**This is an audio documentary that focuses on the development of underground music in Egypt through the scope of the not-so-popular genre such as metal. The documentary looks at how music was back in the 90s up until today. It also highlights how it is being a female musician, in this male-dominant industry of the underground music scene.**

**The Development of Underground Music in Egypt**

**Audio Documentary**

**Script**

Written, Narrated & Produced by: Yassmeen Malash

Guests: Firas Al-Atraqchi
Amy Frega
Tarek Amr Abd El-Latif

Date: 14/10/12

Duration: 13 min 57 sec.

Place: American University in Cairo
5th Settlement, New Cairo.

Professor: Dr. Kim Fox

Course: JRMC 460
Final Project Script:

Lead-In (Not read): In Egypt, music has always been present as a mode of expression. This documentary will be covering the development of the underground music scene in Egypt in the period of the 1990s up until today; through the eyes of musicians from different genres and diverse backgrounds.

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MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP) FADE IN

Firas: “So, I walk on stage, and...” (:03)

SFX – CROWD CHEERING

Firas: “…My hair was half way down my back. Um, and I’m wearing a ‘Paradise Lost’ T-shirt, and a bunch of necklaces...and, you know, people are looking up and they see this, this huge, hairy, guitarist. And, and people came up to me afterwards and told me “It was like we couldn’t believe we were in Egypt anymore. It was like some heavy metal festival’ and…” (:20)

MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP) FADE OUT.

MUSIC (ALEXI LAIHO STYLE – QUICK LICKS – GUITAR SOLO PERFORMANCE BY ANDY JAMES) FADE IN

Firas: “…As soon as I just played one note, people went...insane” (:04)

SFX FADE OUT

MUSIC (ALEXI LAIHO STYLE – QUICK LICKS – GUITAR SOLO PERFORMANCE BY ANDY JAMES) FADE OUT

MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP – LOOP) FADE IN

Narrator: That was Firas al-Atraqchi; 41-year-old professor at the American University in Cairo, AUC, and long-time musician & metal head, describing one of his gigs in November 1993. (:11)

Firas: “By, the summer of 1993 there was this buzz. There used to be this rock show on at 11 to midnight on Thursdays called “Monsters of Rock, Masters of Metal” put on by Osama Kamal. And he decided that maybe it would be a good idea to get together a bunch of underground bands. So he put the word out, and
word of mouth, we eventually all met at his office, and decided to put on a rock festival.” (:30)

**Narrator:** According to Al-Atraqchi, the underground music scene in Egypt had a huge following back in the nineties. In 1992 metal had started to emerge, and by the end of ‘93, the “Monsters of Rock” festival that they had put together, had over 7000 people attending. (:16)

**Firas:** “So, then comes the grand opening night for this rock festival,”(:04)

*SFX (CROWD CHEERING) FADE IN*

**Firas:** “And there had been nothing like it, ever, for heavy metal, in Egypt. The, I think the organizers and the sponsors were themselves very very surprised. Marlboro was one of the sponsors.”(:13)

*SFX (CROWD CHEERING) FADE OUT*

**Narrator:** Not only was the festival noticeably large, but it was held in one of Egypt’s most significant venues; in the Cairo Stadium. The festival grew and turned into a competition, and more and more metal bands started to surface. (:12)

**Firas:** “So around this time, we’re playing all these concerts, we started playing gigs, like in bars and stuff, and we started having a following of people; who would come to each and every one of our gigs. So our following grew, people started doing bootleg recordings of our concerts and trading them. But this was massive, I mean, it was so massive that CNN saw this as a major story and they’re like ‘well there’s heavy metal growth in conservative Cairo, how’s that?’”(:21)

**Narrator:** It was only after international media outlets had covered this underground music growth that the Egyptian media itself & the government started to take notice. Tabloid newspapers started heavily attacking metal music… (:12)

*MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP LOOP) FADE OUT*

*MUSIC (FOREVER FAILURE – PARADISE LOST) FADE IN*

**Narrator:** …Labeling all musicians and their followers as Satanic. And so the situation began to escalate. (:06)

**Firas:** “On January 27 1997, Um, Egyptian internal security started arresting people.” (:07)

*MUSIC (FOREVER FAILURE – PARADISE LOST) FADE OUT*

**Firas:** “They arrested about 180 people…” (:02)
Firas: “And they let everybody but 40 go. And they shaved these people’s heads; they put ‘em into jail, they interrogated them. Some imams in the mosques called for their executions. What you have to understand is that this was at a time where you had militant Islamists fighting the government, and, at the same time, there were all these youths with no jobs, so the government was really afraid, I believe, of these heavy metal concerts because of all these youth getting together, by the tens of thousands.” (:28)

Narrator: The government had tightened security and the situation reached an extreme; materials such posters, CDs or even t-shirts, related to metal, or resemble metal, were confiscated at the airport, and owners of these items were checked. (:16)

