Intersectional Identities in Western Art Music:

Performing Womanhood, Blindness, and Islam in the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra

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Abstract

There is a rich history of disability performances outside of music, namely, the freak shows and carnivals of the nineteenth century. Disability studies scholars have examined these "theatrical displays" of disability and have drawn parallels between the social performance of disability and its performance on stage. The performance of disability has been discussed within the field of disability studies, particularly when analyzing the intersection of disability and music, but authors tend to ignore the wider field of identity politics. This is an issue because disability has an intersectional history that is intertwined with issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

While these dehumanizing displays and performances of disability no longer exist, I argue that this "freak show" narrative still exists within Western art music (WAM) performance, and when a musician does not fit into the concept of the "ideal" body in WAM, they do not just perform the music, but also their identity. Because I am focusing on repertoire within the Western canon, which Alex Lubet (2010) calls "the most 'sighted' musical repertoire the world has ever known," I am interested in the ways that blind musicians navigate this repertoire without sight. To do this, I take an intersectional approach to music and disability performance, using the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra as a case study. I analyze the history of disability construction and its relationship to performativity, as well as the history of blind musicianship (for example, early modern Spain's *oracioners* and blind music notations), and Alex Lubet's (2010) case for a Blind Culture to form a basis for my argument. I then apply these insights and critiques to the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra, using the 2002 documentary *The Blind Orchestra* and more recent videos and reviews of their performances as primary source material.

The Al-Nour Wal Amal ("Light and Hope") Chamber Orchestra is an all-female, blind, and majority Muslim orchestra from a school of the same name in Cairo. The group mostly performs music

from the Western canon, but the gender, ethnicity, and disabilities of the women in the orchestra place it outside (or on the very periphery) of what is considered “ideal” or even “normal” orchestral praxis. While they do play with a conductor, the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra has its own way of musicking that is affected by the individual members’ visual impairments. For example, they all use Braille music notation, which also requires all music to be memorized, and the conductor must use detailed verbal descriptions and auditory cues, rather than typical conducting techniques. This orchestra serves as a great example of the ways in which disability is deeply intertwined with ethnicity and gender, and how music performance can exacerbate disability performance.

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Introduction

The Al-Nour Wal Amal ("Light and Hope") Chamber Orchestra is an all-female, blind, and majority Muslim orchestra that is based in Cairo at an institution of the same name. The group mostly performs music from the Western canon, but the gender, ethnicity, and disabilities of the orchestra members place it outside (or on the very periphery) of typical Western orchestral praxis. The Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra has its own way of musicking that is affected by the individual members' visual impairments. For example, they all use Braille music notation, which requires all of the repertoire to be memorized for rehearsals and performances, and the conductor must use detailed verbal descriptions and auditory cues, rather than the visual conducting techniques that are typically used in Western art music (WAM). The Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra serves as a great example of the ways in which disability is deeply intertwined with ethnicity and gender, and how WAM musicians negotiate their intersectional identities with the expectations of their audience.

In this thesis, I focus on the performance of identity, but especially disability, within WAM. The intersection of disability and music performance has been explored by disability scholars, but the intersections of other identities (such as race, ethnicity, and gender) with disability and musicianship have not received as much attention, despite the history that disability has with other minority identities. Using the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra as a case study, I analyze the history of disability performance, blind musicianship, and the perception of disabled WAM performers to answer the question of how the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra negotiate their intersectional identities with the expectations of their audience.

Theoretical framework

This thesis uses the following theories and concepts as a way to interpret the literature and documentary used throughout the chapters that follow. I am also using these theories in combination

with each other, placing a special emphasis on the intersectionality of "different" identities within Western art music (WAM) performance, which is often neglected in the currently available literature. Disability and other intersectional identities are brought together throughout this thesis by the concept of performativity because it is through performance that we see the way people negotiate their different identities and present them to the world. I am taking an intersectional approach to analysis because the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra's members are part of multiple marginalized groups (namely, female, disabled, Middle Eastern, and Muslim). Previous scholarship on this orchestra tends to ignore the ways that the members' different identities interact with one another to influence not only the audience's perception of the group's performances but also how the performers themselves navigate the typical expectations for Western classical music performance and rehearsals.

Disability

Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin define disability as a fluid form of identity that "encompasses a broad range of bodily, cognitive, and sensory differences and capacities."[1] Unlike most other identities, disability can happen to anyone at any time, it can be situational, and it can wax and wane within a person's body.[2] The term "disability" and its current definition of "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities [or] the fact or state of having such a condition" have been in the English language since 1547,[3] but was not until the nineteenth century that it started to be associated with words that hold such negative connotations such as "deviance," "disorder," and "abnormality." This association likely formed as a result of the discourses around the concept of normalcy within statistics, law, and medicine during this time.[4] These discourses

[1] Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, "Disability," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*. Keywords, eds. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 5.
[2] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 5-6.
[3] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 6.
[4] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 6.

also fed into the eugenics movement, which sought to rid the world of disabilities by way of sterilization programs and segregation.[5]

Activists in the disability rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s sought to shift the idea of disability from solely a medical issue to a social one. This shift is reflected in the laws created in the US and worldwide, which can be seen in the definition of disability that is given by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; 1990), as well as the definition given by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008). The ADA defines disability as "A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; being regarded as having such an impairment,"[6] with the third part of the definition being absolutely crucial for emphasizing the social aspect of disability. The conventional definition states that disability "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."[7] Both of these definitions emphasize aspects of disability that are external to the body and disability studies scholars refer to this approach as the social model of disability.

Disability studies scholars use the social model of disability to focus on "building—as well as excavating from the past—a rich and self-conscious record of the perspectives of disabled people themselves."[8] Developments in disability studies and the disability rights movement are similar to feminist epistemologies, queer theory's blending of social analysis and subjective expression, and postcolonial and critical race theorists' critiques of hybrid identities and psychic displacements.[9] All four of these movements started with "a first wave of identifying and resisting oppressive structures,

[5] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 6.
[6] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 8.
[7] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 8.
[8] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[9] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.

which was followed by attempts to recover a cultural heritage as a backdrop for individual and collective expression in the present."[10] The parallels between these political-cultural-academic movements emphasize the intersectional nature of disability, of gender, of race, and of sexuality. "Intersectional modes of analysis point to the common interests, struggles, and pleasures these movements can promote."[11]

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The concept of disability is often divided into two models: the social model and the medical model.[16] The medical model of disability defines bodily and cognitive differences as deficiencies that

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[10] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[11] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[12] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[13] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[14] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[15] Adams, Reiss, and Serlin, "Disability", 9.
[16] Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Music, Music in Disability Studies," In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-8.

should be fixed with the medical treatments or cures available. It assumes a total biological basis for every disability, which makes the development of a cure (and therefore the eradication of disabilities in general) a real possibility under this model. The social model of disability, on the other hand, focuses on the infrastructure within current societies that impair and/or disable those with bodily or cognitive differences. Proponents of this model do not ignore the fact that at least some disabilities have a biological basis, but this is not where they decide to place the emphasis when discussing issues relating to disability. Instead, they analyze and criticize the ways that societal norms (further) marginalize those who do not fit into society's vision of the "ideal" body.

Disability and bodily difference are typically defined in comparison to a society's ideal of what the "ideal" human body is. In most Western societies, this is typically the straight, white, and able-bodied male.[17] David J. Connor and Beth A. Ferri also argue that the language used to describe people who do not fit this ideal (i.e. disabled—not able and black—not white) positions them as outsiders and devalues their worth in comparison to what the culture considers a desirable citizen.[18] Rosemarie Garland-Thompson proposes an alternative disability narrative—the view of disability as ethnicity. This narrative provides deeply cultural meanings for disability, implying the social construction of disability and that there are strong social benefits for disabled people to gather in a space where they do not need to be ashamed or self-conscious of their impairments.[19]

Ableism

Fiona Kumari Campbell defines the terms disability and ability, providing a brief history on how these two terms came to have opposite meanings and connotations. She argues that the concept of

[17] David J. Connor and Beth A. Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability: Creating Normalcy, Containing Difference," In *Foundations of Disability Studies*, eds. Matthew Wappett and Katrina Arndt (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 29-67.
[18] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 30-1.
[19] Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Shape Structures Story: Fresh and Feisty Stories About Disability." *Narrative* 15, no. 1 (2007): 113–23.

ability "shapes our understanding of what it means to have a livable life," establishes standards for the human body and mind, and has been used as a way to determine social status for individuals and groups.[20] Campbell also points out that, while today ability and disability make up a simple binary, it was not always like this, and the disabled body did not always carry the negative connotations that it does now—throughout premodern Western history, the concept of ability was linked to a person's role in their community, rather than being a fixed condition.[21]

It was not until the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries that the term "abled" was used to refer to a type of person or object, but even still, the term was not coupled with "disabled" as an opposite. The abled/disabled binary only began to emerge during the age of enlightenment (ca. 1700-1800), during which, "mental or bodily ambiguity came to represent anomaly and aberrance, and the dis/abled person was identified with failure, hopelessness, and the necessity for surveillance, repair, and management."[22] It was also during this time that able-bodied people had become associated with their ability to sell their labor, causing the human body to be measured in terms of efficiency in the workplace. This association was only strengthened with the expansion of global markets, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of manufacturing.[23] It was in the 1980s that ability and disability were decisively coupled as a binary. According to Campbell, "whatever new meanings attach themselves to 'ability,' the concept is now firmly paired with an opposite that is deficient, provisional, and nonproductive. The contemporary world is witnessing a new 'abled,' signifying an unencumbered worker who is a master of economic possibility and available for further corporeal enhancement as the economy or workplace requires it."[24] The modern concept of ability, as well as it's definitional

[20] Fiona Kumari Campbell, "Ability," in *Keywords for Disability Studies*. Keywords, eds. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin, (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 12.
[21] Campbell, "Ability," 12.
[22] Campbell, "Ability," 12.
[23] Campbell, "Ability," 12-3.
[24] Campbell, "Ability," 13.

juxtaposition to the concept of disability, have molded an "ideal" body for society that excludes most disabled people.[25]

This emphasis on the ability/disability binary led to a rise in ableism, which Campbell defines as "the ideological hypervaluation of ableness and the ways in which such norms of abled and disabled identity are given force in law, social policy, and cultural values…Ableism denotes the ideology of a healthy body, a normal mind, appropriate speed of thought, and acceptable expressions of emotion."[26] She goes on to describe two key elements to ableism: the concept of normalcy and the enforced differentiation between the "ideal" human and "the aberrant, unthinkable, underdeveloped, and therefore not really human."[27] A critique of ableism from the disability studies perspective does not focus on disability as a "self-contained designation," but rather, it focuses on what it means to be abled today and how those meanings affect other aspects (intersections?) of a person's identity, such as gender, race, and sexuality.[28]

Narrative prosthesis

One way that disability identities are defined in practice is via a narrative prosthesis. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder coined this term as a way of demonstrating and critiquing the ways that disability has been historically used in literary narratives as a crutch for representational power, analytical insight, and disruptive potentiality.[29] Mitchell and Snyder argue that stories about disability have reinforced and even restricted wider society's beliefs about disabled people because the portrayals of disability in media are typically very similar and often negative. These portrayals of disability often

[25] Campbell, "Ability," 13.
[26] Campbell, "Ability," 13-4.
[27] Campbell, "Ability," 13-4.
[28] Campbell, "Ability," 13-4.
[29] David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, "Narrative Prosthesis," in *The Disability Studies Reader,* ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York, NY: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 204-18.

neglect the wider social context of what it is actually like to be disabled, especially the discrimination and prejudice that people with various disabilities face.[30]

Mitchell and Snyder also extend this concept past the literary narrative into film. They argue that visible disabilities in film and media "encourage audience fascination with overt displays of physical differences." In the darkness and 'safety' of the theater, audiences are able to stare at the disabled character, an act that is highly discouraged in other settings.[31] They then link this concept of the stare to Leslie Fiedler's critique of the freak show, which he argues is still alive and well in modern literature. He also says that the fascination with disability and 'freakishness' are no longer concealed as they were during the nineteenth century; authors and readers now openly revel in, and sometimes fetishize, disability.[32]

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in her paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."[33] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge define intersectionality as "a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences…Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves."[34] Hill Collins and Bilge identify six core ideas of intersectional frameworks: social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity, and social justice.

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[30] Mitchell and Snyder, "Narrative Prosthesis," 212.
[31] David T Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Corporealities: Discourses of Disability (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2014).
[32] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 147.
[33] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (2015).
[34] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2016), 11.

Social inequality is rarely caused by only one factor, so intersectionality is helpful for looking at social inequality through multiple lenses (gender, race, disability, etc.). Not only do intersectional frameworks encourage us to look at social inequality from multiple perspectives, but they also place a heavy emphasis on the interactions between these different identity categories.[35] Intersectional frameworks work from the standpoint that identities such as race, gender, disability, and ethnicity are shaped through interlocking, mutually constructing, or intersecting systems of power. In intersectional frameworks, power relations are not just analyzed via their intersections, but also across domains of power.[36] The four domains of power Hill Collins and Bilge cite are the interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural domains of power.

- The interpersonal domain of power focuses on "how people relate to one another, and who is advantaged or disadvantaged within social interactions." The use of intersectionality as a lens helps to emphasize the complex multiplicities of an individual's identity and how different combinations of identities can affect power relations between people.[37]
- The disciplinary domain of power focuses on the organization of power and how "different people find themselves encountering different treatment regarding which rules apply to them and how those rules will be implemented." These differences in treatment can affect the opportunities that people have in the future, making certain life paths seem more or less viable, depending on the person's identity and disciplinary past.[38]
- The cultural domain of power focuses on the concept of a level playing field and the widely accepted explanations for social inequality. "The cultural domain of power helps manufacture

[35] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 27.
[36] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 28.
[37] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 15-6.
[38] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 16.

messages that playing fields are level, that all competitions are fair, and that any resulting patterns of winners and losers have been fairly accomplished."[39]

- The structural domain of power focuses on institutions and the way that they are organized. Intersectionality questions how intersecting power relations shape the structure and organization of different institutions.[40]

Relationality focuses on the analysis of the relationship between different identities, such as gender and disability, rather than on the differences between them.[41] Hill Collins and Bilge state that social context is a grounding force of intersectional analysis. It is necessary to analyze arguments and power relations in terms of the historical, intellectual, and political contexts that have shaped them. Without this, it can be difficult to see the relationality between different identities.[42]

The four core ideas above (social inequality, power, relationality, and social context) are all interconnected, which can make intersectional analysis complicated, but Hill Collins and Bilge say that intersectionality is "a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world."[43] It is precisely this element of complexity that makes intersectionality stand out from other methods of analysis. The need to not only notice, but also inspect the intersections of different identities that may be seemingly unrelated is an inherently complex task for analysis, but it is absolutely necessary for an intersectional framework. Finally, is the core idea of social justice, which Hill Collins and Bilge refer to as being the "most contentious core idea." They include social justice, though, because even though

[39] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 17-8.
[40] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 18.
[41] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 28.
[42] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 29.
[43] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 29.

it is not necessary for intersectional analysis, many people use intersectional analysis to work for social justice.[44]

Performance

The concept of performativity will be used to link disability and intersectionality in this thesis. Richard Schechner and Sara Brady define performances as "actions that people train for and rehearse."[45] They call these actions restored behaviors or twice-behaved behaviors: "performance in the restored behavior sense means never for the first time, always for the second to nth time: twice-behaved behavior."[46] Schechner and Brady go on to say that not just art and ritual, but also activities of public life, are performances, even if they seem to be one-time events. They argue that if a one-time event is broken down into its basic elements, the "onceness" is just a matter of context; the actual actions performed are still restored behaviors.[47] Schechner and Brady also argue that restored behavior is integral to all performances because "all behavior is restored behavior" because every action is a combination of previously behaved behaviors.[48] To use performance as an analytical lens is to treat an object, work, or product "as" a performance. This means investigating "what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships."[49] This thesis will analyze how the highly intersectional identities of the women in the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra contribute to the ways that they rehearse and perform WAM. I will be looking at the conventions of WAM as a type of ritualized performance wherein the performers, in this case, the members of the Al Nour Wal Amal Chamber

[44] Hill Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 30.
[45] Richard Schechner and Sara Brady, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 28.
[46] Schechner and Brady, *Performance Studies*, 36.
[47] Schechner and Brady, *Performance Studies*, 29.
[48] Schechner and Brady, *Performance Studies*, 34-5.
[49] Schechner and Brady, *Performance Studies*, 30.

