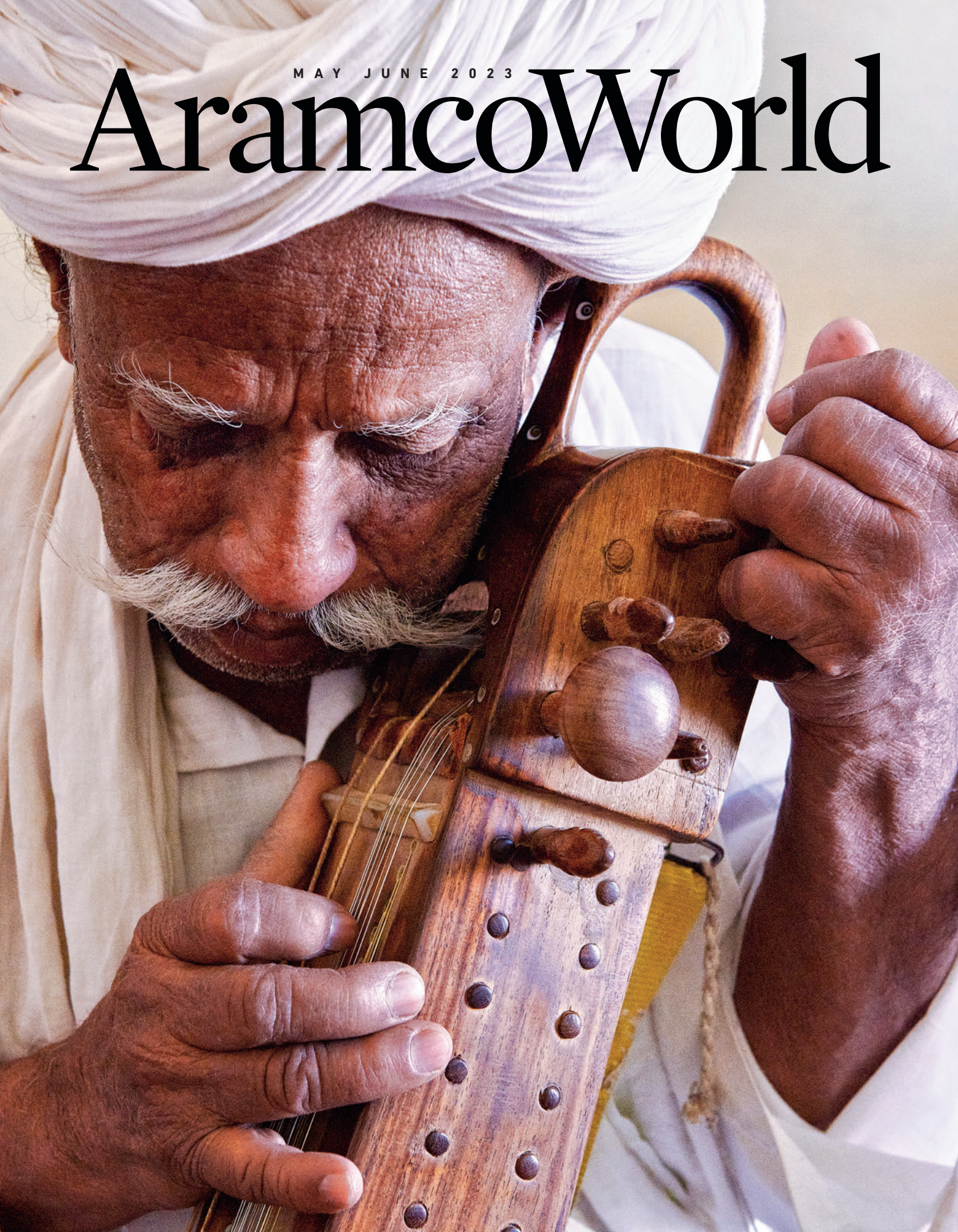
MAY JUNE 2023

AramcoWorld



AramcoWorld

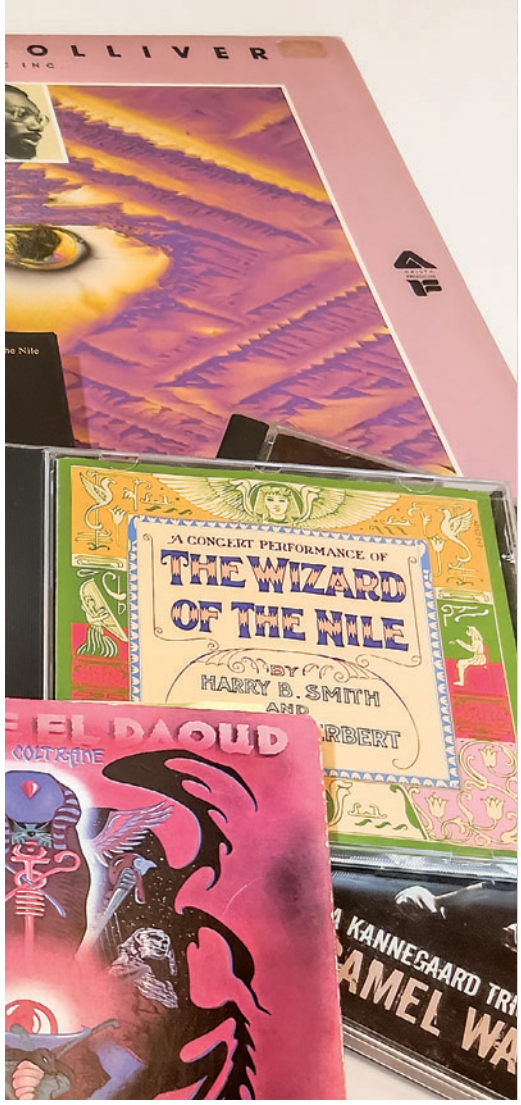
MAY / JUNE 2023 | VOL. 74, NO. 3

aramcoworld.com

We distribute *AramcoWorld* in print and online to increase cross-cultural understanding by broadening knowledge of the histories, cultures and geography of the Arab and Muslim worlds and their global connections.

FRONT COVER Holding a hand-carved wooden sarangi, Lakha Khan has curated Rajasthani culture through music, with songs of celebration for his community. Photo by Poras Chaudhary.

BACK COVER Wearing different color *kummah*s, two brothers sit on the entrance of Ibri Castle in Oman right before Friday prayer. Photo by Oman / Alamy.



Publisher: Aramco Americas | President and CEO: Nabeel I. AlAfaleg | Director, Public Affairs: Rania B. Biltagi | Editor: Richard Doughty | Digital Media Editor: Johnny Hanson | Associate Editor: Alva Robinson | Assistant Editor: Sarah Taqvi | Digital Support Editors: Waleed Dashash, David Lugo, Yazmine White | Contributing Editor: Dianna Wray | Administration: Sarah Miller | Print design: Graphic Engine Design | Printing: RR Donnelley / Wetmore | Web design: eSiteful Corporation

Subscribe online: aramcoworld.com

Subscription services: aramcoworld@sfsdayton.com or P.O. Box 292348, Kettering, Ohio 45429 USA

Editorial: editor@aramcoamericas.com or P.O. Box 2106, Houston, Texas 77252-2106, USA

ISSN: 2376-1083

FIRST LOOK

The Beauty of the Streets

Photograph by Norah AlAmri

As an introverted person, I sometimes find being a street photographer difficult, especially when getting close to people.

This photo series began unexpectedly when I found that photographing people behind windows and maintaining a distance made me, and the people I photographed, feel more comfortable. I purposefully frame myself in the reflection of the window to see into the space I'm photographing. I feel every window tells a different story.

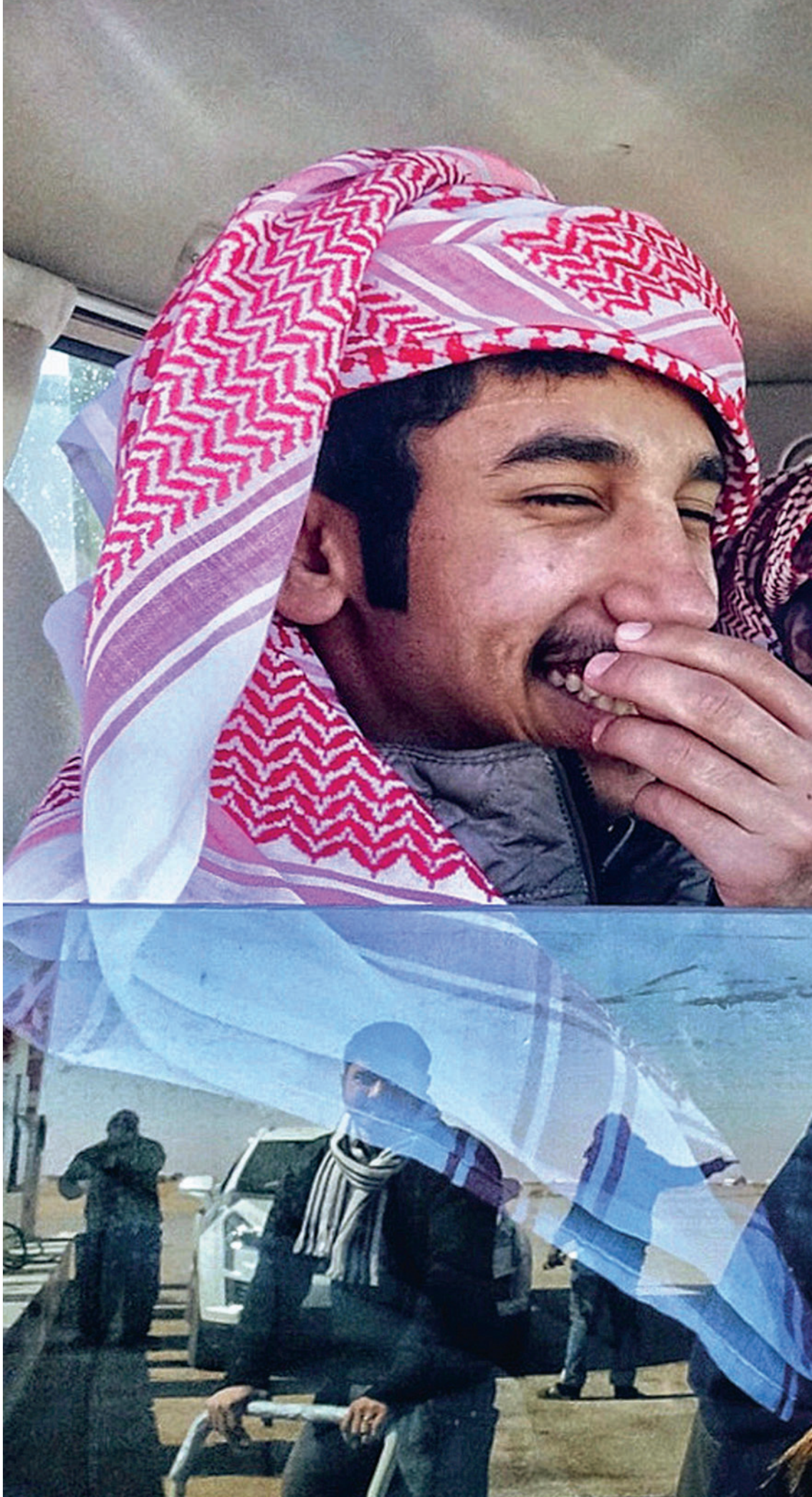
This image was taken when a couple of other photographers and myself attended the King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in 2018 in al-Rumahiyah, Saudi Arabia. We stopped in the middle of the desert to get some gas when I noticed this car of young Bedouin men. They looked like they were enjoying their journey, so I couldn't resist. I walked up to them while taking photos until the teenager in the front felt a little embarrassed and started to laugh. I like this moment because it was real. They said they were on their way to the camel festival as well.

I just love taking genuine moments. It makes me fall in love with that memory, and it's forever captured in a photo.

—Norah AlAmri

@n_amri

To see more images by Norah AlAmri, scan here:



Chicken Kabab Burgers

Recipe by Asma Khan

Photograph by Laura Edwards

Like the iconic bun kabab of Karachi in Pakistan or Hyderabad in India, a spicy kabab inside a bun is a popular street food in certain regions of the Indian subcontinent.

You can add pineapple and chile chutney, cilantro and mint chutney, or garlic and chile chutney, all of which you can find ingredients for within my most-recent collection of recipes, *Ammu*. These kababs can also be cooked on the barbecue. You could use ground beef or lamb instead of chicken, but you may need to adjust the cooking time.

(Serves 6—making 12 burgers)

750 grams (1 pound, 10 ounces) ground chicken thighs

1 tablespoon full-fat Greek-style yogurt

1 tablespoon ginger paste

1 teaspoon garlic paste

2 teaspoons ground coriander

1 teaspoon garam masala

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 teaspoon salt

3 green chiles, finely chopped

1 onion, finely chopped

2 small tomatoes, chopped

2 tablespoons cilantro leaves, chopped

1 egg, beaten

Scant 1 cup (200 milliliters) vegetable oil, for frying

To Serve

12 burger buns (or naan or pita bread)

Chutney (optional)

1 red onion, sliced into 12 rings

Put the ground chicken in a bowl and add all the remaining ingredients (except the oil); mix well. Oil your hands and divide the mixture into 12 pieces. Roll each piece into a ball and then flatten to a patty. Each kabab should be 2 centimeters (3/4 inches) high. Cover the kababs to prevent them from drying out.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over high heat. To test that the oil is hot, cut one of the onion slices in half and dip the tip into the oil—it should start to sizzle immediately. If not, heat the oil for a bit longer and check again. Reduce the heat to medium and after 30 seconds slip the kababs from the edge to prevent the oil from splashing and burning your hand. Do not overload the pan. Fry the kababs in a single layer with enough space for you to turn them safely, until well-browned on both sides and cooked through.

