

MUSLIMGAUZE CONCERT 13/6/99 ON MS STUBNITZ
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AL VERBAL POLICE AGREEMENT HAS SINCE BEEN INVALIDATED).
THE VERY SURVIVAL OF THIS CULTURAL PROJECT IS UNDER
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Equations of Eternity

MUSLIMGAUZE WAS A controversial figure whose personal beliefs, despite his anonymous profile and bedroom-originated recordings, managed to inflame emotions on both sides of the Middle Eastern chasm via his artistically provocative yet electronically-charged instrumental music. And the onslaught of 'Gauze products continues unabated. In *KHIDER* reveals the man behind the mask. Imagery: Christian Pallin.

Rumors abound of the late Bryn Jones, better known as Muslimgauze; he was a religious extremist who used proceeds from album sales to fund the Palestinian Liberation Organization; cited despots like Saddam Hussein as an inspiration for records; was anti-Jewish as demonstrated with his objection to the state of Israel's right to exist. Such rumors can hardly be faulted when trying to determine who the reclusive Jones was apart from recordings found in better music stores.

Muslimgauze records sometimes had provocative covers like veiled Iranian women engaging in target practice (*Hamas Arc*), hooded men brandishing knives in one hand and the Quran in the other (*Salaam Alekum, Bastard*), or provocative titles such as *Return of Black September* and *Al Aqsa Intifada*. Dedications to the PLO on the back of CDs and liner notes did not do much for PR either, other than occasionally getting the discs banned outright from stores. Those curious enough to look up

"The (Jones) family is just your everyday, average Christian family. They lived in a semi-detached three bedroom house that any normal everyday kind of person would live in."

Manchester is world-renowned as a hotbed of pop music, one that gave birth, during Jones' youth, to the Clash, Joy Division/New Order, the Buzzcocks, and A Certain Ratio. The UK takes its music seriously and growing up, Jones was no different, seduced by the siren songs and the attendant DIY ethos. Preferences included Brian Eno, Wire, Throbbing Gristle and Krautrock bands like Kraftwerk, Can and Faust. From this climate, Jones was stirred to create his own music in the late 70s/early 80s while doing a brief stint in graphic design in art school, which he christened as E.g. Oblique Graph. Under this moniker, in 1982 Jones released records on local labels Kinematograph and Recloose. The latter was run by an acquaintance, Simon Crab of Bourbonese Qualk. Crab



interviews in obscure magazines, scrutinize the nearly 200 releases, communicate with family members, label runners and music collaborators, and educate her/himself on the Mid-East conflict would develop a less dramatic picture of Jones. To unwind and peer beneath the gauze is to reveal a project fronted by a painfully shy and awkward recluse who was well-informed yet strongly opinionated and above all passionate about his twin loves—politics and music. Whether one advocates or abhors what Jones stood for, one cannot help but admire his focus and dedication.

Jones was born to working class parents in 1961 in Manchester, England where he was raised and where he eventually passed away January 14th, 1999 from a rare blood fungus at the age of 38. Throughout his brief life, he lived in the bedroom of his youth. When not researching on the conflict-ridden Muslim world, Jones only ventured out to studios where he feverishly made tracks and to arrange the business end of recording including his distribution and label deals. The surviving nephew in charge of Jones's estate, Gareth Jones, spoke of his uncle's surroundings,

recalled: "I started Recloose, which was a Bourbonese Qualk label, really, though at the time the first release was a compilation. We released a Jones' 7" as E.g. Oblique which was a foolish thing to do. We only sold 50 or so 7"s. Just after he released it, he changed his name to Muslimgauze, and we released *Buddhist on Fire*."

E.g. Oblique Graph music was largely synthesizer melodies processed through filters and delay, owing much to the New Wave aesthetic. In an inspired technique foreshadowing later work, Jones over-dubbed his tracks with news broadcasts of a political bent culled from radio and television. Previous E.g. Oblique titles were in themselves often politically-coined: "Murders Linked to Gaulist Clique," "Human Rights," and "Castro Regime." Though perhaps above average for its time, the music in retrospect is unspectacular, yet formed a vital part of Jones's progress towards proficiency.

