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Deposited on: 23 April 2018
JEAN JENKINS, MUSIC AND THE 1976 WORLD OF ISLAM FESTIVAL

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Introduction

The ethnomusicology archive of Jean Jenkins (1922–1990), was first established by the Royal Scottish Museum (now National Museums Scotland (NMS)) in 1980, when the museum purchased Jenkins’ personal collection of musical instruments and cultural artefacts. After Jenkins’ death in 1990, she bequeathed her sound recordings, photography, and paper archives to the museum (Knowles and Lewandowski 2012). Musical instruments in her collection range from drums to wind and string instruments, sourced on a number of pioneering field trips, whilst the paper archive includes field diaries, notes and correspondence from these travels, which covered countries from Soviet Central Asia to Ethiopia and India. It is believed to be one of the broadest musical recording archives ever collected by one person.

This paper approaches the archive, not from the perspective of ethnomusicology (the study of those who make the music) but instead considers Jean Jenkins’ aims and objectives as a researcher and collector, beginning to contextualize her role as an ethnomusicologist during the mid-twentieth century. More specifically, this paper focuses on Jenkins’ affiliation with World Heritage agencies, and her involvement with the World of Islam Trust, which developed the World of Islam Festival held in London in 1976. This Festival was a collaboration between London’s major museums, the British Government, and numerous Islamic Nations (Lenssen 2008). Jenkins made major contributions to the Festival and organized a key exhibition at the Horniman Museum titled Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam. This exhibition (April–October 1976) brought musical instruments, recordings and information from the Islamic world together in London for the very first time. The partnerships that developed between British cultural agencies and Islamic nations for the Festival enabled Jenkins to travel to over ten Islamic countries. In under a year, she collected musical instruments, sound recordings, and associated material culture for the Horniman exhibition (NMS/DWC/JJA/43:53), an opportunity she might not have had otherwise due to lack of time and financial resources. Focusing on this very productive period of her career reveals significant insights...
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into her research concerns, aspirations, and her ideas regarding the preservation of musical traditions.

Each of the key organizers of the Festival had different agendas, priorities, and expectations, but all were motivated by a common cause; to preserve Islamic traditions for future generations. This paper also recalls the political climate in which the Festival was developed and how it allowed Jenkins to broaden her experience and knowledge through research and fieldwork, thus increasing her reputation and status within the field of ethnomusicology.

Jean Jenkins and the Preservation of Music

Jean Jenkins’ career as an ethnomusicologist began in the early 1950s following her graduation from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), when she was employed as the assistant curator of the musical instrument collection at the Horniman Museum. In this role, Jenkins rapidly built up the Horniman’s instrument collection, and brought its Musicology Department to prominence. Jenkins was deeply concerned with the threat an increasingly globalized and homogenized world posed to distinct musical traditions. In an interview with Pete Matthews published in Time Out Magazine (June 18–24, 1976) she argued that ‘the transistor radio and the impact of technological and social change has accelerated the distortion of the local musical culture so much that it is no longer easy to keep up: In some places I’ve been to, the actual instruments have disappeared in a decade’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:51). Thus, in the hope of preserving vanishing musical legacies, Jenkins was prompted to undertake field research to raise awareness of the situation (see Figure 1). As Bicknell and Downie have observed, Jenkins was ‘motivated by the belief that their demise would be a loss to the variety and complexity of the musical heritage of mankind, she created recordings to preserve at least some evidence of their existence’ (2007: 95). Therefore, her sound recordings became objects; they were central to her collecting strategy—a tangible yet intangible glimpse into endangered traditions.

Jenkins’ first field recording trips began in the early 1960s, in which she travelled extensively through Soviet Central Asia and later Africa, including: Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. The materials recorded during these trips were subsequently used as teaching resources during lectures and seminars to promote non-Western music. Jenkins was regularly invited to broadcast her recordings on BBC travel and music radio programmes, and her material became an important part of the BBC’s World Music Archives (NMS/DWC/JJA/22:37). Jenkins’ trips to Ethiopia (1962–69) proved to be most fruitful resulting in the production of three LPs of traditional Ethiopian music under the Tangent Record label. Discussing these recordings in the interview with Matthews, Jenkins emphasized the importance of preserving world music
highlighting how ‘records like these can help you to an understanding of what people are trying to do—incorporating music into their lives in a functional way that no longer exists in our culture’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:51). As a result of the recent analysis of her archive, it can be inferred that for Jenkins, recording was a necessary form of documentation. Recordings created a sense of permanence, in which certain musicians or musical styles could be captured and retained. The music could then be replayed, or even re-appropriated by new musicians, who in turn would keep part of these cultural forms alive.