Slice the open burger buns and spread both sides with a thin layer of chutney, if using. Top with a kabab and a slice of onion.

Reprinted with permission from

Ammu: Indian Home Cooking to Nourish Your Soul

Asma Khan.

Interlink Books, 2022.

interlinkbooks.com.

URSZULA SOLTYS

Asma Khan is the chef and restaurateur of London's Darjeeling Express, which went from supper club to pop-up, before settling in its permanent location to wide acclaim. Khan's food is homage to her royal Mughlai ancestry and the busy streets of Calcutta, where she grew up. An all-women team runs the kitchen at Darjeeling Express, which has been featured in *Time Out*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Guardian* and numerous others. In 2015 it was named one of the best restaurants in London by the *Evening Standard*, and in 2017 *Eater* named it one of its most-impressive restaurant newcomers.

Rajasthan's Folk Musicians Find New Ways to Play

Lakha Khan closes his eyes, takes a breath and pulls a rosined bow across the stringed instrument in his lap. The hand-carved wooden sarangi emits a drone with unexpected power, piercing like the cry of a hungry infant in a concert hall but soothing like a lullaby. It's a sound that resonates, an otherworldly note from the beginning of time.

Written by SCOTT BALDAUF

Photographed by PORAS CHAUDHARY

LEFT Considered a master of the 27-string sindhi sarangi and armed with a musical library that stretches centuries, including devotionals, popular Hindi music, ballads, folk tales and oral histories, Lakha Khan performs with his two sons Pappu Khan, left, and Dane Khan, right, at his residence in the village of Raneri, Rajasthan. Khan, in his early 80s, was born into a family of traditional musicians in the Manganiyar community of western Rajasthan, India, where he learned how to perform as a child. It's here with his sons and grandchildren that he is passing along the same oral histories and traditions to be carried on for generations to come. **ABOVE** Lakha Khan is carrying a drum to his home, accompanied by his grandson.

After a moment, Lakha Khan adds his own voice, raspy and warm. He sings a love story hundreds of years old. Where most Indian love songs are about a boy and a girl, this one is a poem about the love between man and God. In a society where light, bouncy Bollywood tunes seem to permeate every corner of every home, there is something timeless about this song that rises above the chatter of the everyday, acknowledges pain and comforts broken hearts.

"When I start playing, it is sounding sweet from the first note," says Lakha Khan, who was recently awarded the Padma Shri, one of India's highest civilian awards for artists. "I feel a direct contact with God when I play."

Born To Play

For centuries musicians such as Lakha Khan, Saker Khan and others have been entrusted with the cultural traditions, history and music—and indeed, the collective memory—of their communities. Music is so socially and culturally important, that it eclipses other considerations such as caste and religion. In Rajasthan, professional musicians like Lakha Khan and his community—who are Muslims—serve as the principal curators of Rajasthani culture, including songs of celebration for all communities. No birth, wedding or funeral—no major event—happens without them.

Lakha Khan's community are a hereditary caste of professional musicians called Manganiyars. As children, Manganiyars start their training early from their elders, and over time they develop their craft to a high level. Unlike folk musicians who perform part-time in a participatory sing-along environment, Manganiyars demonstrate a virtuosity that allows them to perform on stage alongside better known Indian classical maestros such as tabla master Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pandit Ravi Shankar, *shehnai* master Ustad Bismillah Khan and *mohan veena* master Vishwa Mohan Bhatt.

Manganiyar music is specifically written for a society that is alien even to most Indians—a world of arid isolation at the edge of India's largest desert, the Thar. But just as Appalachian folk musicians broke through ages of prejudice to pave the way for modern country music in the United States, the stories and songs of Manganiyars have an emotional power that transcends the borders of languages, cultures and even national origins.

An untrained ear may hear similarities between Rajasthani ragas and those of Indian classical music—the drone of a tamboura, the surging polyrhythms of the dholak drum and, above

TOP A group of Rajasthan's premier Langa and Manganiyar musicians traveled to London, England, to perform in 1983, including Sakar Khan Manganiyar, pictured top row, second from the right. and **ABOVE**. He is considered the greatest *kamaicha* player of his time and was the first Manganiyar to receive the Padma Shri award, one of the highest civilian awards of India. **LEFT** Sakar Khan's eldest son Ghewar Khan Manganiyar is pictured with his grandson Ayan Khan Manganiyar, 5, who will help carry on the family legacy of music. Like his father, Ghewar performs the kamaicha and Manganiyar music across the globe.

it all, the complex melodies that sound improvisational but are in fact well-beloved melodies handed down for generations. But what sets a Manganiyar raga apart from other classical ragas are the regional stories they tell, and the tone and the power of the singer who tells the story.

Fans who heard Lakha Khan's collaboration with Malian kora player Madou Sadiki Diabate were struck on how well the sounds of two distinct desert cultures—Rajasthan and Mali—blended with each other. But those who listen to Lakha Khan's 2015 album, *Live in Nashville*, first notice his voice. Its keening

Jodhpur, **TOP** and **ABOVE**, known for its iconic blue buildings and the towering Mehrangarh Fort, is a city in northwest Rajasthan located in the Thar Desert some 300 kilometers west of the state capitol of Jaipur. It is also home to the annual Jodhpur Rajasthan International Folk Festival. It's here where the buzz of 1 million people and the opportunities of the city attract some younger Manganiyar and Langa to leave their communities for work and school.

tones invite comparisons to the rugged power of bluegrass singer Ralph Stanley or blues singer Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter. Some voices just pierce through the howling wind, pass through you and leave you wanting more.

For inspiration, Lakha Khan turns to his faith, even if he is performing for audiences with other belief systems.

"For us, there is only one God," he said. "Bigger than the night is the sky. Bigger than the sky is the word. Beyond words there is nothing, and in that nothingness is where the Lord is."

Preserving Culture

Yet the social arrangement that allowed Manganiyars to become some of the top musicians in the country is under strain. Age-old economic relationships in villages across Rajasthan have broken down, and market-based solutions have yet to emerge or to take hold. While some better known Manganiyars are traveling farther afield to find paying gigs, many young Manganiyars are leaving the family business to find work in the big city.

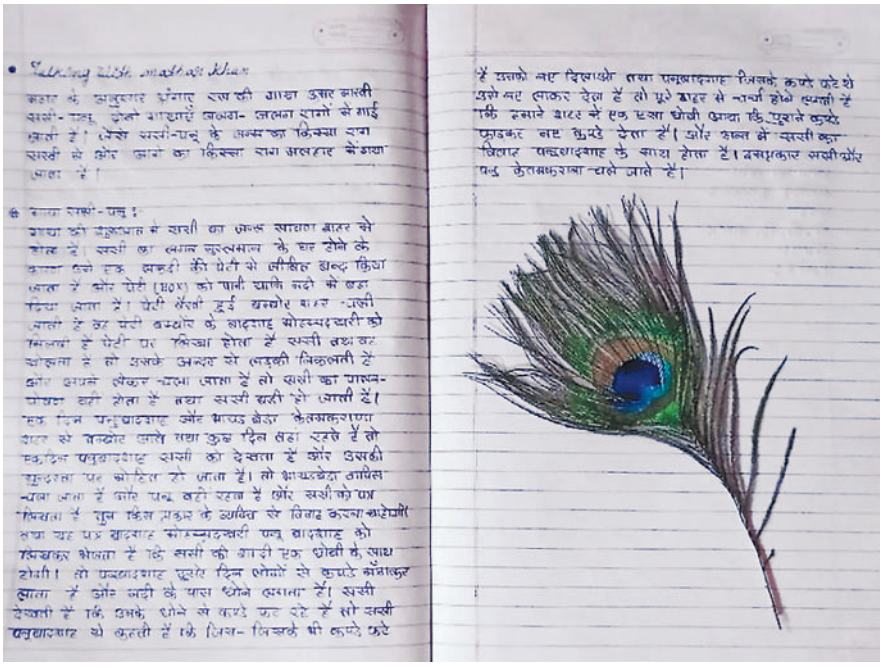
The consequences of these changes are potentially catastrophic,

with the potential of losing centuries of music that exists only in the memories of aging masters. Keeping the great Rajasthani songbook alive has now become an urgent matter. Allied with academics and music impresarios, Rajasthani traditional musicians are working hard to sustain their livelihoods while preserving their music before it disappears.

Ethnomusicologist Shubha Chaudhuri said Indian society is already witnessing a slow cultural destruction. And for more than 40 years, Chaudhuri—as director of the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology at the American Institute of Indian Studies in Gurgaon—has been conducting field recordings to preserve Rajasthani music before it is lost.

Time is of the essence, of course, but time is also an enemy.

[The] challenge has been to document the songbook of the Manganiyars and Langas, and other musician communities before it is lost forever.



LOWER Shubha Chaudhuri, an ethnomusicologist at the American Institute of Indian Studies in Haryana, India, browses through the collections in the library archives at the Institute. Her goal is to record and preserve the folk-music traditions in western Rajasthan. To date, in a collaboration with the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology at the American Institute of Indian Studies and the Rupayan Sansthan, a team has recorded and documented more than 500 musicians from more than 200 Langa and Manganiyar villages. **ABOVE** Notes taken by a research assistant show the detail of the study.

ABOVE Archivists and field assistants learn how to record musicians during a workshop. The project, Documentation of Endangered Musical Traditions of Western Rajasthan, includes digital recordings along with extensive information about the musicians that will be preserved, **LEFT**, for generations to come.

"In our modern society, people don't want to listen to something that is longer than three minutes," and not all traditional music fits into a three-minute format, Chaudhuri says. It's common for Manganiyar musicians to entertain guests at a Rajasthani wedding all night long, singing and performing compositions that can last for hours.

"Lakha Khan is the only one of his generation left now," Chaudhuri says. "He knows the whole repertoire. He is special."

And when Lakha Khan's generation passes on, he will take much of this music with them.

Chaudhuri's solution to this challenge has been to document the songbook of the Manganiyars and Langas, and other musician communities before it is lost forever. Just as the father and son team of John and Alan Lomax visited rural America from the 1930s to the 1960s to record work songs, blues and ballads for the US Library of Congress, Chaudhuri began in the 1980s to visit hundreds of villages across Rajasthan to record the musical traditions of the Manganiyars and Langas. (She has also done field recordings in other Indian states, like Goa and Meghalaya.)

Much of the material Chaudhuri and her team have gathered is now available for paid download on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings at folkways.si.edu, a repository that not only preserves these traditions but also gives living Rajasthani musicians a stream of income from the download sales.

More recently, a collaboration between Chaudhuri's archivists and the folkloric organization Rupayan Sansthan has given tools and training to young Manganiyars to carry out their own fieldwork identifying, interviewing and recording the older generation of musicians, and preserving the great Rajasthani songbook before it disappears.

"Music represents culture," Chaudhuri says. "Music has that emotive power. It has that power to connect people. My training

Indian folk-music fans are treated to a night of folk fusion in New Delhi at Amarrass Nights in Sunder Nursery organized by Gurgaon-based label Amarrass Records and Amarrass Society for Performing Arts. **TOP** The Tapi Project from Gujarat weaves powerful vocals with poetic verses in a contemporary style. **ABOVE** The group Rehmat-e-Nusrat, a band of five young Hindu men and one Muslim from the foothills of Uttarakhand, offer a new perspective to traditional *qawwali* music. **RIGHT** Rajastan's Jumme Khan and Group performed traditional folk and poetry, featuring the sounds of the harmonium, chimta, dholak and the single-stringed *bhapang*.

is as a linguist, so I approach my work as a linguist, the text and the context. What is the song about, and who is it for? If you know the language, then traditional regional music is very rich. But what gets me most are the voices."

Building new stages

Like Chaudhuri, Ashutosh Sharma gathers field recordings of traditional Rajasthani musicians. But his methods and motives are different. Sharma hopes that high-quality traditional music will find a market among a new generation of Indian youth who are tiring of formulaic Bollywood pop and hunger for music that feels authentic.

With the digital transformation, every smartphone is a recording studio, and every YouTube channel has opened a new

market for smaller indie-rock bands, singer songwriters, and increasingly from regional traditional musicians like Lakha Khan. With friends, Sharma has helped musicians to take their music to not just the hipsters in Delhi and Mumbai, but also to world music festivals in Europe and the US.

"The audience for this music exists, but the festivals didn't exist, at least not here in India," said Sharma, founder of the New Delhi-based Amarrass Records, which promotes Lakha Khan, the Barmer Boys and other regional musicians.

With Amarrass's help, Lakha Khan has toured in Germany, Portugal and Canada in 2022. Another Amarrass client, the Barmer Boys, have performed their mix of Rajasthani traditional music and hip-hop at the world music festival WOMAD, the international arts festival in Germany, as well as festivals in Spain and Netherlands.

"We understood that a lot of American artists made it in Europe first before they made it back home," Sharma said. "The same thing proved true with our artists. As they got big abroad, they got more accepted back here in India. With the Rajasthani band the Barmer Boys, our initial plan was to get them onto the popular Indian TV show Coke Studio. But in two years, they were playing with Outkast and the Rolling Stones."

