



Music and Sound Seminar Series

Walk Like an Egyptian, “Play Like a Foreigner”: Egyptian Jazz & the Troubles of ‘Real’ Jazz Legitimacy

Farida Gohar

June 10, 2026, at 5pm

At CEDEJ

23 Gamal Eldin Abou Elmahassen, Garden City, Cairo

[\[https://maps.app.goo.gl/wax29Y3jLvSkwg787\]](https://maps.app.goo.gl/wax29Y3jLvSkwg787)

Registration link for online participation:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/JITAYTsuTKWkRgmIGQer0w>

Jazz music has been a historically contentious site of social, cultural, and political signification. From the violent subjugation that characterized its origins and aspirational freedom that animated its practice, to its transformation into a distinctly ‘American’ music instrumentalized by the US State Department to counter Soviet influence, jazz’s capacity for the inscription of meaning is vast and regularly cause for debate. The particular configuration of jazz music in Egypt is no less complicated although seldom studied. This research ventures an initial mapping of the dynamics and negotiations that historically defined the initiation of ‘Egyptian’ jazz, as well as the ones that characterize the contemporary Egyptian jazz scene. By taking as its subject three influential figures of Egyptian jazz music— Rashad Fahim, Salah Ragab, and Amro Salah, it offers a critical narration and analysis of their personal histories and jazz-related discursive sensibilities. What emerges in the process is a complex portrait of jazz music in Egypt, one that, above all else, can be characterized by a profoundly lacking sense of situated identity. Referencing archival material, one-on-one interviews, and fieldwork at the Cairo Jazz Festival, this research marks the first substantive step towards a critical study of jazz music in Egypt and offers substantial material for further research.

Farida Gohar is a poet and anthropologist working in journalism. She graduated with an MA in anthropology from the American University in Cairo where she wrote her thesis on jazz music and musicians in Egypt. Her research interests are generally preoccupied with the travelling of musical cultures, tracing how they mutate and transform upon encounter and using postcolonial theory as an interpretive lens.

Interested in experimenting with form to think through ideas of accessibility, interaction, and co-production, Farida regularly teaches collage-based found poetry workshops. She is also a founding member of Cairo Poetry Collective where she runs experimental poetry workshops and open writing studios with her friends. She currently hosts a creative research writing lab at the Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences.

--The Music and Sound Seminar series is convened by Sophie Frankford and Dalia Ibraheem--