As a result of her fieldwork Jenkins published valuable typologies on non-Western musical instruments, which had not been systematically formulated in the past. In 1968, Jenkins became Secretary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council of Museums’ (ICOM), Comité International des Musées et collections d’Instruments de Musique (CIMCIM). Under their auspices Jenkins published two books: *Ethnic Musical Instruments* (1970) was intended as a handbook to help museum curators with non-musical training to identify, catalogue, and conserve non-Western musical instruments, and *The International Directory of Musical Instrument Collections* (1977) was a comprehensive list of musical instrument collections from around the world (Lambrects-Douillez: 2013).
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Whilst Jenkins’ contribution to ethnomusicology during this period was clearly recognized by organizations internationally, she still found it difficult to raise funding for research and fieldwork. As an employee of the Horniman Museum, Jenkins was not paid for her fieldwork and only minimally compensated for the musical instruments she acquired in the field. Jenkins’ correspondence and newspaper cuttings provide fascinating insights into her situation. In an interview for the *Indonesian Times* newspaper, she revealed that her field research was ‘undertaken during holidays or on leave of pay’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:44). An account regarding Jenkins’ trip to Ethiopia stated that ‘she had to save up her wages, borrow money, and sell her car in order to afford the trip’ (Bicknell and Dowie 2007: 92). Her trips were inevitably restricted, and she was only able to conduct her research for as long as her vacation time would permit (ibid). With resources limited, it was imperative for Jenkins to draw upon useful connections and any opportunities that could offer potential prospects for travel and study. Therefore the proposed 1976 pan-Islamic festival, which collaborated with Islamic nations, cultural institutions and British museums, must have been exciting to Jenkins as both a research and funding opportunity.

*World of Islam Festival*

The 1976 *World of Islam Festival* presented a unique occasion to highlight the religious, artistic, and cultural ethos of the Islamic world, from an Islamic point of view, and was a highly progressive undertaking in Britain. The festival included endorsements from thirty two Islamic nations, and became a massive collaborative initiative between prominent British museums and university institutions. The festival lasted for three months between April and June and also included ‘162 lectures and 50 days of academic seminars involving scores of scholars from many nations’ (Sabini 1976: 3).

The initial development of the Festival had actually begun in the early 1960s and was in large part stimulated by the Western contemporary arts world. Anneka Lenssen highlights how the creator/director of the *World of Islam Festival*, Paul Keeler, had been a prominent leader in the London arts world—particularly the avant-garde scene. Keeler originally drew inspiration for the Islamic Festival from the ‘Kinetic Art’ movement, which focused on the flow, unity, and symbolism of abstract forms. Lenssen asserted, ‘the countercultural gloss that Keeler would in the 1970s bestow on Islamic and Arab art’s much-asserted aniconism is here anticipated in the 1960s in the gallery artists’ populist, research-oriented experimentation into dynamic structures that could produce geometric and abstract forms to engender communal effects’ (2008: 43).

The same inspiration produced by the dynamism of patterns and structures of the ‘Kinetic Arts’ aesthetic, Keeler discovered, could also be found in the
Islamic forms of art and design. In a special Festival edition of the Aramco World Magazine, author John Sabini described the spirit of the event.

As in the form of Islamic art called the arabesque, a handful of themes appeared and reappeared, turned back on themselves, intertwined with one another and by reinforcing each other, imposed a recognizable unity on the whole Festival—a unity that is the central idea of Islam and that runs like a bright thread through 1,300 years of diverse art, science and society (1976: 3).

