Artist Statements I

Al-Hadra: A Live Electronic Music Improvisation within a Sufi Worship Ritual

by Nour Mohamed Mahmoud Emam

Al-Hadra is a practice-based ethnographic research project that culminated in a live performance during a Sufi worship ritual. Al-Hadra is a continuation of a previous research project I had conducted in 2015, titled '21st Century Islam: Towards an Integration of Electronic Music with Sufi Worship Rituals'. Past findings led me to speculate as to whether the integration of an electronics musician within the Sufi worship situation would enhance worshippers' spiritual and religious experience. The exploration aided in gathering information regarding traditions and rules in Islam concerning music and worship. It resulted in three sound pieces, which I called 'studies', that explored the possibilities of integrating electronic music with recordings I had made of excerpts of Sufi rituals.

In August 2016, I was granted permission by one group of Sufis following the Rifayyia tariqa - a specific Sufi order - to perform an improvisatory live set during their weekly hadra ritual in Cairo, Egypt. This essay will briefly recap previous research as well as cover updated findings regarding cultural and religious information concerning music in Islamic practice prior to focusing on the methodology and the implementation of this performance piece.

In my paper '21st Century Islam: Towards an integration of Electronic music with Sufi worship rituals', I had discussed the importance of sound and music, whether instrumental or vocal, in Islam. This is a religion that depends solely on 'vocal transmission, recitation, cantillation and audition' [1]. It is known to us, however, that Islam is also a religion whose somewhat rigid rules have deprived practicing Muslims of innovation within their worship obligations and rituals. Although this orthodoxy has pushed Muslims to seek more mystical means of connecting with their belief, the room for out-of-the box approaches in such 'mystical' practices is practically unheard of.

In discussing this project, it is important to start with a clear definition of Sufism: Sufism is the mystical part of Islam, and although it is often understood as a sect in Islam, Sufism and Sufis are not part of a sect, as Sufism is supplemental to Sunnite and Shī'ite Sects. Sufis seek closeness to God and purification of the soul through worship [2]. There are different turuq (Sufi orders) who have different sheikhs (i.e. spiritual guides/mentors) and must complete additional worship duties, such as private recitation of certain names of the Islamic God, and a weekly gathering of the followers for dhikr, a remembrance ritual [2][3][4].

There are different approaches to Sufi rituals depending on which tariqa (Sufi order) is practicing. In Turkey, there are schools of whirling dervishes, who are accompanied by a band and a vocalist. In Egypt, some Sufi orders rely on percussive instruments and clapping during their rituals, while others only use their voices and breath. Some orders are more melodic and musical in their recitations, while others are less so. Sufis use music in their ritual, in the belief that it helps them connect to God and enter an ecstatic state of love through reciting God's name and singing songs of praise [5].

Although music for worship is not bound to a certain style as long as it represents divine love, Sufi worship music still adapts to the culture it is created in [6]. Therefore, Sufi worship music is commonly associated with Middle Eastern music and is hardly ever found to have Western musical qualities. This is mainly due to the fact that Qur'anic recitation and songs praising God and the Prophet Muhammad must follow certain rules of recitation, corresponding to Arabic music scales and melodic modes. It is forbidden for Muslims to 'improvise' with their Qur'anic recitations, as such attempts are perceived as disrespectful to the sacred nature of the text.

There is a growing interest in spirituality in both Middle Eastern cultures and Western cultures, particularly in seeking a spiritual life away from the constraints of strict religious adherence [7]. Semas, which literally means listening, is based on listening to music in order to 'attain divine contact, trance or illumination' [4]. It is not based on collective vocal or musical participation, but consists of a music ensemble that does not take part in the worship ritual and the worshippers who experience the Sema. In Turkey, some rites with music involving whirling dervishes are open to tourists to see and hear. But how does this affect the ritual? Has it become merely a show?

Although many tariqas do not permit recording, whether audio or video, many others encourage it as a means to make it known to the world. However, caution must be taken with making such materials available to the public, as it may be incorrectly used. For instance, people who are not aware of the religious and sacred significance of such materials could sample such records for their own productions. 'Oriental Sufi Music' is now found in clubs and discos, because it is being used by people who do not

necessarily have knowledge of its meaning [6].