Orchestra, take on a persona outside of themselves that is formed not just by their position as an orchestral musician, but also by their personal identities as women, as people with disabilities, as Muslims, and as Egyptians.

Ritual consists of a liminal phase, where the people participating in the ritual are stripped of their identities and are then given a new one. Schechner and Brady say that the workshop-rehearsal phase of performance is the same as the liminal phase of the ritual process.[50] So in the case of WAM performance, when people decide to become performing musicians, they are beginning this transformation from an individual to a musician; as a WAM performer, especially in an orchestra where uniformity across all members is striven for, one is primarily identified in relation to their instrument or group. Some examples of this include uniformity in actions (i.e. bowing directions) for appearance, not just aurality; the discouragement of doing things that could take attention away from the music/the homogenous group and to the individual (i.e. foot-tapping, 'extra' movements--even as a soloist, etc.); and matching dress for concerts (typically all black and/or tuxedos).

Philip Auslander discusses this concept in relation to music performance in his article "Musical Personae."[51] He argues that when we watch a musician performing, we aren't really seeing them, but a persona that serves as a mediator between the "real person" and the performance.[52] In other words, the audience is seeing a version of the musician's real self that they have constructed specifically for the purpose of music performance--their musical persona. Further, Auslander argues that "what musicians perform first and foremost is not music, but their own identities as musicians, their musical personae."[53] Because Auslander is positing that musicians have a specific identity that they only perform while they are performing music, he makes a link to Erving Goffman's work where he says

[50] Schechner and Brady, *Performance Studies*, 66.
[51] Philip Auslander, "Musical Personae," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 100-119.
[52] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 102.
[53] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 102.

that people perform themselves differently in different frames/routines. Auslander argues that music is a primary social frame using Goffman's definitions. A social frame is an event that is the product of human agency, and the actions that occur during a primary frame are "untransformed, instrumental" acts.[54] Auslander says that the playing of musical instruments or singing is perceived as music because of their primary framing, but music is a sonic event that is intentionally produced by humans, which places it into a social frame.[55] In addition, Auslander recognizes that different types of music performances have different expectations, which can lead to the construction of different musical personae, saying, "musical persona varies with the performance situation, and may reflect the definition of that situation more than the musicians' individual personalities."[56] Finally, Auslander points out that musical personae are not autonomously constructed by the musician. The musical persona is constructed according to the rules and expectations of the genre, and it must be approved by the audience, who, according to Auslander, produces the final construction of the performer's identity.[57] [link to illicit stare]

The (illicit) stare

An important part of disability performance is the concept of the illicit stare, which Rosemarie Garland-Thompson discusses in her chapter, "Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists & the Dynamics of Staring." She says that because we are taught not to stare at disability, doing so would be illicit. She goes on to say that "the disabled body is at once the to-be-looked-at and not-to-be-looked-at, further dramatizing the staring encounter by tending to make viewers stealthy and the viewed defensive. In this way, staring constitutes disability identity by visually articulating the subject

[54] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 104.
[55] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 104.
[56] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 110.
[57] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 114.

positions of 'disabled' and able-bodied.'"[58] But how do performers and audiences navigate this conflict of to-stare or not-to-stare when the person performing has a disability? Garland-Thompson discusses three disabled performers who purposefully use the staring dynamic as a part of their performances.

> By boldly inviting the stare in their performances, [Cheryl Marie Wade, Mary Duffy, and Carrie Sandahl] violate the cultural proscription against staring, at once exposing their impairments and the oppressive narratives about disability that the prohibition against staring attempts to politely silence. Staring unfolds in their work as a charged social exchange between active agents, not simply a form of exploitation or surveillance perpetrated by starers on victimized starees…Their performances thus unleash and realign the power inherent in the social transgression that is staring. Wade, Duffy, and Sandahl perform what Rebecca Schneider calls "the explicit body" as a form of cultural criticism that uses the body to explicate the bodies in social relations.[59]

In other words, these women take the dynamic of staring, which is usually seen as "wrong," "exploitative," or "illicit," and reframe/reclaim the power dynamic that was often present in earlier dehumanizing displays of disability. Rather than letting their audiences ignore their potential discomfort with the sight of a disabled person, Wade, Duffy, and Sandahl all use their empowered position as the performer to make the audience confront these feelings. Wade subverts the stare during her poetry readings by reclaiming the language used by society to describe her non-normative body, turning the stare into a "look of love," as Garland-Thompson puts it, and affirming the love she has for her own body.[60] Similarly, Duffy seeks to transform society's narrative around disabled bodies, but she

[58] Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists & the Dynamics of Staring," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, eds. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 30-41.
[59] Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares," 32-3.
[60] Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares," 35-6.

does this through performance art. She turns herself into the art object, and by doing so, she is transforming the stare from the medical or freak-show context into art, making her audience challenge their ideas about the aesthetics of the human body.[61] Sandahl, a performance artist, "unmasks the operations of disability identity formation and stigmatization that polite social prohibitions obscure in day-to-day social encounters" by confronting her audience with the assumption that one can learn and know things about her disability just by staring at her.[62] In their own ways, each of these women "unmask the dynamic of staring by forcing the audience to become starers, to violate the social proscription against being captivated by the desire to stare."[63] Their performances are assertions that disability should be expected—variation among human bodies is the norm, not the exception, and, according to Garland-Thompson, it is ableism that has convinced society otherwise.[64]

Positioning Myself

I first entered the world of WAM when I was ten years old and started learning to play the flute in my school's concert band. I continued my flute playing through high school, undergraduate school, and graduate school. As such, I have been participating in, learning, and performing WAM for over half of my life. As a Hispanic woman, I have had to deal with firsthand the trials of being a "classical" musician who does not fit into WAM's ideal of the straight, white, able male body. I have also, as many others studying music at the university level have, struggled and fought against my own body because, even though it served me perfectly well in all other aspects of my life, minor things, such as the proportions of my fingers to one another, were impacting my ability to succeed as a musician without making accommodations. Some of these accommodations involved changing the way I

[61] Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares," 36.
[62] Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares," 38.
[63] Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares," 39-40.
[64] Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares," 40.

organized practice sessions, and others went as far as having to modify my instrument in order to make up for the "flaws" that instrument makers do not account for.

But how, then, are all of these challenges amplified when the musician in question is not only a woman of color, but also has a disability that (potentially) affects the rest their daily life? Particularly, in a world that values sight above all other senses (and in WAM, which does rely on the ear, but sight is the primary avenue for learning repertoire), how does one negotiate their highly intersectional identity and carve out a space for themself? This is why I am interested in the Al-Nour Wal-Amal chamber orchestra as a case study—because the women who play in this ensemble represent the opposite of WAM's "ideal body" in almost every conceivable way.

Chapter Outline

This thesis examines the intersectional nature of disability and the ways that disabled (and particularly, blind) WAM musicians must negotiate their identities for rehearsal and performance of WAM repertoire. Through a critical examination of the literature, this thesis aims to contribute to the body of research about WAM musicians with disabilities, focusing on the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra as a case study.

In the first chapter I explore the concept of disability performance as well as the social construction of disability. I build upon Judith Butler's argument that gender is performative, using concepts from disability studies to apply this to the performance of disability. I find that, while Butler argues that there is no "core essence" of gender,[65] this is not necessarily true for disability, since proponents of both the medical and social models of disability acknowledge that there is a biological basis to at least some disabilities. Because of this, I argue that, rather than disability being perpetuated by constant and consistent repetition of "abled" or "disabled" behaviors, a society's concept of the

[65] Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 163-80.

“ideal” body plays a large role in determining which bodies and behaviors are disabled and in how disabled people should present their disability to the world. I also give a brief history of disability, but as I discuss in chapter one, much of the available literature focuses on western culture, and particularly on the United States. Since my case study, the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra, is based in Egypt, I also use Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein’s work on how disability is perceived in Islamic societies in order to provide a more complete, intersectional overview of disability identities. As I show in chapter one, disability is performed in a similar way as gender, and the performance of disability and other identities is only exacerbated when looking at disabled WAM musicians because of the much narrower view of the “ideal” body in WAM performance.

In the second chapter I shift my focus to the concept of rehearsal, not just using the term “rehearsal” in the typical sense of intentionally preparing for a performance, but also using “rehearsal” to encapsulate everything leading up to a performance—history, culture, community, learning to read music, and intentional practicing. All of these factors influence the performance practice of an ensemble, and this insight is much needed when looking at an orchestra such as Al-Nour Wal Amal, since they are so unique in the world of WAM. First, I examine the norms of WAM rehearsal, particularly the high value that is placed on memorization, since this is integral to learning music from a Braille score. I then examine Alex Lubet’s argument for the existence of a Blind (music) culture, arguing that, with his definition of culture and the way he compares the existence of Deaf culture to blindness, there is not much of a case for a Blind culture. Instead, I propose the use of the term culture as a noun of process to mean the *cultivation* of something—of a community, a skill, etc.

With this definition, I provide a historical case study of the *oracioners* in early modern Spain to serve as an example of the existence and cultivation of blind music communities. Next, I discuss the myths and stereotypes surrounding blind musicianship because stereotypes shape the audience’s expectations of what a blind musician should look and sound like, meaning that blind musicians must

learn to negotiate their identities with the audience's expectations in order to be a successful performer. I then analyze different types of blind music notation because notation is integral to learning WAM repertoire and it is one of the more uniquely blind ways of learning music. Finally, I discuss all of these concepts in relation to the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra.

In the third chapter I take a closer look at the concept of performance as it applies to WAM and identity. I begin with an explanation of performance according to performance studies scholars Richard Schechner, Sara Brady, and Kiri Miller, tying in Judith Butler's concept of performativity in a way that includes both speech acts and bodily practice. I also revisit the concepts of the musical personae and the illicit stare, since the musical personae is what the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra is presenting to their audiences, and because the audience must negotiate their obligation to look or stare at the performer with the cultural illicitness of staring at disabled bodies. I then discuss the norms of WAM performance, including the perspective of Itzhak Perlman, a physically disabled violinist, on the way that disability affects the way he feels audience perceive his performances. I also use Stefan Sunandan Honisch's article about Imre Ungár (1909-1972), a blind pianist, as a basis for analyzing reviews of blindness and musical performances by the media. I build upon the cases of Perlman and Ungár, as well as the established norms of WAM performance in my discussion of the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra's performances and their reception by the media. Through an analysis of what leaders of the orchestra say about their performances, as well as what the orchestra members do and how they dress for performance, I demonstrate the ways the orchestra performs blindness, gender, and ethnicity/religion. Finally, I analyze reviews of Al-Nour Wal Amal which, while positive, often emphasize the orchestra members' visual impairments and use stereotypes to explain why they are good musicians. I conclude that the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra do not just perform WAM, but also their blindness, through their lack of music stands and a conductor, and their gender and ethnicity by wearing hijabs on stage. In the conclusion, I answer the question of how the

members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra negotiate their intersectional identities with the expectations of their audience, finding that the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra has its own, uniquely blind way of musicking, and the members perform all aspects of their intersectional identities while performing WAM.

Music, Performativity, and Disability

Though many people today acknowledge disability as an identity that crosses the lines of race, class, and gender, this was not always the case. Disability has a history that is deeply intertwined with other minority identities, particularly race.[1] Upon thinking about Judith Butler's argument that gender is performative, I was led to the question: *can someone perform their (dis)ability in the same way that gender is performed?* Butler asserts that there is not a "core essence" of gender, but proponents of both medical and social models of disability acknowledge a biological basis to at least some disabilities, so the concept of disability performance extends beyond constant and consistent repetition of "abled" or "disabled" behaviors, as Butler argues is true for the performance of gender.[2] Rather, the concept of the "ideal" human body, whether that be within wider society or within a profession, such as professional sports or WAM, plays a large role in determining whether or not a person is disabled and how they 'should' present their disability to the world.

The performance of disability has been discussed within the field of disability studies, particularly when analyzing the intersection of disability and music, but authors tend to ignore the concept of intersectionality, paying little attention to the way that other (minority) identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class, affect the way that a disabled musician experiences and performs their disability on stage and off. Throughout this chapter, I take a closer look at the history of disability, identity, and performativity, focusing on the way that the intersections between disability and other identities, especially within the context of WAM. To do this, I will be using the works of disability studies scholars such as Blake Howe and Tobin Siebers, as well as works by Simon Gunn, Judith Butler, Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein, David Connor, and Beth Ferri to highlight the

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[1] David J. Connor and Beth A. Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability: Creating Normalcy, Containing Difference," In *Foundations of Disability Studies*, eds. Matthew Wappett and Katrina Arndt (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 29-67.

[2] Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 163-80.

intersectional nature of disability identities and to discuss what this means in the world of WAM performance. I argue that disability and ability are performed in a similar way to gender, and that this performance is exacerbated within WAM because of the concept of the ideal body that is ingrained in the culture surrounding classical music performance. This chapter begins with an introduction to the concepts of identity and performativity, as well as the social and medical models of disability. I will then examine how these concepts carry over to the field of musicology.

Identity

Simon Gunn identifies two different meanings of identity: one based on internal attitudes and the other on external attitudes. An internal identity is one that often distinguishes oneself or/and one group from others, such as a religion, culture, or nationality. An external identity is defined by a person or people outside of the group being described. This is most often seen in the identities of minority groups, which are typically defined by popular prejudice and by those who have more power and representation in a particular society.[3] The internal versus external dichotomy creates a distinction between an identity's name and the experience of people within the specific group. A group's name may remain constant over time, but the experiences of the group and what it means to be a part of it can change.[4] Peter Burke also discusses the concept of external identity and highlights the way that this can very negatively impact society's view of a particular group, saying, "the construction of individual or collective identities is not the work of insiders alone, performing the persons they wish to be, but of other social groups as well, including hostile ones. For example, anti-Semites have contributed to the formation of Jewish identity."[5]

[3] Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow: Longman, 2006), 131-55.
[4] Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 134.
[5] Peter Burke, "Performing History: The Importance of Occasions," *Rethinking History* 9, no. 1 (2005): 35-52, https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/1364252042000329241.

While discussing class and social identity, Gunn briefly discusses the ideas of the social psychologist Erving Goffman and the ways that, rather than assuming class, we can explore the relationship between power and status. According to Goffman, social identity and class are a performance, and it is the job of the historian to understand how class is performed, as well as what meanings are created for both the participants of a class, as well as the "spectators" within the larger society.[6] This ever-changing and evolving meaning of an identity can be easily seen throughout the history of disability.

