



## **Contesting the Performance of Pre-eminence**

**Friday 3 February, 2pm-6pm**

**Stewart House (Room ST274/5), 32 Russell Square, London WC1 B3**

A symposium sponsored by Royal Holloway's Humanities and Arts Research Centre, within this year's theme of "**Welcoming Strangers**". The event brings together scholars and creative practitioners in performance, music, and critical spatial practice, addressing movement around borders in Canada, Palestine, and the UK. Co-sponsored by the Institute of Musical Research, and the Centre for International Theatre and Performance Research.

Tea and Coffee will be provided for those registering by 31 January with [music@sas.ac.uk](mailto:music@sas.ac.uk)

PROGRAMME (scroll down for abstracts and information about speakers)

### **2.00 Introduction**

### **2.05 Performing walls, borders and checkpoints**

Annie Pfungst (Goldsmiths, University of London)  
Performing power: bodies and architectures of space in Palestine

Rachel Beckles Willson (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
On the borders of performance

Jonathan Holmes (Jericho House)  
The walls of Jericho

### **3.35 Tea/coffee**

### **4.00 Performance as a checkpoint**

Dylan Robinson (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
Inviting Strangers: the Inclusion of First Peoples in Canadian Art Music

Yara El-Ghadban (University of the Witwatersrand)  
Canon-making on a bed of ambivalence: Portraits from Montreal's contemporary Western art music scene

Alison Jeffers (University of Manchester)  
Hospitable stages and civil listening.

### **5.30 Final discussion**

**Annie Pfingst (Goldsmiths, University of London)**  
**Performing power: bodies and architectures of space in Palestine**

Palestinians encounter the assertions of sovereign power of Israel as a nation state in multiple ways every day - as they wait to be processed by soldiers protected by their military clothing and by the architecture and military zoning of the checkpoint; or walk in the shadow of the concrete panels of the Wall of separation; or watch as bulldozers tear out olive trees by their roots in the occupied territories; or stand to witness the demolition of the tents and animal shelters of the Bedouin in the Naqab and in the Jordan Valley. Applying a critical spatial practice and a visual eye to the materialized geographies of Palestine, the paper maps the ways in which bodies and architectures of space perform dispossession, territoriality and sovereignty, performances authorized by the discursive framing of Palestinians as strangers.

**Rachel Beckles Willson (Royal Holloway, University of London)**  
**On the borders of performance**

Since the Oslo Accords of 1993 European and U.S. musicians have been keen to present their work in the Palestine region, and have demonstrated particular interest in both collaborations and placings. Bringing together Israelis and Palestinians was seen as desirable, for instance, and choosing to perform in both Israel and Palestine remains common; Barenboim's taking the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra through Israeli checkpoints into Ramallah was an unusual move – but is notable because of its immense media impact.

As the Oslo process foundered, and distance between utopian performances and material realities became so painful, Palestinians came to challenge imported projects, sometimes through their own (musical) performances that reconfigured borders and place. So in my presentation I compare some of the ways that Europeans and Palestinians perform the borders through music. My suggestion will be that the differences can be illuminated by both post-structuralist theories of the simulacrum, and Jameson's thesis that the transnational distribution of culture is a new age of empire, namely the 'third great original expansion of capitalism around the globe' (1991).

**Jonathan Holmes (Jericho House)**  
**The walls of Jericho**

In September 2011 the UK theatre company Jericho House embarked on the first international tour of the Palestinian Territories to concentrate on found spaces rather than regular theatres. The production taken was Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This paper focusses on two early performances within that tour, occurring respectively on the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem and adjacent to the Israeli partition wall in the Aida refugee camp at Bethlehem.

**Dylan Robinson (Royal Holloway, University of London)**  
**Inviting Strangers: the Inclusion of First Peoples in Canadian Art Music**

This presentation examines the shift in late 20th century Canadian intercultural music composition from models that appropriate First Peoples' songs and stories, toward models that feature First Peoples themselves as soloists or transform them into members of chamber ensembles. Despite the move from appropriation to inclusion, such invitations for First Peoples to participate in art music have often resulted in sanitizing difference. Indeed, providing space for First Peoples in art music has some resonance with the history of the reservation

system in Canada. In response to such work, my presentation considers how intercultural work might be transformed from an invitation of strangers to an invitation of strangeness: the disjunction of witnessing the rough edges of difference and engaging in agonistic dialogue.

**Yara El-Ghadban (University of the Witwatersrand)**

**Canon-making on a bed of ambivalence: Portraits from Montreal's contemporary Western art music scene**

In the Canadian province of Québec, the public funding of contemporary Western art music rests mainly on the requirement to train future generations of musicians and composers. This criteria is designed, on the one hand, to remedy contemporary music's lack of public appeal, and on the other, to build a home-grown Western art music tradition from the ground up, in which today's young musicians and composers potentially become tomorrow's canonical figures, providing Québec with its own local repertory and national musical heritage. This strategy is part of a larger cultural policy that leans heavily on education as a form of nation-building. Indeed, Québec maintains a strong sovereignty movement which is, nevertheless, continually offset, in the public sphere, by a potent identity discourse of ambivalence and in-between-ness, resulting from its attachment, both to Europe as a former French colony, and to North America, as part of Canada.

