



Curatorial > INTERRUPTIONS

This section proposes a line of programmes devoted to exploring the complex map of sound art from different points of view organised in curatorial series.

With **INTERRUPTIONS** we make the most of the vast musical knowledge of the artists and curators involved in the **Ràdio Web MACBA** project, to create a series of 'breaks' or 'interruptions' in our Curatorial programming. In à-la-carte-music format, our regular curators have carte blanche to create a purely musical experience with only one guiding parameter: the thread that runs through each session must be original and surprising. In *Radio Maghreb* Alan Bishop mixes AM and FM radio emissions, field recordings and other sources to create a radio collage work.

Curated by Alan Bishop

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As a founding member of outsider music/performance megalith Sun City Girls, Alan Bishop has performed on and/or produced dozens of critically acclaimed recordings over the past three decades. Owner of Abduction Records since 1993, he also runs Sublime Frequencies, a label started in 2003 to expose great lost treasures of sound, ceremony, and experiences from under-appreciated musical legacies across the world. Other creations of his consist of radio collage, folk cinema, odd performance characters, and various writings.

INTERRUPTIONS #10

Radio Maghreb

In this project Alan Bishop vindicates the use of radio as an electronic instrument in a journey through time and space that unearths old recordings from the AM and FM airwaves made during his first trip to Spain and Morocco in 1983.

01. Summary

It all began for me in Saginaw, Michigan, where radio was the primary portal to instantaneous information in the world. A decade before satellite TV emerged and approximately thirty years before the internet transformed the way people receive their news and entertainment, my father bought me a cheap portable radio with shortwave, weather, police, and AM/FM bands. I was nine years old. I had other radios to listen to, but this one was different. It offered me more than the standard AM medium-wave frequencies which dominated the device in the sixties (FM was insignificant at the time). I was captivated with the possibilities of shortwave reception and so began my obsession with the radio. For me it was an explosive, vital source of an almost endless variety of sounds. Combine this fact with the ever-changing reception possibilities of geographic movement and it could be argued that the radio is the most unique and resourceful electronic sound instrument ever devised. By 1980, I was experimenting with sound collage, utilizing snippets of television and radio sounds incorporated with my original music and field recordings.

In May of 1983, I traveled to Marbella, Spain, with my brother and a friend. The plan was to spend a few weeks in a flat owned by a cousin and then move south to Morocco. We spent the days busking the streets with guitars to support our food and drink. In the evenings I would scan the local radio. I began to record snippets of music from Radio Tangier International from Morocco, which I was receiving in Spain on a portable cassette radio recorder. The variety of music they were programming was astounding: jazz and be-bop, Egyptian and Lebanese orchestral classics, Moroccan folk music, Indian film soundtracks, late sixties psychedelic rock, French chanteuse, etc. I had never heard anything so diverse transmitting from one source. After recording selected songs, I began capturing the commercials, bumper music spots, station IDs and news broadcasts. This process continued as I crossed the strait of Gibraltar and landed in Morocco where I spent the next two months.

Listening to local radio stations is a logical and effective way to immediately tap into the possibilities of what music styles exist in a country or region. My original intention of recording radio was to capture a snippet of a song so that I could play it for a clerk at a local record store to find out the artist name and song title and then purchase that album or cassette. As I began to record radio segments consecutively onto cassette, I noticed there was a strange, yet beautiful and informal sound collage being formed. Then I began manipulating the radio for this effect intentionally. My aim was to create audio collage in real time, although I eventually became quite adept at editing segments together (*Radio Algeria* has more than 70 cuts, *Radio Sumatra* over 100 edits). *Radio Morocco* was the first collage I assembled in the regional/national radio source format. After recording many hours of meticulously selected audio, I simply sequenced my favorite segments together to form an hour long mix which I felt represented the most satisfying listening experience for me. I had no idea that, 21 years later, it would become the first commercially released locale-specific radio collage. I employed a combination of AM, FM and shortwave broadcasts which featured everything from local Berber music to popular Moroccan and Egyptian songs and international news stations like the BBC, Radio France, and Radio China.