During the research phase of this project, I came across many artists - typically from Middle Eastern/Muslim countries - producing what they call 'Electronic Sufi Music'. Dhafer Yousef's album 'Electric Sufi', a cross-over between oriental oud music and oriental jazz, is one example: signs of electronically-produced sound are audible throughout the album. Another example is a band called Egyptian Project, in particular their song 'Soufi'. This song, sung in Arabic and featuring Middle Eastern instruments, has quite a modern sound and beat, as opposed to traditional praise songs. Additionally, the musician Mercan Dede uses a lot of sema' music and electronic beats in his works, although they are still quite restricted to the oriental sounds one is expecting to hear when listening to 'Sufi music'.

I have yet to come across attempts to merge Western musical styles with the content of Sufi worship rituals, even though the sema' is not bound by a certain style of music genre. As long as it evokes spiritual, ascetic emotions for worshippers, then one can create sounds and music for dhikr and sema' in any way or form [8], bearing in mind that the musical element in religious rituals should always be kept under control, as the listener and performer should not neglect the sacred meaning of the ritual

for musical enjoyment [9].

The word 'hadra' literally means 'presence'. Worshippers believe that when they perform the hadra, God, the angels and saints are present during the ritual. It is also expected of each participant to be fully 'present' in themselves and present with God during the ritual. Within the hadra there is a section called the dhikr (pronounced: zikr), in which worshippers recite certain names of Allah in a certain order and tempo, accelerating according to the leader's command [4].

As a researcher in this project, I have come to understand how crucial it is to take the time in getting to know your subjects, and in my case, to get to know the ritual that is of interest to me. I have been participating in the hadra of the Rifayyia tariqa for almost three years, and I believe this project would not have been possible had it not been for this long observation/participation time. When the researcher is not part of the group or has not given him/herself enough time to gain acceptance within the group, the ethnographer may produce work that is not close and accurate to his/her subjects [10]. By taking my time in participating in the weekly hadra, I was able to develop an understanding of and sensitivity to the structure of the ritual and the slight variations in group emotion and states of mind from week to week.

The hadra took place in a flat in suburban

Maadi, Cairo. I used two stereo pairs of speakers, which I rotated to face the walls and had them tilted slightly upwards,

thus diffusing the sound more and avoiding a specific directionality that could possibly distract the participants during the ritual. I performed live using pre-recorded material in an Ableton Live set. I was particularly inspired throughout this process by Eliane Radigue's slowly evolving and in my opinion, highly emotional and spiritually moving 1998 album, 'Trilogie de la Mort'. Furthermore,'The Talking Drum' by Bill Viola, Terry Riley's piece 'Shri Camel' as well as the inspiring and highly underrated Halim El- Dabh's 1944 'Wire Recorder Piece', were all works I listened to frequently during the music writing process.

In addition to sampling notes from my analogue synthesiser, I recorded people of both genders, aged 8-50, reciting the divine name 'Hu', which translates to 'He' and is regarded in Sufism as the ultimate name of Allah [1]. I then stretched these recordings into audio files that were 30-40 minutes each and mixed them during the performance either separately or together, which resulted in a choir-like drone sound. The hadra lasted approximately one hour; the participants that day were four males and two females all aged 45 to 75 (see Appendix A for Ritual timeline and breakdown) [11].

The feedback I received from the group was entirely positive. They agreed that

the music helped them enter the focused state of mind of the ritual quicker than usual, and some men reported having 'seen' things through the sounds they were hearing. They felt the lower frequency sounds resonated in their chests and the higher frequency drones gave them a sense of floating. One man told me that he felt that he was flying when he heard the softer drones at the end of the session, and experienced an enhanced sense of release when the music stopped between each divine name during the dhikr. Moreover, I noticed the participants trying to sing in key with the sounds I was playing. The Rifayyia Tariqa's hadra is usually not very melodic, but I observed a shift in their tone such that they were leaning more towards singing rather than speaking. It was also interesting to see how their emotions were affected by the music: when I played softer sounds, their voices would grow softer, and their facial expressions would soften as well.