The Two Models of Disability

The field of disability studies was created in the late 1980s along with the emergence of the disability rights movement. Disability studies focuses on the social construction of disability, rather than on (potential) biological aspects of disability.[7] The field recognizes two modes for understanding disability: the social model and the medical model. The medical model of disability is the view that disability is a deficit as compared to the "normal" or "ideal" body, and that all disabled people should seek a diagnosis and cure. Howe et al. (2016) describe the social model rather aptly: "disability is simultaneously real, tangible, and physical and also an imaginative construct whose purpose is to make sense of the diversity of human morphology, capability, and behavior."[8] In other words, the social model of disability acknowledges that there may be a concrete biological basis to disability, but focuses instead on the social, cultural, and political meanings that are created around it.[9] The social model argues for the value of bodily difference and argues that an impairment only becomes a disability when it is stigmatized by way of not being accommodated by society.[10] For example, a blind person is

[6] Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 141-2.
[7] Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Music, Music in Disability Studies," In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-8.
[8] Howe et al., "Introduction," 1.
[9] Howe et al., "Introduction," 1.
[10] Howe et al., "Introduction," 2.

disabled by text, but not by Braille type. Finally, disability studies and the social model of disability do not assess the activities of people with disabilities in terms of what they have accomplished *despite* their disability; instead, they focus on what people with disabilities can accomplish *by*, *through*, and *because of* their disability.[11] It is important to note that because there are so many different types of disabilities and so much variation even within the same type of disability, disabled identity (particularly when advocating for disability rights) is not based on the similarity of impairment among a group, but rather on an epistemology of what it truly means to be a disabled person living in society.[12]

Disability, race, and religion

David J. Connor and Beth A. Ferri give a very detailed history of disability, its meanings, and its relationship with race in western culture in their chapter, "Historicizing Dis/Ability: Creating Normalcy, Containing Difference" (2013). In the west, the concepts of both (dis)ability and race were defined and perpetuated by the use of "scientific knowledge" and comparison to the societal ideal (the white, able-bodied male). Deviation from this ideal constituted difference, and, for disabled and Black people, often led to their devaluation and their identification by main society as outsiders.[13] The first instance of disability being linked with race that Connor and Ferri discuss is during the nineteenth century. During this period, pseudo-sciences and theories such as phrenology, polygeny, and craniometry were used to identify non-white people as a different species and justify the continuation of slavery in the United States. For example, S. A. Cartwright, a prominent physician in the American south, documented diseases in slaves that were both physical and mental. He named and described diseases such as dysthesia and drapetomania in the *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*.

[11] Howe et al., "Introduction," 3.
[12] Tobin Siebers, "Disability, Pain, and the Politics of Minority Identity," In *Foundations of Disability Studies*, eds. Matthew Wappett and Katrina Arndt (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 17-28.
[13] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 30-1.

Dysthesia was characterized by the enslaved person performing a task carelessly, "breaking the tools that he works with, and spoiling everything he touches." Drapetomania was seen as a form of insanity that manifested as the desire of an enslaved person to run away from their master.[14] This pathologizing of acts of resistance helped to perpetuate the idea that enslaved people were "like children"[15] and could therefore not survive without their masters. Another publication that justified slavery was a New York medical journal's report of higher rates of blindness and deafness in populations of free Blacks in the North, versus that of slave populations in the South. This report was also used to justify the argument for racial segregation, on grounds that miscegenation was socially injurious and produced disability.[16] Ideas about miscegenation also fed into the concepts of biological determinism, which held that intelligence levels are inherited, and eugenics.

Eugenicist beliefs led to the development of specialized classes in schools for both the "feeble-minded" and for the "gifted." Publications based on eugenicist beliefs by prominent figures in education, such as Leta Hollingsworth's *Gifted Children: Their Nature and Nurture* (1926), which "extolled the innate virtues of children from northern European stock, while dismissing their southern European counterparts,"[17] as well as newspapers that described Black students as being intellectually and behaviorally different from their white peers ("slow," "lazy," "aggressive")[18] caused minority students to be disproportionately placed into special education classes in the early twentieth century. This only began to shift with the construction of learning disabilities in the mid-twentieth century. This disability label was given, almost exclusively, to children who were expected to be intellectually superior because of their race and class: white, middle-class Americans, typically males.[19] With the

[14] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 32-3.
[15] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 33.
[16] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 33.
[17] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 38.
[18] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 43.
[19] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 44-5.

development of the learning disability label, we see a rather firm reproduction of the concept of the "ideal" body—according to beliefs and to the science of the time, a white, middle- or upper-class, able-bodied male child should succeed in school, so there *must* be a biological reason if he is not. Meanwhile, non-white, lower class, and physically disabled children were immediately expected to do poorly in school, so they were often held to a lower standard and segregated from their white, middle-class peers. While these ideas of disability are still prevalent today in the West and within much of academia, they do not fully encompass the experience of disabled people in other parts of the world. As the orchestra in my case study is based in Egypt, I feel that it is important to also discuss the perception of disability in Islam.

The concept of disability in Islamic societies is heavily influenced by the Quran, in addition to the surrounding culture, which means that there are often different perspectives on disability among the wider Muslim community. In his book, *Inclusion, Disability and Culture*, Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein discusses the concept of disability in Islam, noting that much of the scholarship about disability focuses on western culture. He states that this is a problem because many non-western cultures define and/or address disability in a different way than western culture.[20] Hassanein cites arguments by Fedwa Malti-Douglas (2001) and M. Miles (2007) to support this claim. Malti-Douglas argues that the hierarchy embraced by Islamic societies does not diminish or contradict the literature about disability in the West, and Miles posits that the practice and experience of Islam across the world does not address many of the issues and realities of disability.[21] Hassanein argues that political, economic, and cultural dimensions affect what is considered a disability,[22] so because of the vast cultural and societal differences among Muslims, these definitions can vary. It is for this reason that

[20] Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," in *Inclusion, Disability and Culture*, Studies in Inclusive Education, Volume 28, (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2015), 1-21.
[21] Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," 2.
[22] Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," 2.

Hassanein discusses the perception and definition disability in Islam in religious and linguistic terms. For example, the words in Arabic that denote disabilities such as blindness, deafness, etc. are used figuratively, rather than to indicate that the person is disabled; they refer to people who "do not make the best use of their senses to believe in Allah or to grasp the Devine message."[23] In other words, anyone can be considered blind because they are not devoted enough to Allah, but what impact does this have on people who are actually blind? This feels similar to tropes in western culture and media that attribute disability to a moral failing, even though in this context, figurative blindness is not a disability and could technically be overcome by 'improving' their devotion.

The concept of perfection in Islam is also one that is different from that of western culture, greatly affecting the way disability is defined. Hassanein quotes Muhammad Asad (1999), who said, "as long as we have to do with human, biologically limited beings, we cannot possibly consider the idea of 'absolute' perfection, because everything absolute belongs to the realm of Divine attributes alone…[perfection] does not imply the possession of all imaginable good qualities, nor even the progressive acquisition of new qualities from outside, but solely the development of the already existing, positive qualities of the individual in such a way as to rouse his innate but otherwise dormant powers."[24] In other words, Asad argues that perfection, from the Islamic perspective, is not a universal standard, but each person should strive to be perfect in their own way.

But even with this very nuanced definition of perfection, there are still contradictory religious beliefs about disability. First, there is the belief that disability is a test from God to "test peoples' level of religiosity, patience and confidence in Allah. Those who succeed in this test will get a very great

[23] Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," 4.
[24] M. Asad, *Islam at the crossroads*, (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: The Other Press, 1999), quoted in [24] Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," in *Inclusion, Disability and Culture*, Studies in Inclusive Education, Volume 28, (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2015), 1-21.

reward in the hereafter."[25] This belief supports the inclusion of disabled people in society and encourages disabled people to be as successful as they can, while also encouraging their family members to support them. The second belief is that disability is a punishment; "some parents believe that if they have got a disabled child that Allah is punishing them for something wrong which they have done in their life."[26] This belief can often lead to both the family and the disabled person to feel ashamed of the disabled family member, and parents may even prevent their disabled child from going to school.[27]

Performativity

In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender is something we all perform, as per society's expectations for our gender. She begins with Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one."[28] With this, she argues that gender is not innate but are learned through socialization:

> Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes, nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis...and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness.[29]

Butler then continues by explaining that there is no "core essence" of gender. Rather, it is the constant and consistent repetition of gender acts and attributes that solidify gender as an identity.

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[25] Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," 11.
[26] Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," 12.
[27] Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," 12.
[28] Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, 147.
[29] Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 163-80.

Without this constant performance of gender, there would be no way to assert the notions of essential sex or of masculinity or femininity which, according to Butler, could allow for more societal possibilities than patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality.[30] But what about disability? Both the medical and social models of disability acknowledge that there is a biological basis to (at least some) disability, but the social model asserts that it is the lack of accommodation for bodily difference that constitutes a disability. By this logic, I would argue that there is also not a "core essence" to disability under the social model of disability because if society accommodated for bodily difference both in terms of infrastructure and in terms of social services, there would be less of an obligation for someone to perform their disability if everything was accessible and accommodating to bodily and mental differences. The lack of need for performing disability would thereby lessen the divide between abled and disabled people.

Performing disability—The Freak Show

Can we perform our ability? Most people would argue that we can, since professional athletes and professional musicians do exactly that. But can we perform our disability? While scholars such as Blake Howe and Nathan Straus argue that disability can be performed in music, there is also a rich history of disability performances outside of music, namely the freak shows and carnivals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Disability Studies scholars have examined such "theatrical displays" of disability and have drawn parallels between "the social performance of disability and its similar performances on stage—whether within the dehumanizing frame of the freak show or in newly liberatory scripts associated with dance, performance art, and theatre."[31] Racial differences were also featured in freak shows (though, as mentioned previously, racial differences were often seen as disabilities during this time), with an emphasis placed on "primitive species," blurring the line between

[30] Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions," 180.
[31] Howe et al., "Introduction," 2.

what is human and what is animal. According to Connor and Ferri (2013), "spectators left the show with their own normalcy confirmed, along with numerous stereotypes about race and disability reinforced."[32] While this type of dehumanizing exhibition of disabled people no longer exists, there are a lot of features of what I will dub the "freak show trope" within classical music performance.

Music Performance and Disability Performance

The notion of the "ideal body" is deeply ingrained in classical music culture. The construction of musical instruments, music notation, and accepted and expected performance practices come together to construct the classical musician's "ideal" body, shaping the specific meaning of normalcy within the classical music world.[33] The expectations of a music performer stretch beyond able-bodiedness into an almost superhuman expectation of physical and mental ability that musicians must strive to reach. "Concert performance is a venue with especially high expectations for exemplary able-bodiedness, typically showcasing a performer's prodigious skills—like those that govern aspects of technique (speed, agility, range, precision) and musical sensitivity (nuance, finesse, emotionality)."[34] In this aspect, a musical performance by an able-bodied musician is a form of the "freak show" narrative; audience members go to a concert to hear beautiful music, yes, but also to see someone displaying abilities that are not common amongst the general population. This is, of course, different from the actual freak shows of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, since most musicians have to train their minds and bodies for many years in order to meet the demands of classical music performance, but the general premise is similar—audience members are spectators, wanting to see bodily or mental difference in action.

[32] Connor and Ferri, "Historicizing Dis/Ability," 41.
[33] Blake Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 191-206.
[34] Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," 191.

When the musician in question has a disability, this "freak show" trope is exacerbated. Not only must the disabled musician perform their music, but they must also perform their disability for the audience. Howe argues that disabled music performance creates a juxtaposition between the musician's high ability to perform their instrument and what another part of their body is unable to do.[35] Depending on what the disability is, a lack of accommodation may cause the performer to be musically disabled, as well, causing the performances of music and disability to be deeply entwined.[36]

Some disabilities are visible, meaning that they are evident from a person's physical appearance or their use of an assistive device, but others are invisible. Invisible disabilities may become evident in certain situations. For example, a person with a cognitive impairment or a more discrete assistive device (such as a prosthetic) may be able to choose when and whether to reveal their disability. But a person can perform their disability identity differently depending on the occasion, whether intentionally or unintentionally—within music performance, there are some disabilities that affect the musician's ability to perform and others that do not. Howe (2016) offers some examples of disabilities that are visible, invisible, audible, inaudible, or some combination of these. "Some speech impediments, for instance, are visually concealed but audibly apparent; other disabilities, such as blindness, may be visually apparent but audibly concealed. Still other disabilities—like infertility or mental disorder—can be both invisible and inaudible. Finally, some disabilities are "audiovisual"—that is, they are performed in both sight and sound; for instance, persons with Down syndrome may perform their disability in this manner."[37] Joseph Straus (2011) notes that when a performer has a visible disability, the audience comes to see the disabled person's body in addition to wanting to hear the music.[38] This is

[35] Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," 191.
[36] Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," 197.
[37] Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," 192.
[38] Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 125-149.

further evidence of the "freak show" trope in relation to disabled musicians, and it gets taken one step further when looking at the ways people often talk about disabled musicians.

Descriptions of these musicians often make use of metaphors such as the Heroic Overcomer (someone whose music and life signifies the overcoming of their disability), the Saintly Sage (someone whose disability gives them a "higher, transcendent wisdom"), and the Mad Genius (someone whose work is emboldened but also corrupted by their disability).[39] When these metaphors are used to describe disabled musicians, it creates an image of them as being different from, and possibly even superior to, the rest of society, potentially adding to the "intrigue" audiences might feel when going to watch a disabled musician perform. These meanings that are created around the disabled musician means that it becomes crucial for musicians with disabilities to find a way to perform their disability in a way that neutralizes it for their audience.[40] Refusing to perform one's disability in a way that is non-threatening and/or intriguing to the audience could seriously impact the musician's career as a performer, a career path that is often difficult for most musicians, abled or disabled, to sustain.

Conclusion

It is clear that disability can be performed similarly to the way gender is performed, but there are some aspects of disability that render its performativity more nuanced. For example, race and ethnicity can change the way a person performs their disability or how they are perceived by the rest of society. This depends on the society's concept of the "ideal body" which varies around the world; in the west it is typically the straight, white, able-bodied male, but as seen in the chapter by Hassanein, Islamic societies often view perfection as varying depending on the person and their skills and talents. In terms of music performance, some visible disabilities do not affect the way the music sounds, and

[39] Howe et al., "Introduction," 4.
[40] Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 128.

some disabilities are normally invisible but can be heard in music. Because of the incredibly high demands of classical music notation, instruments, and performance practice, musicians with disabilities often have to find ways to perform their disability in a way that does not affect the music but also does not evoke any negative meanings about disability for the audience.

Just as the history of disability has affected the way that able-bodied people and the wider society perceive disability, it has also impacted the ways that disabled people rehearse and perform their disabilities. In the next chapter, I will delve into the history of blind musicianship, including blind music communities and blind music notation systems, to show how present-day blind musicians perform their disability identity in conjunction with their musical repertoire. I then look at the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra and examine how the members negotiate their intersectional identities with the stringent norms and expectations of WAM.

Rehearsal

This chapter is titled "Rehearsal" because it encompasses everything that leads up to stage performance. I am using rehearsal here in the broadest sense of the word, to describe the process of learning and bodily adaptation that links a person's biology to society's expectations. Rehearsal, in this case, is not only the way a musician learns to play and perform music, but also how their history and culture shape the way that they perform the different aspects of their identity. Raymond Williams describes three ways in which the term "culture" is actively being used: (1) as an independent and abstract noun to describe a process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development, (2) as an independent noun to signify a particular way of life (either of a people, a time period, a group, or even humanity in general), and (3) as an independent and abstract noun to describe the works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity.[1] This third meaning is, according to Williams, seemingly the most widespread use of the word culture, encompassing music, art, theater literature, film, and sometimes philosophy, scholarship, and history. It is also a relatively late usage of the term culture, and it is an applied form of the first meaning.[2] I argue that, when discussing a blind music culture, we should be using the first definition to mean a form of "cultivation;" cultivation of community, of skill, and of identity. In the case of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra, its members must negotiate their disability, ethnicity, and gender with the norms of WAM.

The stringent norms and expectations placed on both the performers and audience members of WAM have led to the idea that WAM is a genre that "encodes maturity…and the demands of responsibility to family and society."[3] Performers are expected to follow a strict code of expectations

[1] Raymond Williams, "Culture," in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1985), 64.
[2] Williams, "Culture," 64.
[3] Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

that ranges from dress (such as a tuxedo for orchestral performances, black slacks with a colored shirt for early music performances, etc.) to the convention that some musicians, like pianists and singers, must perform from memory, with few exceptions.[4] Nicholas Cook points out that, while it is not really known why only certain musicians are expected to memorize their music for performance, there is a reason for this convention. It developed out of the romanticized idea that solo music performance should seem spontaneous, as if it were "an improvisation that just happens to coincide note for note with the composer's score."[5] In other words, it is not enough to just memorize and perform the music exactly as it is written in the score. The performer is expected to be so fully immersed into the 'world' of the piece that they are practically possessed by it.[6] But at the same time, as Cook mentions later in his book, WAM is designed for reproduction—music in the Western canon is made to be heard as a 'performance of' a piece of music that has its own history and identity.[7] In other words, the musician is expected to perform as accurate of a reproduction of the composer's score as possible, but they are also expected to be so immersed in their performance that it feels like they are improvising, and one of the ways that this can be demonstrated to the audience is through memorizing the music.

This expectation places a high value on memorization as an ideal that is only achieved by the best, most prepared musicians. But how does this (and other expectations of WAM performance) change when a musician is disabled, and particularly when the musician is blind? Blind musicians have no choice but to memorize their music, as per the demands of Braille music and other non-text scores, but this necessity causes audiences to no longer see the memorization as an "extraordinary feat," but rather, an obligation. At the same time, the obligation to memorize the music and the views around

[4] Cook, *Music*, 35-6.
[5] Cook, *Music*, 36.
[6] Cook, *Music*, 36.
[7] Cook, *Music*, 81.

memorization in WAM contribute to stereotypes about blind musicianship and blind peoples' "deeper connection" to music.

This chapter will discuss blind musicianship and performance practice as the process of learning to perform WAM and disability. I start with a discussion about whether a blind music culture exists, using Alex Lubet's case for a Blind culture and David Baker and Lucy Green's interviews with blind musicians, as well as the *oracioners* of early modern Spain as a historical case of blind musicianship. The presence (or lack thereof) of a present-day blind music culture affects the way that blind musicians learn to perform their disability while performing music. For this same reason, I look at examples of stereotypes about blind musicianship; these widely held beliefs, despite their accuracy, shape the audience's expectations of what a blind musician should look and sound like, so blind musicians must learn to negotiate their identities in relation to these expectations of them in order to be a successful performer. I then analyze different types of blind music notations because they are integral to learning WAM repertoire and are a part of a more uniquely blind way of learning music. Finally, I discuss the previous concepts in relation to my case study, the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra, which is an all-female, blind orchestra from Cairo.

Blind Musicianship- History and Community

In his book, *Music, Disability, and Society*, Alex Lubet argues for the existence of a Blind culture that is analogous to Deaf culture. The word "culture" is typically used as a noun that describes "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity."[8] Working with this definition, Lubet's definition of Deaf culture encompasses the groups of people who use manual sign languages, follow uniquely Deaf social protocols, create artistic media for Deaf people, and/or are members of

[8] Williams, "Culture," 64.

institutions such as Deaf schools and clubs.[9] He makes his argument on musical grounds by comparing these facets of Deaf culture to similar instances among blind musicians throughout history.

There are few instances of Blind languages, aside from the "secret language" developed by the Blind minstrel's guilds in Ukraine, since they are not entirely necessary. Instead, Lubet focuses on the fact that the Blind have developed their own language technologies, since these were created specifically for the blind to give them access to text.[10] The most common language technology used by the blind today is Braille, a tactile writing system consisting of six-dot groupings called cells. Lubet also notes that there are specific rules of Blind social interactions, including "introducing oneself as blind in social situations where this is relevant and warranted."[11]

Lubet also notes the importance of musical institutions in the formation of a Blind Culture. Historically, there have been Blind musicians' guilds that fostered solidarity and community among their members. A few examples of this are the Ukrainian minstrels' guild,[12] the Tōdōza or Proper Path Guild in Japan,[13] and countless organizations of *oracioners* in Spain, the last of which will be discussed in more detail further in this chapter. In terms of geography, Lubet argues that, like Deaf culture, Blind (music) culture is often centered around institutional enclaves, which asserts Blind identity "on the basis of culture, a largely linguistic community, rather than on impairment or disability status."[14] It is

[9] Alex Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian: Music and Blind Culture," in *Music, Disability, and* Society, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 69–88..
[10] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 86.
[11] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 73.
[12] As Lubet writes, "The Ukrainian minstrels' guild had the same regulatory authority as, or more than, comparable trade organizations. It provided its members more interesting, less menial work, and in many ways a materially better standard of living than their sighted socioeconomic peers (Kononenko 1998)." Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 73-4.
[13] As Lubet writes, "In Japan, the Tōdōza, or Proper Path Guild, which included the *biwa hōshi* and the members of all traditional blind professions such as massage, became a regulatory agency beyond direct governmental control, with the authority of "a country of the blind" (Miles 2000, 612). This was remarkable for its time and place and especially for the impairment status of its members, who might elsewhere be regarded as vulnerable or defective and less worthy of such rights." Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 74.
[14] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 74.

important to note, as Lubet does, that this Blind music culture may have developed out of stereotypes that the blind are exceptional musicians.[15]

I believe that Lubet's argument would be stronger if, rather than using the more common definition of "culture" as an independent noun, he used Williams' first definition of "culture" to focus on the definition of "culture" as a noun to describe the process of cultivation.[16] Blind language technologies, uniquely Blind social protocols, and musical institutions exclusively for and/or inclusive of the blind have helped to cultivate a sense of a blind *community*—a group of people with common needs, social struggles, and/or interests.[17] Raymond Williams gives five definitions of community, of which the first three denote actual social groups and the final two define qualities of a relationship: (1) the commons or common people, (2) a state or organized society, (3) the people of a district, (4) the quality of holding something in common, as in community of interests, community of goods, and (5) a sense of common identity and characteristics.[18]

Defining culture as a process of cultivating community would strengthen the weak point in Lubet's argument that appears when he acknowledges manual sign languages as a major basis of Deaf culture, but that there is no true analog for Blind culture. The idea of blind culture being a process of cultivating and facilitating a community for blind people also creates a space for the blind to rehearse, reinvent, and reject society's current standards for disability. But is there even a need among blind people for a specifically blind music culture?

David Baker and Lucy Green discuss the different perspectives of visually impaired musicians about the existence of and need for a blind music culture or disability arts scene. Many of the musicians Baker and Green interviewed were members of either the Inner Vision Orchestra, an ensemble made up

[15] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 71.
[16] Williams, "Culture," 62.
[17] Williams, "Community," 54.
[18] Williams, "Community," 54-5.

of blind and visually impaired musicians that plays Middle Eastern, African, and south Asian music, or of the Paraorchestra, an ensemble of both disabled and non-disabled musicians that plays WAM. Baker and Green's interviews provide valuable insight into what actual blind musicians think about the existence of and need for blind music culture and a disability arts scene.

Baker and Green cite a report by John Ludlow where he argues that most visually impaired musicians are not interested in the idea of there being a unique blind music culture. Despite this, Baker and Green found a mix of opinions among their visually impaired interviewees, many of whom were members of ensembles that are composed of disabled musicians such as the Inner Vision Orchestra and the Paraorchestra.[19] Baluji Shrivastav, the founder of Inner Vision, describes the ensemble as a politically motivated process. The aim of Inner Vision is for the musicians in the ensemble to develop confidence and to raise wider awareness of the musicians' abilities so that they can work alongside their sighed counterparts. Baluji then said that once this happens, Inner Vision will no longer be necessary, which is the ultimate goal of the organization.[20] The Paraorchestra has similar goals. They hope to increase the visibility and reputation of disabled musicians internationally, challenge perceptions of disability and remove barriers to musicking for disabled musicians, and encourage the development of assistive technology for disabled musicians.[21]

A large part of why some visually impaired musicians may prefer to participate in ensembles made up of disabled musicians is because of the prejudice within the music industry. Oftentimes, this prejudice is rooted in ignorance about blind musicians' musical skills compared to the sighted as well as ignorance of their practical needs for things such as transportation and navigating venues. Some visually impaired musicians have found ways to overcome these practical problems and have placed

[19] David C Baker and Lucy Green, *Insights in Sound: Visually Impaired Musicians' Lives and Learning*, Music and Change: Ecological Perspectives, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).
[20] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 145.
[21] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 147.

themselves on equal footing musically with their sighted peers, but for other visually impaired musicians, there are still musical and practical problems that they are unable to overcome for various reasons.[22]

Baker and Green found that many of the negative opinions about ensembles such as Inner Vision or the Paraorchestra were held by visually impaired interviewees who were able to develop successful careers alongside sighted musicians. Many believed that focusing on disability could take away from the quality of the musical product.[23] Despite this, there were also subgroups of visually impaired musicians, particularly those who worked together in disabled musical ensembles, who held similar and positive views of a disabled music scene. There were a number of musicians in ensembles such as Inner Vision and the Paraorchestra who did not think of their participation as being politically motivated; they joined so that they could take advantage of the opportunity provided for making friends, networking, or chances to perform.[24] Baker and Green conclude with their position as sighted people. They note that while, as sighted people, it can be easy to think of the idea of a blind music scene or culture as only a positive thing, the implied need for disabled people to find strength and solace in each other through disabled ensembles is an inherently ableist perspective because it implies that disabled people should be ashamed of their disabilities and need each other for commiseration and for finding "inner strength," it suggests that all disabled people are a monolith and share the same interests and opinions, and it can cause unnecessary pressure for visually impaired musicians to present themselves in a certain way.[25] While Baker and Green found varying opinions relating to whether not there is or should be a blind music scene, they found that the ultimate goal for people on both sides of the debate was the same: they both want equality and integration into the wider music industry with

[22] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 148.
[23] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 150.
[24] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 153.
[25] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 155.

their sighted counterparts.[26] In the next section, I will discuss the *oracioners*, blind musicians who formed communities throughout early modern Spain. They developed a profession for the blind, formed guilds, and played an important role in society. *Oracioners* and the guilds they formed facilitated the development of a community of blind musicians in many Spanish cities who taught, worked with, and cared for each other.

Spanish Oracioners

During the early modern period in Spain, the blind made a living by learning to sing and/or recite prayers in the street; these blind singers were called *oracioners*. This community was viewed as being different from beggars, and *oracioners* formed brotherhoods that helped them gain control over and recognition in their field. Some brotherhoods, such as the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit in Barcelona, owned their own chapels, and others were able to afford legal protection. Because few written materials survive from this time period and because blind street singers learned their trade orally, scholars use information from documents such as traveler's journals, art, contracts, and wills as primary sources when writing about *oracioners*. This section begins with a description of *oracioners*, who they were, what they did, and how they did it. It continues with information about the brotherhoods they formed and the benefits that these brotherhoods provided their members. This rich history of *oracioners* serves as an example of the culture[27] of blind musicianship that developed and the positive impact this had on blind people's position in the wider society.

Tess Knighton uses accounts from Swiss traveler Thomas Platter, contracts that people drew up for apprenticeships, wills, and inventory of Pere Caparo's rented residence after his death, to create a

[26] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 156.
[27] Again, I am using the word "culture" here to mean a process of cultivation; in this case, the cultivation of communities of work and care, as well as the cultivation of skill.

profile on the blind street singer, or *oracioner*.[28] Platter notes that many of the street singers are able to play violin and guitar very well and that they would play through their repertoire for only a small sum of money. To this, Knighton says that *oracioners* in Barcelona were forced to beg for alms in the streets by singing or reciting prayers since their disability excluded them from most other jobs.[29] This perspective is limiting because it does not acknowledge the brotherhoods that the blind formed, which gave them a lot of legal protection. With the help of the brotherhoods they created, *oracioners* were able to maintain, and in some places dominate, the sale of print literature and the performance of prayers.[30] The brotherhoods also fostered a community of care in which members would help to pay one another's funeral costs, take care of sick *oracioners*, and teach young blind children the trade.[31]

Though oracioners and the blind in general eventually were viewed as having an established, dignified profession, it was not always this way. For instance, Juan Gomis cites a number of literary works from this period that "offered a merciless image of the blind, portrayed as crafty, greedy, idle individuals who preferred to live from begging rather than apply themselves to work."[32] In other words, Gomis shows that literary sources created a specific image for these blind singers, which might have demonstrated and shaped the public's view about them. Barbara Weissberger also discusses the public's negative view of the blind in her article, "Blindness and Anti-Semitism in Lope's *El niño inocente de la Guardia*."[33] Blindness was often used in plays, such as *El niño inocente de la Guardia* to drive forward anti-Semitism, portraying Jews as being blind because they did not believe in Christ. So,

[28] Tess Knighton, "Orality and Aurality: Contexts for the Unwritten Musics of Sixteenth-Century Barcelona." In *Hearing the City in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Tess Knighton and Ascensión Mazuela-Anguita (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 295–308.
[29] Knighton, "Orality and Aurality," 304.
[30] Madeline Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind in Spain." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2015).
[31] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[32] Juan Gomis, "Pious voices: Blind Spanish prayer singers." *Renaissance Studies* 33, no. 1 (2019): 42-63.
[33] Barbara Weissberger, "Blindness and Anti-Semitism in Lope's *El niño inocente de la Guardia*," *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond* 2 (2012): 203-217.

there is evidence from the literary sources that, while *oracioners* held a high enough status to be accepted as having a career, the general public likely did not see them in the same light.

Knighton cites Renaissance humanist Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540), who said the blind should learn to play wind or string instruments.[34] Families of blind children often followed this advice by apprenticing their sons (and sometimes daughters) for two to six years to a blind *oracioner* who would teach them how to play an instrument, as well as all of the repertoire they knew. Knighton uses surviving contracts to gain more information about these apprenticeships.[35] These apprenticeships contributed to the culture of blind musicianship in early modern Spain by serving as a way for blind children to cultivate their musical skills and to start to form a network of other blind musicians. As is seen with the development of confraternities, these networks fostered a sense of community among *oracioners*, further strengthening the musical culture that they were cultivating.

Finally, Knighton discusses the wealth that oracioners had, using information from rental contracts, wills, and residence inventories. She also notes that the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit, which was established in Barcelona in 1339, owned its own chapel, so it must have had considerable wealth. From Knighton's sources, she finds that many oracioners owned their instruments, some rented homes, and a few even owned written materials.[36] Knighton poses follow-up questions about why a blind person would own written materials, but she does not offer any potential answers to these questions.

Madeline Sutherland-Meier was among the first to make connections between blind singers, their brotherhoods, and the rights they gained by being recognized as a profession in the fifteenth century. She uses archival documents, literary works, and art to create a history of the blind and their

[34] Knighton, "Orality and Aurality," 305.
[35] Knighton, "Orality and Aurality," 306.
[36] Knighton, "Orality and Aurality," 306-7.

activities in Spain.[37] As printing became more widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the role of the blind started to change. In addition to singing ballads and prayers, they often began selling printed ballads and other literature. Sutherland-Meier notes the irony of this, saying, "while it was an extension of their well-established role as performers, this shift marked the beginning of one of the great ironies of the history of the blind in Spain: for over three centuries, their major profession was selling printed texts, merchandise that they themselves had neither access to nor use for."[38] This new role could explain why, as Tess Knighton questions, printed materials were found in residences of oracioners after their deaths. Though these printed texts were not of immediate use to the oracioners, they represented a source of income for them.

Sutherland-Meier also goes into depth about the brotherhoods, or confraternities, that oracioners formed. Through these organizations, blind street singers were able to organize themselves for mutual aid and protection. The confraternities also helped to define them as professionals, distinguishing oracioners from beggars and helping them to take legal control over what were traditionally blind occupations.[39] The by-laws of these confraternities included religious and charitable obligations, the dues each member was required to pay, and the mutual aid they would provide for each other, such as helping sick members and sharing alms with them.[40] Gomis also mentions that brotherhoods paid for the burial of their members, and all members were obligated to attend and say prayers for the deceased.[41] Brotherhoods were essential to cultivating the community of blind musicians in early modern Spain by bringing together people with similar identities, needs, and social status.

The confraternity in Madrid, the Hermandad de la Visitación, admitted women and sighted members. Sighted members paid a lower membership fee than blind members, with their membership

[37] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[38] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[39] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[40] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[41] Gomis, "Pious Voices," 46.

giving them only burial insurance. Blind members received burial insurance, subsidies if they fell ill, and dowries for their daughters.[42] This is important to note because most of these brotherhoods were open only for blind men, and proving blindness was a requirement. Because of the regulation that these brotherhoods provided, there is a lot of documentation on them that has survived. Documents from the eighteenth century show that the authorities in Madrid viewed the sale of literature and chapbooks as an occupation for the blind, and members of the brotherhood gained a monopoly on the sale of chapbooks that contained compositions, such as ballads about criminals being executed in the city, which they sold during and after executions.[43]

In his article, Juan Gomis focuses on the role that brotherhoods played in the status of blind street singers in Spain and he uses by-laws of confraternities as well as "other legal and judicial documents" as his primary sources. The monopolies that some brotherhoods did have, Gomis says, were of benefit to both the confraternity and to the authorities. "The monopoly was used by the authorities as a further instrument for the control of begging: firstly, it provided a livelihood for individuals incapable of working; secondly, it excluded from vagrancy people who could be used for work, by refusing them authorization to recite prayers; and, thirdly, it 'cleansed' the city of poor people from other places who devoted themselves to begging."[44] Gomis concludes that the strict organization of brotherhoods for the blind and their collaborations with the authorities not only provided security for members but offered a way for the government to control what was being sung or recited in the streets. McIlvenna also reaches this conclusion; authorities throughout Europe were always in control of what news could be sung or recited in the streets.

This collaboration with authorities shows that *oracioners* were incorporated into the wider fabric of society, which answers our question of whether there is or ever was an exclusive, isolated

[42] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[43] Sutherland-Meier, "Toward a History of the Blind."
[44] Gomis, "Pious Voices," 49.

blind culture. The case of *oracioners*—the mutual aid they provided, their status within society, and their impact on society—reinforces the case for a blind culture in the sense of a process of cultivation, rather than an exclusive, monolithic group. The shared experience of blindness and the social issues that come along with it helped *oracioners* to form communities where they could support other members when they were in need and where they could formally organize and petition for more rights within the society.

Myths and Stereotypes

There have, historically, been many preconceptions about disability—and especially blindness—giving people a musical advantage. These stereotypes can cause audiences to have preconceptions about disabled performers, causing musicians to change the way they perform their disability in order to fit the audience's expectations of what they should look like and how they should act. Perhaps the most well-known examples of these stereotypes pertain to Beethoven after he began to lose his hearing. Nicholas Cook cites Franz Joseph Fröhlich, who believed that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was a sort of "self-portrait in music," depicting Beethoven's struggle and eventual 'overcoming' of his deafness. In this context, the word "overcoming" does not, of course, mean that Beethoven was able to regain his hearing, but rather, it means that he was able to find success in his career *despite* his disability. Fröhlich even went as far as to say that the setting of Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in the last movement is representative of Beethoven's "victory over his affliction" and "the power of joy to overcome suffering."[45] This is a good example of the ways that disability is stereotyped within music—disabled musicians are often seen as "Heroic Overcomers," like Beethoven, or as "Saintly

[45] Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Sages", in that their disability gives them higher or transcendent wisdom.[46] For blind musicians, the "Saintly Sage" stereotype is much more common, with some people believing that blind people have a sort of 'inner vision' that helps them to be naturally better musicians than the sighted. As Oliver Sacks puts it, "the image of the blind musician or the blind poet has an almost mythic resonance, as if the gods have given the gifts of music or poetry in compensation for the sense they have taken away."[47] It is potentially because of this stereotype that some of the blind musicians interviewed by Baker and Green did not want to connect their musicality with their blindness at all. This is especially evident in this quote from their interview with Sayani Palit, an Indian classical singer:

> I tell all the people who do interviews or do videos, not to mention any special connection, because I really do feel that music and this condition has nothing to do with it. There is no link. I don't want people to say 'Look, she can't see but she's such a good singer'. I want my identity to be just as a normal singer, because I don't want any special sympathy.[48]

Other artists, such as Kevin Kern, use these stereotypes as a marketing tool, either by their own choice or that of others. Kern has been described as "having phenomenal musical abilities, as the Stevie Wonder of classical music who plays the music of light and paints sound paintings, and as one who sees the music other musicians can only hear."[49] In his case, Kern's visual impairment is only implied, rather than stated outright, but at this point in his career, it would be impossible for him to distance himself from his blindness if he wanted to; he would have had to keep it a secret from the beginning of his career.[50] Now, he must negotiate the assumptions made about him because of his blindness with his

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[46] Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Music, Music in Disability Studies," In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-8.
[47] Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of music and the brain*, (New York: Vintage, 2008).
[48] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 152.
[49] Baker, David C, and Lucy Green. *Insights in Sound: Visually Impaired Musicians' Lives and Learning*. Music and Change: Ecological Perspectives. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.
[50] Baker, David C, and Lucy Green. *Insights in Sound: Visually Impaired Musicians' Lives and Learning*. Music and Change: Ecological Perspectives. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.

real identity, potentially incorporating some inauthentic, but stereotypically "blind" behaviors into his performances. In other words, since the implication of Kern's visual impairment can cause audiences to expect different things from his performances because of his disability, Kern, and other disabled musicians in this same position, may feel obligated to rehearse and later perform their disability in a way they would not normally do, so that they can live up to audience expectations and maintain a successful career.

While Oliver Sacks agrees that it is partially a social phenomenon that blind people are often pushed into musical performance, he says that there are also internal forces at play here, and modern neuroscience backs up these claims. In various studies, Adam Ockelford found that "40 to 60 percent of the blind children he taught had absolute pitch," and a 2004 study by Hamilton, Pascual-Leone, and Schlaug found that "60 percent of blind musicians had absolute pitch, as opposed to perhaps 10 percent among sighted musicians."[51] There is also evidence that, for those who are born blind or lose their vision very early in life, the visual cortex will be reallocated to other sensory needs, particularly hearing and touch. This can also happen when one is blinded later in life, though it is not a guarantee.[52]

This research shows that, even though the main reason for the stereotypes about the blind being better musicians is likely social, there is a biological basis. That is not to say, of course, that every blind person is naturally a very talented musician, but it is likely that their higher dependence on auditory feedback, as well as the greater chance of having perfect pitch, gives those blind people who are interested in music a bigger advantage at the start of their musical education. This does not diminish the fact that the WAM musician, blind or sighted, must spend thousands of hours cultivating their musical skills in order to be successful. This path just looks a little different for blind WAM musicians because of the accommodations they must make. The first, and potentially most noticeable

[51] Sacks, *Musicophilia*, 173-4.
[52] Sacks, *Musicophilia*, 175.

of these accommodations is to the printed score; many blind and visually impaired musicians are text-disabled, so they must learn to read music through tactile (typically Braille) music notation.

Blind Music Notations

Before musical notation became more commonly used around 1500, visually impaired and sighted musicians were deemed equal in terms of learning music, with visually impaired musicians sometimes having an advantage, since they are constantly dependent on their memory. As musical notation grew in popularity, however, print disabled musicians lost stature, eventually degenerating into beggars and street musicians. Without a musical notation system of their own, becoming musically equal with the sighted was no longer a possibility. In the late nineteenth century, Louis Braille invented his writing and musical notation systems to try to solve this problem, and they gained popularity in the early twentieth century. A standardized Braille music notation[53] has emerged, but there is still room for changes to be made. In this section, I will discuss Braille music, two of its predecessors, and spoken music, detailing the affordances and drawbacks of each.

A major pitfall of Braille musical notation, and one that is important to note, is that since there are only 63 possible combinations for each cell, the symbols used in Braille music are also used in literary Braille, meaning that a blind person may not know whether a Braille text is a piece of music until they are told.[54] Other systems were developed around the same time as Louis Braille's, such as the raised-dot code of Gabriel Abreu Castaño and the raised letters code of Pedro Llorens y Llatchós,[55] and more recently, a system of spoken music has been developed where the music learner hears a short

[53] The present system features note values and names, rests, accidentals, time signatures, key signatures, octave signs, and chord designations. It is a set of six dots, which form a cell. In musical notation, the Braille cell conveys two kinds of information: the note name and its length.
[54] David Baker, "Visually Impaired Musicians' Insights: Narratives of Childhood, Lifelong Learning and Musical Participation," *British Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 2 (2014): 113-35.
[55] Esther Burgos Bordonau, "The First Spanish Music Codes for the Blind and Their Comparison with the American Ones," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 57, no. 2 (2010): 167-85.

fragment of a piece, which is then read in detail.[56] While each of these three tactile systems (Braille, Abreu, and Llorens) have their own pros and cons, the one thing they all have in common is that a blind musician cannot read music and play an instrument simultaneously, forcing them to rely on their memory and other resources, such as audio recordings, in order to learn a piece of music. This can put the text-disabled musician at a disadvantage in comparison to sighted musicians since the requirement of memorization means that learning a piece of music will take longer.[57] While Braille music and other tactile notational systems allow blind and print disabled people to learn music, these systems do not serve the blind in the same way as staff notation serves the sighted. For example, sighted people have the advantage of being able to develop sight-reading skills, helping them to study music in silence and granting them greater independence than blind musicians have when learning from a score.[58]

A Brief History of Braille Notation

Fred G. Kersten describes multiple eras in the history of Braille literary and music notation: the dark age for the blind (before 1500), the era of speculation (1500-1789), the era of experimentation (1784-1871), the era of codification (1871-1892), the era of catalog-building (1892-1908), the era of disturbance (1908-1922), and the era of standard terminology (1922-present).[59] Seeing as this would make the final era almost one hundred years, and there have been vast technological improvements in that time, I am proposing that a new era should be added: the era of digitization (2000-present). During the dark age, musical notation was still uncommon, so a lack of sight was not a disadvantage. When the era of speculation began, people began to look for methods that could help the visually impaired to

[56] D. Crombie, S. Dijkstra, E. Schut, and N. Lindsay, "Spoken Music: Enhancing Access to Music for the Print Disabled," *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 2398, no. 2398 (2002): 667-74.
[57] Hyu-Yong Park and Mi-Jung Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means: Significance and Limitations," *British Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 2 (2014): 137-55.
[58] Fred G. Kersten, "The History and Development of Braille Music Methodology," *The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 18, no. 2 (1997): 106-25.
[59] Kersten, "The History and Development of Braille Music Methodology," 106-10.

read, such as Jean Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), who created different types of metal and wooden type, and Denis Diderot (1713-1784), who wrote about the possibility of music notational systems. The era of experimentation is when many notational systems were invented. Kersten describes the development of tactile notation as an "endeavor to bring to the blind through their sense of touch what the seeing receive through [their sight]."[60] While Braille originally experimented with raised letters, he eventually moved on to simplify the twelve-dot system created by Charles Barbier. The development and spread of Braille's system began in the era of codification. When Frank Hall invented the stereotyping machine, the era of catalog-building began in which large amounts of Braille music were able to be produced and sold. The popularity of Braille music notation slowed during the era of disturbance, where other methods and systems challenged (and led to improvements of) the existing method. Finally, Kersten's era of standard terminology brought about efforts to standardize the Braille code so that it would be more universal.[61] My proposed era of digitization would include the beginnings of print-to-Braille translation software, as well as voice-to-text programs and spoken music. Because of the advancements in technology over the past twenty years, there is no longer one way that music for the visually impaired is used or produced. Visually impaired musicians can now choose to use technologies such as Braille music, spoken music, large print, or any combination of the available methods. Each of these methods has its own advantages and disadvantages, but they all still require the user to memorize the music before they can perform it, so they still contribute to a uniquely blind way of musicking and of learning and rehearsing music.

Spanish Tactile Music Notational Systems

During the early nineteenth century (Kersten's era of experimentation), there was a shift in society towards providing education to the disabled, particularly the deaf and blind, which led to the

[60] Kersten, "The History and Development of Braille Music Methodology," 107.
[61] Kersten, "The History and Development of Braille Music Methodology," 106-10.

development of schools and institutions for disabled people in many countries. All of these schools focused on not only general education, but also on skills training that would allow students to learn a trade, and music played a special role in these schools for this reason—it was viewed as an important future career path. To teach music, some genres of which are notoriously ocular-centric, new methods of rehearsal had to be developed, including new, accessible ways to express print music notation. Two systems for tactile music notation came out of schools such as these in Spain: one by Abreu and one by Llorens. Both were used for blind education in Spain until the mid-1900s, competing with each other and with Braille for fame and public recognition.[62] I am discussing these systems of tactile music notation because they serve as an example of efforts across Europe to make music more accessible to the blind and show that there was a large enough community of blind musicians and music students for a tactile notation system to be warranted. This is significant because, as I have discussed earlier in the chapter, community building and music notation are essential parts of rehearsal.

Llorens' system was similar to many other codes used throughout Europe and America at this time. It consisted of a mixture of vertical, horizontal, and oblique lines combined with dots. This enabled him to represent musical notes and any other symbols that could occur in a piece of music. Llorens believed that his system could be easily learned by the blind and even more by the sighted than Braille or any other raised dot code, which he, as a sighted person, always found difficult to understand and overly complicated.[63] While his method for writing music was very concise and easy to learn, critics argued that his code was not good for the blind, since it had been proven that blind people can perceive a raised dot more easily than a continuous line. Because of this, Llorens' and other raised-letter codes were abandoned for better methods.[64]

[62] Bordonau, "The First Spanish Music Codes for the Blind," 184-5.
[63] Bordonau, "The First Spanish Music Codes for the Blind," 171-2.
[64] Bordonau, "The First Spanish Music Codes for the Blind," 172-4.

From studying Abreu's code, it is obvious that he was familiar with the Braille system, but he adjusted it to better suit musical training. He broadened the possibilities for combinations by adding two more dots, going from 63 to 256 available combinations. This system also made it possible to write musical symbols and lyrics simultaneously. While the Braille music code allows all musical symbols to be represented, it often requires multiple cells to represent a single sound or symbol. Abreu's code, on the other hand, gave each sound a corresponding symbol without the need to use more than one cell to represent one sound or one group of notes, improving the ease of both reading and writing music for the blind.[65] About this system, Esther Burgos Bordonau says that it is very precise, leaving no room for doubt about any aspect of each particular note. It was well-received among the blind students who were also learning Braille at this time, particularly in Madrid. Abreu's code was used in the National School for the Deaf and the Blind of Madrid for a hundred years after it was created, and today, musicians who remember learning Abreu's code alongside Braille agree that the Spanish code has many advantages over the French code.[66] Taking these experiences, as well as those from the following case studies into account, can make one wonder why Braille's code was standardized, at least for music, rather than Abreu's. It is possible that it was just simpler to standardize a single code for everything (literature, music, and math) than to introduce a separate one, but if Abreu's system brought the ease and efficiency of learning music closer to that of learning print music, then the benefits would surely outweigh the difficulties.

Braille Music Notation

Braille music notation mediates the distance between print notation and blind musicians, but the differences also change the way that blind people learn music as compared to sighted people, and this leads to a more uniquely blind way of musicking. Braille music, just like print music notation, has

[65] Bordonau, "The First Spanish Music Codes for the Blind," 169.
[66] Bordonau, "The First Spanish Music Codes for the Blind," 170.

internationally agreed-upon criteria, meaning that it is the same regardless of language or location. Braille music is an independent system from staff notation, but almost anything that can be written in standard print notation can also be written in Braille music notation, with the caveat that Braille can only be written linearly. So, rather than lines that would be played simultaneously being placed above one another as in print notation, in Braille music notation they are written one after the other with a symbol to show that they are played at the same time.[67] this can make Braille music difficult to learn, but as Wesseling (2004)[68] has suggested, many blind people are not even given the chance to learn Braille music because of changing emphasis in school curricula and a lack of teachers who are able to teach it.[69]

Baker and Green make a distinction between the ways that sighted and blind musicians learn music. They call sighted staff notation users "in-process sight-readers." Regardless of their ability and experience, these musicians are able to simultaneously read and play or sing passages at sight using their knowledge of print notation as well as the auditory feedback they receive from playing or singing. Those who use Braille music or highly magnified scores, on the other hand, are considered by Baker and Green to be "iterative reconstruction" learners. These musicians must constantly go back and forth between the score and their instrument, which causes the act of realizing the music in sound to be more disconnected than it is for in-process sight-readers. As a result, visually impaired musicians who are reading from a score tend to learn shorter parts of the music at one time, sometimes even just a few measures or a few notes, so that they can commit them to their short-term memory and then

[67] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 124.
[68] Wesseling, L., (2004) *Focus on Braille Music*. London: Musicians in Focus, quoted in David Baker, "Visually Impaired Musicians' Insights: Narratives of Childhood, Lifelong Learning and Musical Participation." *British Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 2 (2014): 113-35.
[69] Wesseling, L., (2004) *Focus on Braille Music*. London: Musicians in Focus, quoted in David Baker, "Visually Impaired Musicians' Insights: Narratives of Childhood, Lifelong Learning and Musical Participation." *British Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 2 (2014): 113-35.

reconstitute the fragments later into full pieces.[70] Iterative reconstruction learners, therefore, require a much greater time commitment for learning a piece of music;[71] they must spend time cultivating and rehearsing their memorization skills in order to perform any piece of music. Because of the nature of Braille music notation, memorization is an integral part of learning, rehearsing, and performing WAM as a blind or visually impaired musician.

Hyu-Yong Park and Mi-Jung Kim focus on three main questions in terms of the affordances of Braille music: how do visually impaired people learn and use Braille music, how do the affordances of Braille music suit the needs of visually impaired people, and what are the conditions that make Braille music affordable? To answer these questions, the authors interviewed music students and teachers at a school for the blind in Korea.[72] The authors describe the relationship between a musician and the instrument as a mediational relationship, where the player is the agent, and the instrument is a medium. The idea of a mediational relationship can be applied to all musicians, regardless of whether they rely on sight to learn, rehearse, and play music, but a visually impaired person, who cannot use sight, must use and develop other mediational means (sense, capacities, utilities, etc.). "In this way, [visually impaired musicians] as the agents play a piece of music with a musical instrument or their voice, which is a mediated action, with the help of Braille music or tape-recording, which is the mediational means."[73] Braille music as a mediational means is devalued because many visually impaired people find it cumbersome and avoid learning and using it. It is because of this that Braille music must be evaluated in terms of its affordances.

Regarding the significance of Braille music, several students and a composition teacher responded that it is important to learn Braille music because learning a piece by ear is not always

[70] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 130.
[71] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 131.
[72] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 138.
[73] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 140-1.

accurate, and having the notation can help to resolve any confusion about a note that was difficult to hear.[74] In other words, Braille music is more concrete and reliable than learning music by ear because there can be no confusion over what a note name or length is. Despite this, many of the respondents said that the differences between Braille print notation make Braille music hard to learn and cumbersome to use; it is impossible to learn a piece from Braille music alone, so visually impaired musicians typically use it as a supplement to audio recordings[75]

Respondents expressed disdain when asked about the learnability of Braille music. A voice student, SP, said that because the Braille system uses the same symbols for letters, numbers, and musical symbols, it can be difficult to tell whether a transcription is a piece of music, math, or literature until the teachers tell them. A piano student, HJu, pointed out another difficulty: it is not possible to glance at a Braille score and be aware of an error in one's playing. For every mistake made, a mark must be made near the error position.[76] The authors were able to deduce four main difficulties in terms of the learnability of Braille music; (1) one has to learn literary Braille first since Braille music notation is a more complicated version of literary Braille, (2) the process of learning Braille music is very time-consuming and elaborate, (3) detecting tactile signs is difficult for those who were not blind from birth, and (4) there is a difference between sighted and blind musicians' strategies for learning and practicing music.[77]

Park and Kim identified the following routine that most interviewees said they do to practice a piece of music: (1) listen to the target music, (2) check the Braille score to determine the overall flow of the music, (3) identify main themes and start to practice them one by one, (4) confirm the playing of each passage by referring to the source music to correct mistakes, (5) consult the Braille score to

[74] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 145.
[75] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 146.
[76] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 146.
[77] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 146-7.

recheck the playing, (6) practice as often as possible to memorize the music, and (7) combine the melodic passages until a satisfactory level of automaticity is achieved in playing.[78] This outline is much more detailed and extensive than that of the typical sighted musician. When a musician can utilize their sight, they do not have to constantly check between their memory, the score, and an audio recording, since all of the information is in front of them. A sighted musician only needs to work towards memorization of a piece of music if they choose to, which often makes the music learning process a lot simpler.

Spoken Music

The music department at the Dutch Federation of Libraries for the Blind (FNB) collaborated with blind clients in the mid-1990s to develop spoken music.[79] In a spoken score, a fragment of music, typically only a few bars long, and a spoken description of the example are played. The musical examples are made on a computer so that it is a pure, uninterpreted version of the music; it is there to provide the listener with context for the spoken material, not to influence the player's interpretation.[80] Originally, the FNB recruited volunteer readers to record the spoken scores (in Dutch only), then visually impaired clients used them and provided feedback.

There were many positive notes given on the following features: the level of detail in the spoken descriptions, the independence gained from this system, the ability to read and play the music simultaneously, and the fact that it is easier to learn than Braille music. There were, however, some important criticisms raised, mainly about the speed of the descriptions and excerpts and the length of musical fragments.[81] These problems, as well as the lack of score availability in multiple languages, have been improved with the implementation of technology. For example, the program Solfège uses

[78] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 147.
[79] D. Crombie et al., "Spoken Music," 669.
[80] D. Crombie et al., "Spoken Music," 669.
[81] D. Crombie et al., "Spoken Music," 672.

synthetic speech, which allows the score to be translated into any language where synthetic speech is available, MIDI excerpts afford the user the ability to change the speed of the descriptions and musical fragments, and the use of CDs, rather than the original tapes, gives the user the ability to skip a recording or excerpt if they desire. The automation of this process means that the production of spoken scores is quicker and cheaper than having to train readers or having to edit each music and spoken section.[82] Overall, spoken music seems to remedy the limitations of Braille music, as identified by the interviewees of Park and Kim's research. As technology continues to advance, the production of spoken scores will become even quicker and easier than it already is, which may lead to the standardization and preference of spoken music books over Braille scores.

While Braille music has given visually impaired people more access to music, it does not serve them as well as printed scores serve the sighted. Braille music is very difficult to learn, the musician cannot read the score and play their instrument simultaneously, and the Braille score does not present the music in the same way as the printed score, causing many visually impaired musicians to have to rely on a teacher to help them and on audio recordings to really understand how the music sounds. Gabriel Abreu Castaño invented a raised-dot code around the same time as Louis Braille, which was only for music but offered a single combination for each musical symbol, unlike Braille, which only has 63 possible combinations, causing the need for multiple cells to represent one symbol and for the symbols to be the same as those used in literary and mathematical Braille. Those from Spain who had learned the Abreu system alongside the Braille system as children have said that Abreu's code was a much better system for learning music, yet after about one hundred years, it stopped being used, while Braille was standardized. More research should be done on why this is the case since both were

[82] D. Crombie et al., "Spoken Music," 672-3.

developed at the same time and relatively close to each other, yet the one that has been deemed "less good" prevailed over the other.

The idea of Braille not being "good enough" is evidenced and supported by the interviews done by Hyu-Yong Park and Mi-Jung Kim. Park and Kim's research identifies the shortcomings of Braille music, such as the longer process for learning music, the requirement to be dependent on memory, and the fact that it is very difficult to learn Braille music causing many visually impaired people to avoid it altogether. The advent of spoken music scores has proven to be beneficial in increasing accessibility for visually impaired people wishing to learn music, since the visually impaired person does not have to know Braille and they can play and read music simultaneously, and since spoken scores are becoming easier and cheaper to produce, so cost will be less of a barrier. The translation of descriptions into more languages will also help to vastly improve the accessibility of spoken scores, but in this age of digitization, there are so many options for blind people to learn music, and there is no longer only one way that music notation for the visually impaired is used or produced.

Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra

The Al-Nour Wal Amal ("Light and Hope") Chamber Orchestra is an all-female, majority Muslim, blind orchestra that is based in an institution of the same name in Cairo, and it is the only orchestra of its kind in the world.[83] This uniqueness, and possibly also their geographic location, place the Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra on the periphery of WAM orchestral praxis, but it also makes the group an interesting case for discovering how WAM performance practice must change in order to accommodate musicians who do not fit into the current idea of the "ideal body" in WAM. And, as Alex Lubet notes, the Al-Nour Wal Amal's performance practice and unique accommodations made for its

[83] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 75.

members' disabilities make it so that within the context of rehearsing and performing together, the musicians' blindness ceases to exist as a disability or barrier to WAM.[84]

The Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra has developed its own (blind) way of learning, rehearsing, and performing the WAM repertoire, which Alex Lubet refers to as "the most 'sighted' musical repertoire the world has ever known."[85] The orchestra has its own shared forms of conduct, and it being part of a small residential school means that there have been unique opportunities for community-building among members and staff. In the 2002 documentary *The Blind Orchestra*, an interview with a teacher at the institute exemplifies the type of community that has been created among the women and girls at Al-Nour Wal Amal: "The way I treat the girls at the institute makes it feel like I am an older sister to them. Like they are my children. Everything that concerns them interests me. I like to give them advice. I like to help them, and I do everything they need."[86] This statement shows that a community of care has formed in the institute, similar to the brotherhoods that were created by *oracioners* in early modern Spain. The relationships between the women and girls at Al-Nour Wal Amal are not just as students and teachers, but as friends or even family. They are willing to help each other beyond just their educational or musical needs. The cultivation of such a strong community among the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra surely impacts their performance practice and the organization of the orchestra.

The orchestra's late maestro, Ahmed Abu el-Aid, describes the 'sightedness' of the traditional Western orchestra, and how this impacts the musicians in the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra:

> Every orchestra in the world is based on two things: a maestro with a baton with which he sets the tempo and regulates…when the different instruments play. And secondly, the score

[84] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 76.
[85] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 75.
[86] Door de manier waarop ik met de meisjes op het instituut omga is 't net alsof ik een oudere zus van ze ben. Alsof ze mijn kinderen zijn. Alles wat hen aangaat interesseert me. Ik geef ze graag advies. Ik help ze graag en ik doe alles wat ze nodig hebben.

> that the musicians read while playing. You do not play classical music from memory. You must have the score in front of you…I remember that a well-known American orchestra came to Egypt to play in the open air. There was a gust of wind blowing the sheet music away. Everyone stopped. Because they cannot play at all without a score and without looking at the maestro's baton. We must do it differently here. Because our girls must do without those two things.[87]

What is probably the most immediately obvious thing that the Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra does differently than sighted orchestras is that they do not perform with scores or a conductor since all of the members are blind. But they are not a conductor-less orchestra, and they do learn their repertoire from a score. The first instance of a more uniquely blind way of musicking for this orchestra, then, is seen before rehearsals even begin. The orchestra members play from Braille scores, which are all copied by hand by one of the institute's staff members. In the film, she is shown copying parts by reading a part that is already in Braille with one hand and then embossing the new part with a slate and stylus.[88]

Once the parts are copied and distributed, each of the musicians in the orchestra must learn and fully memorize their parts before rehearsals are possible. The documentary shows a bassoonist, Hana Shaban, practicing alone with her Braille score beside her while a voiceover plays of her describing the process of learning a piece with Braille music:

> Once a score has been converted to Braille, we still need to do a few more things. First, I simply have to memorize the notes. Then the dynamics and articulation. As an ordinary, sighted musician can read the score, I must have the entire piece pictured in my head.

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[87] "Elk orkest ter wereld is gebaseerd op twee dingen: een maestro met een stok waarmee hij het tempo aangeeft en regelt...wanneer de verschillende instrumenten moeten inzetten. En ten tweede de partituur die de musici onder het spelen lezen. Klassieke muziek speel je niet uit je hoofd. Je moet de partituur voor je hebben...ik weet nog dat er een bekend Amerikaans orkest in Egypte kwam spelen in de open lucht. Er stak een windvlaag op waardoor de noten wegwaaiden. Iedereen stopte. Want ze kunnen helemaal niet spelen zonder partituur en zonder te kijken naar de stok van de maestro. Wij moeten 't hier anders aanpakken. Want onze meisjes moeten 't zonder die twee dingen stellen."

[88] Sabine König, *The Blind Orchestra* (The Netherlands: Cobos Films and IKON, 2002).