LEFT Barmer Boys, from left, Magada Khan, Manga Khan and Sawai Khan, prepare to perform near Gadisar Lake in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. The group has performed more than 200 concerts in 20 countries highlighting their Rajasthani folk and Sufi music. **RIGHT** Jumme Khan, a Muslim yogi and storyteller from the Alwar district of eastern Rajasthan, recites and performs folk stories and poetry in hopes of preserving and encouraging audiences to engage with the long-standing oral traditions. **BELOW** At his home workshop in Hamira, Rajasthan, *kamaicha* maker Shankara Ram Suthar carves out the frame of one of the oldest bowed-string instruments used by Manganiyar musicians.

TOP LEFT: PHOTO COURTESY SUMER SINGH RATHORE

To help give musicians greater exposure closer to home, Amarrass has set up a monthly concert series in Delhi called Amarrass Nights. Held in the historic Sunder Nursery, which abuts Delhi's historic Humayun's Tomb, Delhi music lovers huddled in shawls under the open sky, listening to a wide variety of regional musicians from north and western India. The opening act, the Tapi Project, a dreamy rock-fusion band from Surat in Gujarat, performs songs about spirituality and breaking boundaries. Jumme Khan, a Muslim yogi from the Alwar district of eastern Rajasthan, promotes a message of the unity of all religions through his music. And Rehmat-e-Nusrat is a band of five young Hindu men and one Muslim from the foothills of the Himalayas, paying tribute to the late Sufi *qawwali* master Ustad Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

As different as these bands are, they all share a perspective that is perhaps best stated by Jumme Khan: "You can divide anything you want on earth, but how can you divide the open sky?" he sings. His delivery is sardonic, prompting laughter. But his message is serious, gentle, warm and inclusive. "There is just one god," he adds, "yours and mine."

Sarrjeet Tamta, the lead singer of Rehmat-e-Nusrat, turns the focus away from people and toward the divine creator of all, in the popular qawwali tune "Allah hu" (which means "God is").

There is no one like you
And that is your grandeur, O unique one
You are the imagination and the inquisitiveness,
You are the wish
You are the light
and the voice of the heart
You were there, you are there, and you will be there
God is, God is, God is.

It's striking that Tamta, like most of his audience, is not Muslim. He was born Hindu into a family that performed Hindu religious music, but now he prefers the timeless poetry of Amir Khusrao and Nizamuddin Dawliya, which promote the open-mindedness and inclusiveness—and the hope—that he craves.

They learned their trade at home, memorizing melodies and lyrics from their father, starting when other children would have started elementary school.

A New Generation

In Hamira village, a short drive from the hilltop walled city of Jaisalmer, Ghewar Khan and his brother Firoze are keeping the spirit of their father's music alive. Sons of Saker Khan, the first Manganiyar to receive the Padma Shri, one of the highest civilian awards in India, Ghewar and Firoze perform for their Hindu patrons in Hamira but have also traveled across India and to Europe and North America as well.

They learned their trade at home, memorizing melodies and lyrics from their father. Starting when other children would have started elementary school, the boys learned enough to begin performing with the family at events and gradually gained

LOWER Performing before The Rolling Stones took the stage at the Roskilde Festival 2014 in Denmark, the Barmer Boys blend traditional and contemporary styles, including beatboxing, that prove appealing to broader audiences globally.

ABOVE Learning his family traditions, Ayan Khan Manganiyar, 5, plays the kamaicha and gets some help from his great-great-uncle Pempe Khan Manganiyar, left, as his grandfather Ghewar Khan Manganiyar, right, plays along.

proficiency in playing instruments. Ghewar learned his father's instrument, the *kamanche*, while Firoze played the barrel-shaped dholak drum.

Recently Hamira has seen a revival of some of the traditional crafts that make Rajasthani music possible. At the request of Saker Khan, a local carpenter named Shankara Ram Suthar returned to Hamira from the big city of Pune and learned to make kamanches that met the maestro's exacting standards. Suthar now has dozens of consignments with musicians and non-profit organizations, and he has begun to train his son the trade.

Now, like his father, Ghewar has students of his own: his own children and other relatives, and even a few foreigners from England and the US. Some local musicians have left Hamira, and arguably regional traditional music behind, moving to Mumbai to seek work singing for Bollywood films. Ghewar's own brother, Sattar, is a soldier in the Border Security Force, although he continues to perform music as part of his duties.

"This is my profession, this is something I was born to do," Ghewar said. "The next generation will decide if they are interested in carrying on with it."

In Saker Khan's house, one is only ever a bowstring away from music, and Ghewar and Firoze find themselves playing again. The melody that emits from Ghewar's kamanche is at turns powerful and tender, and Firoze matches his brother step by step, his fingers building up speed and an intensity like a desert thunderstorm passing through. Between them, Ghewar's four-year-old grandson Ayan arrives, and the two men urge the boy to sing along or to try the kamanche or dholak.

As Firoze puts a kamanche in his lap, an instrument that is easily as large as the boy, Ayan holds the bow perfectly with his left hand, but shakes his head. "You better tune this," he said. "You can't just let me play it."

The two old men are patient, and they offer encouragement. This is how they first encountered music, taught by their elders through play, not through pressure. And this is how the new generation will take up the mantle—Saker Khan's descendants in Hamira; Lakha Khan's descendants in Raneri. This is how a cycle of renewal begins again—through play.

Scott Baldauf is a former correspondent with the *Christian Science Monitor*, based in New Delhi and Johannesburg, and is now a writer and editor with Saudi Aramco Public Affairs in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. **Poras Chaudhary** is a photographer based in Haryana, India, known for his striking compositions capturing daily life with an eye for color. He is a regular contributor to *The New York Times* and has won numerous awards.

Related articles at aramcoworld.com
Sitar virtuoso: Nov / Dec 2020
Kerala mappila music: Jul / Aug 2020

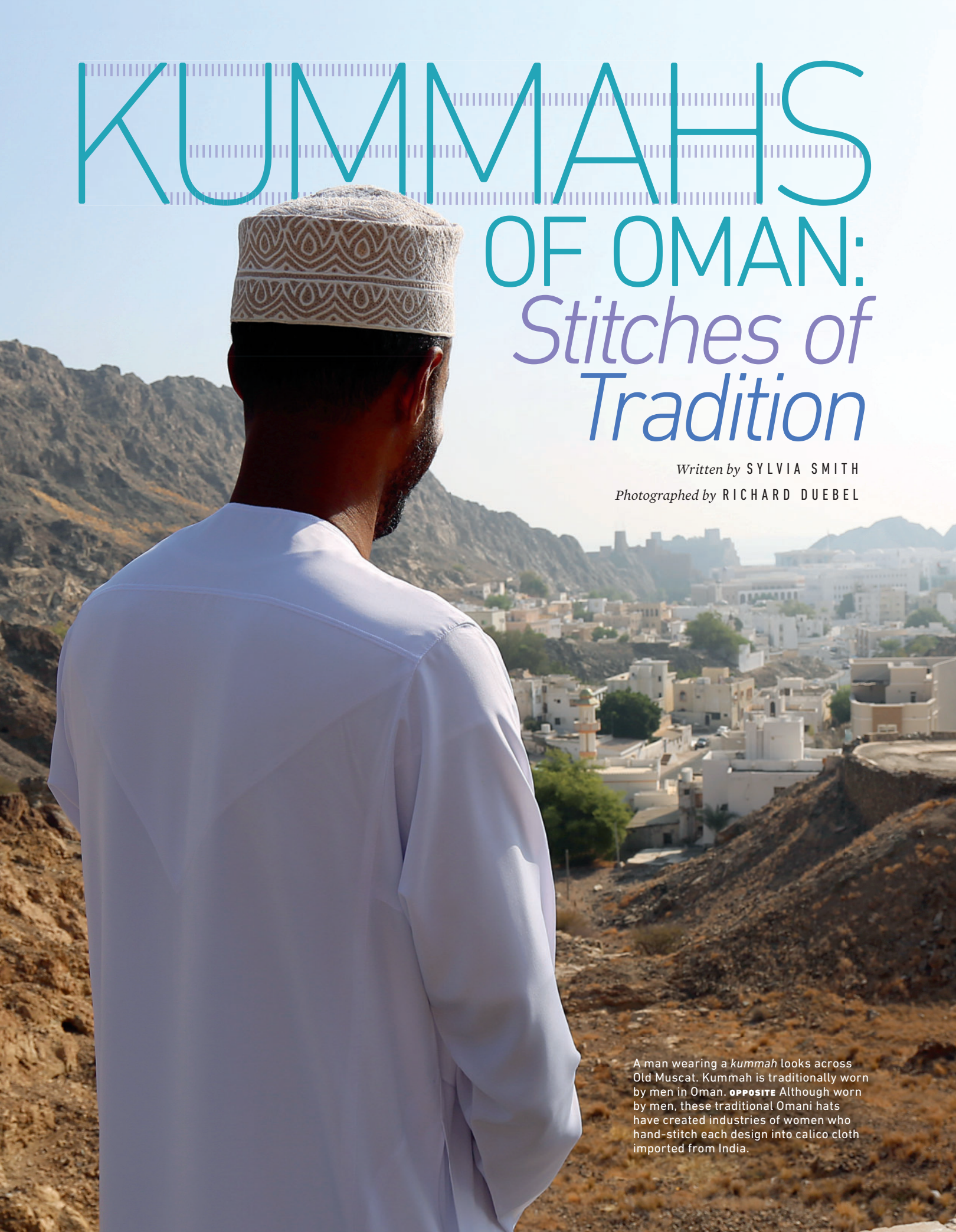
Video at aramcoworld.com

OPPOSITE: PHOTO COURTESY ASHISH SHASHIDHARAN / AMARASS RECORDS

KUMMAHS OF OMAN: *Stitches of Tradition*

Written by SYLVIA SMITH

Photographed by RICHARD DUEBEL



A man wearing a *kummah* looks across Old Muscat. Kummah is traditionally worn by men in Oman. **OPPOSITE** Although worn by men, these traditional Omani hats have created industries of women who hand-stitch each design into calico cloth imported from India.

BOTTOM: ERIC NATHAN / ALAMY

ABOVE Latif Al Bulushi is the owner of Bait Adam Museum, a private museum in Muscat dedicated to preserving Omani history and culture. For many, kummahs link Omanis to their cultural past and have become a personal statement. **LOWER** Kummahs are worn both by children as well as adult men.

From her home in Muscat, capital of Oman, Safiya Ahmad Al Lawati is using peach-colored thread to embroider a cap known in Omani Arabic as a *kummah*. Pushing her needle through the thick white calico, she works the thread around one of the cap's dozens of small eyelets that aide ventilation in a hot climate. "I started early this morning," she explains. "It is a long and complicated process, and it can take up to a month or more depending on how elaborate the decoration is."

Al Lawati says usually she doesn't have much time even to make kummahs for her husband and son, as she splits most of her time between overseeing a growing network of scores of women embroidering kummahs throughout Oman and her job as an administrator at The National Museum. "My eyes aren't as good as they used to be," she says as she fishes out her glasses. The kummah, she explains, is part of nearly every Omani man's everyday dress.

"Some customers make requests, and demand is boosted by unique, made-to-measure styles and commissions, but most are content with standard designs," she says. "It demonstrates pride in our heritage." Even her five-year-old grandson sports one in the photo she keeps as her phone's wallpaper.

Using as its base either calico or other cotton cloth stiff enough to stand alone on the head, the kummah is a link to the people of the region's past as well as a personal statement for the present.

Experts diverge on its origins. Some believe the cap originated in Zanzibar, which

TOP A group of Omani men wearing different colors of kummahs sit chatting at a cafe in a *suq* at Nizwa, al-Dakhiliyah Region. Predominantly worn around the Indian Ocean, kummahs have taken on a variety of styles and designs introduced across the region, but as many people believe, the kummah remains an Omani innovation. **ABOVE** An Omani gentleman wears a kummah in a local fish market off the coast of the Arabian Sea.

was part of the Omani empire for much of the 18th century until 1964. In appearance, it is similar to the traditional *kofia* of men in East Africa.

Zulfikar Hirji, an associate professor of anthropology at York University in Toronto, says the kummah is "clearly associated with Indian Ocean society," as both Oman and Zanzibar were parts of "a huge trading community, and dress and costume styles were passed around and picked up," he explains. "The kummah's past can never be a cut-and-dried history as there are no written records, few photographs, and people simply identified kummah wearing with a widespread geographical region."

However, John Gillow, author of *African Textiles*, believes it was the Omanis who introduced the kummah to East Africa. That is why today, he says, the Omani cap usually has finer work.

TOP: GRANT ROONEY / ALAMY; OPPOSITE BOTTOM: CHARLES O. CECIL / ALAMY

MAKING A *KUMMAH*

The *kummah* is made in two parts: the circular top and the rectangular brim that, when attached to the top, becomes the sides. Both are made of double layers of thick white cotton calico. This helps the cap maintain its shape and not collapse on the head.

The design is drawn onto both of the two sections freehand or in accordance with a pattern. The pattern may comprise of rosettes, stars, geometric patterns or arabesques or other inspirational motifs.

The pattern outline is followed by two rows of evenly spaced running stitches in white.

To give the pattern a raised appearance, three strands of thick thread are inserted between the two layers of calico, giving it a 3D look. This is generally known by the Italian word for quilting, *trapunto*. It sets the pattern into relief by puffing up the shape.

Once the entire pattern has been outlined using this technique the eyelets are made through both layers of cotton. Around 15 interlocking blanket stitches surround each perforation.

Finally the top and brim parts are sewn together.

