



SADIE HARRISON Finzi Trust Scholarship Report August 2016

COLLABORATION WITH THE AFGHANISTAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC: A new work for the Afghanistan Women's Orchestra 'Zohra'

Since 2013 I have been working closely with the Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul, as their Composer-in-Association, (the first westerner and only woman ever to be afforded such a privilege). ANIM provides a dynamic, challenging, and safe learning environment for all students regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religious sect, or socio-economic circumstances. The school focuses especially on supporting the most disadvantaged children in Afghanistan – orphans, street-working vendors and girls.

The Head of ANIM, Dr. Ahmad Sarmast writes: *'Given the tragic damage done to Afghanistan's musical culture across many decades of war, it is my strong belief that the efforts to rebuild and revitalize Afghan music into a strong cultural voice needs to focus on those who will be our future musicians: the children and youth of Afghanistan. The Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM,) which I founded in 2010 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, is doing exactly that. Through investing in young musicians, we are not only sowing the seeds for long-term and sustainable growth in the music and culture sectors of Afghanistan but also repairing and honoring the musical heritage that is dear to the heart of every Afghan.*

Since its inauguration, ANIM has risen to become known both locally and internationally as the most important, effective, and successful music education institution leading intercultural dialogue in Afghanistan and the region. Through its growth and progress, ANIM has proven that the role of music education is vital in rebuilding a war-torn country and contributing to the establishment of a just and civil society. ANIM is committed to ensuring the musical rights of Afghan children,

promoting musical diversity in Afghanistan, transcending cultural ethnic, religious, and gender barriers, and transforming the lives of Afghan children through its many programs.'

I have written several small-scale chamber pieces for the students, all based on the country's extraordinarily varied and vibrant traditional musics. As part of an ongoing collaboration (entitled *Gulistan-e Nur: The Rosegarden of Light Project*) between ANIM, myself and the US ensemble Cuatro Puntos, several of these pieces (recorded to video by ANIM's Girl's Ensemble) have been toured across the USA (September 2015) and Europe in May-June 2016 (UK, Germany and The Netherlands). The Tours were generously supported by grants from Arts Council England, RVW Trust, Hinrichsen Foundation, the Ambache Charitable Foundation, New Music USA and a PRSF Women Make Music Award, these being a reflection of the unique nature of the work we were undertaking. Further details about *The Rosegarden of Light Project* can be found at www.sadieharrisoncomposer.co.uk and www.uymp.co.uk there is a longer article about how I became involved with the music of Afghanistan at <http://britishmusiccollection.org.uk/article/collaborating-afghanistan-national-institute-music-sadie-harrison>.

Following the success of *The Rosegarden*, the Head of ANIM, Dr. Ahmad Sarmast, initially requested that I write an orchestral piece for the Afghanistan National Youth Orchestra. However, the brief changed over the weeks as the Afghanistan Women's Orchestra 'Zohra' grew in size and profile with the prospect of tours to Europe and the USA in 2017. On ANIM's website, the AWO is described as *'the first of its kind in the country. It consists of over thirty female students from grades 6 – 12. Led by young female conducting students who are the first female conductors in the country's history, this ensemble is an important step in providing opportunities for female musicians to unite in solidarity, deepen their commitment to music, and develop their skills as collaborative musicians. Additionally, the AWO has strengthened female students' motivation in practicing and has inspired the youngest girls at ANIM to work hard in order to join the ensemble when they are old enough. The AWO is prominently featured on the album "The Rosegarden of Light," released internationally on Toccata Classics and Naxos in 2016. Via this album, the AWO has been heard in radio and online broadcasts all across the world. The young female conductors are overseen by Mr. Kevin Bishop.'*



Plans for the European and US tours are now well underway and I am absolutely thrilled that my new work *Sapida-Dam-Nau (New Dawn)* will be premiered at the Closing Concert of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland on 18 January 2017 in collaboration with the Orchestre de College, conducted by Kevin Bishop. Further performances will take place through January and February 2017 at the International College in Geneva, the University of Music Franz Liszt in Weimar, also in Berlin and at Goldsmiths, London.