The performance was a unique experience for me, as I was not a participant in the hadra for the first time in my life, but rather an observer. I had concerns in the weeks leading up to the performance, because I did not feel like I was in the spiritual or emotional place I was in when I first started researching for this project. I was worried that the music I was going to play would not be genuine and that this would reflect on my performance. During the performance, I

was not connecting to the ritual spiritually, but instead was completely immersed in the improvisation. It was also particularly difficult because this was not like any other performance: I felt responsible for making the participants enter and enjoy their ritual and was burdened by the possibility of distracting them with my music instead.

I found it particularly interesting to see how the presence of sound and music had a substantial effect on the participants. This was also confirmed by them after the session, when they reported feeling more 'in-tune' with the ritual and felt their emotions heightened. The question that remains unanswered for me, however, is how to move forward with this project, and whether this is something that can be developed further and presented to the public.

Timeline & Breakdown of "Al-Hadra" Performance for Project 3

00:00 until 07:00 minutes: I am silent as the participants recite excerpts of the Holy Qur'an as no music may be played during this time.

07:00 until 14:30 minutes: Participants transition into prayers and verses of praise for the Prophet Muhammad. During this time, I am able to start introducing sounds to the ritual.

14:50 to 28:30 minutes: The worshippers sing a poem of praise for the Prophet Muhammad.

30:20 to 56:05 minutes: The dhikr begins straight afterwards. The dhikr is a dynamic part of the ritual, where worshippers recite different names of Allah, which translate to different attributes of God. Some attributes are stronger and more 'aggressive' than others, which can also be observed in the recording with the participants' change of tone, tempo and emotion. I tried to mirror these aspects in my music as well.

56:30 until 62:30 minutes: Participants read out prayers to their loved ones and the saints and prophets and end the hadra by singing a short song of praise for the Prophet Muhammad.

Sisters Akousmatica Agoradios for Little-Heard Voices

by Sisters Akousmatica

Sisters Akousmatica work on the premise of this:

The act of listening is a magnetic force and unfolding creative attraction that expands our imagination with radical potential. And does so through live broadcast and transmission, recordings and ephemeral performance.

The beauty of radiophonic technology is that it is accessible for just about anyone, anywhere [12]. Radio exists not only in

the commercial market, but in nature, in regional and remote places, in industry, in communities, and is the potential site for radical action or, simply, communication between people. The radio, as a physical object, can be a musical instrument or a transmission vessel for uncensored content to occupy public space. Radio provides an invisible spectrum of possibilities to invade visible territories. In this context, as a constellar mode of collaborative performance, Phillipa Stafford and Julia Drouhin created Sisters Akousmatica, a collective radiophonic project to carry the voices of women and non-binary people into the public realm as a form of agoradio, and as a space to gather, or to open discussion.

The use of digital technology is embedded in our collaborative projects as well as in our individual practices. Using field recording, handmade electroacoustic musical instruments, audio editing soft-ware and hardware in our experimentation, we use digital technologies to share local and ephemeral events and extend them worldwide.

Concerning Sisters Akousmatica, the live performances are shared not only by terrestrial broadcast but also through digital broadcast which allows listeners who are not physically present to witness it. It reaches more audience: in their cars, home and workplaces.

On May 8th, 2016 at 11am, Radio

Queens, Julia Drouhin and Phillipa Stafford, left Signal, a youth arts venue at Northbank, Melbourne, armed with twenty-eight radios, to begin a slow walking journey of transmission around the urban Yarra River. Simultaneously, 3CR, a community radio station, be-gan a live seven hour street broadcast featuring sound artists with diverse practices, programmed content highlighting the historical and on-going contribution of women to the station, and pre-recorded messages from the Radio Queens. A project developed for Melbourne-based experimental arts or-ganisation Next Wave and mentor organisation, Liquid Architecture, Sisters Akousmatica took place during 2016 Next Wave Festival and also Mother's Day in Australia.