In addition to E.g. Oblique releases, 1982 was also the year that Jones cited in interviews as conception point of the Muslimgauze concept, which was directly as a result of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. Jones seized

on this incident as a reason to educate himself not only on the regional conflict but the Muslim world as a whole. Interest in these conflicts mushroomed into an obsession that confounded all he knew, including his family, and to this day remains a mystery. "It's baffling to be honest," reflects Gareth Jones. "It was something he obviously felt strongly about. As a family it is not something we hold dear to. We all had our own opinion but Bryn took it to the next level. He had his own views from reading the newspaper, just his own research. I never understood his music and I still don't understand it today. I listen to it and think, what's he trying to say, and what's this about?"

Though Jones did not change his project name that instant, hints crept into track titles such as "Islamic Koran in Camera Dome," and significantly "Muslin Gauze." To attempt to understand why Jones made the kind of music he did, it is essential to understand his political views as

artist left a lasting sense of bitterness that took years to overcome. In 1984 the first Muslimgauze album, *Buddhist on Fire*, was released on Reclouse. As Simon Crab recalls, "Things started to go wrong when we released the album. The deal with Reclouse was that we paid 50 percent of the profits to the artist and 50 percent went to the label, which was a pretty good deal, especially since we didn't sell that much. We put a lot of energy into marketing, and most of the artists signed to the label sold off the back of Bourbonese Qualk anyway. He assumed we sold loads of albums but we didn't even cover the costs. He used to write and call us up, demanding money. We got sick of it and wouldn't answer him. He wouldn't accept anything we told him. We didn't pay him as we never made costs, so we offered to give it back to him. This was after we got him to play live in Holland, which was a terrible mistake. We played in the biggest left field venues in Europe, and were

the two were inextricably linked. In interviews, Jones cited events in the Muslim world rather than other types of music as inspiration, and those ideas would flow through his hands as he created a piece. The ethnic styles Jones extrapolated from were merely a vehicle to get his ideas across to the listener. Though album and track titles were kept general, there were some that denoted a direct link between an event and the ensuing music. In album titles, cases in point would be *The Gulf Between Us*, relating to the 1991 Gulf War; *Vote Hezbollah*, to the elections in Lebanon around the time; *Betrayal*, to the Oslo Accords in 1993; and *Hebron Massacre*, relating to the 1994 incident. The same applied to track titles like "Curfew Gaza" from *Zul'm*, and "Last Mosque in Herzegovina" from *Sufiq*, not to mention dedications Jones made to struggling Muslims, especially the PLO, in his liner notes. As Jones stated in interviews at the time, without these events the music would not exist. This led to the politically-charged packaging, yet in a twist, Jones chose not to use lyrics as he did not want to preach; he admitted that the music could be enjoyed outside a political context.

While Jones rapidly developed concepts, experiences as an emerging

keen on getting Bryn to play there to help promote the album, and he agreed to do it. What ended up happening was me and my partner in BQ playing with him on stage, where it became clear he was absolutely terrified; he hated it, even hid on stage. Afterwards he was angry, and said he would never play live again. Then he did interviews where he slagged us off. We thought it was rude, a slap to the face. We were pissed-off, and after that he demanded money from us for playing and that was the beginning of the end of it."

Following the split, Jones released Muslimgauze LPs on his own aptly titled imprint, Limited Editions, until 1998. Due to a limited budget, he could only release one or two records a year. Like E.g. Oblique, early Muslimgauze was not extraordinary, though the key difference was percussion as the focal point of his musical structure. Like later works, early pieces were composed with drum machines, drum kits, traditional percussion and even pots and pans. Techniques cultivated as E.g. Oblique, like filtered and treated synth-sweeps and instrumental fragments, and over-dubbing of pre-recorded news broadcasts, were now placed atop

rhythms. These nascent tracks were rudimentary, two dimensional when compared to bigger label releases, but demonstrated potential. Though the release catalogue did not reflect it, Jones continuously made and recorded music while keeping in mind that he wished to out-do his previous work. Subsequently, Muslimgauze albums kept improving, sonically and artistically. Listeners often drew broad analogies to Jones' then contemporaries Throbbing Gristle and Nurse With Wound.