LEFT A close-up of a lady sewing a *kummah* in Zanzibar, where the introduction of the hat by Omanis have resulted in a set of designs unique to Zanzibar, with more perforations and available in a limited range of colors. **ABOVE** Safiya Ahmad Al Lawati, who oversees a growing network of women throughout Oman embroidering kummahs, hand-stitches one together herself in her home in Muscat, the Omani capital. For Al Lawati, a kummah, depending how intricate its design is can take up to a month to make.

The Zanzibari varieties, he adds, have more perforations and are found in a more limited range of colors.

The kummah's popularity today was much enhanced by the late Sultan Qaboos, who ruled Oman for nearly half a century, from 1970 until his death in 2020, and wore a kummah in public.

The structure of a kummah is that of a skull cap with a circular top sewn onto cylindrical sides. The technique used for the eyelets is broderie anglaise, a fine needlework craft incorporating features of embroidery, cutwork and lace. Oman has passed legislation to protect the women who make kummahs against cheap, machine-made imitations so that only caps made in conformity with the regulations can be labeled and sold as authentic kummahs in Oman.

It's not uncommon for men to amass dozens of kummahs over the years, and even to inherit them.

"I've probably got about three dozen," says Said Al Kithiri, who works as an exhibition designer. "But I haven't really counted recently. I just pick one up as I leave the house in the morning. Of course I keep my more fancy kummahs for special events such as weddings."

But the most important personal aspect of a kummah, according to Al Lawati, is that it is made by a female member of the family, which gives her the chance to be artistically creative, show her feelings for the wearer and demonstrate her craft skills.

Al Lawati's group of kummah makers, scattered throughout the country, is a second wave designing, sewing and embroidering every imaginable style of the ubiquitous cotton cap. The women fit this home working around household duties supplementing the family income and bringing new kummahs into the market: whether the suqs of Muscar or kummahs increasingly ordered online.

At the moment her network is struggling to keep up with demand. Al Lawati is pushing her traditional thick palm needle which she prefers to using a steel needle through the thickness of the raised design to create yet another eyelet. "I answer all their questions and market the finished product. Helping women who aren't experienced in the demands of kummah

> "People simply identified kummah wearing with a widespread geographical region."
>
> —ZULFIKAR HIRJI

making is my role," she says.

"I'm quite well known in Oman on Instagram as @um.fatmakm, and I like being able to boost my salary and help my family," she says.

"I'm always looking for new designs," admits Ahmed Al Syabi as he strolls through Muscat's central Mutrah suq with two of his cousins. "I take really good care of my kummahs because the best-quality, handmade varieties are expensive. Some can cost hundreds of dollars." Some in his collection are machine-made and thus much cheaper. "The handmade kummah can be very expensive so there are shops where you can rent for a special occasion like a wedding."

The Sidabi Women's charity in old Muscat is the source of much of Shaikha Rashid Saif Al Battashi's work. Her house is calm as most of her family are out, but her ability to create an outstanding kummah in approximately two weeks is down to having learned the art at the age of eight. Now in her mid-40s, "It's natural for me to sew in my spare time," she says. "I'd miss not having anything to do with my hands." Some of the women who depend on the charity, she adds, are just entering the kummah business, and I am here to help, as it is a complex process. You have to ensure that the intricate patterns match and that the design flows."

> "[Kummah making] is a complex process. You have to ensure that the intricate patterns match and that the design flows."
>
> —SHAIKHA RASHID SAIF AL BATTASHI

As Al Battashi finishes her task, her teenage daughter enters the room and Al Battashi comments on her daughter liking all things Western. "With the current fashion for long acrylic nails and mobile phones taking up more time, some teenage girls aren't yet involved in making kummahs, "she says. "But the kummah will go on. It is so elegant, and it adds to our national sense of belonging."

RIGHT: ROBERTO CORNACCHIA / ALAMY

TOP LEFT Natural light from a window brings out the detail of a blue-on-white kummah. **RIGHT** A street vendor, having unloaded hundreds of kummahs, finalizes a sell in the backstreets of Muscat, where each kummah's unique design becomes a personal statement. **BOTTOM** A shop in Muscat sells kummahs wrapped within an embrodiered woolen cloth, *massar*, which is tied around the head, with or without the kummah.

Richard Duebel is a filmmaker, photographer and art director who has been working in North Africa and the Middle East for more than 20 years. His interests lie in culture, the environment and the applied arts. **Sylvia Smith** makes radio and television programs from the Arab world as well as reports from Europe and elsewhere that explore connections with North Africa and the Middle East.

Related articles at aramcoworld.com
Kufiya nouveau: July / Aug 2018
Kanga: Nov / Dec 2017


SANTORE

UPCYCLING TRAVEL WRITING AT ELAND PUBLISHING

Written by MATTHEW TELLER

Photographed by ANDREW SHAYLOR

Travel writing is notoriously difficult to define. Travel writers even more so. Some could be called writers who travel—Jan Morris, Ibn Battuta, Robert Louis Stevenson; others are travelers who write, like Gertrude Bell, Marco Polo and Jack Kerouac.

Travel writers come from all walks of life. The celebrated United States journalist Martha Gellhorn often described places and travels amid reporting on war. Ernest Hemingway, to whom she was married to for five years, wrote travel as fiction. Former US Poet Laureate Billy Collins declared the highest form of travel writing to be poetry.

Cheap airline tickets and social media have forced travel writing to re-examine its origins and purpose, precipitating an identity crisis in the genre. Gellhorn, it turns out, plays a role in the story of how for 40 years, one small London publisher has brought new life to travel writing, however the term may be defined.

Three flights of stairs above an Italian restaurant on Exmouth Market, a cheerful street in Clerkenwell, husband-and-wife directors Barnaby Rogerson, 62, and Rose Baring, 61, run Eland Publishing out of a cluttered attic filled with books. From there they oversee Eland's modest output, each year publishing only a handful of six to eight titles and selling a similarly modest 35,000 or so books in total.

"We don't define anything," says Rogerson from his chair amid the stacks of books. Travel writing, he says, is "a highly adaptable form" that looks outward. "Our readers relish the spirit of place and like to understand other communities."

Eland's list of more than 150 published works over its four decades reflects a worldly eclecticism. A book of letters from Istanbul written in the early 18th century by Mary Wortley Montagu sits alongside a 1990s comic novel about life in Jamaica, *One People*, by Guy Kennaway. British officer Ralph Bagnold's 1935 account of desert exploration, *Libyan Sands*, shares its shelf with Sybille Bedford's travelog about Mexico, *A Visit to Don Otavio*, and Veronica Doubleday's tales from 1970s Afghanistan, *Three Women of Herat*.

"We look for books that are not defined by heroic adventures but the ability to listen," Rogerson says. "We relish books that take each culture on its own value and plunge you amongst cattle nomads with the same energy that other writers might devote to interviewing presidents. Our principal resource is our readers, who are often much better read in specific regions than those who work in the Eland office."

Caroline Eden, whose forthcoming *Cold Kitchen* is set to

PREVIOUS SPREAD Travel writing looks outward, says Barnaby Rogerson, who together with Rose Baring runs Eland Publishing from its London office, where shelves hold some of the more than 150 books published since its founding in 1982. Most titles are re-releases of books whose value has endured beyond their original printings. **LOWER** Eland's office includes memorabilia from Rogerson and Baring's own travels, much of them in North Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. **OPPOSITE** During those years Rogerson wrote history and travel books of his own, and the couple befriended Eland Publishing's founder John Hatt, right, as well as Mark Ellingham, founder of the *Rough Guide* travel guidebook series.

Hatt, at right **ABOVE**, named his publishing company after the African continent's largest antelope—which happened to also be the name of Eland Road, where he had—and still has—a home in south London. His first title under the Eland name, *A Dragon Apparent*, described a journey through Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1950 by British writer Norman Lewis, whose modesty and working-class roots made him an outsider to London's literary establishment. "Here was a book I loved, and it was out of print. That was a beginning," Hatt says.

extend her award-winning series of books based on food cultures of Western and Central Asia, names her own Eland favorite: *The Caravan Moves On*, by Turkish adventurer Irfan Orga, originally published in 1958 and reissued by Eland in 2002. Eden regards the story of Orga's stay with Turkey's nomadic Yürük people as "an examination of modernizing Turkey, ... a snapshot of a world that is much changed," and, she adds, "that is very Eland."

"We've got a passionate, informed readership," says Rogerson. He and Baring receive dozens of recommendations of books now out of print that readers would like to see made available again. For example, he explains, Baring's stepsister, who at the time was in Sri Lanka as an anthropologist, "insisted that we look at *The Village in the Jungle*, Leonard Woolf's novel published in 1913, for its insight into the lives of ordinary people in what was then British-ruled Ceylon."

Similarly, he adds, "the first Eland I was absolutely sure of came from a friend's recommendation to read the letters of the 16th-century Habsburg ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Ogier de Busbecq. And he was quite right. It is a most brilliant book, gossipy and unpretentious, but also intelligent, inquiring and deeply insightful." So too was the genesis of the Eland title that briefly stood on top of the United Kingdom's fiction bestseller list, *The Ginger Tree*, by Oswald Wynd, set in early 20th-century Japan. It came about, Rogerson explains, because a friend of Eland's founder, John Hatt, insisted he read it.

> "Our readers relish the spirit of place and like to understand other communities."
>
> —BARNABY ROGERSON

Hatt, 74, established Eland in 1982. Witty and ebulliently curious, Hatt describes how in the 1970s he traveled across the UK as a publisher's sales rep, "with a briefcase, going to almost every bookshop. … There was no section called 'travel literature' then. Lots of good stuff had gone out of print, and it was very unfashionable. There was a gap in the market. I thought it was worth starting an imprint that did travel."

Hatt had—and still has—a home on Eland Road, a narrow parade of squat, 19th-century rowhomes in Clapham, a suburb of south London. He decided to name his publishing company Eland partly for the street but also because the eland is the

BARNABY ROGERSON

Rogerson and Baring took over as Eland's owner-directors in 2001, and last year they celebrated the publishing house's 40th anniversary. "The very act of remaining independent is a virtue every morning," Rogerson says.

largest antelope in Africa: "It was quite useful to have a colophon that's an animal—think of Penguin," he says.

For almost 20 years, Hatt ran Eland from his tiny home office while also working for part of that time as travel editor for *Harpers & Queen*, the predecessor of *Harper's Bazaar*. His first title under the Eland name, *A Dragon Apparent*, described a journey through Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in 1950 by the British writer Norman Lewis. "Here was a book I loved, and it was out of print. That was a beginning," Hatt says. He bought the rights to it cheaply enough, and went on to do the same for other books by Lewis, whose working-class roots and modesty made him an outsider to London's literary establishment.

Lewis often wrote about marginalized peoples and cultures: His 1968 newspaper article reporting government atrocities against indigenous people in Brazil led to the creation of the global human rights organization Survival International. His account of wartime Italy, *Naples '44*, described by the *Guardian* as "hauntingly comic," became another Eland acquisition, named by journalist Gellhorn in 1994 as her personal favorite travel book. The regard went both ways: Hatt reprinted Gellhorn's 1978 collection *Travels with Myself and Another*, and the two became close friends. Writing in *The Independent*, the novelist Nicholas Shakespeare declared that Gellhorn "adored [Hatt] not simply for resuscitating her fiction, but [because] Hatt embodied self-sufficiency."

"My golden rule," Hatt says with vigor, "is never, ever think about whether the book will sell. You have to completely rule that out. You'll only survive in the niche if you do what you think is good." He lands on the example of *The Ginger Tree*: Refusing to heed warnings about the book's seeming lack of commercial appeal, he published a new edition in 1989 just as a four-part television adaptation also aired in Britain, Japan and the US.

> Eland's upcycling has been honed to rescue quality from obscurity.

That market instinct served Hatt in other travel-related ventures. In 1996 he bought the Internet domain cheapflights.co.uk and built such a booming business that he was able to sell three and a half years later, becoming a dotcom millionaire at the age of 50. But the experience, he says, "exhausted" him. "I wanted to start my life again. So I looked to sell Eland."

Rogerson recalls the same period. He describes how he had "adored Eland from a distance," writing admiringly to Hatt from

his university years—where he and Baring met—after reading *A Year in Marrakesh* by Peter Mayne, originally published in 1957 and reissued by Eland in 1982, and *Morocco That Was*, by Walter Harris, originally published in 1921 and reissued by Eland in 1983. "I was very aware how little there was on Morocco for the general reader. Those Eland books opened not just a doorway, but all the windows too," Rogerson says.

The couple stayed in touch with Hatt while traveling extensively, including research for guidebooks to Morocco, Tunisia, Cyprus and Istanbul. Children forced a change. Having settled, Rogerson determined to "inhabit and really immerse" himself in Islamic history, writing a biography of Prophet Muhammad "for an ignorant Westerner like myself," as well as narrative histories of North Africa and the Ottoman Empire and *Meetings with Remarkable Muslims*, a touchingly personal collection of pen portraits.

Rogerson and Baring took over as Eland's owner-directors in 2001. ("There couldn't have been nicer buyers," adds Hatt, who retains a small percentage of the business.) The duo opened the office in Exmouth Market, a short walk from their home, just as the street was gaining new life with restaurants and independent businesses. Rogerson—author of a dozen books yet self-defined as a "barrow-boy trader" from a "book-hating family"—leads on sales and marketing, while Baring, a psychotherapist who admits "I would never have become a publisher if I hadn't hitched my wagon to Barnaby," oversees design. Behind the scenes, a "hidden team" of remote-working freelancers handles Eland's publicity, bookkeeping, typesetting and other roles.