One could argue that such ‘unity’ would therefore be the cohesive subject matter that would bring a pan-Islamic Festival to fruition—a concept that could potentially be embraced by both Western and non-Western nations alike.

Thus, the above factors most likely popularized the idea of a World of Islam Festival to the general public, but the sense of ‘unity’ and the scholarly approach to pan-Islamic culture also grabbed the attention of UK cultural and government agencies. Western governments were aware of the growing influence and power from oil producing nations, specifically in the Middle East, and therefore the need for greater foreign diplomacy, particularly in the Islamic world. It is probably no coincidence that some of the founding members on the Board of Trustees of the World of Islam Festival were former UK ambassadors and diplomats to the Middle East. The most prominent participant on the board of trustees was Sir Harold Beeley, former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, whom the Guardian newspaper, in his obituary, claimed was ‘The personification of British efforts in the postwar period to develop a new and healthy relationship with the Arab world…’ (Weir 2001). In a retrospective article regarding the impact of the festival, Beeley asserted that the timing of the event was paramount to the public’s positive response to the cultural programme:

For in no previous period would such an event in a Western capital have benefited from so widespread an interest in the intellectual and artistic achievement of the Islamic peoples. The increasing economic interdependence of Western Europe and the Near and Middle East has played its part in creating this receptivity, as has the expanding range of organized tourism (1978: 10).

Beeley’s description of the festival was tactful, however his statement glossed over underlying objectives that most likely gave momentum to the exhibitions. At the inauguration of the festival in April 1976, Vogue London reporter William Feaver was much more explicit in his own interpretation of the event, observing, ‘Oil has now changed things. Once again Arab states have revived and Islam has come to the fore. And one of the side-effects of the oil-rush has been a rebirth of interest in the achievements celebrated in the Festival’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:42). Whilst the World of Islam Trust frequently remarked on the Festival’s non-political agenda, it would have largely been impossible for the Festival to be completely removed from socio-political influences. Although
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originally conceived as a stage for artistic and cultural appreciation, the event inevitably became a platform for diplomacy and foreign relations. The Festival promoted good will on the side of the British cultural and government sectors who wanted stronger ties with the Islamic world, and the event also brought positive attention and interest to the sponsoring Islamic nations, with each party gaining favorable outcomes (see Figure 2).

‘Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam’

The collaboration between UK cultural and government agencies and Islamic nations resulted in a sizeable budget for the event of over four million dollars.
Scholars and curators from museums and galleries were actively encouraged to consult with the Festival, in order to collect materials and undertake field research for the major exhibitions (Lenssen 2008; Sabini 1976). As Sheila Weir, a curator for the Festival quite candidly pointed out to the authors in October 2013, ‘I think all of us researchers were delighted to have fieldwork and collecting financed, not to mention generous funding for the exhibitions we did…There was no pressure to do things in any particular way…We were given the funds, and just did things how we wanted’.

With Jenkins’ growing prominence as an ethnomusicologist, she was appointed musicology consultant for the World of Islam Festival Trust. However, as mentioned, Jenkins was uncertain of the amount of support she would be given by the Horniman Museum, in terms of both monetary assistance and leave of absence. In a letter written by Alistar Duncan, the Administrator of the Festival, to Keeler, Duncan explained Jenkins’ predicament:

Her situation vis-à-vis the Horniman Museum is that…it is unlikely that her Director will provide her with any assistance or help. She may try to take unpaid leave of up to a year’s duration and may have to even resign her post, in order to achieve the quality which she and the Trust wish to attain. This will mean that we will become totally responsible for her livelihood and will need to replace her present gross earnings of around £4,500 (NMSDWCJJA12.10).

In fact, Jenkins was given leave of absence by the Horniman, whilst the Festival Trust was left responsible for Jenkins’ expenses, which included the installation of the exhibition, Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam. Jenkins was therefore given the opportunity to travel, collect, and record valuable musical traditions fully financed by the Festival (NMS/DWC/JJA/63: uncatalogued).