The process of writing *Sapida-Dam-Nau* began with really understanding what ANIM required. From the outset (and in stark contrast to the processes undertaken in my earlier Afghan-inspired works) I was not concerned about the musical politics that might be at play here. There has been a great deal of debate about why ANIM should place such importance on understanding and playing western repertoire alongside their own culture's music. Whilst I have entered into that debate several times with both myself and others in the past, I did not intend *Sapida-Dam-Nau* to be an expression of any political currency at the point of composition. I simply wanted to write a piece that the girls could play well regardless of whether they were beginners or more advanced in ability in a style that would challenge their ears a little more than usual, whilst also being a work that they might enjoy performing.

My brief was musically challenging. Currently, nearly all of the orchestral pieces played at ANIM are arrangements of Afghan tunes or western classical and romantic pieces. I was asked to write something completely new, something modern and certainly not an arrangement of traditional songs and dances as I had done previously. Much of my initial thought was given over to finding a 'sound' and a 'language' that could effectively convey the unconventional orchestration with its mixture of traditional Afghan, North Indian and contemporary western timbres. The orchestra :

- 2 oboes
- 2 clarinets
- 1 trumpet
- 4 hands at one piano
- 4 percussionists (pitched/non-pitched)
- 5 violins
- 2 violas
- 3 celli
- 1 double bass
- tanburs
- ghichaks
- dilrubas
- sitars
- rubabs
- qashkarchas.

SAPIDA-DAM-NAU
NEW DAWN
 dedicated with admiration to the Afghanistan Women's Orchestra

John Neuman 2014

The image shows a page of a musical score for the piece 'Sapida-Dam-Nau (New Dawn)'. The score is written for a large ensemble, including various woodwinds, strings, and traditional Afghan instruments. The tempo is marked as '♩ = c.72 Balfai'. The score includes parts for Oboe I & II, Clarinet in Bb I & II, Trumpet in Bb, Snare, Qashkarcha, Dutar/Tanbur, Rubab, Piano (Player 1 & 2), Glockenspiel, Xylophone, Cymbals (left & right), Sax/Cymbal, Violin I & II, Viola, Violoncello I & II, and Contrabass. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various dynamics and articulation marks.

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I was not familiar with the playing techniques of all the instruments and internet research is generally unhelpful even at the most basic level where instrument identification is confusing partly through the multiplicity of region-specific spellings and also due to the huge variety of instruments within each type. Some instruments also have several names depending upon the area of the country in which they are traditionally played. With ANIM photographs in hand, I turned initially to husband and wife team Professor John Baily (Founder of the Afghan Music Unit in Goldsmiths, London) and Veronica Doubleday (Visiting Research Fellow at the AMU), UK-based specialists in Afghan music. They gave very generously of their time in Brighton and London



Prof. John Baily & Veronica Doubleday in discussion 2016.

familiarising me with the instruments. Although John primarily plays the dutar (a long-necked lute) the rubab, (Afghanistan's national instrument) he also has a large collection of traditional stringed instruments. (These can be seen at the bottom of the report. The photograph was taken in May 2016 when I was accompanied by cellist Allan Ballinger and violinist Aaron Packard during the Rosegarden of Light European Tour.) Veronica is a singer and daireh player.

Having confirmed which specific instruments at ANIM were being used, and researched their ranges and the conventions of their playing techniques, I began to think about the actual music and the overall character of the piece. Knowing that it would be premiered at the World Economic Forum's Closing Concert in Davos, with the AWO as a symbol of positivity and solidarity, I wanted the new work to be joyful and rousing to listen to. This, together with the unique sound of the ensemble's massed percussion, piano and harmonic-rich traditional plucked strings gave me the idea of jubilantly pealing bells. The conductor of the ensemble, Kevin Bishop, had also asked that I write something with a certain amount of repetition with memorable melodic lines that the traditional instrumentalists could learn by ear. Although their parts are fully notated, they generally do not use the music, learning it aurally. It seemed to me that the repetitive patterns of bell-ringing would be perfect. That said, church bells are not part of Afghan culture whilst being inescapable in the west, and their function was something that had to be explained to the girls during rehearsals.