Sisters Akousmatica created an acousmonia or city-scale radio orchestra and invited eves (NZ/VIC), Angie Garrick (NSW), Kate Geck (VIC), Rosalind Hall (VIC), Shani Mohini-Holmes (with Georgie Darvidis, VIC), radio cegeste (NZ/TAS) and Ela Stiles (NSW) to explore the concept of akousma, the idea of sound removed from its source. Each performer, cloistered within Signal performance space and broadcasting to the city, created a new, improvised sound work and were encouraged to use the sound of the previous performance as their inspiration, creating an audio exquisite corpse. Each transmitting their presence into the flux of the cityscape:

a voice that we can see, then a voice without body, and just the sound of that voice mixed with daily noises. Relaying the sound, an instrumentarium of radios played with the texture of the city and looped from one radio to another, each radio playing the same broadcast but with its own texture, flavour, and signal strength.

This ecology, created from the visible (radios, performers, a specifically designed radio cart) and the invisible (the web of broadcast transmission, which included both live performance, live programmed interviews and pre-recorded content, specifically for the project) gave audiences and performers a layered experience which subverted notions of sources and copies through radio broadcast and this 'diffused network of social interaction' [13].

We also provided the audience with a riso-printed map, as well as a paper printed amulet. This amulet was made by one of the performing artists, Kate Geck, who developed her artwork as a AR code with the app LAYAR. Any participant on the walk could scan the amulet with a smartphone and see the location of the walk and link to the Sisters Akousmatica website for more information, augmented with visual and animated details.

Investigating the possibilities of performance through the building of temporary networks, made up of

transmitters and receiver modules to activate new ethereal territories [14], the project is not so much site-specific as site-responsive and this acousmonia, can be set up in any space in a multiplicity of broad-cast/performer/sound configurations. The digital aspect of the broadcast offers the possibility to expand invisible territories in private space.

The aim for the acousmonia was to conjure a mysterious and ritualistic experience of sound, drawing on a non-hierarchical understanding of art intervention in situ. Using radio and instruments as both sculptural form and tools for performance, it established a layered relationship between form and con-tent, representing chaotic, rhizomic systems that loop and feedback [15].

Our presence as costumed "Radio Queens", while an aspect that exists in friction with the concept of akousma, turned them into literal broadcast nodes (the costumes are, in fact, working radios) and is also used as a demarcation of the performance space. "The body itself, as you know, is an electrical device" [16].

Slipping between performer, radio and host, we, as Radio Queens led the audience gently through a radiophonic journey. Moving slowly through public space as a disruption, walking à la flâneur, we car-ried a heavy vessel full of receiving radios that broadcast live radioscapes at specific geophonic points.

The movements of the Sisters in diffusing the sound were subtle, not overly performative, creating a shifting awareness of the space as radios were moved around me, and ritualising the transmission in a way that took the radio experience out of casual listening and into focused performance listening. It was a powerful experience for me in hearing a series of female musicians being broadcast throughout the city over such a duration [17]

Through this process recordings were generated and gathered for a collective installation at Signal after the seven hour live broadcast. This installation was a sound experiment in which twenty-eight radios were tuned to seven competing frequencies, transmitting the recorded performance, inside the gallery/performance space. This was an opportunity to play and be playful with electromagnetic fre-quencies, bodies, distance and the concept of the radio orchestra. The custom radio cart was trans-formed into a central mono speaker and seven transmitters were connected to four radios each, reconfiguring seven radiophonic floating islands, symbols of the performers. None of the recorded live performances were synchronised with each other so the composition never repeated: the resulting audio was an unpredictable, layered acousmonia, interwoven with the ambient sound of the gallery space. This ambient gallery sound, with the recordings looping and layering, was also transmitted

along Signal's 18-speaker outdoor sound walk on Les Erdi Plaza daily for two weeks, carrying voices a bit further, a bit longer.

Not only a radio transmission project, Sisters Akousmatica focuses on giving voice and visibility to social-cultural and gender minorities in the field of experimental sound art and in this spirit our part-nership with 3CR was not just of technological advantage but one of mutual understandings: commu-nity radio, unlike its male-dominated commercial counterpart is a space in which women are trained in production and management [18].