While Jones produced and released works on Limited, he also set to work finding distribution, eventually securing as such in Australia via Extreme, North America via Soleilmoon, and Europe via Staalplaat. Later, these distributors would become official Muslimgauze labels. Jones began to receive fan mail from throughout the world, but much to his chagrin, was virtually unrecognized in the UK. This turned out to be a double-edged sword in that Jones never supported his local scene, which in turn failed to



support him. On the other hand, he began listening to traditional music from Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, the Middle East and even Japan, music that contributed directly to the formation of the more "familiar" Muslimgauze sound.


Extreme, Staalplaat, and Soleilmoon gradually achieved enough stability to begin labels in their own right, though it was the latter imprint, run by Charles Powne, who first approached Jones in 1988 about doing a release on Soleilmoon. It just so happened Powne was visiting England from the US that year on business and took advantage of circumstances to meet up with Jones to discuss the project. Engaging in a label transaction with Jones was ideal for Soleilmoon, as Powne recalls: "I probably first wrote to him in 86 or 85. When I had the idea of putting out music I contacted him in 87. That quickly led to the *Abu Nidal/Coup D'Etat* cassette and didn't really involve a lot because I said I wanted to do something and he said sure, and he sent me the master tapes. It was the fastest sort of deal you can imagine. He didn't hassle me or haggle or anything; he just said okay, here you go, do it. From then it became, 'Do you want to do another

record?' and he would ask me or I would ask him."

In 1988, English label Red Rhino was poised to release the first Muslimgauze CD, *Iran*. Just before release, Red Rhino went under; happily, Jones was able to negotiate with Staalplaat's Geert-Jan Hobijn to take over the project. *Iran* was the beginning of a more fruitful relationship and a friendship that lasted literally right up to Jones' deathbed. Part of the reason was that of all the labelheads, Hobijn was geographically closest. He notes: "I consider him not of this time. He would go every morning to the studio, stay there all day and then go home, and he did that consistently for the last 20 years. No musician works like that. In the old days people were as focused as he was. He was so much in control of the material he did that I don't know of any musicians who...if you keep doing it again and again for 20 years you reach a certain level, and he was like that. He was this amazing musician. Did you know he put in the music certain frequency tracks—highs, lows—just for high-end people who appreciated it, as a sort of secret note. Only if you have really high-end equipment you can hear it."

The first long-term recording contract was with Australia's experimental label Extreme, run by Roger Richards. Extreme put out *Intifaxa*, one of the best early Muslimgauze records because it was recorded and mixed by a sound engineer paid for by the label. Where previous releases were two dimensional, the Extreme label sound renderings were crisp, bringing the music to life in three brilliant dimensions. This became the standard for the ongoing catalogue. Pleased with the result, Richards flew to Manchester to discuss further releases and tabled a contract. "It was like what I expected. We didn't talk about music, we talked about politics and the whole situation that brought his music to life," says Richards. "He didn't consider himself influenced by music. He obviously listened to other music in the past but he really felt influenced by the Palestinian situation from the start." Richards understood that Jones was prolific and Extreme could not accommodate the output, so he compromised by paying the studio to produce different versions of tracks and submitted to the master what he felt was best. This boosted the quality of the results.

Among other details was an offer that would seem impossible for someone like Jones to resist, as Richards relates: "I suppose that he never went to Israel or Palestine, which was interesting. He (Jones) felt that he understood the situation even though he never went there. That always baffled me. I kept saying, 'Extreme will pay for your flight, your accommodations, everything. It's a paradox that you actually haven't been there.'"

Traveling to the Middle East was not in the cards for Jones. Instead, the 90s—the final decade of Jones' life—became his most creative and prolific period. This was a time when Jones received more recognition, not only abroad, but from UK-based peers such as Steven Wilson of Bass Communion, and the Rootsman, which in turn led to fruitful collaborations. Such collaborations with local artists and those abroad resulted in a diverse series of musical influences that crept into Jones' music, while simultaneously widening his fan base. The 90s were also a time when Jones overcame his stage fright and even his reclusiveness to some degree. He was entering a phase of mastery of his craft where his many enthusiasts and the labels he released on would literally take years catching up, particularly after his premature departure from the world... 

