

MENA Music Podcast: conversations on a century of MENA music heritage

Martin Stokes (Department of Music) and Farid Ghrich in collaboration with Counterpoints and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France



Conversation avec Scheherazade Hassan - 1er Congrès de

Conversation - 1er Congrès de Musique arabe. Le Caire, 1932. by Beyc



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- ▶ Conversation avec Jean-Louis Leveau - 1er Congrès de musique arabe du Caire, 1932 39:20

PROJECT SUMMARY

The MENA Music Podcast project was developed as part of *Beyond 1932*, a wider research programme exploring the legacy of the Cairo Congress of Arab Music and its continuing significance for musical life across the Middle East and North Africa. Focusing on recordings from the Congress held by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the project set out to bring this important but under-recognised archive into wider public circulation through a series of short French-language podcasts.

Led by Farid Ghric with Martin Stokes and developed in collaboration with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Counterpoints, the project combined archival research, podcast production, translation, and public dissemination. Its aim was not only to produce a pilot series of episodes, but also to establish a reproducible format for future podcasting in other languages, including English, Arabic and Turkish.

By pairing rare historical recordings with interviews, contextual commentary, and multilingual translations, the project created an accessible platform through which musicians, scholars, archivists and wider audiences could encounter the cultural and intellectual afterlives of the 1932 Congress in new ways.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The MENA Music Podcast project emerged from the broader aims of *Beyond 1932*, which seeks to re-examine the Cairo Congress of Arab Music not only as a historical event, but as an ongoing point of reference shaping musical knowledge, practice, and institutions across the MENA region. While the Congress has been extensively discussed in academic literature, much of its archival material—particularly the recordings held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France—remains difficult to access and largely absent from public-facing platforms.

The project was developed in response to this gap. It sought to create a format through which these recordings could be reintroduced into contemporary circulation, not as static historical artefacts, but as materials that could be listened to, interpreted, and debated in relation to present-day musical practices. Podcasting offered a way to combine archival sound with conversation, commentary, and translation.

The collaboration between Farid Ghric and Martin Stokes built on shared interests in ethnomusicology, sound archives, and transnational musical exchange. Partnerships with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Counterpoints further shaped the project's direction, enabling access to archival recordings while supporting a model of production oriented towards both scholarly and public audiences.



Dr Harun Kormaz in conversation with Farid Grich

WHAT HAPPENED?

The project developed and produced a pilot series of podcast episodes centred on recordings from the 1932 Cairo Congress of Arab Music, held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. These recordings were selected and contextualised through a process that combined archival research with contemporary interpretation, bringing historical material into dialogue with present-day perspectives.

Production took place primarily in Paris, where interviews were conducted with scholars, archivists, and artists connected to the recordings and their wider cultural contexts. These conversations formed the basis of each episode, alongside curated excerpts from the archive. The process involved working across different recording environments and time constraints, requiring adaptability in securing locations and coordinating participants.

Alongside recording, the project involved developing new technical and creative skills in podcast production. This included training in audio production at Morley College, as well as hands-on work in scripting, editing, and sound design. Each episode was constructed through a layered process of selecting archival material, editing interviews, and shaping a narrative that could communicate complex musical and historical ideas to non-specialist audiences. The initial series was produced in French, reflecting the location of the archive.

The completed episodes were disseminated via digital platforms, forming a publicly accessible series. At the same time, the project established a workflow for combining archival research, audio production, and multilingual dissemination, laying the groundwork for future iterations of the podcast in other languages and formats.



Farid Ghric and Prof Jean Lambert in conversation

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The project expanded access to a significant but under-recognised archive of recordings from the 1932 Cairo Congress, repositioning them as materials that can be actively engaged with rather than passively preserved. By translating archival content into a podcast format, it enabled wider audiences—including musicians, researchers, and listeners—to encounter these recordings in accessible and contextually rich ways.

The podcasts have been distributed across a wide range of digital platforms, including major streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and SoundCloud, significantly extending their accessibility beyond traditional academic channels. This multi-platform dissemination has enabled the project to reach geographically diverse audiences across Europe, North and West Africa, and beyond, reflecting existing transnational networks of musical exchange as well as new forms of digital circulation.

Crucially, the project created new forms of dialogue between academic research and contemporary cultural practice. By bringing together scholars, archivists, and artists within a conversational format, it opened space for more situated and plural interpretations of MENA musical heritage. This helped to challenge dominant narratives that separate historical scholarship from lived musical experience, allowing contributors to articulate their own relationships to the archive and its meanings in the present.

The project also demonstrated the potential of podcasting as a method of knowledge exchange within arts and humanities research. It established a replicable model for combining archival sound, interview-based research, and multilingual dissemination, while also revealing the need for greater institutional support for researchers working independently with new media formats.

More broadly, the project contributes to the aims of *Beyond 1932* by reconnecting forms of knowledge that have long been held apart, and by reactivating the cultural and intellectual legacy of the Cairo Congress within present-day conversations about music, history, and postcolonial modernity.

THE TEAM'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

- 1. Treat format as method, not just output**
Podcasting is not simply a way of sharing research. It shapes how knowledge is produced. Building space for conversation, narrative, and listening can open up forms of insight that do not emerge through written outputs alone.
- 2. Invest in skills development early**
Developing technical skills in recording, editing, and sound design is crucial. Taking time to learn these processes at the outset can significantly improve both the quality of outputs and the sustainability of the project.
- 3. Build meaningful collaborations**
Partnerships with cultural institutions and community organisations can open up access to archives, networks, and audiences. At the same time, working with artists and contributors requires sensitivity to different working conditions and lived realities.



FURTHER READING

- **Conversation with Scheherazade Hassan (Ethnomusicologist)**
<https://1932muscon.kcl.ac.uk/conversation-with-scheherazade-hassan-ethnomusicologist/>
- **Conversation with Luc Verrier (Sound Engineer)**
<https://1932muscon.kcl.ac.uk/conversation-with-luc-verrier-sound-engineer/>
- **Conversation with Jean Lambert (Ethnomusicologist)**
<https://1932muscon.kcl.ac.uk/conversation-with-jean-lambert-ethnomusicologist/>



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For further information:
Email: ah-impact@kcl.ac.uk
Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact