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## A Magical Substance Flows into Me

### Jumana Manna

**Producer** Jumana Manna. **Production company** Jumana Manna (Berlin, Germany). **Written and directed by** Jumana Manna. **Director of photography** Daniel Kedem. **Editor** Katrin Ebersohn, Jumana Manna. **Sound design** Jochen Jezussek. **Sound** Antoine Brochu.

DCP, colour. 68 min. Arabic, Hebrew, English.

**Premiere** 14 February 2016, Berlinale Forum

Robert Lachmann was a German-Jewish ethnomusicologist. In the 1930s, his radio show “Oriental Music” explored the musical traditions of Palestine and included regular live performances by musicians from different ethnic and religious groups.

Inspired by Lachmann’s musicological studies, Palestinian artist Jumana Manna travels through Israel and the Palestinian territories of today with recordings from the programme. What do these songs sound like now when performed by Moroccan, Kurdish, or Yemenite Jews, by Samaritans, members of the urban and rural Palestinian communities, Bedouins and Coptic Christians?

When a true fascination for history meets the sounds of the rababa, the saz, the oud and tin cans, a cultural diversity emerges that subverts the distinction between “Arab” and “Jewish”. There are no national borders here, only different kitchens where people make music together – with their guests, while cooking, while someone makes the coffee. Until the music becomes so infectious you can’t help but dance along.

*Marie Kloos*

## Music and pluralism

I was looking to make a film about music in Jerusalem before the 'Nakba', the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948. My research led me to Robert Lachmann, a Jewish-German ethnomusicologist whose special focus was the music of the Orient, and who arrived in Palestine in 1935. I was fascinated by the framework of his 1929 study, *Musik des Orients*, by its blind spots and idealism, and I was moved by the recordings I heard of the music he wrote about. I wanted to bring these recordings to various communities in the present day, and this prompted my search to find their roots. Traveling across the country with Lachmann's recordings constituted the guiding structure of *A Magical Substance Flows into Me*. I chose to include myself and my parents, with their anecdotes and daily routines, to tie together the chapters about the various musicians.

In one scene, my father gives me a suggestion for the film, telling me about a correspondence between Yusuf Dia' al-Khalidi [1842–1906, -ed.], the Palestinian intellectual and mayor of Jerusalem, and Theodor Herzl [1860–1904, -ed.], the father of modern political Zionism. It is 1899: Yusuf reads about the Zionist Congress in the press, and is surprised to hear that the Jews want to transform Palestine into a Jewish state. Even though al-Khalidi identifies with a regional/Ottoman sense of belonging, he understands the threat of Herzl's proposal: that a Jewish National Project of this sort will have a catastrophic effect on Palestine and on the relationship between Jews and Arabs. He writes to Herzl to inform him that Palestine is already full of its inhabitants, and that Jews and Arabs should rather unite and fight together against colonialism, indicating that he doesn't see the Jews as 'other'. Disappointingly, Herzl's reply is closer to that of a real estate developer: the Jews' arrival will raise the value of land, help the country flourish, and recover the economic vigour of the Ottoman Empire.

*A Magical Substance Flows into Me* responds to Yusuf Dia' al-Khalidi's inclusive vision. Through music, my film suggests an alternative form of sovereignty, one that disrupts the constructions of Zionism, and renders visible the complex inter-dependency of identities that were falsely made discrete from one another. It shifts between a constant building of pluralism in a re-imagined Palestine, and a disassembling of the claims and false binaries of Zionism. Lachmann's project in Palestine was somewhat of a failure: his study of the Oriental Jews alongside Palestinians did not create a greater understanding between the concerned communities. Nor was he able to establish the archive he had hoped to build, because it did not fit with the political formations that triumphed. I explore the potential of Lachmann's endeavour as well as the limited possibility of music and culture in general to overcome political divisions.

*A Magical Substance Flows into Me* builds on my previous films and interests. Those include *Blessed Blessed Oblivion* (2010), a portrait of thug culture in East Jerusalem, where I used music as a narrative tool; and *A Sketch of Manners* (2013), a re-staging of the last masquerade party in Palestine, which uses strategies of historical reenactment and performance. Similarly, *A Magical Substance Flows into Me* addresses grand historical narratives, but is also about daily life, resilience and desire as attempts to maintain continuity in a context that seeks to erase and fragment.

*Jumana Manna*

## Music from the film

### Programme 1:

*Men's Songs for a Yemenite Jewish Wedding*, 1936

Recording: Judah Halevi, 1937

Performance: 'The Bird'

Location: Rosh Haayin

Aharon Amram (tin)

Liron Amram (darbuka)

### Programme 2:

*Liturgical Cantillation and Songs of the Samaritans*

Recording: Song of the Sea, Ibrahim, Taufiq and Amram Kohen, 1937

*Song of the Sea*

Location: Mount Gerizim, West Bank

Abdullah Wasif Cahen (voice)

### Programme 3:

*Music from the Western Arab World*

Recording: Moroccan song, Al-Touhami bin Omar

Location: Katamon, Jerusalem

'My Beloved', 'Care Not to Forget Me'

Neta Elkayam (voice)

Amit Hai (mandolin)

### Programme 4:

*Bedouin Sung Poetry Accompanied by the Rababa*

Recording: Qasidat Nimr bin Adwan, Bajis Afandi Im'addi, 1937

*Solo on the Rababa*

Location: Bge'a Village, Naqab

Mousa Al Khamaysi (rababa)

### Programme 5:

*Liturgical Songs of the Kurdish Jews*

Recording: Ten Commandments, Eliahu Mizrahi, 1937

'I Am God Who Created'

Location: Rubel & Asulin Economics and Real Estate Appraisal Ltd, Jerusalem

Yaniv Ovadia (saz)

### Programme 6:

*Arab Urban Music (Maqam)*

Recording: Taqsim Saba, Ezra Aharon, 1937

*Taqsim Saba*

Location: Studio Sabreen, Jerusalem

Said Murad (oud)

Wisam Murad (oud)

### Programme 7:

*Songs for an Arab Village Wedding in Northern Palestine*

Recording: 'Ala dal'una dabke, Ahmed Smir, 1937

*Mawāl & Dabke*

Location: Sakhnin, The Galilee

Osama Abu 'Ali (shabbaba, yarghul)

Hassan Abu 'Ali (shabbaba)

Hussein Abu 'Ali (keyboard)

Hani Shushari (voice)



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Jumana Manna was born in New Jersey, USA in 1987. She studied Aesthetics and Politics at the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia (Los Angeles County, USA), before completing studies at the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo from 2006 until 2009, and at the Bezalel Academy for Arts and Design in Jerusalem from 2005 until 2006.

Jumana Manna lives and works in Berlin and Jerusalem. *A Magical Substance Flows into Me* is her first full-length film.

### Films

2010: *Blessed Blessed Oblivion* (21 min.), *The Umpire Whispers* (15 min.). 2013: *The Goodness Regime* (21 min., co-directed by Silke Storihle). 2016: *A Magical Substance Flows into Me*.