



PERFECT BUT HUMANE
SCHEHERAZADE QASSIM HASSAN

Scheherazade Hassan was born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq. She first studied Western Musicology, then got her doctor's degree in Islamic Sociology and Ethnomusicology with Jacques Berque and Gilbert Rouget at the EPHH in Paris. She taught at the University of Baghdad and conducted extensive field work in all parts of Iraq, where she collected and recorded the Iraqi musical heritage in all its diversity. She founded the first centre for traditional music in Baghdad, which housed a collection of field archives of about 2000 hours of music. She was a visiting professor at many universities. She teaches at the University of Paris-Nanterre and is an associate member to the Laboratory of Ethnomusicology CNRS at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. – Address: 45, rue Rébéval, 75019 Paris, France.

The year I spent at Wiko was the richest, the happiest and certainly the most enlightening I have had in a Western country. The staff of the Institute with its various units (the amazing library, the no less amazing administration, the computer service, which is always happy to serve, and the imaginative kitchen) was not only efficient but also always kind and humane despite seasonal changes and probable personal problems. Added to these qualities, I felt at ease in contemplating the attitude of modesty which characterized all those I had the chance to meet. The particular groupings based on professional interests that gradually took shape among the Fellows, such as those investigating social insects, the picture boys, the globalisation girls and some other smaller groups (like the Mesopotamian, the Oriental and the bird group) had no effect on the quality of exchange, and on the high degree of shared sympathy among the Fellow class.

This gave someone like me haunted by the destructive madness of the world – the necessary strength, liberty and balance needed for work. As an Iraqi, I have been in a state of extreme shock witnessing daily the slippery disastrous road of the destruction of my country presented by those who do not have sufficient knowledge and who present this as the only possible way of stepping out of the dictatorial regime, thus totally abstracting from the scale of the historical, cultural, ecological, human, social and material destruction, all too high and irreversible. Wiko had a soothing effect on me.

With my departure, another lover of Berlin is added to the list of previous Fellows who regretted leaving it. The almost provincial aspect of the city, its uncrowded streets and the easy proximity to trees, woods and lakes makes Berlin a unique place and one of the last capitals in the world to have the privilege of staying natural and unpretentious while still open to modernity. The view from my two windows in the Nietzsche room allowed me to follow the changes of seasons and light, and that's how I started taking regular photos of the garden, trees, lake and streets within the Wiko area. I was also enchanted and charmed by the relationship the inhabitants had with light. In December, when light faded out at half past three in the afternoon, artificial lights and candles could be seen spread everywhere in a discreet, poetic and asymmetrical way. The lights of Christmas were of great beauty. Once on a snowy December afternoon I walked in the Grunewald forest. It reminded me of a 19th-century Russian winter as described by Tolstoy. I will never forget the uniqueness of these intense moments of pure beauty and joy identified in my mind, probably forever, with Berlin and the Wiko.

The project of writing a comprehensive book on the musical tradition of the city of Baghdad, its changes and its relations to other Iraqi cities and to Islamic musical cultures had been in my mind for a long while before I had the chance to really concentrate on it. I did some field work and collected whatever was written or recorded with the hope of examining the material later. Coming to Wiko was the first occasion for me to focus on the project. This was designed to be preceded by listening to, transcribing, putting in order and analysing some two hundred hours of interviews and the many hundreds of hours of music. At a very early stage of my sojourn, my illusions and fear about starting and finishing a book were very soon cleared out and pushed into their proper place. One day while taking the main stairs I ran into Professor Grimm at the bottom of the staircase. This was my first encounter with him. He said, "It seems that you want to write a book." I answered "yes". So, very wisely, with humour and calm he said "You know, most Fellows come here with such a project, but sometimes their books come out seven years later, never mind."

Somehow this made me relaxed and ready to see things differently, in particular that the number of activities, lectures, invitations and concerts the Institute organizes were a real challenge to one's work, but difficult to refuse. Later, when one of my two guests, arrived thanks to the generous possibilities Wiko offers to stay in contact and work with one's professional colleagues, he was disappointed that the book awaited by the community of ethnomusicologists was not ready.