Gellhorn and Lewis, along with the Irish writer Dervla Murphy—"those marvelous mavericks," in Rogerson's words—remain at the heart of Eland's wide-ranging list, platforming what Shafik Meghji, author of the 2022 book *Crossed Off the Map: Travels in Bolivia*, calls "authors who have often unjustly drifted from the public consciousness." Meera Dattani, former chair of the British Guild of Travel Writers, praises "independent, ethically minded publishers like Eland [for] celebrating knowledge of the way different cultures live."

Yet challenges arise with changing times. "Who gets to tell the story of a place?" asks Jini Reddy, author of *Wanderland*, a pastoral travelog focused on landscape and nature, published in 2020. "The condescension of colonial-era tales wearies me," she says.

"Anyone who champions historic travel writing, which in the English-speaking world was often written by a very narrow demographic—usually men, and always from the wealthier ruling classes—must be mindful of the skewed perception of the world this has constructed," adds Tharik Hussain, author of *Minarets in the Mountains: A Journey into Muslim Europe*, published in 2021.

Eland's directors are alive to the issue. "A future Eland has to be much more diverse, not a whole lot of white writers," says Baring. "I'd love to see voices on the page from much further afield than we have."

Rogerson concurs, speaking of trusting readers to grasp who is writing for whom and out of what context. Eland's mission, he says, is "making people realize there are millions of centers of the world. It doesn't have to be Washington, Paris, and London. [If] you understand that Yemen, say, has connections with Indonesia, Malaysia, East Africa, suddenly you see the world not centered from power points. There is no superior culture. But the trick as a publisher is not to be earnest about this. You have to make every reader's journey enjoyable. People learn through delight."

> "Making people realize there are millions of centers of the world" may be Eland's mission, "but the trick as a publisher is not to be earnest about this. … People learn through delight."
>
> —BARNABY ROGERSON

For Rogerson and Baring, the next step is seeking to publish more travel in translation, particularly from non-European languages: Last fall they scouted possibilities in Arabic at the Marrakech Book Festival. Rogerson confirms that Eland has only published 12 new books over its four decades, and that process, he says, is "great fun, but it requires a completely different business model." In contrast, Eland's approach of upcycling old works—in effect rescuing quality from obscurity—has been honed to address gaps in public perception of the Islamic world in particular. This is a reflection in part of Rogerson's own obsessions: Alongside selections from medieval Arab travel writers, Eland's 2011 *An Ottoman Traveller*, for instance, comprises the only writing by the 17th-century Turkish explorer Evliya Çelebi in print in English. Looking closer to home, this year Eland will put out a memoir by Christian Watt, a 19th-century woman from a Scottish fishing family, as part of its efforts to publish more working-class narratives.

And while embracing ever-new horizons, growth is not, at this point, a goal. "The very act of remaining independent is a virtue every morning," Rogerson says. "We're like a farmer with 70 acres from which he knows he can feed his family," he adds. "We don't want to grow. We want to carry on."

Matthew Teller is a UK-based writer and journalist. His latest book, *Nine Quarters of Jerusalem: A New Biography of the Old City*, was published last year. Follow him on Twitter @matthewteller and at matthewteller.com.

Andrew Shaylor is a portrait, documentary and travel photographer based just outside London and has visited 70 countries. He works with a variety of magazines and has published two books, *Rockin': The Rockabilly Scene* and *Hells Angels Motorcycle Club*.

Related articles at aramcoworld.com
Interlink Books: Nov / Dec 2007
E. J. Brill: May / Jun 2015

OF THE WORLD'S GREAT RIVERS, THERE ARE PERHAPS NONE AS ICONIC, EVEN CELEBRATED, AS THE NILE.

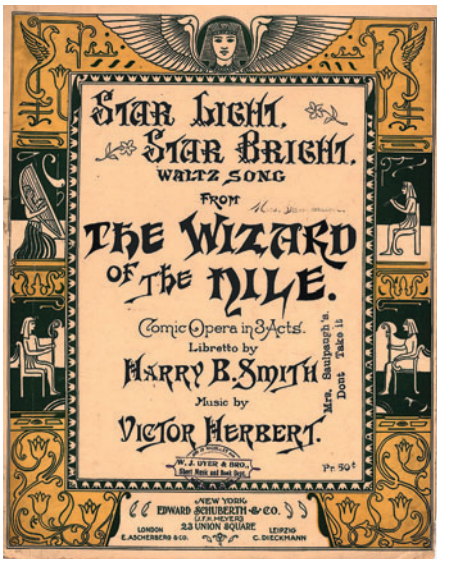
This 6,650-kilometer natural wonder has acquired universal recognition particularly through its association with the pyramids, temples and tombs Egyptians built along and near its banks. Beginning in the mid-19th century, as "Egyptomania" swept popular culture in both Europe and the United States, no country outside of Egypt itself has paid so much attention to the river Nile—glorifying it, mythologizing it, exoticizing it—as the US. And nowhere was this more apparent than in popular music, where nearly 100 musical compositions, produced over some 125 years, have used the Nile as a motif, a metaphor or both. These compositions fall into nearly every category of music of their times, but the most notable uses of the Nile arose during the jazz period, peaking in the second half of the 20th century and continues to this day.

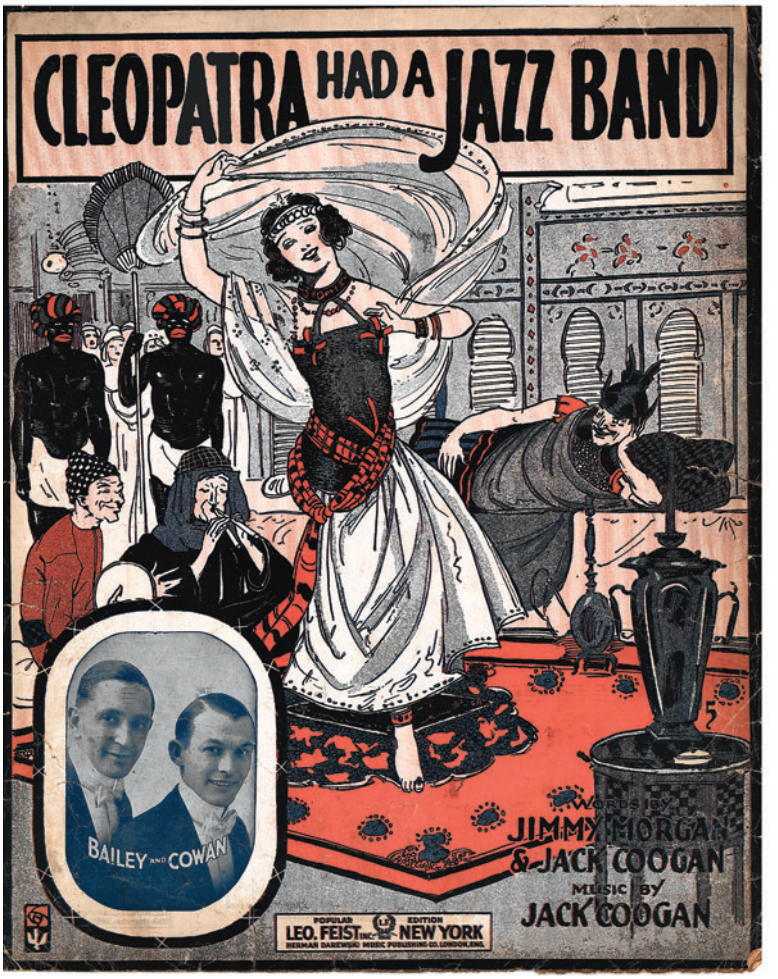
Egyptomania—as it was called at the time—was a form of Orientalism that was both sincere fascination and colonialist exploitation. Stimulated by the advent of the steamship and epitomized by French Emperor Napoleon's 1799 invasion of Egypt, whose forces included not only soldiers but also scholars, the popularization of all things Egyptian—both real and imagined—fed the rising consumerism of the new Industrial Age. Vivid, often lurid images of the far-away and the ancient, appeared on Egypt-themed trading cards, coffee cans, beef jars, chocolates, cosmetics, Camel cigarettes and much more.

No less was true in music, from Broadway to neighborhood music stores. In 1885 the highly successful run of *The Wizard of the Nile,* scored for Broadway by Victor Herbert, was so successful it jumpstarted the composer's career, who went on to become one of America's most prolific artists of musical theater. The three-act comic operetta opened with the refrain, "Father Nile, keep us in thy care," sung by actors portraying boatmen and water carriers whose pleas came from a hymn written more than 40 centuries

Hey, come along with me ...
Take my hand and see ...
Creations planned along the old black Nile
My ancestry, history is calling me.

—GREGORY PORTER, 2009





Over the span of some 150 years, the 6,650-kilometer Nile river has captivated and inspired mid-19th-century Egyptomania in the United States. For more than 125 years, this attraction has resulted in nearly 100 musical compositions produced in the US. **TOP LEFT** Song sheet titled "Star Light Star Bright, Waltz Song From The Wizard of the Nile, Comic Opera in 3 Acts," by Harry B. Smith and Victor Herbert. At that time there were no records. **TOP RIGHT** "The Nile Bride, Egypt." Trading Card from the Holidays series that were issued in 1890. **BOTTOM** Song sheet of "Cleopatra Had A Jazz Band," that was issued in 1917. This was the first time the word "Jazz" appeared on sheet music with that spelling.

ago in the hieroglyphs of Middle Egypt.

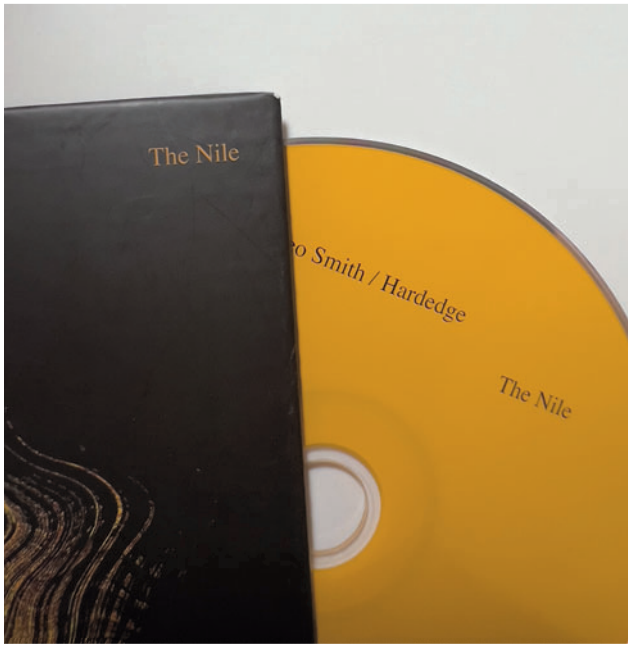
On the shelves of music stores, some 50 novelty love songs appeared using the Nile in titles and lyrics, published in colorful sheet-music form and later also sold as 10-inch, 78-rpm, shellac records for Victrola record players for homes, night clubs and dance halls. Variety shows, revues and cabarets used the songs too, including the lavish Ziegfeld Follies of 1916 that featured among its sketches a song by the eminent composer Jerome Kern titled "My Lady of the Nile." The following year "Cleopatra Had a Jazz Band" ("in her castle on the Nile / ev'ry night she gave a jazz dance in her queer Egyptian style") hit music stores nationwide and sold thousands. Thus did the Nile flow into the American musical scene.

These sounds fell on ears further primed for the novelty of exotica by the rising numbers of travelogs, newspaper accounts, and some of the first of what now might be called immersive experiences: The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago prominently featured the enticements of Cairo Street, which drew large audiences and went on to be replicated by world's fairs and expositions elsewhere, explains musicologist Anne Rasmussen of the College of William and Mary. These kinds of spectacles, she adds, were enlivened and bolstered by music, provided by a growing cadre of local musicians as well as immigrants and their descendants who "played Oriental"—as it was regarded at the time.

The 1930s saw the demise of the sheet music industry and record sales dwindled in the face of financial hardships of the Great Depression. By then Americans were able to hear music freely on the radio, especially tunes of the big band era. After World War II their popularity gave way to smaller groups such as the Duprees whose 1962 hit "You Belong to Me" invited listeners to imagine flying to "see the pyramids along the Nile" or "the marketplace in Old Algiers" and other tantalizingly exoticized lands. In the latter part of the century, Carlos Santana released his spiritual odyssey "The Nile" in 1982, and country singer Pam Tillis sang "Cleopatra, Queen of Denial" in 1992. All reflected and shaped a popular, and stereotype-laden, perception of the great river and Egypt. Likewise numerous musical scores accompanying Hollywood movies of the era did the same, such as *Love Songs of the Nile* from the 1933 cliché film *The Barbarian*.

Rasmussen identifies several stylistic components and conventions among these performances of yesteryear whose titles referenced the Nile. These include minor scales and bent notes "pregnant with the air of the Orient," as well as ornamentation or embroidery of a melody that lent a touch of the exotic or made it sound "just slightly east of the Atlantic."