Firas: “So for a few months we were all living in fear. I mean, I was told, you know, I was given a call at like 4 o’clock in the morning ‘Firas don’t leave your house they’re arresting all of us.’ It was a witch hunt it was ridiculous, I mean, and society turned all of a sudden, and everybody who wears black or has long hair is a Satanist; automatically.” (:18)

MUSIC (ASH – THE SUCCESSION) FADE OUT

MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP LOOP) FADE IN

Narrator: It was only a few months later, in March, that everyone was released and the situation had calmed down. (:06)

Firas: “That was the end of it. The government started this, and the government ended it when it felt like it. It was, you know, a slap on the hand ‘don’t do this again.’ And so heavy metal music kind of went back underground, majorly, for the next six or seven years, till about 2002/2003.” (:16)

Narrator: Unfortunately for the genre, Heavy metal didn’t make as much of a comeback, as it did when it first appeared in Egypt. Musician Tarek Amr, from Scarab; an internationally known underground heavy metal band, tells us how his band was formed in the early millennium. (:25)

Tarek: “We’re a death metal band. Started off by the name ‘Hate Suffocation’ that was in 2001. And then the band changed; to ‘Scarab’, in 2005, yeah; 2005-2006. I joined the band 2005. It was definitely a new start. We had a new theme, new music, new ideas; new everything.” (:23)

Narrator: Tarek, whose band has participated in popular rock festivals such as ‘Battle of the Bands’, ‘Dubai Desert Rock’, and ‘With Full Force Festival’, says that the popularity of the
genre in Egypt has been declining, that the goal of the band (or any Metal band) is to get outside of Egypt. (:16)

MUSIC (HEY YOU – PINK FLOYD) FADE IN
MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP LOOP) FADE OUT

Tarek: “Oh, it’s not popular AT ALL. Like, maximum, a maximum fan base in Egypt, total is, I would say less than 2000 people. That is... the TOTAL fan base. So it’s not a lot.” (:13)

Narrator: Metal was now so underground, that even playing gigs around Cairo mostly happened in illegal settings. (:06)

Tarek: “We used to... all the venues; they were kind of like, underground illegal venues. Like, some spot in a desert. Like, I don’t know like, Esh el Bolbol, Badya, El Maryouteya, El Mansoureya, in Tareek El Sahrawy (Cairo-Alex Desert Road). Like that. We played in Sakia, but that was VERY recent. The only decent places that we played in Egypt before Sakia, was actually the Alexandria Library. We played there three times, but the majority was these kinds of concerts.”(:29)

MUSIC (HEY YOU – PINK FLOYD) FADE OUT.
MUSIC (RESURRECTION – THE TEMPER TRAP LOOP) FADE IN

Narrator: In 2007, Scarab had started participating in major rock festivals around the world. (:05)

SFX (CROWD CHEERING)

Narrator: …It was only recently starting late 2011 after they had grown internationally, that the Scarab band members had noticed a form of acceptance for them to play in respectable venues in Egypt. (:12)

MUSIC (MATT RACH – ENDGAME) FADE IN

Tarek: “Not really a lot of people liked our genre, specifically because it’s the most extreme form of metal. Ok, so, it’s only when we succeeded outside; that we got out of Egypt, it was then when people started to take notice. So, we came back in, and then it was a little bit different, because like, we were THE first metal band to ever play, like, outside; so, in Europe specifically.”(:27)

Narrator: But the question remains; how did they manage to penetrate this international scene when they were shunned from their own local community? (:07)
Tarek: “It was, like, it was all online. Kind of, we sent our music to so many concerts, and labels and what not, and trying, you know, trying our luck, with everything. Like, it took a lot of effort, not a lot of people accepted the music, until like, we… It was kind of like a stroke of luck, where we got into a completion to play a gig in Dubai. Ok, and we won that competition; Desert Rock, Dubai Dessert rock Festival.” (:26)

MUSIC (MATT RACH – ENDGAME) FADE OUT

MUSIC (MOTOWN SPINNERS – IT’S A SHAME) FADE IN

Narrator: It’s true that today, metal is amongst the uncommon genres of music that had developed in Egypt. Nonetheless, the Egyptian underground music scene began to see other forms of music emerge. (:10)

MUSIC (MOTOWN SPINNERS – IT’S A SHAME) FADE OUT

MUSIC (CAN’T PRETEND – THE KA-SETTES) FADE IN

Narrator: Nineteen-year-old Amy Frega tells us about her relatively new band “The Ka-ssettes” & how they started in this business. (:06)

Amy: “I play with a band called ‘The Ka-ssettes’, and, we’re into acoustic. I, I’ve been kind of in the underground scene for like a few; six or seven months. And, we play covers. We have one original that we recoded and we sent to Nile FM, and they’ve been playing it for a while, and we’re writing our second original.” (:24)