Despite a certain regret about this, I feel that the tremendous benefits I received while at Wiko will assist in my writing the book. Three factors in particular helped me to gain new perspectives. The first of these was the Tuesday colloquium with the wide range of specializations of Fellows, its interdisciplinary scope and the importance given to discussion. These together constituted an experience that helped me to fully understand the relativity of each discipline. Most importantly, I understood that what is seen by a specialist as unworthy information, because considered too elementary and common knowledge, becomes an indispensable tool for comprehension by and communication with others. Addressing oneself only to a specialized community leads to an incapacity to communicate effectively outside one's personal domain and of course means knowing less about everything, despite the invasion of media pouring information in on us non-stop. In the Tuesday colloquia, as well as everywhere else in Berlin academic circles, the longest time was allotted to discussion, which is as important as the presentation itself. This was a real revelation to me. In France, discussion is certainly less important, very relative and changes according to circumstances. It was not so usual for me to have long discussions with specialists, let alone non-specialists.

The second defining moment at Wiko was meeting with contemporary musicians. Moments spent with Jörg Widmann and Maurizio Sotelo and concerts they each gave opened my mind both musically and intellectually to modern music. The enthusiasm with which each of them lived his creative experience and the way they expressed themselves when talking about music broke my reticence towards what I used to consider too intellectual and sometimes even inhumane. Added to this were the illuminating lectures of Stefan Litwin.

And last, but certainly not least, the presence of diverse programs on Islam held at Wallotstraße 10, directed by the knowledgeable George Khalil, and their collaboration with the Freie Universität, helped me to better understand my work and thus to position it in its larger cultural context; I only wish that I could have attended more often.

All these experiences were helpful regarding the uneasy problem I face of balancing a multi-faceted project on the music of an oriental, traditional, learned society, with a culture that knows the written and has a theory but nevertheless depends also on oral theory and transmission. I certainly needed the Wiko experience to situate my work at a comfortable distance between the cultural, the social and the musical.

I had set myself a number of tasks to accomplish during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg. A paper that I was asked to give on the problem of identity in Arabic music as part of a conference organized by UNESCO in Muscat, Oman led me to investigate the subject as applied to my own repertoire. Thus, during my sojourn I worked on the interaction of differences and pluralities – ethnic, cultural, religious and social – that appeared within the repertoire of my research. I also pulled together the material for a few chapters without finishing them definitively. Like other Fellows, I also gave various presentations outside the Kolleg.

To move back to the beginning, I feel thankful to have gained new friends among our Fellow group and among the staff. Not only have I never met in one single place such a number of people that I appreciated for their human qualities, but I have also never met so many women, both Fellows and staff, with whom I sympathized as profoundly as I did at Wiko. I can mention here some of the moments that I miss most with my fellow colleagues. The breakfast with Claus, Helge and Tom, the girlish laughter with Helen and Maria in the dark corridor and the familial contacts with Ziba and Richard are only some of the many other pleasant memories I keep.

My admiration for the staff is without reserve. Thanks to Gesine Bottomley, the ever efficient, who kindly taught me one German word per day, to Christine von Arnim, for always being open, considerate and disposed to listen, to Katharina Biegger, for all the nice exchanges, books and otherwise, to Katharina Wiedemann, for being such a hidden treasure, to Daniela Wendlandt, who with her smile at the reception desk, is the first physical symbol of Wiko that anybody sees, to Christine Klöhn and Katarzyna Speder, for their generous open hearts, for the flowers in the gloomy winter days and the other goodies, to Britta Cusack, for the good moments shared between Pergamon and Hackescher Markt, to Monika Fogt, whose face was ready to light up with a smile whenever she saw me, and to Petra Sonnenberg, for her kind help. But this is not meant to be a feminist ending. I can never forget the computer service and precisely both the marvellous Roman and Gregor for their patience with an illiterate person in their domain. And Christian Schmidt, who not only did so much to prepare my musical examples, but also shared with me his liking

for the music and encouraged me not to cut my examples, and Herr Riedel, with his amused expression and sense of humour. I was always struck by the attitude of Martin Garstecki, whom I often saw from my office window crossing the street from the Weiße Villa, as if helping Fellows and finding solutions was a real pleasure to him. In the person of Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus I had a neighbour with whom I exchanged a lot and shared a love of music and birds. Mr. Lepenies struck me for being so terribly considerate, while Herr Nettelbeck, who looked always diplomatic and kind, must be a real talent for putting together such a successful assembly of persons who look happy working together. I can't finish without expressing my tremendous appreciation for the brilliant Professor Grimm. Although I regret not having learned as much German as I wanted to, despite the efforts of Eva, and for being behind the schedule I designated initially for myself, I know that I would not have been so enchanted by my stay had I closed myself in my office only to work.

Thanks to all of you who gave me such a unique occasion to work and a beautiful and inspiring year.