This project, which started as an finite curatorial premise for Next Wave Festival 2016, has expanded and continued as an umbrella for curatorial, artistic, written and performance projects, under the scope of "radio art". Through positioning electromagnetic frequencies in a network of active and pas-sive participants we create a collective ecology of sound.

Sisters Akousmatica is interested in the male-dominated coded language used in radio communica-tion and aim to twist it; invading and appropriating them in conceptual and material ways.

In 2017 Sisters Akousmatica, with the assistance of governmental funding body, Arts Tasmania, developed a Sound Camp

Camp for women and non-binary sound artists, which took place across two venues in Tasmania - the University of Tasmania's Mt Pleasant Radio Observatory and Lisdillon, a property on the east coast of the island. The retreat was designed to do two things: one, take artists out of their everyday lives and pressures, in order to have space to think and dream about their art practices; and, two, to create the beginnings of a new community of sound and radio artists. In the organic tradition of in-jokes, the unofficial slogan of Sound Camp became 'no one left behind' - a statement that grew from situation where one of the artists became stranded near a coastal blowhole in an (un)lucky near-miss. However, this statement echoes a sentiment that characterises our collective feeling and understanding of what we wish for our practice as community builders.

Sound art industries tend to be a male-dominated fields and while there are many female and gender-diverse artists, curators and theorists who are doing much to upset this status quo, many artists are still working within communities in which their presence is as a minority. Writing around sound and radio art is still dominated by the male names that contribute to the canon and understandings of the form. Women's histories and contribution are all too often squeezed out and left in the fringes.

The act of simply being women in public space, in radio/broadcast space, in performance space, in the world can be a radical one - but we do not wish to leave it at that. The aim of Sisters Akousmatica is to pro-vide opportunities for women and gender-diverse artists to work together: share ideas, tools, contexts, skills and knowledge in spaces that are 'heterogeneous, polymorphous, uncentered and rhizomatic' [19].

By inviting practitioners to consider exchanges around tools, distribution, publication, workshop, re-treat, performance, walks, installation and broadcast experimentation, Sisters Akousmatica aims to cultivate a community of skills and resources sharing, forms and audible transmissions.

Acknowledgements

Sisters Akousmatica are Phillipa Stafford and Julia Drouhin. They create international curatorial and written projects concerning radio art, auditory-spatial exploration and the intersection of gender and emergent art forms. Through their projects they aim to support, promote and cultivate women and gender diverse voices in public space. Focusing on the concept of akousma – sound removed from its source – their projects provide a space to examine the possibilities of invisible and ephemeral radiophonic networks. Sisters Akousma-tica artistic and curatorial project umbrellas their collective radio practices which includes a live radio duo Super Occult Cosmophon, publications, workshops, public live art and community building activi-ties. http://www.sistersakousmatica.org/

Time, Autonomy & Self-expression in Sound

by Emah Fox

I came to production as a singer–my instrument was my voice. I had a whole universe of sonic ideas in my head, but no way to communicate their complexity to musicians and producers. I was painfully aware too, that there was a well-worn trajectory for a young 'girl singer': be discovered and championed by an older, male producer / A&R rep. I felt fiercely ambitious, creatively. But I was also fiercely independent and terrified of control being wrested away from me. I chose to study audio engineering, so I could walk into any recording studio and know exactly what all those machines did, understand signal paths and mic techniques, and faders and EQ and effects. Initially, it was a defence mechanism–arming myself with knowledge against the assumption that I had nothing beyond my face and voice to offer. But, I fell madly in love with both the technical and creative aspects of production, and I realised that I was, essentially, a Producer. It was both gradual and revelatory, the way that finding one's identity often is.