With the sound of the piece in my head, I turned again to John and Veronica with sessions on a variety of material that might be useful in the work's composition. I was interested primarily in two aspects - a *rag* or mode that could be played easily by both western and traditional players and also the overall structure of classical Afghan instrumental works - the *naghma-ye kashals*. During

the sessions I transcribed melodies and took away recordings to analyse the structural details of the longer pieces more fully. Ultimately, I decided on *Rag Bhairavi* - a Hindustani classical rag which is used widely by Afghan musicians. (An example of this can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwmkDjE7Yw4> with the Afghanistan National Institute of Music's young rubab player, Ahmad Samim Zafar joined by Ustad Ghulam Hussain, seen below.)

Rag Bhairavi has a sombre 'minor' character and is associated with the hours after midnight heading towards dawn. Although *Sapida-Dam-Nau* is a joyful piece with an overall major feel, the darker sound of *Rag Bhairavi* is heard

in the opening 'bell-section' which punctuates the work, gradually being overlaid with transposed variations of itself, like differently tuned bells ringing out across the countryside. The growing contrapuntal complexity of the piece reflects the structure of many classical Afghan instrumental pieces. In the broadest of terms, the form of these *naghmas* can be divided into three main sections - the *shakl* which spells out the mode and expresses its

characteristics, the *astai* which is the work's main section containing many variations of the main melodic material and the *antara*, a rather complex section made up of several short related 'compositions' that can be played in any order but which generally increase in difficulty, becoming faster and higher pitched. (Extended definitions of these terms can be found in John Baily's seminal work *Music of Afghanistan: Professional musicians in the city of Herat 1973-77*, Silk Road Books and Photos Publications, Second Edition 2012). Although my piece does not directly adopt this tripartite form, elements of the *shakl*, *astai* and *antara* were integrated into its composition, in particular the introduction of the *rag*'s characteristics at the opening and the increasing complexity of the structure through the interleaving of short, repeated sections which are transposed higher and higher towards the end.



ANIM student Ahmad Samim Zafar in a public 'teaching' session with Ustad Ghulam Hussain, playing a *naghma* in *Rag Bhairavi*.

PROGRAMME NOTE:

The AWO is unique in its integration of traditional and western instruments, including the tanbur, ghichak, dilruba, sitar, rubab and qashkarcha, instruments which feature alongside compliments of strings, woodwind, percussion and piano. *Sapida-Dam-Nau* integrates the instruments into a piece which celebrates the unique sound of the ensemble. The huge variety of sounds are transformed into jubilant peals of bells and two contrasted melodies. The first melody is lyrical and reminiscent of the English pastoral and the second is joyous in character, inspired by an Afghan-Indian scale associated with early morning. The title is suggestive of the music that might

be heard at dawn in both my home town of Shaftesbury and in Kabul and also celebrates the 'new dawn' of music in Afghanistan. It is particularly wonderful that this rebirth is being spearheaded by the Afghanistan Women's Orchestra 'Zohra' (Venus).

I am hugely indebted to the Finzi Trust for their support of this project, allowing me to take time away from my quotidian work to research instruments with which I was unfamiliar and then to compose a work that is now part of the essential rejuvenation of Afghan culture. The mottoes for the Afghanistan National Institute of Music are:

Assure Musical Rights
Transform Lives through Music
Revive and Preserve Afghan Music
Train Future Music Educators
Lead Cultural Diplomacy between Afghanistan and the International Community

It has been an extraordinary privilege to play a small part in promoting these values and I thank the Finzi Trust for their understanding as the nature of the piece was transformed during the period of the Scholarship - accepting the Afghan way!