Shrouded in Mystery

overviews of early Muslimgauze work

INTIFAXA (Extreme)

The first release on Extreme circa 1990 and the first Muslimgauze album to employ pristine sound engineering techniques, which became the standard for the ongoing catalogue. *Intifaxa* is a pensive drumkit “solo” with vestiges of traditional percussion hovering on the outskirts of the central rhythm. The reverberating crash of cymbals spread over the drum work and the effects utilized (such as an awning) help to flesh out the percussives into a near-kaleidoscopic barrage of rhythm. The instrumental concept of the album is simple, the end result anything but.

UNITED STATES OF ISLAM (Extreme)

A driving kickdrum beat ploughs through these tracks as rhythms, dazzlingly varied in texture yet derived from traditional Middle Eastern and North African motifs, abound throughout massed vocalizations and sculpted noise. Rhythms are soaked in reverb, enhancing the sense of spaciousness throughout. Oddly, an ominous growling, ventilating noise occurs over these pieces, as if a dragon was comingling in the drum circle. Further accentuating these already rich compositions—like adding more powdered sugar to the baklava—are bits of discreet sitar and the rush of sundry wind instruments.

ZUL’M (Extreme)

A good representative Muslimgauze record for those unfamiliar with the music because of its inherent variety, as each track is markedly different from its predecessor, conveying rhythms simultaneously traditional, breakbeat-esque and atmospheric. Arabic and Indian session players were used on this record, which ushers in a deeply ethnic sensibility. Moreover, club dance beats intermingle in tandem with the traditional. The listener may be able to discern a bit of the Manchester dance scene in these grooves, no doubt interjected by Jones’ wryly soaking in the sounds he heard walking by the clubs he passed on his way home.

EMAK BAKIA (Concrete)

Though the official release date is 1994, the album was actually recorded in 1990 and given to a German label, who in turn passed it to Concrete Productions to remix (without Jones’ consent) and release some years later. To Jones, the album held up well despite being dated. *Emak Bakia* is a 4/4 minimal techno album infused with Jones’s characteristic ethnic and kit work. A DJ might very well be able to mix these tracks alongside songs from Happy Mondays and Stone Roses without blinking. Dated and not exactly a masterwork due to Cargo’s interference, but an enjoyable record just the same.

VOTE HEZBOLLAH (Soleilmoon)

A hurricane of densely layered hand percussion persists here, with cymbals crashing like lightning bolts as an ether of voices and wind instruments are overwhelmed in storms of wailing feedback. Fragile moments of calm occur as the listener is thrust into the “eye,” but the swirling rhythmic rage is not far behind. On this record, Jones sheds contemporary Western reference points and creates something all his own. *Vote Hezbollah* is one of the darkest and most overwhelming Muslimgauze releases, but also amongst the most beautiful.

HAMAS ARC (Staalplaat)

Overlap is not unusual in Muslimgauze recordings as Jones was such a prolific artist, hence this disc, an accompanying volume to *Vote Hezbollah*; in fact, there are two tracks taken from the latter. Rather than get caught up in the previous perfect storm, *Hamas Arc* lingers in the array of stirring after-effects. Tracks are more distinctive rather than seamlessly blended; virtuosic hand percussion is more distinctive, as are the atmospheric sections where voices are discernible by their native dialects.

VEILED SISTERS (Soleilmoon)

Among the more atmospheric and meditational of records, this 2-CD work contains dialogue in Arabic and French (perhaps Algerian), set to restrained, consistent rhythms. Like house music, the mostly electronic beats are repetitive; the listener must pull back, focus, and listen to the errant sounds that buttress the unfolding narrative. Urban noises and anguished conversations fan out; it is as if one is listening to some clandestine and exotic radio drama. Rhythms and drones make for a deeply hypnotic experience, a virtual cinema for the imagination.