Nothing changed my world like a laptop and a DAW. Everything opened up from there: MIDI programming soft synths to hardware modular synthesis, sampling, full arrangements and production of songs, sound design, mixes. Computer music offers such incredible freedom, and in a world where our autonomy still needs to be fought for, it's a natural fit for women to be drawn to electronica: it offers freedom to play, to explore, to test out ideas and push them in

every conceivable direction. To have a kernel of an idea, and see it through multiple incarnations until it is its own living, breathing thing. The beauty of electronica is that I can try anything, and the freedom to try is so incredibly important. Particularly when it comes to song production, it's important to be able to frame the raw and personal (lyrical and vocal expression) within a context that gives it power. Strong production demands respect–it's the bone and muscle and skin of a song. I see music production as akin to athletic skill–at its best, it is both artistic and muscular. A beautifully produced piece of electronica could be delicate and porous as easily as it could be dense and brutal. There are endless choices to be made, myriad possibilities of where a track might wander. Remaining open to the unexpected, listening to a piece for what needs pruning for the rest of it to thrive, what elements need reimagining to bring the whole into focus– this is the artistry, the open connection to the intuitive. The muscularity comes with the confidence and ability to act on that intuition, and translate it with some accuracy.

Time. Autonomy. Self-expression. Having the space to try something that doesn't work. But that not-working might lead to something strange and wonderful, a dance down an unfamiliar path.

There can be an obtuseness to the

way those in the synthesis world talk about music production: a kind of one-upmanship display of knowledge and gear collection, a race to prove the seriousness of one's skill and investment (in the gear, in the scene). I work against this in myself–that pressure to justify my presence and my work as 'legit'–because as women our legitimacy in tech spaces is called into question and scrutinized more, alongside insinuations (or outright accusations) of cruising on the 'novelty' of having a female body. Who produced your track, who did your beats, who bankrolls you, what are you wearing, what are you selling, gender/sexuality as a distraction, a ruse, a commodification. But autonomy and self-expression can also be explicitly about gender and sexuality. For those of us making our way in the world with these bodies and experiences, why the hell shouldn't we want to make work that explores that? When your gender is continually pointed to as an anomaly, whether as an aberration, a distraction or a nifty diversity point-score, it becomes something that is central to your experience. The autonomy to create and express freely that computer music offers should not be subverted by self-censorship or subscription to the idea that to be a serious producer you have to downplay your gendered experience.

In the synth workshops I run at Melbourne Electronic Sound Studio Ltd (MESS), one of the things I try to

emphasise most strongly (above and beyond the breakdown of sound-physics and signal-paths) is the importance of knowing and internalising that You Do Not Have To Earn The Right To Explore. This I think is honestly the single most impactful thing people take away from the workshops. Inhabiting a non-male body means that you have learned early on you cannot take for granted that body's presence will be welcomed or even safe when you walk into a space that is dominated, statistically and energetically, by men. This is even more true for transwomen or non-binary people. As a cis-woman, I can speak to my own experience and say that as young girls we are generally not encouraged to pick up a piece of technical equipment and 'have a go', and we are, more often than not, actively discouraged. If we don't clearly know what we are doing, we can be met with not only ridicule, but outright hostility. And yes, of course, the toughest and most passionately determined of us persist and succeed. But this is something I try to drive home when teaching: My dream is not just to see more exceptional women reach the top of their field. We have the right to be just as mediocre as the most average of men. Don't enter into music production thinking you can only justify your presence through excellence. Take on that crazy-looking Buchla 200 system and see what sounds it makes under your hands. You don't need to know what you are doing to experiment.

The truth is that not knowing what the hell you are doing can be the most exhilarating moment. This is one of the things I value most about working with hardware synths, and having access to the vast MESS collection means there is always a new beast to keep the unfamiliarity fresh. The level of control and precision available in a DAW like Protools, Logic, Ableton, is incredible, but personally I find that I benefit from balancing it against the unpredictability and play of figuring out something new and less controllable. The lack of control is almost more important to me than the mastery of technology. There is joy in mastery, but there is also joy in apprenticeship. In that sense, I have no interest really in becoming the expert or the master of any one particular machine or technique. For me, the interest and excitement comes from the immediate engagement with 'trying'. Trying gets a bad rep -'Nice try' has overtones of sarcasm, 'Nice try, love' adds a gendered humiliation cherry to the cake. But trying is the best part!