These sounds, she adds, also reached the ears of jazz players, led much by those African American musicians who in the 1950s were leading the rise of a revolutionary form of jazz called Bebop. This movement, says Richard Brent Turner, a scholar of African American religious history and music at the University of Iowa, created a fertile cultural and intellectual ground for



the musician's embrace of the Middle East in general and, for more than a few, Islam. This flourishing movement swept in others as well, creating a disparate, yet cohesive, community of instrumentalists who composed more than 30 jazz refrains evoking the Nile's sunrises, sunsets, moonrises, upper and lower regions, the fertility of its delta, its populous banks, and even animal life along its shores. Their contributions facilitated the growth of contemporary/modern jazz forms and genres—cool, fusion, modal, free, avant garde, funk/soul, latin, astral, spiritual, and the straight-ahead jazz heard today. In 1957 Sun Ra, whose name draws on the Pharaonic sun god, wrote for his composition "Enticement":

> "I think it's very likely that many of these references are, if not nationalistically, then culturally, expressions of Kemet—Black ancient Egypt."
> —MICHAEL FRISHKOPF

Imagination is a magic carpet
Upon which we may soar
To distant lands and climes…
I cordially entice you,
I diligently tempt you:
Step upon my magic carpet of sound,
And share my adventures
On the land of pleasure Hi Fi

NILES BLUE, WHITE, BLACK

From central Africa and the highlands of Ethiopia flow the White Nile and the larger Blue Nile, and they join in Khartoum, Sudan, to flow north as the single river Nile. In 1970 pianist and harpist Alice Coltrane, saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and Joe Henderson, bassist Ron Carter and drummer Ben Riley produced "Blue Nile," which featured Coltrane at the helm of a musical journey propelled by her glistening harp runs and tranquil flutes underlaid by a deep and resonant bass line. Recorded on the Impulse label, it is regarded as a seminal work in the annals of spiritual jazz. In 2016 it was reinterpreted by the Atlantis Jazz Ensemble, whose up-tempo, hard-swinging version "is definitely meant to elevate the soul," says the group's cofounder and pianist Pierre Chretien. The Blue and White branches of the Nile also come together under *African Skies,* Kelan Phil Cohran's 1993 cosmic masterpiece, considered one of his finest works, a slow build that combines East African tones and Western jazz fusions.

"I called it 'Black Nile,' not as a nationalistic device but to locate it," pointed out Shorter in a comment chronicled in jazz critic Nat Hentoff's liner notes. "I was thinking of the Egyptian civilization which at the time of its greatest achievements was a black civilization.

TOP The influence of the Nile extended to British-born jazz singer Zara McFarlane's 2019 single "East of the River Nile." **MIDDLE** In 2014, Indie label Hardedge released a four-composition LP from American jazz trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, who released his first album more than 40 years before in 1972; **LOWER** Released in 1966 by jazz multi-instrumentalist Yusef Lateef for Impulse! Records, *A Flat, G Flat and C*, which includes the track, "Nile Valley Blues," helped the Tennessee-born artist pioneer the world-music scene.

In the piece itself, I tried to get a feeling flowing—a depiction of the river route." Released originally in 1964 on the Blue Note label, "Black Nile" has been re-issued more than 50 times and, in 2009, Gregory Porter set lyrics to it: "Hey come along with me / take my hand and see, Creations planned along the old black Nile, my ancestry, history is calling me."

MaseQua Myers and Jami Ayinde take up the same theme in their soulful 1975 jazz refrain "Black Land of the Nile," joined by saxophonist Chico Freeman. "I think it's very likely that many of these references are, if not nationalistically, then culturally, expressions of Kemet—Black ancient Egypt," remarks musicologist Michael Frishkopf of the University of Alberta in Canada. Moreover, it looms beyond boundaries and serves as an important connector between the continent's coastal north and Sub-Saharan regions while also traversing the cultural spheres of Afrocentrism and Afrofuturism.

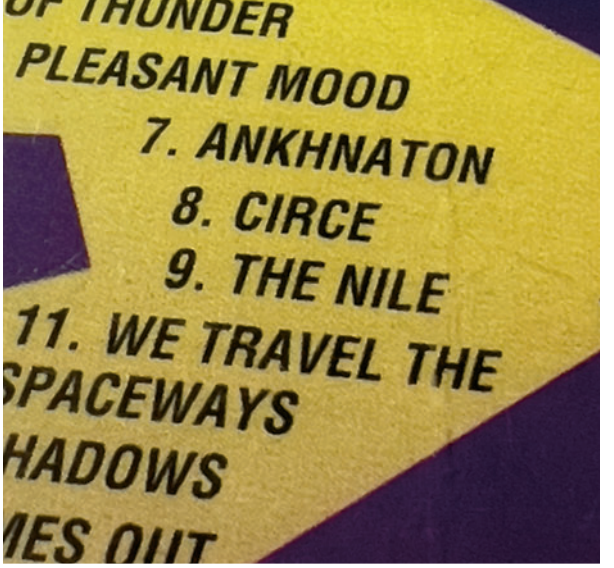
Pianist McCoy Tyner embraced Islam in 1955 at the age of 17, and in 1970 led a groundbreaking collaboration among himself, Coltrane, Shorter, Jones, Carter and sax player Gary Bartz, "Message from the Nile," which epitomized the cutting edge of jazz and remains influential. The history that transpired on and along the Nile evoked by the music is an "integral part of the experiences of Black people," noted McCoy. This sentiment was mirrored in pianist Randy Weston's 2002 composition "Roots of the Nile," inspired by his travels to Egypt.

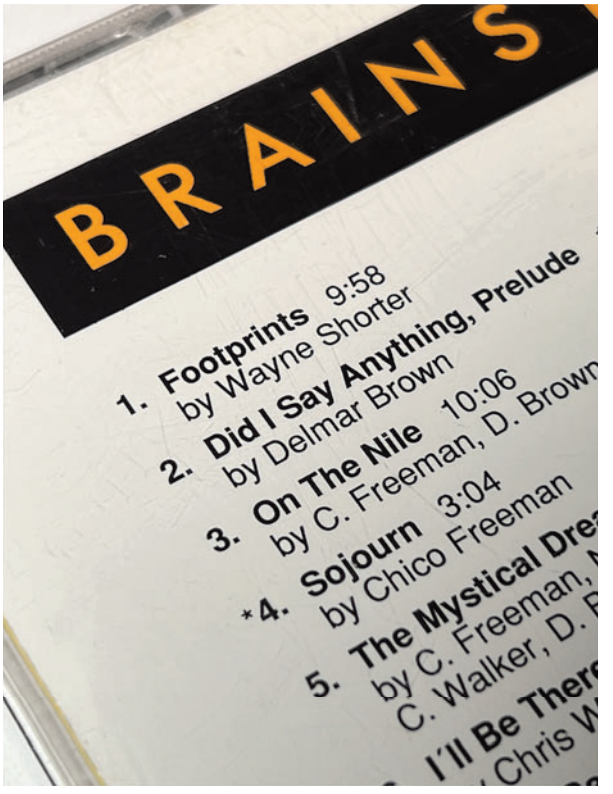
WHERE ON THE NILE?

"The stately Middle Eastern theme moves like one of Cleopatra's opulent barges," wrote jazz critic Ira Gitler in his liner notes to saxophonist Jackie McClean's 1975 rendition of "On the Nile," composed in 1969 by trumpeter Charles Tolliver and recorded by numerous artists, each a record of an encounter with a Nile that conjures a wide range of feelings and sensations dictated both by the real and the imaginary. "I like to rumble, I take the most difficult routes for improvisation ... no gimmicks, just hard-core jazz music," Tolliver confided in a *Downbeat* magazine interview. Henceforth he and his fellow musicians, among them pianist Stanley Cowell, pursued a musical journey in a performance that rivals the best of any in their careers. Tolliver joined up in 2011 to revisit this number with Archie Shepp on sax in a lavish orchestral adaptation staged in Germany. Los Angeles-based pianist Horace Tapscott, founder of the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra, as well as Shari Cassity, who played in Tolliver's Big Band, followed suit with their own adaptations of this masterwork; and saxophonist Chico Freeman's 1990 recording is driven by a harmonious mix of Afro-Latin rhythms.

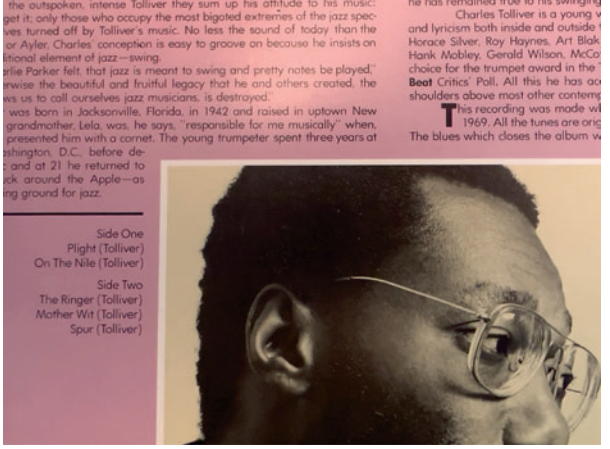
> "The stately Middle Eastern theme moves like one of Cleopatra's opulent barges."
> —IRA GITLER

While saxophones reigned supreme at the outset of the modern jazz era, the playful and lyrical piano also affirmed its place in the





TOP The back cover of the 1993 CD double reissue of the 1960 albums *Fate in a Pleasant Mood* and *When Sun Comes Out*, features the track, "The Nile," by the late jazz-artist, poet and Afrofuturism pioneer Sun Ra and his Myth Science Akestra band. **MIDDLE** A close-up of a list of tracks on the CD re-release of the 1974 album *Southern Comfort*, by The Crusaders, a jazz fusion band that disbanded in 2010 after 50 years of playing together, reveals a track list that included the song "Lilies of the Nile." **LOWER** A track list from Chico Freeman & Brainstorm's 1990 *Sweet Explosion* includes the 10-minute composition, "On the Nile."



repertoire, an instrument Danish pianist Maria Kannegaard used in 2008 in her gentle, hypnotic "Drifting Along the Nile," which is set to a circularly repeated, three-chord pattern that references "minimalist classicism without sounding anything like it," wrote John Kelman in his AllAboutJazz.com review. The place of the piano up front and center is also evident in the soulful arrangement accentuated by the striking cords of Ahmad Jamal, one of American's most influential jazz pianists, bandleaders and educators as he charted a private space for the listener's own river journey, "Somewhere Along the Nile" in 1974. The cruise is extended to the river's upper dominions in a 1986 piece titled "6 A.M. / Walking on the Nile" by keyboard and synthesizer master Joe Zawinul, of Weather Report fame, which recalled the sights and sounds of daily lives "glimpsed or imagined."

The ruminations of two saxophonists, a trumpeter and flautist frame the Nile with references to its geographic regions, and its fertile flood plains and delta. "I was in the Nile Valley just as a traveler," recalls Yusef Lateef, a leading reed instrumentalist of his era. "[I] felt a parallel between that valley and the richness of the blues form," which he conveyed in 1966 in his "Nile Valley Blues," a performance roused by breathy vocals, some spoken through the flute. Other vocals resonate in Carlos Garnett's 1974 composition "Banks of the Nile," as Dee Dee Bridgewater, accompanied by full-sounding horn lines, takes lead and saxophonist Garnett embarks on the soprano while "the horns also develop in gradually rising patterns," wrote Michael Cuscuna in the LP's liner notes. "Lower Nile" was a spirited 1977 composition by Arthur Blythe in which once again the saxophone stands supreme: Departing from his standard free jazz and avant-garde modes, Blythe settles into a Funk Jazz classic that features a steady percussive base line and melodic arabesque patterns that become even more riveting in the later 2009 rendition by cellist Erik Friedlander. Similarly the winding Middle Eastern sway that underscores Tom Harrell's 2015 evocation "Delta of the Nile" showcases his talent as "a deft cool-tone trumpeter and extremely skilled composer" while Omer Avital played the 'ud to give this standout number a touch of the sublime.

> "I was in the Nile Valley just as a traveler, ... [I] felt a parallel between that valley and the richness of the blues form."
> —YUSEF LATEEF

THE SUN, MOON, RIVER

The sun's daily east-west journey, central to old Egyptian beliefs from creation to afterlife, also engaged the imaginations of jazz musicians. None perhaps more than trailblazing composer Sun Ra, who, queried in an interview published in *Prophetika*, a compendium of his poetry and prose, said that his source of his inspiration came "from

TOP In 1970 American jazz trumpeter and composer Charles Tolliver released his third album, through British label Polydor Records, *The Ringer*. featuring the track, "On the Nile." **MIDDLE** Nearly 30 years later, in 1999, AEI Records released a remastered recording of the 1950 concert performance of the comic opera *The Wizard of the Nile*, composed by Victor Herbert with libretto by Harry B. Smith. **LOWER** The 2004 release of *Nile River Suite* on Daagnim Music by the late jazz musician Dennis González, a former Dallas public school teacher, comprises six tracks including "The Nile Runs Through New York," "The Nile Runs Through My Heart," and "The Nile Runs Through Us All."

From sheet music and vinyls to CDs and digital releases, American music has used the Nile as its motif for more than 125 years, as shown in the collection of records and discs above. **BELOW** A vinyl record of Charles Tolliver and Music Inc's 1975 *The Ringer* features five tracks, including "On the Nile."

ancient Egypt. I would say I feel at home when I'm in Egypt. ... 'Once I dwelled in Ancient Egypt, when the world was young I walked beside the Nile.'" Hence, it is befitting that what is regarded as the first modern jazz recording to focus on the Nile, made in 1963, belongs to him. It also appears on the cover art of the album *When Sun Comes Out*. Multi-instrumentalist Derf Reklaw, whose 1998 album *From the Nile* features "Sunrise on the Nile" as its leading track, credited Sun Ra's influence, and especially Sun Ra's 1992 "Sunset On the Night On the River Nile."