> Everything, down to the smallest detail. My fingers have to play on their own without thinking about it. That definitely takes more practice. To give an example: If an ordinary musician studies two hours a day, which is certainly not enough, then I have to study five times as long.[89]

This response mirrors the interviews done by Park and Kim where blind Korean music students described their experiences with learning and using Braille music notation.[90] Despite the increased time commitment and added difficulties of Braille music, it does not seem to have discouraged the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra, especially Hana Shaban who, at the time of the film, was a bassoon student at the Cairo Conservatoire.[91]

After learning and memorizing their parts, the orchestra rehearses with their conductor, who coaches the ensemble on cohesion and interpretation verbally.[92] The maestro takes individual sections of the orchestra to show the musicians how their parts fit together and then he adds in one section at a time until the entire orchestra is playing.[93] In the documentary, several clips of rehearsals are shown, wherein the maestro often keeps the beat by loudly tapping on his desk, since the orchestra is unable to utilize typical conducting gestures. When the maestro needs to make a correction, he must describe the change without any sort of visual cues and with minimal visual language. For example, when a violinist, Suaad, was not matching the rest of the violin section's bowing pattern, Maestro Abu el-Aid asked her to stand next to another member of the section, where she put her hand on the player's wrist to feel the up-and-down pattern while the violins played the section again. The film also shows

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[89] "Als een partituur in Braille is omgezet, moeten we nog een aantal dingen doen. Ten eerste moet ik simpelweg de noten uit mijn hoofd leren. Daarna de dynamiek en de articulatie. Zoals een gewone, ziende musicus de partituur kan lezen zo moet ik het hele notenbeeld in mijn hoofd hebben. Alles, tot in de kleinste details. Mijn vingers moeten 't dan vanzelf spelen, zonder erbij na te denken. Dat vergt absoluut meer oefening. Om een voorbeeld te geven: Als een gewone musicus twee uur per dag studeert, wat zeker niet genoeg is, dan moet ik vijf maal zo lang studeren."
[90] Park and Kim, "Affordance of Braille Music As a Mediational Means," 146-7.
[91] König, *The Blind Orchestra*.
[92] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 75.
[93] Phillip Schuyler, "Sounds of light and hope in Egypt, a western-style orchestra breaks more than one barrier," *Braille Monitor*, July 1996. Reprinted from *Natural History*, November 1995.

examples of the maestro and another teacher leading a rehearsal in which they had to correct the notes players were playing. In both cases, since the orchestra members did not have music in front of them, the leader of the rehearsal sang the part aloud using solfege so that the musicians knew what the correct notes were and could commit them to memory.[94] I am unsure if the rehearsal leaders read the parts aloud in solfege because of the orchestra's use of Braille music notation or if this is standard practice for learning and teaching music in Egypt, but it is likely that it is related to the fact that the musicians use Braille music. This is because Braille music notation dictates musical notes by using the letters 'd' through 'j' to represent the notes 'C' (do) through 'B' (ti), with a symbol before to indicate which octave the notes are in. This implies that Braille music notation is best suited for the use of fixed do. If this is the case, then the use of solfege for learning, memorizing, and correcting musical lines contributes to Al-Nour Wal Amal's uniquely blind way of musicking.

Alex Lubet discusses some of the perspectives that orchestra members and institute staff have on the stereotypes about blindness and musicality. Lubet says that some orchestra members disagreed with maestro Abu el-Aid's belief that blindness is not compensated for by exceptional musical abilities.[95] This compensation may actually exist, as I have discussed above, but I believe that it is likely that any advantages that blindness would give to a musician would only be valuable in the beginning stages of their musical training. Lubet also mentions a stereotype that was not mentioned earlier in this chapter when he quotes Samha el-Kholy, the program's founder. She said, "people are so kind…They think, 'Oh, these girls are blind, it's very nice that they can play at all,'" but then went on to say that this type of thinking is exactly what the orchestra hopes to combat and that blindness was an excuse for mediocrity.[96] These statements are similar to what many of Baker and Green's interviewees had to say, which shows that, within the blind music world, there are strong opinions about the long-

[94] König, *The Blind Orchestra*.
[95] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 79.
[96] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 80.

held stereotypes about blindness that many people are actively trying to contest. Unfortunately, these views are still common among the general sighted population, which can likely be attributed to (internalized) ableism, as well as ignorance towards the reality of being blind and the things that blind musicians can achieve not despite, but through their disabilities.

The final main point addressed in the film and by Lubet that pertains to rehearsal is the members' feelings about being able to play alongside sighted musicians. Hana Shaban is very vocal about her perspective in the documentary, describing why she decided to pursue education at the conservatory, as well as her hopes of playing in an orchestra with sighted musicians:

> When I heard my teachers play the bassoon, I also wanted to become a good musician. At the institute that was difficult to achieve because there, they only study up to a certain level. Then the study ends. But I really wanted to become a very good bassoonist. Just as good as an ordinary, sighted musician. Of a comparable level. That's why I wanted to attend the conservatory afterward…I had high ambitions to play in a regular orchestra with normal, sighted musicians. But it is becoming increasingly clear to me that that dream is not achievable in Egypt. Nobody here has the courage to include a blind musician in their orchestra. They think this is such an exceptional step that they cannot imagine taking. As a result, my hope had started to fade a bit. Still, I don't want to give up hope completely.[97]

It is clear, especially in the second half of Shaban's statement, that it is not blindness or a lack of ability that is restricting blind musicians' ability to participate in orchestras of sighted musicians. It is, instead,

[97] "Toen ik mijn docenten fagot hoorde spelen, wilde ik ook een goede muzikante worden. Op het instituut was dat moeilijk te bereiken, want daar, studeren ze alleen tot een bepaalde niveau. Daarna houdt de studie op. Maar ik wilde echt een hele goede fagottiste worden. Even goed als een gewone, ziende musicus. Van vergelijkbaar niveau, daarom wilde ik daarna naar het conservatorium…Ik had veel ambitie om in een gewone orkest te spelen met normale, ziende musici. Maar 't wordt me steeds duidelijker dat die droom in Egypte niet haalbaar is. Niemand heeft hier de moed om een blind musicus in zijn orkest op te nemen. Dat vinden ze zo'n uitzonderlijke stap dat ze 't zich niet kunnen voorstellen. Daardoor begint mijn hoop een beetj te vervliegen. Toch wil ik de hoop niet helemaal opgeven."

the rigid set of rules and ideals within WAM, combined with society's preconceived notions of disability that are reducing blind musicians' opportunities to play alongside their sighted peers.

Lubet says that participation in orchestras like the Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra can have benefits in terms of public exposure, travel opportunities, and feminist and disability pride.[98] This view seems like, whether intentionally or not, it is rooted in the ableist belief that disabled musicians playing together gain strength and solace from each other.[99] Despite this, or perhaps because of this, it is also important to note that Iman Fawz, a bassist in the Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra, has said, "We prove ourselves as Egyptians, as blind people, and as women. We show the world what we can do,"[100] so it obvious that at least some of the musicians in this orchestra would not see Lubet's statement as ableist. It is important to acknowledge that this difference is possibly because the orchestra members do not live in a country that is considered to be a part of the "West," and also, WAM has a very restricted view of the ideal musician. When one is outside of this ideal (not white, not male, disabled, etc.), they may feel extra pressure to prove themselves as being just as good or better than their 'more ideal' counterparts, since they are automatically perceived to be at a disadvantage in the world of WAM. In the case of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra, its members subvert the androcentrism, Eurocentrism, and ableism of WAM by not just existing, but also by being successful in a space that was designed to exclude them. The uniqueness of the orchestra's membership and performance practice has also led to them being able to tour internationally, opening eyes all around the world to what WAM could be, and to whom it could include.

[98] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 80.
[99] This belief is ableist because perspective because it implies that disabled people should be ashamed of their disabilities and need each other for commiseration and for finding "inner strength," it implies that disabled people are a monolith and all share the same interests in opinions, and it can cause unnecessary pressure for blind and visually impaired musicians to present themselves in a certain way that could be inauthentic to them in order to fit the expectations of those around them.
[100] Schuyler, "Sounds of light and hope."

Performance

Richard Schechner and Sara Brady define performances as "actions that people train for and rehearse."[1] These actions, since they are practiced and repeated over and over again before they are finally performed in public life, are never being performed for the first time.[2] Rather than focusing on this aspect of repetition, Kiri Miller focuses on the relationship between performed actions. She cites Susan Foster's argument that identity is not performed, but rather choreographed and *then* performed.[3] Quoting Foster, Miller differentiates between choreography and performances by saying that "choreography is 'a slowly changing constellation of representational conventions' and performances are the individual iterations of those conventions through which that slow change might transpire."[4] Miller makes it clear that Foster was not trying to ignore Judith Butler's concept of performativity, but expand on it so that it included both speech acts and bodily practice. Performance and choreography are complementary, and including the concept of identity-as-choreography implies that the norms associated with different identities can and do change slowly over time, eventually leading to new choreographies and meanings within an identity performance.[5]

This chapter focuses on how the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra perform the music and their identities in the context of WAM performance; specifically, I discuss how they negotiate their personal identities with the ones thrust upon them by WAM conventions and their audiences. To do this, I feel that it is important to first revisit Philip Auslander's idea of the musical personae since this is what we actually see when we watch the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra performing on a stage. In his article, "Musical Personae," Auslander defines the musical persona as a

[1] Richard Schechner and Sara Brady, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 28.
[2] Schechner and Brady, *Performance Studies*, 36.
[3] Kiri Miller, *Playable Bodies: Dance Games and Intimate Media*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[4] Miller, "Dancing Difference/Gaming Gender," 77.
[5] Miller, "Dancing Difference/Gaming Gender," 77-8.

constructed version of the musician's real self that serves as a mediator between the "real person" and their performance of the music.[6] The musician is not the only participant in the construction of their musical persona; the audience also plays a part in the construction of the musician's identity. The audience approves or disapproves of the musician's musical persona according to the rules and expectations of the genre, as well as according to their own ideas of what the musicians should be according to other aspects of their identity, such as race, religion, gender.[7] The audience's role in constructing a performer's identity becomes even more complicated when the performer is disabled, because of the visual aspect of performance as well as because of societal conditioning to not stare at disabled people. This is where the concept of the illicit stare comes in. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson says that "the disabled body is at once the to-be-looked-at and not-to-be-looked-at, further dramatizing the staring encounter by tending to make viewers stealthy and the viewed defensive. In this way, staring constitutes disability identity by visually articulating the subject positions of 'disabled' and 'able-bodied.'"[8] Because WAM performance has such a strong visual component, disabled performers and their audiences must negotiate the obligation to look or stare at the performer with the cultural illicitness of staring at disabled bodies. The disabled performer must invite their audience to stare at them in a way that empowers them and helps them to reclaim and reframe the typical power dynamic attached to able-bodied people staring at disabled people. At the same time, the disabled performer must perform (and therefore construct) their disability in a way that is not threatening to the audience so that they will feel more inclined to violate the social rules around staring.[9]

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[6] Philip Auslander, "Musical Personae," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 100-119.
[7] Auslander, "Musical Personae," 114.
[8] Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, "Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists & the Dynamics of Staring," in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, eds. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 30-41.
[9] Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 125-149.

Norms of WAM performance

There are stringent norms and expectations that both performers and audiences are expected to comply with when they are performing or watching WAM. For example, audiences are expected to be still and quiet while the musicians are playing, and should refrain from clapping until the end of a complete work, rather than in between movements.[10] The performers , on the other hand, must not only follow specific conventions, but also a particular dress code (a suit or all black for orchestral performances, black slacks and a colored shirt for early music, etc.). Nicholas Cook notes that the dress code for orchestral performers tells us a lot about their status (and subordinacy) as a WAM performer:

> …[P]erformers traditionally wear the same clothes as waiters: dinner jackets. I do not mean this as a simply frivolous observation. The point I am making is that the way we think about music leads us to assign a subordinate status to the performer–a status that is totally at odds with the adulation of charismatic performers in the marketplace–and that is confirmed by its links with other expressions of subordinate status within society. Or to put it in another way, the idea that the performer's role is to reproduce what the composer has created builds an authoritarian power structure into musical culture, whether expressed in the relationship between composer and performer or in relationships between performers – especially, as I said, between the conductor (who acts as the composer's representative) and the rank-and-file orchestral players.[11]

This implied power structure in WAM positions the composer as having the ultimate authority over the music (what it should sound like, how fast it is, and potentially even what it should look like), with the conductor and performers being placed underneath the composer as 'employees' who must do their best to replicate the score in sound. The dress code for WAM performers reinforces this hierarchy and

[10] Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35-6.
[11] Cook, *Music*, 25-6.

makes it visible and apparent to audiences. Because of this hierarchy, the score is viewed as the "original" and "perfect" work of art, with every performance of said score being just that—a "performance of" the already existing work; a replication.[12] Because the performer is striving for as perfect of a replication of the score as possible, they must find a way to negotiate their physical abilities with the demands of the score.[13] In addition to scores, construction of musical instruments and the (typical) requirement of a conductor helps to shape the concept of the *normal performance body* in WAM, disabling, and potentially excluding, those who do not fit into this very specific construction of an ideal body. The ideal body, according to WAM, "…usually possesses all limbs, with above-average hand and finger size, lung capacity, and strength, among other qualities…"[14] When a performer does not have one or more of the qualities that comprise the ideal WAM performance body, they have *performance impairments* that can become musically disabling without adequate accommodation. When this happens, Blake Howe argues, that music performance and disability performance become indistinguishable from one another, and music performance can exacerbate or even create a disability that would not have been noticed otherwise.[15] But what, then, is the reality for a disabled musician whose body may not be able to achieve an exact replication of the score without some sort of mediating technology or technique?

The most common solution for the musician who does not conform to the concept of the ideal body because of a disability is to find alternative ways of participating, this can either be through the use of adaptive techniques or by adjusting a composition in order to make it easier for the musician to play (such as using a musical reduction or transposition). Blake Howe notes that when there is a

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[12] Cook, *Music*, 81.
[13] Blake Howe, "Paul Wittgenstein and the Performance of Disability," *The Journal of Musicology* 27, no. 2 (2010): 135–80.
[14] Blake Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 191-206.
[15] Howe, "Disabling Music Performance," 196-7.

community of musicians with similar disabilities, a suitable repertoire will follow. Unfortunately, examples of such communities and a resulting repertoire are rare, potentially because the lack of repertoire may lead teachers to discourage their disabled students from pursuing classical music. This presents a circular problem: without accessible repertoire to play, disabled musicians may find it difficult to break into WAM, and without disabled musicians playing WAM, composers may not feel the need to create music that accommodates specific disabilities.[16] It is because of this that many disabled musicians must make accommodations that will facilitate their playing of the currently available repertoire.

The accommodations that disabled musicians must make in order to participate in WAM are often visibly and/or audibly apparent to the audience. As a result of this, the disabled performer is performing both the music and their disability for the audience. The link between (dis)ability and performance is certainly not new; it can be seen as far back as in the freak shows and carnival acts of the nineteenth century.[17] Though the freak show is a more blatant and vastly more dehumanizing example of people performing their bodily differences, it cannot be denied that there is at least some aspect of the freak show that is still alive and well in music performance. Even without a disability, the WAM performer displays a level of physical virtuosity that the average audience member does not (and may never, at least not without years of training) possess. In essence, audience members are paying for a concert ticket not just to hear music, but also to stare and marvel at people who have an abnormal, expertly honed ability.[18] This effect is only magnified when the performer in question has a visible or known disability, and in this case, the musician must negotiate their performance of the music *and* their

[16] Howe, "Paul Wittgenstein," 172.
[17] Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, "Introduction: Disability Studies in Music, Music in Disability Studies," In *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-8.
[18] Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 125.

disability with the audience's expectations.[19] These expectations are based on the general status quo within the society, which Stefan Sunandan Honisch summarizes as "corporeality dominates aesthetics in the reception of disabled performers."[20] In other words, the disabled body is first and foremost about disability, so the disabled performer is not seen as a performer, but as a disabled person *who happens to be a performer*. This brings about consequences for thinking about disability as a performance. Disability performance should not be viewed as merely a display of bodily difference;[21] this can reduce the performer and their identity down to just their disability, leading to audiences identifying them with one of the many metaphors used for disabled performers (i.e., the Heroic Overcomer, Saintly Sage, Mad Genius, etc.).[22] Instead, disability performance should be understood as a process—a series of interventions the disabled performer is using in order to negotiate their impairment and, in our case, their music performance.[23] Before getting into the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra and the ways they perform not only their disabilities, but also their gender, ethnicity, and religion, I want to discuss two other real-life examples of disabled musicians who had to negotiate their musical and disability performances and how this affected the way they were received.