There is absolutely pressure on women working in tech fields to be invulnerably proficient, if they want to even attempt to explore. To begin, you have to prove you are serious. To present work, you have to be able to back it up in the language the community understands. This is unnecessarily alienating and frankly elitist. Basically, electronica is FUN. Playing with

a synthesiser, whether it's a Moog 55 or a second-hand microkorg, is play. Letting it be play is so important. Chopping up beats, layering pads, pitch-shifting field recordings, creating bass-lines and melodies, sampling the shit out of everything in your house and turning that into a piece of music–all this is fun. And there is no right way to do it.

I don't have a background in music theory or technique. When dipping toes into jazz or classical waters I have never understood why rules were so rigidly adhered to, or why my instinctive approach was always, always 'wrong'. I've always been attracted to the strange and the experimental. Warping, stretching, sampling, layering harsh against lush, cross-rhythms, dis-chords, shifting tempos and time signatures–the electronic field allows for so much play, and so much complexity. Electronica is built on experimentation, so to me, it's intrinsically a perfect feminist medium. The relative youth of electronica means that it doesn't carry the weight of centuries of white, male institutional regulation–so the non-male body, the non-binary body, the non-white body–so we cannot be silenced by accusations of perverting the traditional order of things. There is no traditional order. All is experimentation, all is play, all is in flux. That's not to say that all is equal–it isn't. But the access to autonomy is much, much simpler. I cannot imagine feeling anywhere near as empowered by
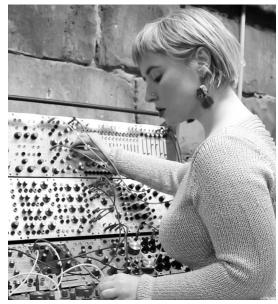
another genre.

I speak a lot about autonomy and independence. Should we have to do everything ourselves to be seen as having credibility? No. But with independence comes complete control–that's something that is important for women. We can own our work. Financially, creatively, legally, and in the eyes of the world. Having a medium that offers me that choice, has been crucial. I've been the girl whose work was attributed to the dude on the periphery of a project. I've been the girl who has had production and management deals fall through because I would not make myself sexually available to the men who wanted me. I've been the girl whose voice has been buried in the mix because it's grittier and less 'pop' (how embarrassing that would be) for the vocals to sound like an afterthought. I've been the girl who has been told to be sexier, or less sexy, if I want to be taken seriously. My story isn't exactly unusual. The desire for autonomy and independence is born from experience.

I try to be transparent about how and why I produce. It's important to me that there is a lit and open pathway visible to anyone who is interested in production. It involves sharing resources and opportunities and skill-sharing, creating communities and online and offline spaces to geek out, learn, rant and play. I am often approached by men seeking to

to create more diverse line-ups or playlists, asking for recommendations–who should I be listening to, who should I be programming? My response is generally: here is a list of women and non-binary producers and performers. Add them to a spreadsheet. For every one of them you approach ask them for another list of names to seek out. Watch it grow. Don't just ask the best-known and the most established. Give opportunities to people who have never played a show before, the way you would with an enthusiastic guy. Eventually you won't need to come to us to do this labour for you, you will have your own diverse network. And, if you have a collective or a community that is male-dominated and you want to shift this but don't know how–try some targeted paid marketing. Actively outreach to women's groups and queer groups and ask them what would make them more likely to get involved. Listen to their answers.

Diversity can be performative, and 'female producer' is a hashtag for the current zeitgeist. It's amazing to see it celebrated so widely, but we're not unicorns and I don't want to be seen as one. I don't want to succeed in isolation, or to be the wizard behind a curtain. I want to be able to be transparent about my journey and my process and show others that they have just as much right to take that path as I do. I want to hear others' ideas and see them grow and morph and inspire. Suzanne Ciani said 'we need to create a critical mass

of women' [20]. Change can happen and is happening, but it absolutely needs to be nurtured and strategised and fed.

Figure 1. Emah Fox at Melbourne Electronic Sound Studios working on a Buchla 200 System.

Emah Fox is a musician and producer based in Melbourne, Australia, creating synth-pop, abstract electronica, and Green Room Award nominated sound designs for theatre. A passionate feminist, she spoke on the 2016 LISTEN conference panel 'Gender Diversity in Experimental Arts', and is the developer and facilitator of Melbourne Electronic Sound Studio's Synth 101 workshops for femme and non-binary people

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