Drawing on field research carried with members of the NEM, a contemporary music ensemble based in Montreal, and around the events of the International Forum for Young Composers, an international competition organized bi-annually by the same ensemble, I examine, in this paper, the impact of these policies and identity politics on those who have dedicated their lives to contemporary music. Their experiences lead me to argue that cultural policy that was developed to promote contemporary music has, paradoxically, contributed to its increasing marginalization by focusing on the production of the nation musically as opposed to performing it.

**Alison Jeffers (University of Manchester)**

**Hospitable stages and civil listening.**

Theatre projects with refugees and asylum seekers have been popular in the UK since the late 1990s and involving refugees in making and performing works based on their own stories and experiences is perceived to be a useful way to challenge negative stereotypes about refugees and asylum seekers. Alison will investigate this phenomenon as an act of offering a hospitable stage in order to question the role of the audience in this performance transaction. What are the implications for undertaking theatre with refugee groups if audiences remain conceptualised around the existing polarities of ignorance and knowledge? Is it possible to develop a more complex role for audiences in which the notion of civil listening can be developed?

## **About the speakers**

**Rachel Beckles Willson** is Reader in Music at Royal Holloway, University of London, where she is also Director of the MMus in Advanced Musical Studies. Her research on Eastern Europe and the sociology of western classical music has been published in two monographs, and over 20 book chapters and journal articles. Between 2008 and 2010 she was based at the Humboldt University in Berlin, supported by a Fellowship for Experienced Researchers from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation; during this period she wrote her forthcoming monograph,

'Orientalism and Musical Mission: The Case of Palestine'. Current interests include classical Ottoman traditions and the 'ud.

**Yara El-Ghadban** is a post-doctoral researcher in anthropology at Wits University and an ethnomusicologist, based in London. Music has been her gateway to reflecting on the politics of identity, otherness and mutuality in a postcolonial context riddled with violence. She worked on contemporary Palestinian music in diaspora and in Palestine, as well as on musicians from the global South trying to make it into the exclusive world of contemporary Western art music. Beyond music, since 2010, she has been following the reconstruction of the Nahr El-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, focusing on the biopolitics that are implicated in a project where national and international stake-holders, utopia and dystopia collide (and collude), crystallizing the ethical and political conundrums that have come to be associated with the Palestinian question.

**Jonathan Holmes** is the director and founder of Jericho House. In 2007 he wrote and directed the testimony play, Fallujah. In 2008 with The Sixteen he revived Henze & Bond's opera Orpheus Behind the Wire at the South Bank Centre, and in 2009 his testimony play Katrina, about New Orleans and produced in association with the Young Vic, sold out for a month in a warehouse in Southwark. In 2010 his documentary feature film, Perpetual Peace, was premiered at the South Africa International Film Festival. He also wrote the libretto for the 2011 opera The Tongue of the Invisible by Liza Lim, (based on the poetry of Hafez) which premiered in Amsterdam and Koln, and was consultant on Freedom Studios' site-specific project The Mill, in Bradford. Jonathan has a Ph.D from The Shakespeare Institute and for six years he taught Drama and English at Royal Holloway, University of London, publishing many articles and two books on Renaissance poetics while there. In 2005 he recovered and premiered several songs by John Donne at St. Paul's Cathedral, where they were performed by Dame Emma Kirkby, The Sixteen, and Carolyn Sampson.

**Alison Jeffers** has been researching the subject of theatre and performance by and about refugees and asylum seekers since 2004 and her book *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis* was published in 2011. She is a lecturer in applied theatre and contemporary performance at the University of Manchester.

**Annie Pfingst** brings an inter-disciplinary and critical spatial, academic and visual practice to encounters with the geographies of colonial territoriality and the enactment of sovereign power. She has researched, written and exhibited in Australia, the UK, Indonesia, Europe, and in Palestine-Israel. In late 2010, she was awarded a doctorate by the University of Technology, Sydney for her dissertation – *Erasure, Enclosure, Excision: Framing Palestinian Return* in which she mapped the unfolding cartography of Israeli practices across the geography of historic Palestine from 1948 to the present.

**Dylan Robinson** is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London, where he is part of the Indigeneity in the Contemporary World project. Dylan has previously held positions as a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, and at the University of California Berkeley as a John A. Sproul Research Fellow in Canadian Studies. He is the co-editor of *Opera Indigene* (Ashgate, 2011). His current research on "The Aesthetics of Reconciliation in Canada" examines the role that the arts play in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as how the politics of sensation embedded in material, aural, kinetic and haptic modes of expression enact symbolic forms reconciliation.