Although I had little knowledge of Arabic or local languages, I found this supposed disadvantage as more of a refreshing new outlook on my perception of



[Alan Bishop. Photo: Olgu Aytac]

sound. Many people tend to disagree, yet I stand by my observations and experience that not understanding the syntax of a language can be an advantage when exploring forms of sound within the context of song and voice. New interpretations and designs of the language of sound have a subconscious effect and inspire more diverse thoughts for me than the utilitarian perceptions that familiar words can trigger. The abstract takes over and language becomes mood and feel instead of definitive communication. Some of the most interesting lyrics I have written came from spending hours listening to Thai vocalists and picking out the words and phrases that resemble English, which I would write down consecutively creating a narrative that I feel worked better for me than, say, the random Burroughs/Gysin cut-up technique. A similar phenomenon was happening in reverse. Most Moroccans I met were not familiar enough with English to be able to recognize, understand or pronounce the correct lyrics to a Bob Marley or Michael Jackson song, yet they would sing the song in their own made-up language in a shameless and honest emotional manner. The point: music is alive on multiple levels, and the original lyrics or language are not enough of an obstacle to stand in the way of feeling the beauty, power, and energy of the song as a whole.

Mine is not an academic approach and this is not by design, but a result of practical experience. Accidentally, the radio collage concept has created an aesthetic and ethical dialogue amidst some adventurous music aficionados and ethnomusicologists in Europe and America over the past few years. Political correctness has changed the way people use language. The term *exotica* (which I've always utilized) has all but disappeared from use as a description for music from foreign atmospheres, yet it serves a purpose from all perspectives. For example, what may be exotic to a Moroccan is the music of Frank Sinatra or Bob Seger, and I have no problem with that either. Literal, descriptive terminology and method of presentation seem to be of greater interest to music critics today than the music or sound itself. This is unfortunate and I have my own ideas as to why this has occurred but I will not entertain this topic at length here. My primary concern and passion is the music as sound itself, and the descriptive elements that happen to surround the presentation are much less significant. Sound as a pure form has supreme power in comparison to the presentation of it (regardless of who presents it), and this is what I will always be most concerned with. And do I feel the need to identify every source of sound I have assembled into a collage? No. I present the audio as it was revealed to me. The identification of the sound is as evident as I received it, directly passing my experience on to the listener. I do not feel a responsibility or obligation to organize or re-contextualize the material for others.

And to be completely transparent and sincere, misinterpretation can be a positive and revelatory dynamic which often leads to new avenues of thought. Various pockets within academia suggest that certain and/or partial interpretation and presentation of phenomenon (in this case we are speaking of phenomenon as music from beyond the West) is wrong or improper, can be disrespectful, racist, or damaging. I suppose this could be argued as a reasonable and valid viewpoint in some circumstances, yet it remains a perspective, and in fact, all interpretation becomes partial when a human agent intervenes, so the idea of an unbiased or total presentation is null and void from its very conception. But like most things academic, exclusivity and protocol become enforced thought and reason, sold by large institutional mechanisms which have the supreme power to intimidate human perceptions to a degree that the rest of us can only dream of. This by no means renders them correct or valid, just more visible and influential, resulting in varying degrees of social engineering by default (if not by design). So, in essence, I ignore the rules of academia and the exclusivity it adheres to and proceed with my own methods learned from experience and guided by intuition and the often underrated but crucial faculty of humor. Academic institutions lack a sense of humor. There is not much to smile about behind bars, especially when there is tenure to secure. I would also argue the idea that listening to or presenting music from beyond the West is a political act. Am I creating a political statement if I eat Syrian, Cambodian, or North Korean food? If I owned and operated an Iraqi restaurant (as a non-Iraqi) and therefore presented Iraqi food to the public, would that be a political statement? Is there a correct way to present Iraqi food to the public?