In 1975, the year leading up to the Festival, Jenkins traveled to over ten Islamic countries over an exhausting fourteen weeks. However, as observed from Jenkins’ correspondences, she was exceptionally skilled at building strong social networks, which she used to ensure successful fieldwork. Her affiliations with cultural agencies such as ICOM, UNESCO, The World of Islam Trust, and the Horniman Museum no doubt helped her to travel more freely in certain regions and to meet specific musicians. In her interview with the Indonesian Times, Jenkins acknowledged the enormous amount of assistance she received while conducting her field research, observing, ‘Everywhere I have had wonderful cooperation, from government departments and private individuals… In many countries expert guides were found to take me to the best places to record—Algeria, Iran, Morocco, and others’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:44).

Jenkins’ talent for maximizing research potential was in large part facilitated by her ability to guarantee that the ‘right’ people were informed of her endeavors and gave their support for her projects. A good example of this can be seen in the correspondence regarding Jenkins’ trip to Iran for the World of Islam Festival.
Based upon Jenkins’ written requests for assistance from the British Council in Tehran, it is evident that she planned to arrive in country, wasting no time or squandering exorbitant amount of funds (NMS/DWC/JJA/36:33). Similarly, in correspondence to the Institute of Persian Studies in Tehran, she asked for accommodation and reminded her contacts that she intended to start a serious collecting trip upon arrival (NMS/DWC/JJA/36:53).

Jenkins’ field notebooks from this period are fragmentary and inconsistent, containing short descriptive passages about recordings or performances—revealing little detail of her collecting strategies. However, Jenkins’ personal letters highlight her unorthodox and resourceful collecting methodologies. In a message dated 19 August 1975 to the British Council in Shiraz, Iran, Jenkins singles out the driver assigned to her for acknowledgement. She asks that ‘these photographs’ be given to the driver ‘who was so extremely kind and helped me in the collecting of music and musical instruments there’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/33:48). Within Jenkins’ field notebooks, it is possible to build up some semblance of a budget for the World of Islam Festival. Budget estimates for her fieldwork include a wide range of services and costs, and list of expected fees for the related exhibition. Services itemized included payment to musicians, interpreters, guides, and costs for instruments, photography, and recording equipment (NMS/DWC/JJA/12:21). In the inchoate details of these receipts, one can piece together the large amount of assistance and cooperation Jenkins received in order to accomplish her work.

Whilst researching in Iran, Jenkins’ wide social networks facilitated the chance for her to travel and collaborate with ethnomusicologist Fouzeih Majd, who was working for National Iranian Television. Together Jenkins and Majd travelled to remote areas of Iranian Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, ‘collecting folk and tribal instruments and music’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/36:70) (see Figures 3 and 4). In a letter written by Jenkins to Miss Audrey Lambert of the former British Council in Tehran, Jenkins enthusiastically recounted ‘the music I recorded in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan is some of the very best I have recorded in the last year’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/36:78). With the support of local ethnomusicologists such as Majd, Jenkins’ collecting trips were effective and efficient, making best use of the limited amount of time she had in each country. The local ethnomusicologists and cultural organizations provided Jenkins with the opportunity to record the best musicians who may otherwise have been inaccessible. With these local informants, Jenkins’ was able to present a wide range of varied musical traditions in the exhibition, which might otherwise have been difficult to include with only of eighteen months in total to prepare for the event.

After Jenkins’s extensive field research was complete, she was able to fully devote herself to the curation of the Music and Musical Instruments in the World of Islam exhibition (see Figure 5). The exhibition displayed over one hundred and seventy instruments from twenty Islamic nations. Jenkins made the decision to arrange the instruments typologically rather than by geographical region to
Figures 3 and 4. Photographs of a recording session in Azerbaijan in 1975. The Kurdish musician Ardela Armian is playing the **tar**, a type of long-necked waisted lute. He is sitting with two other musicians, who sing and play the **saz** (a long-necked lute). Ardela Armian also plays the **kamancha** (spike fiddle) as seen in figure 4. The musicians are playing near Khoy in western Azerbaijan, Iran. Photographs taken by Jean Jenkins. (NMS/JJA ref: IR.13.16 and 18) Courtesy and copyright, National Museums Scotland
prevent visitor confusion—as some instruments could be found in multiple countries. As reported in the Inner London Education Authority News, ‘The exhibition shows how, with the spread of Islam, music and musical instruments from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish centres influenced the mainstream of music in places as far-flung as East and West Africa, Spain and Italy in the Middle Ages, the Balkans, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and even China’ (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:40). Not only did the exhibition accent the major influences the Islamic world exerted on Eastern and Western musical traditions, the display also
Rachel Ainsworth and Sarah Worden showed the evolution of Islamic instruments as they were incorporated in other parts of the world. Jenkins also integrated sound recordings, photographs, and slide shows of musicians playing the instruments to provide a wider context. The exhibition was well received by the media. In an anonymous article entitled *Islamic Music in South London* it was observed:

