherhood, and connection integral to our shared humanistic value system. Our broadened views of a diverse community inspired new and meaningful ways to bridge unique cultural expressions with a contemporary global experience – and essentially, helped us to access the depths of the human spirit.

**“Whatever its vernacular forms, the language of art, more so when it is spiritually inspired, can be a positive barrier-transcending medium of discourse, manifesting the depths of the human spirit.”**

– His Highness the Aga Khan (London, October 19, 2003)

## Islamic Choral Music & Aboriginal Music - study materials

### TEXT TRANSLATIONS AND PRONUNCIATIONS

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#### Multi-faith Chant I

*Allahu Allah*  
[ʌ:l:lahu] [ʌ:l:lah]

---Allah, Allah

*Shalom*  
[ʃalom]

---Peace

*Amen*  
[amen]

---“Truly”/May it be so

*a ni na, a ni a ni a*  
[æ] [ni] [na] [æ] [ni] [æ] [ni] [na]

---Vocables...Aboriginal roots...excerpted from  
“Journey” composition by local singer Russell  
Wallace

#### **Music Master**

You that love lovers,  
this is your home. Welcome!

In the midst of making form, love  
made this form that melts form,  
with love for the door,  
soul the vestibule

Watch the dust grains moving  
in the light near the window.

Their dance is our dance.

We rarely hear the inward music,  
but we're all dancing to it nevertheless,

directed by the one who teaches us,  
the pure joy of the sun,  
our music master.

---Jelaluddin Balkhi'(Rumi)

#### Multi-faith Chant II

*Aum mane padme hum*  
[om] [manɛ] [padmɛ] [hum]

---Sanskrit for "Aum, the jewel is in the lotus."  
This phrase refers to the true reality that is  
revealed when, through meditation and right  
living, the veil of *Maya* (illusion) is stripped  
away.

*La Ilaha Illallahu*  
[la] [ilaha] [il:l:lahu]

---There is no Diety but Allah

*Shalom, Shanti*  
[ʃalom] [ʃanti]

---Peace, Peace/Tranquillity

*Gloria In Excelsis Deo*  
[glɔria] [in] [ɛkʃɛlsis] [deɔ]

---Glory be to God on high

#### Rest for a Soul

*Allahumma salli aala*  
[ʌ:l:lahum:ma] [sʌli] [aala]

---O Allah, (send your) blessings on

*Muhammad(in) wa aali Muhammad*  
[mum:mʌdɪn] [wa] [aali] [muhʌm:mʌd]

Muhammad and progeny of Muhammad

*Dona Nobis Pacem*  
[dɔna] [nobis] [patʃɛm]

---Grant Us Peace

## *Islamic Choral Music & Aboriginal Music* - study materials

### **Selected Bibliography**

**Jenkins, Jean and Olsen, Poul Rovsing** (1976). *Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam*. World of Islam Festival. ISBN 0-905035-11-9.

**Habib Hassan Touma** (1996). *The Music of the Arabs*, trans. Laurie Schwartz. Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press. ISBN 0-931340-88-8.

**Shiloah, Amnon** (1995). *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-cultural study*. Wayne State University Press. Detroit. ISBN 0-8143-2589-0

**Stuart, Wendy** (1972). *Gambling Music of the Coast Salish Indians*. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Ethnology Division.

**Schimmel, Annemarie** (1992). *Islam: An Introduction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. ISBN 0-7914-1328-4

### **Internet Resource pages**

- Wikipedia: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

- Islamic Music: [www.muhababah.com/music](http://www.muhababah.com/music)

- Lil'wat Music Group - Tzo'kam: [www.knowledge-weaver.net/Tzokam/index](http://www.knowledge-weaver.net/Tzokam/index)  
(or just google Tzo'kam; this group includes composer/performer Russell Wallace)

- Orchestration materials on some Arabic instruments: [www.vi-co.org](http://www.vi-co.org) (the VICO website)

### **Scores - Islamic Choral and Aboriginal**

#### **Gatherings**

by Hussein Janmohamed and Russell Wallace  
(Available from the composers)

#### **Rest for a Soul**

Arr. Hussein Janmohamed

#### **Translink Inspiration** (A Multifaith Chant)

Arr. Mehnaz Thawer

#### **Mombasa Matatu Meditation**

by Hussein Janmohamed

#### **Kader kiç**

by Bern Herbolsheimer

#### **Prière**

by Ton de Leeuw

#### **Twelve Qur'anic visions**

by Eric Banks

### **Discography of Russell Wallace**

**Hearts for the Nations** - Aboriginal Women's Voices in the Studio 1997 - Recording Producer

**It'em** - Tzo'kam - Performer/Composer/Producer

**Journeys** - Tzo'kam - Performer/Composer/Producer

**Chinook Winds** - Aboriginal Dance Program - Composer/Producer

**Through the Cracks** - Performer/Composer/Producer

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### General Note

The foregoing materials are being made available to attendees of the educational series, **Music of the Whole World**, produced by the Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra (VICO) and presented at the Vancouver Public Library. The presentation, **Islamic Choral Music and Aboriginal Music: Unique Bridges**, with Hussein Janmohamed, was presented on December 5, 2007 at the Vancouver Public Library.

### Inter-cultural Orchestration Materials

These materials form part of a larger work in progress (as of 2007) entitled *Orchestrating the World - a Manual of Inter-cultural Music Making* by Moshe Denburg. Portions of this work are available for downloading on the VICO website. To download this study guide and others, go to:

[www.vi-co.org](http://www.vi-co.org) and click on 'Study Guides'

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Comments, feedback, suggestions? Please let us know at: [info@vi-co.org](mailto:info@vi-co.org)  
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### ***Bismillah Raven***

- About the artwork by Sherazad Jamal on the front page

This piece came out of an artist's residency called **Avaaz**, held at the Roundhouse Community Center in Vancouver, April 2003. **Avaaz** or Voice is a significant component of any kind of human expression, be it cultural or artistic. Our voices allow us to share our stories, our beliefs, our ideas, and our selves with each other. Without finding our voices we cannot be heard, cannot be known. The intent of the residency was to work with a group of young people from the Ismaili Muslim community to give visual expression to their voices through a process of sharing and art making between two cultural approaches to Voice: that of the Squamish Nation and the Ismaili Muslims. **Bismillah Raven** represents the coming together of two cultures, two belief systems, two ways of art making. In the Squamish tradition, Raven, a wise trickster who keeps human kind on their toes, represents the Creator. Raven is drawn abstractly in a distinct style using ovoids and colours found in the West Coast of Canada. In our traditions, Allah's voice is represented in calligraphy formed into geometric or abstract animal shapes. **Bismillah Raven** is Raven meets Allah, Squamish Nation meets Ismaili Muslim. And the meeting, so far, has been harmonious.

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