The straight-ahead style of Gary Smulyan, a deep-toned master of the baritone sax, also produced "Moonlight on the Nile," which features on his 1990 album *The Lure of Beauty*.

A NILE STILL RUNS THROUGH THE US

The growth and development of jazz continues, and with it, the appearance of Middle Eastern and Nile-related titles through genres, styles and conventions. Consider the vanguard trumpeter and musical theorist Wadada Leo Smith, who in 2014 teamed up with electro-sound designer Hardedge for a sizzling backdrop on "The Nile." In 2003 Dennis González's Inspiration Band released "The Nile River Suite," a three-part study in tranquility and pop-up lyrical moments that segues into a heartfelt groove, one whose flow reminds musicians and audiences alike that a musical Nile continues to run through us all.

Jonathan Friedlander is a historian, author and photographer. Formerly assistant director of the Center for Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, he is presently affiliated with UCLA's Young Research Library. His forthcoming study is entitled *Orientalism and Americana: The Middle East in American Jazz*.

Related articles at aramcoworld.com
Cairo, USA: Sep / Oct 2020
Roots of US blues: Jul / Aug 2006

BRIDGING LYRES AND LUTES

INGENUITY • INNOVATION • 3

Written by LEE LAWRENCE

Arabian *'uds* and European violins; Chinese pipas, Indian veenas; Indonesian rebabs, West African koras and American electric guitars and banjos—all are descended from lutes, a family of instruments whose shared DNA includes strings that run parallel across a flat soundboard or belly up a distinct pole or neck. There have been countless variations of lute forms over more than 4,000 years as people across the globe adopted, adapted and adjusted instruments to satisfy a preference, meet a need or indulge a curiosity. What if I ... added strings? Modified the shape? Made the neck shorter? Longer? On and on—and along the way, some innovations proved as consequential as they were simple.

For composer and musicologist Tarek Abdallah, whose research at France's Université Lumière Lyon 2 has included a deep dive into the evolution of lutes into 'uds. According to Abdallah, the first such innovation took place between the ninth and mid-11th centuries CE. At that time, the standard 'ud had four strings, sometimes with an added lower fifth one. At some point, an anonymous luthier doubled each of the four standard strings. Now the instrument sported eight in pairs tuned to the same pitch with the optional ninth. This not only endowed the instrument with a fuller, richer sound, but it also turned out to be "an invention that revolutionizes everything," says Abdallah.

For example, he says, 'ud-makers had to widen the neck to accommodate the additional strings, and then they had to modify the head to fit four more tuning pegs. They also had to strengthen the instrument: When played, the vibrations of the strings travel through the bridge to the soundboard, temporarily pressing it in. The more strings, the greater the pressure and the more movement throughout the soundboard as it repeatedly presses down and releases.

The first known reference to doubled strings on 'uds comes from the 11th-century-CE theoretician and musician al-Hasan ibn al-Musiqi al-Tahan, who discussed the effects of the doubling in his treatise, *Hawi al-Funun wa-Salwat al-Mazhun* (*Encompasser of the Arts and Consoler of the Grief-Stricken*). Abdallah explains that because of the stress and pressure double strings exert on the soundboard and bridge, Ibn al-Tahan recommended that a lute not be carved out of a single block of wood but be assembled from several pieces. Ibn al-Tahan further suggested that the soundboard be made of two or three pieces, thicker than the ribs of the soundbox and supported by an unspecified number of wooden bars.

This also made for a lighter instrument that was easier to handle, which Abdallah says he appreciates whenever he practices or performs with one of his own 'uds.

Traveling back in time, the oldest surviving lute was made around 1490 BCE in Egypt, and it was buried alongside the musician Ḥvar-Moše. Carved out of a block of cedar, its body is a concave oval 43 centimeters long, 11.5 centimeters wide and 8 centimeters high. It is topped by rawhide that had been, according to a 1944 article in the New York *Metropolitan Museum Art Bulletin*, "stretched in place while still damp, eight short slits having previously been made in it and the neck passed through these; the hide shrank as it dried, so that it fitted the sound box tightly and clamped the neck down along the top."

Yet it was itself a descendant from far older instruments. From paintings and texts, scholars know that lutes were one of the many cultural artifacts that were adopted in Egypt from Mesopotamia starting around 1550 BCE. Archaeomusicologists who specialize in the science of music and musical instruments can't say how long people in Mesopotamia had been making and playing lutes. But they agree that

Evidence of the earliest stringed instruments are believed to be shown in cave paintings dated around 13,000 BCE, indicated by a simple bow with one string. **OPPOSITE** A clay tablet discovered at an Old Babylonian Period (1595 BCE-849 BCE) archaeological site, Tell Ishchali, southeast of Baghdad, Iraq, shows a musician playing a long-necked lute. During this period, the instrument had three to four strings and was played with a wooden plectrum. **BELOW** Found at an archaeological site at Dra' Abu el-Naga' in Thebes, Egypt, an oval, thinly-walled lute sound box dated around 1550-1295 BCE, was carved from wood and was most likely covered by a rawhide soundboard. **RIGHT** A Byzantine-era Egyptian-made lute dated between 200-500 CE included peg holes, a wooden nut on top of the neck and indentations on the soundboard. These advancements suggest the instrument could be an ancestor to the guitar and others in its family. **LEFT** Egyptian 'ud player, composer and musicologist Tarek Abdallah plays a modern 'ud that is pear-shaped with sound holes in the soundboard and a bridge that secures 11 or 13 strings depending on the instrument.

RIGHT TOP AND BOTTOM: THE MET (2); LEFT: COURTESY TAREKABDALLAH / HASAN AMIN; OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

'Ud maker Antoun al-Tawil plays an 'ud at his shop in Damascus, Syria. The bridge lifting the paired strings off of the soundboard allows the strings to be strummed and plucked with a plectrum—the same way lutes were played some 4,000 years ago.

it was sometime before 2330-2284 BCE when the carver of a cylinder seal depicted a scene filled with mythical and divine beings. Seated on the ground in their midst, a musician cradles a long-necked instrument with a round body, one hand picking or strumming and the other reaching around the back of the neck, fingers curled over the strings in front.

Richard Dumbrill, cofounder of the International Conference of Near Eastern Archaeomusicology, interprets that round body as a gourd, and over it, a stretched hide. "When you play it with your hands, it's a drum," he says. "Then you add a bridge and a neck, and it becomes a string instrument." Dumbrill fetches his reconstruction of such an early lute which, in shape, resembles a modern-day banjo.

> "When you play it with your hands, it's a drum ... then you add a bridge and a neck, and it becomes a string instrument."
>
> —RICHARD DUMBRILL

The drum, he says, becomes a soundbox, with the hide drumhead acting as a soundboard. As in Har-Mose's lute, Dumbrill has slit the hide to create straps that, in this case, flank the center of the body. As in the cylinder seal carving, the neck extends beyond the soundbox to accommodate the length of the player's forearm and then some.

At the head, Dumbrill has secured each string with rope that he has looped and knotted in a way that allows him to tighten or loosen tension on the string. At the lower end, he has tied the strings firmly to the tip. But had Dumbrill stopped there, the lute would be mute: The strings would merely hit the wood pole and the hide—thwack, thwack.

Enter the bridge.

Dumbrill points to the slim piece of wood that rises from the neck, near the center of the soundbox. It is firmly wedged and runs perpendicular to the strings, lifting them high enough above the soundboard to ensure that they vibrate unimpeded. But this is not all. On their own, strings cannot move much air, and the sound they produce is faint. Here, however, their vibrations travel through the bridge to the much larger surface of the soundboard, as well as to the sides and back of the soundbox. The effect of plucking those strings is now amplified as the air inside the soundbox comes alive with waves of sounds.

In this respect lutes are not alone. Ancient lyres also amplify notes thanks to a bridge and a soundbox. But where lutes and lyres differ is in the way musicians can adjust pitch, that is, produce different notes.

Lyres are U shaped with a crossbar at the top that spans the two arms and, at the base, a soundbox with a bridge. The strings run from the crossbar through open air to the bridge, which allows players to pluck and strum with both hands, one on each

Temesgen Zeleke of the Ethiopian band Krar Collective plays an electric *krar*, a five-or-six stringed, bowl-shaped lyre, during a performance at New York's Central Park Summer Stage in 2013. The basic shape and structure of the instrument mimics that of its earliest ancestors, but this lyre is electrified to produce contemporary sounds.

side of the set of strings. They tune every string to a pitch and, if they want more notes, they have to add strings.

On the lute, however, players can use each string to produce many pitches with the press of a finger. By pushing the string against the neck, they mark a new end point, thereby varying how much of the string is vibrating: The shorter the active length, the higher its frequency and pitch.

Lutes started out as "pastoral instruments," says Dumbrill. And although "it is highly probable that if you were a peasant, you wouldn't think in terms of rules," the shifts in pitches and octaves that correlate to distinct notes would have guided practiced fingers from the earliest times.

At Alaca Hüyük, an archeological center of Neolithic and Hittite culture in north-central Turkey, a relief produced between about 1250 and 1200 BCE depicts a musician playing a lute that shows marks on its neck—frets. This gave Dumbrill insight into the notes ancient musicians may have played. "From the moment you have the neck of the instrument and the bridge, and you have frets," he says, "you can calculate hypothetically the value of the pitches." Dumbrill later compared these to a similar study of Egyptian depictions from about the same period by musicologist Ricardo Eichmann. "We found exactly the same fret positions" relative to the length of their necks, says Dumbrill. The implications to him are clear: "So it means that from Egypt to central Turkey, and probably in the rest of the Babylonian empire and so forth, they had a standard system."

In some cases, innovations have unwittingly retraced the steps of these same distant ancestors. Abdallah cites a well-known incident in 1957 when renowned musician Munir Bashir left Iraq to perform in Beirut only to have the bridge on his 'ud snap and rip off part of the face. He set Muhammad Fadil, his luthier, the task of making him an 'ud that would avoid such a fate. Fadil came up with a bridge that wasn't anchored to the soundboard but simply rested on it, held in place by the strings—a floating bridge. It was ingenious, and "they presented it as an invention," says Abdallah. "But as it turned out," he cautions, "you can't reinvent the wheel." He points to Ḥvar-Moše's lute: It too had a floating bridge.

> Lutes started out as "pastoral instruments."
>
> —RICHARD DUMBRILL

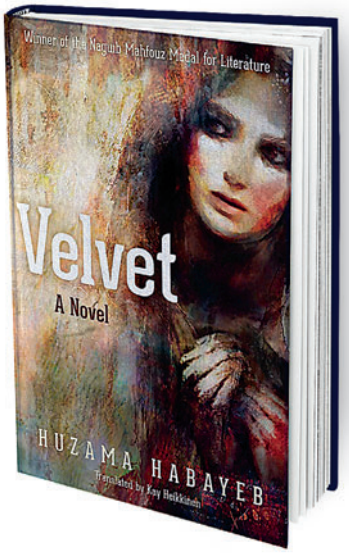
The "huge step" occurred when someone millennia ago created the bridge itself, Abdallah says. Though musicologists like him and Dumbrill may never pinpoint who made that crucial tweak or when, it connects those early innovators to every descendant of their lutes and to the music they make, from village squares to concert halls to streaming playlists.

Based in Brooklyn, New York, **Lee Lawrence** (leeadairlawrence.com) writes frequently on Islamic and Asian art for *The Wall Street Journal* and cultural affairs for *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Related articles at aramcoworld.com
'Ud: May / Jun 2020
Ziryab: Jul / Aug 2003

JACK VARTOOGIAN / GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE: LOUAI BESHARA / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

REVIEWS



"Velvet has an aroma unlike any other. ... It's the aroma of warmth, of dormant heat, of depth and expanse; it's the aroma of well-deserved luxury, of pride and restraint;"

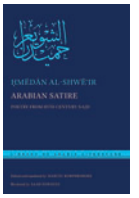
—From *Velvet: A Novel*, by Huzama Habayeb and translated by Kay Heikkinen

Velvet: A Novel

Huzama Habayeb. Trans. Kay Heikkinen. Hoopoe, 2019.

Intensely poignant, Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature award winner Huzama Habayeb pens the life story of Hawwa, a fiercely strong seamstress living in a Palestinian refugee camp from childhood to death. The novel winds throughout Hawwa's life as she takes on the burdens of her parents, siblings, and later her husband, children and grandchildren, attempting to insulate her loved ones from the violence in and around the camp. Depicting the highs and lows of modern womanhood, as well as the special strength that comes from an arduous life, Habayeb weaves a heart-wrenching story that springs from the sorrow of a young girl. Hawwa searches for meaning in the love and grief that surround her. Through the years, we witness Hawwa's quiet strength persevere as she tries to stitch her family's life back together. Equal parts touching and tragic, this novel gives an intimate view of love and loss inside of a tumultuous world. —HANNAH STERENBERG

Without endorsing the views of authors, the editors encourage reading as a path to greater understanding.



Arabian Satire: Poetry From 18th-Century Najd

Ḥmēdān al-Shwē'ir. Trans. Marcel Kurpershoek. NYU Press, 2020.