…the show itself is a delight, largely because almost all the instruments on view have been so obviously played and loved…Far from being an exhibition of rich men’s treasures, made with precise craftsmanship and magnificent embellishment, this is a show about real life music among the mass of the Islamic peoples… They not only demonstrate the continuity of traditional Islamic classical music and musical instruments, but in many cases also link them with Europeans musical roots (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:47).

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Royal Albert Hall in London was the venue for a series of pan-Islamic concerts which was organized throughout April and May and included musicians from Iran, Turkey, India, and Pakistan (NMS/DWC/JJA/63: uncatalogued). As a lasting legacy of the exhibition and the concerts Jenkins, in association with ethnomusicologist Poul Rovsing Olsen, produced a six LP record set of Islamic Music entitled *Music in the World of Islam*. Each record focused on one of the six musical traditions of pan-Islamic music: the human voice, lutes, strings, flutes and trumpets, reeds and bagpipes, drums and rhythms. Music critic Maurice Rosenbaum eagerly expressed his enthusiasm for the compilation declaring:

Tangent Records deserve the highest complements for their latest production a set of six LPs entitled ‘Music in the World of Islam’… This is a remarkable achievement and I have the impression that it owes a certain vitality and immediacy to the fact that it was produced by a smallish company working fast and devotedly… (NMS/DWC/JJA/42:57).

The enthusiasm and dedication Jenkins brought to her research was ultimately rewarded by the success of the exhibition, catalogue, and records she helped produce. The outcomes of the *World of Islam Festival* and the *Music and Musical Instruments* exhibition created a lasting legacy, and became a resource for scholars and musicians.

**Conclusion**

By the time Jenkins became involved in the *World of Islam Festival*, she had over fifteen years of field work experience on which to draw. As a single professional woman working in an era in which formality and diplomacy were a recognized
form of currency, Jenkins took advantage of her single status to travel and to engage in ambitious and often exhausting itineraries. She frequently used a combination of well networked introductions and opportunistic developments on the ground. Whilst her diaries may, for the researcher, on the whole, provide a less than satisfactory record of people and places she encountered, one senses a woman getting on with the job as it played out. One could suggest that Jenkins made the most of her experiences in the field, and her confidence and persuasive personality jump off the page in her correspondences.

In order to have a better understanding of Jenkins’ influence and career as an ethnomusicologist, it is important to gain insights into the motivations and influences on her research. How did the problems she encountered allow her to create strategic ways to overcome obstacles and achieve success in the field and in the museum? The 1976 World of Islam Festival was a useful case study to address such questions. For Jenkins, her primary concern was to preserve and safeguard vanishing musical traditions. However, to complete that goal Jenkins had to be strategic, as resources were limited. The World of Islam Festival provided an opportunity for her to record and collect music and musical instruments for the future generations to enjoy, and the Festival provided monetary assistance as the Trust was sponsored by many benefactors. Whilst in the field, Jenkins also relied on various social networks and the support of local ethnomusicologists to record and collect the best musical legacies from each region. Ultimately, Jenkins ingenuity and resourcefulness led many accomplishments and the materialization of what was a pivotal exhibition for the World of Islam Festival. This case study sheds light on one of many strands of research and collecting that Jenkins carried out as an ethnomusicologist and the potential of Jean Jenkins’ archive (and collection) at NMS is presented as a source for further scholarly enquiry and research.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Chantal Knowles and Friederike Voigt for their support and helpful advice.

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