Narrator: According to Amy, how the underground music scene works is through low-key connections based on the person’s musical reputation. Do they sing? Can they play guitar? Do they have a good voice? So it’s basically networking between musicians and one another. (:13)

Amy: “Mahmoud you know, he’s in another band called ‘Faking it’; he’s the vocalist. And his bassist I knew, and he’s like “Ah our vocalist wants to do this acoustic project thing, and we’re going to BCA tonight and there’s gona be karaoke, so come.” So I went to BCA, and there was the karaoke and I sang, and then after I sang Mahmoud came and he’s like ‘We have to do something together’ so I’m like ‘Ok’.” (:23)

Narrator: It’s true that nowadays a variety of bands have surfaced, but are there really enough venues for them to shine? If large performance halls are not an option for non-mainstream music, where could they perform? (:11)

Amy: “I performed; I performed once in Bikya, I performed a few times in Cairo Jazz. Um, I go to open mics, BCA... What I really like about these places, is that your audience are actually musicians, so whatever you do, it’s gona be really
appreciated by the audience. You really focus on, you know, getting really creative musical elements, really nice vocal techniques in your music. I think it’s really cozy; I like it. It brings the musicians together. This is pretty much where, you know, musicians get connected and meet each other and stuff.” (:38)

**Narrator:** Even though playing in small venues has its upsides, it’s not all fun and games. When it’s time for a band to expand and try to reach a larger audience, they will most definitely encounter difficulties. (:10)

MUSIC (Carlos Santana & Ottmar Leibrt - Samba Pa Ti - Acoustic) FADE IN

MUSIC (CAN’T PRETEND – THE KA-SETTES) FADE OUT

**Narrator:** When asked, this is what Amy said about how to expand in Egypt. (:03)

*Amy:* “Ukh, performances in… places. You do have an audience here, like, here, people are pretty loyal to your music; your audience. They like it, they’re gona watch you perform wherever you perform, but they’re very limited; they’re not much. So, I guess expanding, it’s still through the performances, and make your own album and sell... (:22)

**Narrator:** But is it that easy? (:02)

*Amy:* “The problem is, here in Egypt, You’re making English music, and it’s Arabic. So you’re not gona really sell much, and imagine putting your creative elements and selling English music, so that’s gona be kind of an issue. It’s kind of not in the right market.” (:15)

**Narrator:** When it comes to underground music in Egypt, having problems is expected. Trying to fight the conventional type of music that exists and attempting to stand out is an obstacle on its own. But due to cultural influences, musicians like Amy, have a little bit more on their plate. (:14)

*Amy:* “It’s easier being a male musician than it is being a female musician. Because, working in music, it’s always late at night, err performing, going to studios, it’s really late at night and not a lot of girls do this in Egypt. Like, they don’t really go to studios late at night or perform late at night; it’s a bit hard.” (:17)

MUSIC (Carlos Santana & Ottmar Leibrt - Samba Pa Ti - Acoustic) FADE OUT

MUSIC (THE TEMPER TRAP – SWEET DISPOSITION) FADE IN

**Narrator:** But as they say, “Every cloud has a silver lining” so it might not be too bad after all. (:05)
Amy: “Being a musician; a female musician; going to studios where everyone around you is a guy, I think it’s kind of an advantage honestly. It’s not the usual male voice, that’s one thing – because people hear male voices all the time. Uhm, I don’t sing the usual, like, you know, Beyoncé, kind of, very pop music. I’m more into like very subtle voices and sometimes put really rough elements in the middle. So I’m a female and I have a different style of singing, so it’s...it makes people remember you more, I guess. And they’re more into listening to something new and different in Egypt. So I think that’s what really, you know, puts you on the spot. (:41)

Narrator: In the end, Male or female, metal head or acoustic singer, it’s safe to say that the underground music scene in Egypt has drastically changed throughout the past two decades. I’m Yassmeen Malash and this was ‘The Development of Underground Music in Egypt’ Audio Documentary. Thanks for listening. (:16)

Narrator: Music credits go to:

1. Resurrection by The Temper Trap.
2. Quick Licks Guitar Solo Performance by Andy James.
3. Forever Failure by Paradise Lost.
4. Ash by The Succession.
5. Hey You by Pink Floyd.
6. EndGame by Matt Rach.
7. It’s a shame by Mowtown Spinners.
8. Can’t pretend by The Ka-ssettes.
10. Sweet Disposition by The Temper Trap.

Narrator: Special effects credits go to: The MalitaArmy account from Youtube. Special guests: AUC professor, & musician; Firas Al-Atraqchi, AUC Graduate & Scarab band member; Tarek Amr Abd El-Latif, and AUC Student musician; Amy Frega. This Audio documentary was created & produced by yours truly; Yassmeen Malash, for Professor Kim Fox for the JRMC 460 Audio Production Course at AUC. Thanks for tuning in. (:55)

MUSIC (THE TEMPER TRAP – SWEET DISPOSITION) FADE OUT.

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