After working on and eventually releasing many radio collage sequences from the Middle East, India, and South East Asia over the ensuing 22 years, I returned to



the Maghreb in 2005 to work on *Radio Algeria*. The Algerian national radio station has a massive presence in multiple forms on both AM and FM. As is the case worldwide, FM stations are numerous and offer mostly musical programming, whereas AM has been relegated to news, talk, sports, and religion. Moroccan, Spanish, and French stations were competing for frequency space as was a network from the Canary Islands. Oran has a smaller radio selection as does the central mountainous region. The amount of Algerian music styles offered locally was astounding: modern and classic raï, traditional guesba, Khabyale pop, cliché Arabic and Algerian pop and heavy rock, Saharawi songs from the Polisario camps in the south, as well as various Saharan styles of Tuareg and hybrid folk music. Combined with Andalusian and French-styled popular songs, there were many areas to explore. On shortwave I was able to receive local stations from the coastal East of the country, the southern desert, and from bordering Saharan nations like Mali, Niger, and Libya, although I decided not to include any of this material in the final mix. The playlist accompanying this text consists of re-sequenced excerpts from *Radio Morocco* and *Radio Algeria*.

I will continue to champion the radio as the greatest electronic sound instrument ever made. As a device for composition and experimentation, it is a limitless resource. The idea of locale-specific radio collage is something that should have been created and presented by others throughout the history of the device. Perhaps some examples of this exist somewhere and are waiting to be discovered in an existing archive or on old tapes buried in a basement or attic. I would love to listen to hours and hours of radio recordings from the developing nations in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Radio recording and collage has always been a personal hobby for me, something that was never intended to be released publicly. Fortunately I've been able to share these personal experiments with a larger audience.

Alan Bishop, December 2011

02. Playlist

Radio Tangier International (Morocco)

Field recording introduction; Radio Tangier theme from 1983; Berber folk music variations; excerpt from Abdel Halim Hafez' 'Maoud'.

Chante du Tamri (Morocco)

Collage of AM segments featuring Arabic, Spanish and French Music, DJ announcements.

Disco Maghreb (Algeria)

Intro bumper; guitar raï from the seventies; Oran (Cheb Zergui); Modern Algerian pop.

Radio International (Algeria)

Seventies Algerian raï rock (Cheb Khaled); Radio IDs; Algerian rock.

Saharan Music (Algeria)

Sahel blues folk music, indigenous music, radio bumper and commercial, Modern Algerian pop; Andalusian folk music – used as recurring radio theme.

Radio Marrakesh (Morocco)

Moroccan folk classical; French-Arabic Music; classic Arabic instrumental popular music; Berber music; Lebanese pop.

Radio Algiers (Algeria)

Radio Bumper spots; French pop music; Algerian radio theme.

The Color of Frequency (Morocco)

Collage of AM mono excerpts panned in stereo; Berber music; classic Lebanese pop; Moroccan pop; imam Koran; Lebanese pop (Taroub); indigenous music.



Collage Ornamental (Algeria)

Radio ID; Algerian folk pop; DJ announcement; Andalusian music; commercial; indigenous music.

The Fading of Fidelity (Algeria)

Brief commercial; Algerian National Anthem; Algerian folk song phased from stereo FM to mono AM. The intro to this track was recorded from FM before the tape ended yet I recorded most of the song (after I recognized the intro) from AM, therefore I was able to complete the song by merging both partial recordings.

Radio Essaouira (Morocco)

Radio DJ; Oud interlude; Radio Tangier theme #2 with DJ; indigenous folk music; field recording finale.

03. Related links

Sublime Frequencies

www.sublimefrequencies.com

Abduction Records

www.suncitygirls.com/abduction/

'No Sleep till Beirut: A conversation with ALAN BISHOP', by Brandon Stosuy (2005)

www.arthurmag.com/2010/10/25/no-sleep-till-beirut-a-conversation-with-alan-bishop-by-brandon-stosuy/

Sublime Frequencies' Ethnopsychedellic Montages, an article by Marcus Boon

www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/musicandnoise/ethnopsyche

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH... Sublime Frequencies podcast

rwm.macba.cat/en/extra/memorabilia_sublime_frequencies/capsula

04. Credits

Curated and produced by Alan Bishop.

05. Acknowledgments

Thanks to Mark Gergis.

06. Copyright note

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