

Spring has been around a while, says Spring Lessons



Sara Duana Meyer and Caram Kapp, co-founders of Spring Lessons at their first event, Musiksehen.

By **Chitra Kalyani/ Special to Daily News Egypt** **April 4, 2012, 4:41 pm**

It is late March in Berlin, one of those rare days when the sun is making a generous appearance, and people are out enjoying its light and warmth. Another kind of Spring is being celebrated at Theater Aufbau Kreuzberg (TAK), where co-founders of Spring Lessons, Caram Kapp and Sara Duana Meyer are presenting their first event, "Musiksehen" (Visualizing Music) on March 23. The evening presents and discusses filmic approaches taken by contemporary music in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Meyer, whose various identities include being a curator, editor and culture manager, describes Spring Lessons as "an initiative, network and platform for socio-cultural projects and artistic research focussing on the current developments in the MENA region." It was also an idea that germinated in discussions following their first meeting at an event entitled "Freisprechanlage" (Free Speech) that explored expression in Arab countries (especially Egypt) and Germany.

Their shared vision is evident as they complete each other's sentences. "Spring Lessons is a project born out of curiosity," says Kapp. "And it is curiosity that drives us," adds Meyer. Upon witnessing the Arab Spring from Germany, the duo observed similarities in artistic production and a vantage point for discussion and communication with the various countries.

It is also curious and telling that one of the first lessons of "Spring Lessons" is that Spring has been around a long time.

"One of my aims [for Musiksehen, the first event]," Kapp tells Daily News Egypt, "was to say that, yes, the uprisings have taken place, but artistic production on a very high level was happening before they started." Kapp, who is a cultural producer and graphic designer, noted that music from the region also already shared "common points of cultural heritage."

Meyer said another aim of the event was to "surprise a little by cracking open assumptions of what 'Arab music' might be."

Musiksehen brought home the history of Arab music videos that is deeply rooted in "the word" as Fadi Abdelnour, graphic designer and festival coordinator for Alfilm Berlin, suggested.

To illustrate the concept, Abdelnour presented a work by Iraqi-American visual artist Usama Alshaibi. "Allahu Akbar" makes impressive and intelligent use of geometric patterns to visualize divinity. Another music video called "Dak Almani" randomly and nonsensically juxtaposes Google images with words in the song to produce an amusing result.

Besides providing a theoretical framework for the history of contemporary music, Musiksehen also brought home the idea of an independent music label. Kinda Hassan, co-founder of the independent music label Eka3, said they had produced music videos mainly to be released and viewed online.

"Youtube is the future of television," said Hassan in a Skype interview at Musisehen. Eka3 music videos composed the larger part of the line-up for the event.

"Most of their line-up are artists influenced by global musical trends who incorporate those with local musical tradition," said Kapp, speaking of Eka3 that aims to support indie musicians.

Meanwhile assumptions of 'local' and 'global' were also challenged by the event, which started with visualizations of Alshaibi's images of traditional geometrical patterns and ended with the groovy feel-good look of "General Suleyman" by Zeid and the Wings, a colourful if not fantasized blend of 'East and West.'

Musiksehen was as much theory and video-watching as it was discussion. "People are hungry to express content," said Meyer, a fact that is equally true of discussions in the Arab world it is was at Musiksehen. The audience, which contained members of Arab diaspora, introduced the topic of 'shaabi music' which, some argued, was more representative of popular Egyptian trends.

The discussion which enriched the music discussion was an intended component of Spring Lessons format. "The idea was to

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combine a theoretical approach to the videos —how are they made? where does this come from? — to an analytical approach —why is this in the video ad? what does it say to the audience?— and then offer it up to the public for discussion, as Sara said."

Meyer added, "During the last year the will and the power to actually engage in discussions and dare to criticize openly has gained so much in Arab countries."

While at first Spring Lessons focused on "projects that set a context, or take things so far out of the accustomed context that they force a change in perspective," Kapp said that definition had evolved. Now the aims are more discursive, focused more around lessons rather than the fissure of the Arab Spring, "to document and offer extra perspective on the art that is presented."

"We knew the name would involve spring somehow, as our starting point is the Arab Spring," said Kapp, and once again Meyer completed the idea, "but we are aware that the tag 'Arab Spring' is turning into a point of discussion itself. We thought that this was about curiosity and 'global' learning."

Speaking of their name, Meyer said, "spring of course hints at the Arab spring but for other people it also implies something new, change of season, beginnings." The name also speaks for the format which aims to combine the "Whatever we do will involve the artistic and the theoretical and practical."

Spring Lessons intends to be "a gateway in both directions," said Meyer, "changing and exchanging viewpoints."

While walking their talk, another event that the initiative has planned is an experiment with public space in Cairo. Spring Lessons will collaborate with Mahatat, a group that concentrates on art in public space, and their project called "Shaware3na" (Our Streets).

"By injecting itself into unexpected and familiar spaces," Kapp says that the project "is changing the viewpoint of those who populate [these spaces]."

As spring steps in again, Meyer speaks of the new lessons they desire to be learned from the upcoming project. "We want to explore what public space actually means in Cairo, also before the revolution, and how and if it has changed through it."

"Again, we are incredibly curious where this will lead to," says Meyer.

For more information on the initiative and their future events in Egypt and abroad, please visit the Facebook page 'Spring Lessons' or <http://www.springlessons.org>.



Caram Kapp and Sara Duana Meyer at the first event of Spring Lessons called "Musiksehen" (Visualizing Music).



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