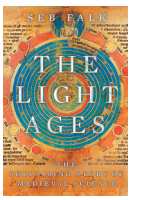
This comprehensive collection of poems is not for the fainthearted or sticklers for political correctness. Ḥmēdān's satire is rife with ribald humor and deliciously venomous criticisms sparing no one, himself and his family included. Frequently self-deprecating, Ḥmēdān, who hails from Najd, in present-day Saudi Arabia, also calls himself a "learned and discerning poet," who relishes "bursting vain pretentions." The poems reflect Ḥmēdān's time in 18th-century Arabia, when honor was equivalent to generosity and bravery—and when a man's worth was measured by his virility and battlefield performance, and women by their youth, beauty and chastity. The accompanying notes explain much and augment the experience nicely. This paperback is English only, unlike its hardback, bilingual version. Rhymes and vernacular were lost in translation, but the unforgiving, often hilarious tone is very present. —MAE GHALWASH

The Heart of Lebanon

Ameen Rihani, Roger Allen, trans. Syracuse UP, 2021.

A leading figure of the early 20th-century US-based Arabic literary movement al-Mahjar, Rihani first moved to New York in 1888 when he was 12 years old. Nearly 20 years later, in 1907, he returned to his native Lebanon. Rihani planned on making 17 excursions throughout the country, but accomplished only nine of those prior to his death in 1940. Beginning with his first journey by mule to Mount Lebanon and the Cedars, Rihani's travelog introduces readers to the landscape and the people, as well as to what he describes as the "values of the essential Lebanese heritage—generosity, kindness, chivalry and humility." Published posthumously in Arabic in 1948, this stirring tribute to Lebanon, translated by Allen, a scholar of Arabic literature, maintains the work's original voice, allowing readers access to Rihani's private dialog with his homeland as he savors "the sweet scent of friendly souls and pure hearts."

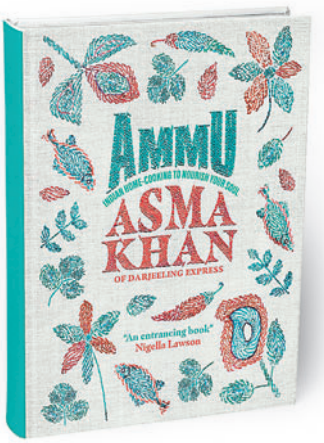
—PINEY KESTING



The Light Ages: The Surprising Story of Medieval Science

Seb Falk. W.W. Norton, 2020.

Finding fresh perspectives on Islam's contributions to medieval Western science is not easy. Falk, a University of Cambridge science historian, manages to do just that through the eyes of little-known 14th-century English cleric and astrologer John of Westwyk. John's journey of discovery through sundry monastic libraries exposed him to manuscripts that inspired his own magnum opus, *Equatorie* [Computer] *of the Planetis*. Examining the Albion, a famed contemporary English astrolabe, John noted that it featured "attributes of earlier instruments" including those designed by 11th-century Andalusi astronomer al-Zarqali. These and other influences on John's own scholarship reemphasizes how "respect for ancient learning and study of ancient texts," especially those of Muslim scholars, were "a key feature of the Middle Ages." —TOM VERDE



Ammu: Indian Home Cooking to Nourish Your Soul

Asma Khan. Interlink Books, 2022.

Cooking Food For the Body, Mind and Soul: A Conversation With Chef and Restauranteur Asma Khan

by MARINA ALI

Asma Khan introduced South Asian food to England when, in 2017. she founded, manages and works as the head chef of the Darjeerling Express, a brick-and-mortar restaurant in London that started off as a supper club. Born in Calcutta, now Kolkata, Khan's food journey started young. Her family traveled extensively around India for her father's job. Later as a young adult, she relocated to the United Kingdom. Khan's cooking ethos reflects her worldly upbringing and education—with degrees in history and law leading to a lifelong passion for cooking and becoming a pioneer for South Asian cuisine in the UK, having written cookbooks while raising two children, opening restaurants and even appearing on Netflix's *Chef's Table*. *AramcoWorld* caught up with Khan to discuss *Ammu* and her culinary philosophy, as well as her ongoing activism through food.

What was the story behind the Darjeerling Express's creation?
About 10 years ago, [The Darjeerling Express] started as people eating around my home dining table. Food was served family style, and everybody ate at the same time. You helped each other out. People passed the food around. People would tell you, "Try this, try that." "Supper club" refers to a style of serving food, but it's really a home restaurant.

So how was it like transitioning to a physical restaurant?
When I opened the restaurant in 2017, I struggled and made mistakes. The service expectations in a restaurant are very different from a supper club, but I survived and learned fast. Still, I keep a casual, homely atmosphere at The Darjeerling Express. There are no posh waiters. Customers recommend what to eat to each other; there's a sense of unity and community in my restaurant. Now, we're relocating because our lease finished. I want a new location where my women are visible. We might even build a site! But we're planning on opening before the end of the year.

Moving on to your books, Ammu and 2018's Asma's *Indian Kitchen*, they *both* reflect on that community, but in different ways. Can you describe those differences?
My first cookbook encouraged people to gather around tables and cook. It's really about holding people's hands through the process of entertaining. It's an art. Some people have it; some don't. [*Ammu*] is a far more personal book. It was written over the pandemic. Three members of my family died within 40 days. I had school friends who died. It was very hard, and I got scared. In all that darkness, this book was in me, but I didn't want it to be a memoir. I wanted to give *ammu*, my mother, the book. I wanted her to know the impact she had on my life. She hadn't only taught me to cook; she taught me how to live.

Speaking about that warmth in your books, what is the culinary philosophy that guides you as a chef and author?
I use food to empower women, change the narrative of how home cooks were seen and highlight the feudal nature of our food. Food media is influential. That's why I don't waste the opportunity. When I was on *Chef's Table*, I was the first chef to show their entire team. There is a duty of care when you're talking about food. There is no reason for only promoting a restaurant, a book, or some culinary crazy theory. We need to talk about power and politics, who eats, who doesn't eat, water rights, land rights and how food is grown.

How do you talk about such heavy topics through food?
If people are interested in your food and not what you're saying, they're the wrong kind of people eating your food. I say this a lot as a Muslim immigrant: You cannot wear my clothes, hear my music, and read my poetry, if you do not accept me. You cannot have my food, and then be derogatory to me and my culture. The separation of food and culture allows people to take the most acceptable part of my heritage: my food. You cannot walk away with my food, and then turn your back at me.

Lastly, what advice would you give to aspiring chefs and restaurant owners?
Lead from behind. Put your arm around everybody, every shift. There's always an opportunity to do better than the last shift. There may be mistakes, but the troubleshooting should not be public. You manage people and their hearts. When your workers are struggling, they are fragile. You cannot just let them sink. You rule by compassion and empathy. Let your staff and the customers know you're on their side.

Keep reading more of this article online at aramcoworld.com.

EVENTS

Highlights from aramcoworld.com

Please verify a venue's schedule before visiting.

CURRENT / MAY

reCRAFTED Histories: An Installation by Zahra Almajidi uses both traditional and contemporary techniques in her work with craft objects. Pulling influence from her parents' background as Marsh Arabs (in southern Iraq) forced to migrate and resettle, Almajidi takes folk art to another level. The objects she re/creates reflect both the original meaning and new stories we may see as viewers several steps removed. Arab American National Museum, **Dearborn**, through May 6.

Reverent Ornament, Art From the Islamic World shares timeless Islamic art that celebrates everyday life, history and culture in countries such as Egypt and India, comprised of works like fine glassware, ceramics, metalwork, painting, weaponry and weaving. The works include objects meant for palaces as well as ordinary homes, evoking a rich vision of daily life from the 10th to the 19th centuries. The **Columbia** Museum of Art, **South Carolina** through May 14.

CURRENT / JUNE

Lawrence Abu Hamdan's Walled Unwalled and Other Monologues invites visitors to consider the "ear-witness" as a form of legal testimony, and how the physical act of listening can both exonerate and incriminate. Abu Hamdan practices what he calls "forensic listening" by documenting and analyzing sound records using video, installation and live performances. Walled Unwalled will be presented alongside three performances described by the artist as "audio-visual essays," which contemplate the intersection of sound and politics: *After SFX* (2018), *Natq* (2019), and *Air Pressure* (2021). MoMA, **New York**, through June 11.

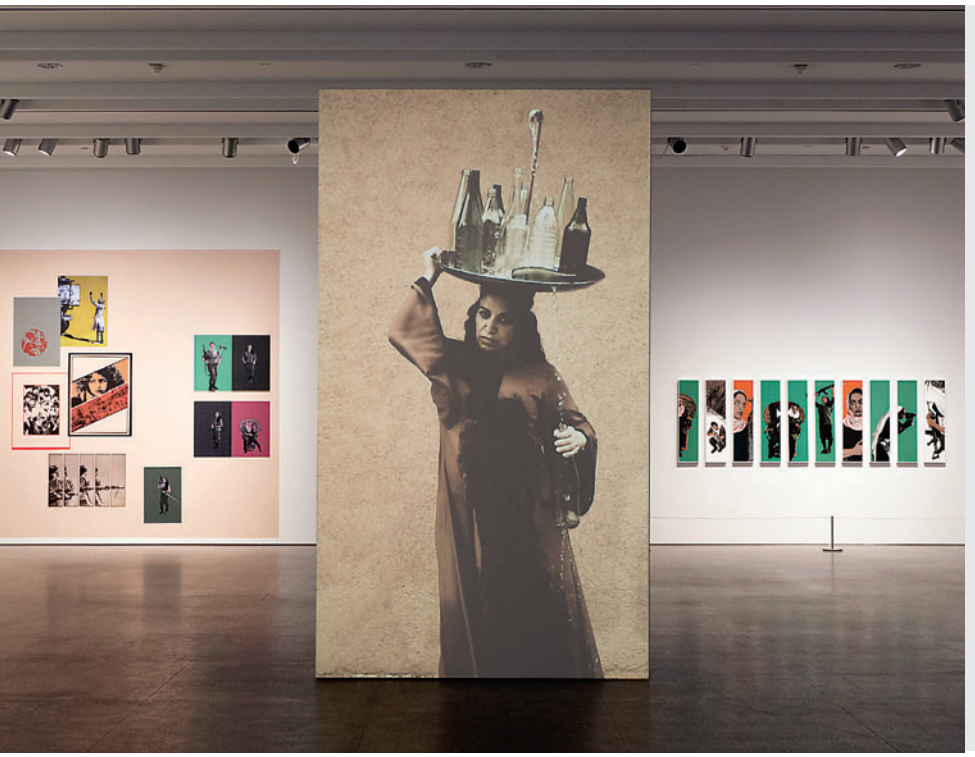
CURRENT / AUGUST

Figural Representation in Islamic Art showcases different types of representation in Islamic art works by contemporary artists Shirin Neshat and Burhan Doğançay. Mosque decoration is often without human figures and includes vegetal, stylized or geometric designs. On the other hand, book illustrations typically depict people, and rulers frequently commissioned their own portraits. This exhibition showcases different types of figural representation in Islamic art, along with works of contemporary artists who encourage us to think: What is in a face? Allen Memorial Art Museum, **Oberlin, Ohio**, through August 6.

CURRENT / SEPTEMBER

Women Defining Women in Contemporary Art of the Middle East and Beyond presents 75 works by women artists who were born, or live in, what can broadly be termed Islamic societies. Each through her unique vision is fashioning not only her own definition of self but also helping to redefine and empower women everywhere and to challenge still-persistent stereotypes. Their art depicts a breadth of inventively and often ideologically conceived women's imagery, bearing witness to rapidly shifting political developments and often accelerated social transformations taking place in lands extending from Africa to Western and Central Asia, as well as in diasporic communities. Across generations and working in different media, the artists share a common sense of identity not exclusively "Middle Eastern" but certainly female, which is evident in their work. LACMA, **Los Angeles**, through September 24.

Readers are welcome to submit event information for possible inclusion to proposals@aramcoamericas.com, subject line "Events."



Sama Alshaibi: Generation After Generation is a solo exhibition shaped by photography's historic and outsized role in generating the gendered and flattened representations of Middle Eastern and North African people and their spaces. Alshaibi reframes this legacy by presenting the Arab female figure as a complex site that embodies the physical and psychic realms of the individual and community when resources, land, mobility and political agency are compromised, using photographic imagery, video and installation. She activates her own body as a mobile medium in consideration of those who are violated and uprooted into physical and psychological exile or positioned as unwanted, alien, silenced and disappeared. **Phoenix** Art Museum, through May 14.

Installation view, *Sama Alshaibi: Generation After Generation*, 2022.

COURTESY OF PHOENIX ART MUSEUM

ONLINE

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram.

Download our free mobile app.

AramcoWorld **is a bimonthly publication available in print, web and mobile editions, and an email newsletter is published biweekly.**
Two-year (12-issue) renewable subscriptions to the print edition are available without charge to a limited number of readers worldwide.

To subscribe to the email newsletter: aramcoworld.com ⟶ Subscribe ⟶ Newsletter.

To subscribe to the print edition: aramcoworld.com ⟶ Subscribe ⟶ Print Edition.

Change of address: aramcoworld.com ⟶ Subscribe ⟶ Print Edition. Have your mailing label with you in order to enter your alphanumeric Subscriber Account Number.

Back issues, from 1960 onward, can be read in full online and downloaded from aramcoworld.com.

Article Proposals: aramcoworld.com ⟶ About ⟶ Guidelines for Contributors.

AramcoWorld **(ISSN 2376-1083) is published bimonthly by Aramco Americas, Two Allen Center, 1200 Smith Street, Houston, TX 77002, USA.**
 Volume 74, Number 3. Periodicals postage paid at Houston, Texas, and at additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *AramcoWorld*, P.O. Box 292348, Kettering, Ohio 45429.

AramcoWorld

aramcoworld.com