

Film/Video Reviews

Rauf and Azim. 2022. Directed, subtitled, and produced by George Mürer, 45 minutes.
<https://javem.org/1-1-rauf-and-azim/>.

In George Mürer's poignant documentary audiences are drawn into a world that is so far from home, but so prescient of the current mood. Mürer is an ethnomusicologist and filmmaker with a particular interest in music, ritual, and culture. His films focus on Kurdistan, Greater Khorasan, and the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean region. This latest film focuses on a musical duo comprising of Arauf Sarkhosh and Azim Bamiyani. Both men are from the Hazara minority group in Afghanistan. This group has been marginalised in Afghan society, with further hostilities emanating from the Taliban. Amongst this backdrop the film crosscuts between a performance for Mürer back in 2006 in Afghanistan, interspersed with Rauf talking directly to the camera from his current home in Sweden. In this 45-minute feature, Mürer provides the viewer with a taste of the culture of the Hazara people through the performance of Arauf and Azim. Arauf takes great care in explaining how he inherited his musical talents from his father, a prolific singer and poet. He shows the viewer his dombra and explains how the instrument is played and created. Mürer includes other performances with the dombra to show the regional variations in playing the instrument.

This film highlighting a musical duo from an oppressed minority group within Central Asia, fits nicely within the canon of film that Mürer has produced thus far. Mürer has spent his considerable film career profiling musical practices throughout the world, paying special attention to members of marginalised communities whose voices would not necessarily be heard otherwise. Before this film, Mürer's oeuvre included a feature-length film examining the professional circuit of the Northern Kurdish wedding scene, sufi practices in Kurdistan, intergenerational music making in Badkhsan, musical cosmopolitanism in Kuwait, and Arab cultural music practices in Southeast Asia. In each of these films, Mürer pays special attention to the specific regional practices of music underlined by themes of war and displacement, the duo highlighted in this film embody this very concept of war and displacement. In switching between a recording of the duo's performance for the filmmaker in Afghanistan and interviews of the duo in the present day, Mürer's work is in dialogue with the films of John Baily which highlight the Herati lineages of music by focusing on the evolving repertoires, techniques, transmissions, terminology, and performance context. Baily too presents his films with undertones of war and displacement, which are felt very much in both bodies of work with the feeling of almost confinement with the subject (e.g., Baily 1985).

The backdrop of the material garnered in this film was a serendipitous musical moment in a private residence in Afghanistan, Mürer supplemented the limited material with present-day interviews of both subjects. He switches throughout the film from the present day back to the past, given the theme of this film with hints of war and upheaval omnipresent, and makes this technique effective. Switching between past and present allows the viewer to enjoy the performance more because its fleeting quality makes it even more captivating. Given the socio-political context in which we currently find ourselves living, this documentary stood out as something both historical and of the moment. This feeling of confinement as articulated by the filmmaker, reverberating through the film like a recent memory, has been felt by individuals all over the world, making the viewing experience more powerful.

George Mürer's oeuvre has been dedicated to meticulously sharing the stories of individuals whose voice traditionally is not heard through the medium of music. This has resulted in the documentation of important cultural practices throughout the world, yet picking up on themes that feel so close to home. After watching this latest project, one is left to wonder what Mürer's next project will focus on.

Reference

Baily, John. 1985. *Amir: An Afghan Refugee Musician's Life in Peshawar, Pakistan*. Directed by John Baily. Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources.

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Domingo en Plaza Almagro (Sunday in Plaza Almagro). 2014. Directed by Jennie Gubner, 11 minutes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfBtK6XcnBA>.

How can you evoke locality, neighbourhoodness, sentimental activism, and musical intimacy “that make them not just abstract ideas but about real people and their real relationships to and through sound?” Filmmaker Jennie Gubner (2022) in her short film *Domingo en Plaza Almagro (Sunday in Plaza Almagro)* proposes this ontological question about the vocabularies of cinema in evoking critical understandings of music as culture. Filmmaking, in this vignette, is applied to integrate both visual and sensory means to invite audiences to *experience* the sentiments in tango culture – a nodal point of the intersection of