Performing Twice?

Joseph Straus cites an interview with Itzhak Perlman (1945-), a violinist and polio survivor, where he talks about his experience of being a WAM musician with a visible disability (he has a mobility impairment from contracting polio as a young child).[24] Perlman describes the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, which has visible steps up to the stage, saying that, when he performed there, he always

[19] Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 126.
[20] Stefan Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences: Blindness and the Performing Self in Imre Ungár's Chopin." in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, eds. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 191-206.
[21] Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 250.
[22] Howe et al., "Introduction," 4.
[23] Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 250.
[24] Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 143-5.

felt as if he had to perform twice—once when he walked up the stairs, and one when he played the violin:

> …In Amsterdam there's this wonderful hall which is world famous, the most wonderful acoustics there are. I don't play there anymore. They have 25 steps in view of the audience to reach the stage. I always felt I was performing twice when I played there. First I was performing by everyone following me up the steps, "There he goes—the first step! There he goes— the second step! Here he comes…will he make the fourth step?! He slipped, oh no, there he is, the sixth step! Oh, he made it!!" Then they will clap with relief when I finally appear on stage. Then I had to play.[25]

Even though Perlman's disability does not affect his violin playing whatsoever, it was still made to be a large part of his identity as a musician. Because the audience can see that Perlman is disabled, despite the fact that it does not affect his musical ability, Perlman's impairment impacted the audience and is part of forming his musical persona.

Imre Ungár- The Reception of blindness in WAM

In his chapter about Imre Ungár (1909-1972), a blind pianist, Stefan Sunandan Honisch discusses the reception of Ungár's blindness and musical performances by the media. Many reviewers used Ungár's blindness and stereotypes about blind musicianship as central points of their review, using them either as a way to explain *why* he was such a good pianist, or to identify him versus his sighted peers. For example, music critic Stanisław Niewiadomski (1859–1936) described Ungár as a "blind visionary" who "expressed his inner vision in sound."[26] Sunandan Honisch cites another review of Ungár's pianism that is rife with stereotypes about blindness.[27] The reviewer frames the music

[25] Straus, *Extraordinary Measures*, 145.
[26] Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 253-4.
[27] As Sunandan Honisch writes, "The blind pianist sits down at the piano and begins to play the first movement of Concerto in E minor. The capacity audience listens with held breath. Some cry deeply moved. The twenty-three-year-old man, who

(Chopin- Piano Concerto in E minor) as being merely a "vehicle" for Ungár to perform his disability, hardly focusing on Ungár's piano playing, but rather on the associations of blindness with eternal darkness and a loss of sexuality, as well as the perceived limitations of the disabled body.[28]

On the other extreme, there are reviewers who only focused on Ungár's pianism while just glossing over his disability, mainly using it as an identifier. An example of this that Sunandan Honisch calls remarkable is a review of Ungár's performance at the 1932 Chopin Competition in *The New Beacon: A Magazine Devoted to the Achievements of the Blind*. The reviewer praises Ungár's technique and concludes that he is "clearly destined for a place among the elect," and does not reference Ungár's blindness.[29] Sunandan Honisch says this is of note because the publication was dedicated to informing its readership of blind peoples' contributions to mainstream society,[30] but I would argue that this was the best approach, according to the social model of disability. The publication was exclusively about blind people, so the readership would not have needed to be told that Ungár was blind, and focusing on his disability may have only fed into the current stereotypes around blindness and disability in general. By focusing solely on Ungár's pianism, the reviewer normalized him, showing that he could participate and be successful in WAM just like any sighted musician.

In the following section, we will see very similar types of reviews of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra. Even though it has been almost 100 years since the reviews of Imre Ungár were written, it is clear from analyzing the ways that the Al-Nour Wal Amal Orchestra is written about that those stereotypical preconceptions about blindness are still fairly common among able-bodied people.

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has never seen the light of day, living in the darkness of an eternal night, sings about the anguish of his life with Chopin's immortal harmonies. Romance flows, reflecting the composer's love experiences. Imre Ungár sings a love story though he has never seen a woman…He is forbidden to love because he will not even know whom he loves…Thus he loves his instrument with all his passionate heart." Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 254-5.

[28] Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 255.

[29] Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 254.

[30] Sunandan Honisch, "Moving Experiences," 254.

The Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra

As a group of musicians who live at the intersections of multiple identities, the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra does not just perform the WAM repertoire, but also their blindness, their ethnicity and religion as (majority) Arab Muslims, and their womanhood. Each of these aspects of the members' identities play a role in the way that they perform WAM and in the way that they are perceived by their audiences. This section describes the way the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra performs each of these identities during their music performance, followed by an analysis of reviews of the orchestra to serve as a comparison between the way the members present themselves on stage and the way they are perceived.

In the 2002 documentary *The Blind Orchestra*, the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra is shown performing multiple times, and though their clothing differs between concerts, the members of the orchestra are always shown performing wearing cream-colored hijabs with sparkly gold accents (Figure 1),[31] and they always perform without stands or a conductor, a visual representation of the fact that they have memorized the repertoire prior to performing (Figure 2).[32]

Figure 1- A close-up of the hijabs worn by the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra. Created by Ati Metwaly. From Ahram Online. https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/0/275578/Arts--Culture/0/Women-of-Al-Nour-Wal-Amal-Orchestra-A-vibrant-plet.aspx.

Figure 2- The Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra. From Al Bawaba. https://www.albawaba.com/entertainment/al-nour-wal-amal-526648.

[31] Ati Metwaly, "Women of Al Nour Wal Amal Orchestra: A Vibrant Plethora of Musicians, Talents, Personalities," *Ahramonline*, August 18, 2017, https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/0/275578/Arts--Culture/0/Women-of-Al-Nour-Wal-Amal-Orchestra-A-vibrant-plet.aspx.

[32] "Danka! Fans Thank Al-Nour Wal Amal for Germany Concert with Standing Ovation," *Al Bawaba*, October 13, 2013, https://www.albawaba.com/entertainment/al-nour-wal-amal-526648.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Al-Nour Wal Amal is not a conductorless orchestra. Typically, during concerts, the Maestro will count off the orchestra at the beginning of the piece and then will stand off to the side of the stage or even go backstage while the musicians perform. The late Maestro Ahmed Abu el-Aid explained why he did this in *The Blind Orchestra*:[33]

> The conductor's gestures during a concert are a kind of show. To make the public understand the interaction between the conductor and the different musicians of the orchestra. But these musicians are blind so why should you make gestures? That is why I stay aloof during some concerts and go backstage. Then the audience sees that I am not influencing the orchestra and that they are playing by themselves. People hear that the performance is correct and exactly the same, so why are those gestures of the conductor necessary? At the most, they help the audience to understand the music better. But they don't help the musicians to play the piece better because we already did that preliminary work during the rehearsals.[34]

Though the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra do not need the conductor's gestures in order to play their music, the "show" put on by the conductor at a WAM concert has come to be expected by audience members. These gestures are crucial for the audience's perception of the conductor as a performer; even when they are not particularly useful to the musicians on stage, the conductor's gestures still serve a purpose within the norms and expectations of WAM performance—they are, in themselves, performative because they perform the cultural meaning of "performance-

[33] Sabine König, *The Blind Orchestra* (The Netherlands: Cobos Films and IKON, 2002).
[34] "De demonstratieve gebaren van dirigenten tijdens een concert zijn een soort show. Om het publieke te laten begrijpen hoe de interactie is tussen de dirigent en de verschillende musici van het orkest. Maar deze musici zijn blind dus waarom zou je gebaren maken? Daarom hou ik me bij sommige concerten helemaal afzijdig en ga ik in de coulissen staan. Dan ziet 't publiek dat ik het orkest niet beïnvloed en dat ze uit zichzelf spelen. De mensen horen dat de uitvoering correct en precies gelijk is dus waar zijn die gebaren van de dirigent die uitsloverige gebaren dan nog voor nodig? Ze helpen het publiek hooguit om de muziek beter te begrijpen. Maar ze helpen de musici niet om het stuk ook beter te spelen want dat voorwerk hebben we al bij de repetities gedaan."

ness"[35] and of the music itself for the audience. There were not any reviews from the audiences' perspective of the effect this has on the music, but it contributes to the orchestra's performance of blindness.

The performance of disability can take many forms and look different depending on the person, but the most obvious ways that the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra performs disability is by not having a conductor or music stands on stage. The absence of these two things, which are typically necessary for WAM musicians but are also dependent on sight, serve as a visual cue to the audience that the musicians do not need them. Of course, one could assume that the orchestra does not play with sheet music as an exhibition of musical skill and preparation, but the way the orchestra is marketed (often being referred to as "The Blind Orchestra") and the absence of a conductor show that this is not the true reason for their playing from memory.

The members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra perform their gender and ethnicity/religion in conjunction with each other by their wearing of hijabs during their performances. This is because the hijab is widely seen as a symbol of Islamic faith and culture, but also of femininity. The hijabs that the orchestra members wear, though, are especially striking to see in a WAM context because they contrast in color to the traditional concert-black "uniform" of classical music performance that the women also wear. They are also highly decorated around the neck, which makes them stand out even more against a black outfit (Figure 1). By wearing such brightly colored and decorated hijabs rather than plain black ones, as the hijabi Muslims of the Cairo Symphony Orchestra wear, they are drawing in the audience's attention to these aspects of their identities that are not normally part of the "ideal" body in WAM. Some of the women in the orchestra also perform their gender and femininity by wearing makeup for performances. This is seen in *The Blind Orchestra* when the women are

[35] Mark J. Butler, "Performing Performance," in *Playing with Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), 65-122.

preparing for a concert. As they leave the room, another, sighted, woman is there helping each of them to finish getting ready. This includes adjusting hijabs if necessary, and, if any of the musicians ask, checking and fixing makeup. She also tells each performer that they look beautiful before they leave the room.[36] This scene, as the reviews about Imre Ungár that focused on his musicianship rather than his blindness, serve as a moment to humanize the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra. It shows that they, like many other women, wear and enjoy makeup, even if they can't see it, and that they, like many other people, still appreciate compliments about their appearance, again, even if they cannot see it. This is especially important in such a short film where the audience does not get to know very many members of the orchestra beyond their musicianship. It shows and normalizes the mundane, "normal" aspects of being blind women and shows that they can and do still enjoy many things that sighted people enjoy, regardless of their disability status.

This type of normalization is rarely seen in reviews of the orchestra. Perhaps the best example of this is from Paul Kobrak's article where he acknowledges the members' blindness, but also highlights their extramusical achievements, saying, "all of them are educated (many with degrees and one at the doctoral level) and a few are married, some with children."[37] Though this is only a single sentence, it tells the reader that the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra have lives outside of WAM performance, and that they can and do pursue higher education and/or start families, much like many non-blind people. In a similar vein, Alex Lubet describes the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra's musical abilities, explaining that it is likely not because of their disabilities that they do not play at a professional level, but because of other factors:

> This group does not perform at the technical level of a professional Western orchestra…particularly in terms of tone color and intonation. Their ensemble cohesion,

[36] König, *The Blind Orchestra*.
[37] Paul Kobrak, "Music Extra: Light And Hope In The Revolutionary Era," *BBC*, March 4, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2018/10/music-extra.

> however, is everything that founder Samha el-Kholy says. Thus, their limitations do not seem to be a function of their blindness, but may be attributed to factors including restraints on individual practice time, inferior instruments, minimal private instruction, and limited occasion to hear professional ensembles.[38]

This is an important distinction to make, especially because, contrary to what some of David Baker and Lucy Green's interviewees believed could happen,[39] the focus on blindness in the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra does not detract from the quality of their musical product. Rather, it is other factors, mostly financial ones, that affect the quality of the orchestra's performances. Phillip Schuyler also describes the orchestra's accuracy when performing, emphasizing the feat that this is without a conductor, as well as the uniformity in bowing patterns among sections, both of which demonstrate the level of preparation and musical ability that the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra has put into learning each piece.[40]

Other reviewers use metaphors or stereotypical language to describe the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra's international success. Reviews online and in newspapers, such as the ones discussed below, help to further mediate the relationship between performers and their audiences, not only by giving the audience an expectation for the performance, but also by giving the performers a way to speak to their audience, particularly in the case of an interview or when the journalist/reviewer has a personal relationship with the musicians. Ati Metwaly, a Polish-Egyptian journalist who is Editor of Ahram Online's Arts and Culture section and a writer for the music and arts section of Al-Ahram Weekly, has written the most about the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra. She says that she has

[38] Lubet, "Play Like an Egyptian," 81.
[39] Baker and Green, *Insights in Sound*, 150.
[40] As Schuyler writes, "…the orchestra plays perfectly, with no direction or cues. The performance is precise, enthusiastic, and perhaps automatic, but it is a great deal warmer and more human than any computer. And with a dozen violin bows moving in perfect synchrony, the orchestra looks as good as it sounds." Schuyler, "Sounds of light and hope."

formed a relationship with the orchestra and clearly respects the members and their achievements, but she still seems to occasionally falls into the trap of using stereotypical language to describe them:

> Over the past decades the orchestra has been a shining light of Egypt's musical firmament. With performances in six continents on over 30 international tours and hundreds of concerts inside Egypt, the orchestra wins the hearts of listeners while the international media describes them as "the fourth pyramid of Giza" and "a human miracle."[41]
>
> Those who attend the orchestra's concerts never fail to be moved by their art, their perseverance and passion…while we look at this orchestra through the prism of the obstacles they need to overcome, we must not forget that with each step, Al-Nour Wal Amal's abilities speak louder than their impairment…And as they carry their music around the globe, they also leave many messages behind. Their tours speak of their art, perseverance, joy for life and boundless positivity. The Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra are true cultural ambassadors, who apart from carrying art with them, also demonstrate that blindness is not a disability. On the contrary, their impairment seems to be an opportunity for a deeper and more humane look at life, an ability many of us, overtaken by our daily routines, lack. The women from Al-Nour Wal Amal offer us the gift of music and culture, and invite us to reflect.[42]

[41] Ati Metwaly, "Egypt's Al-Nour Wal Amal Blind Women Orchestra Opens Brazil's Music Festival," *Ahramonline*, January 24, 2021, https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/33/399471/Arts--Culture/Music/Egypts-AlNour-Wal-Amal-blind-women-orchestra-opens.aspx.

[42] Ati Metwaly, "Women of Al Nour Wal Amal Orchestra: A Vibrant Plethora of Musicians, Talents, Personalities." *Ahramonline*, August 18, 2017, https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/0/275578/Arts--Culture/0/Women-of-Al-Nour-Wal-Amal-Orchestra-A-vibrant-plet.aspx.

The implication that blindness gives the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra "an opportunity for a deeper and more humane look at life"[43] is in line with the stereotype that blind people have an "inner vision" that allows them to be more deeply connected with music, nature, or spirituality. This, in conjunction with Metwaly's implication that sighted people cannot reflect on their lives without a disabled person to serve as a sort of example, can be extremely damaging to blind people. These stereotypes can place a burden or expectation on blind people to be something that they are not in order to live up to the inhuman image of blind people that many societies hold. It is important to note, thought that if she really does have a relationship with the orchestra, then it is not just her opinions in the reviews, but likely also what members and leaders of the orchestra are telling her.

Metwaly does try to provide a more three-dimensional view of the women in the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra in some articles, emphasizing what is gained from participating in this ensemble, especially for those members who have children, the women's lives outside of performing with Al-Nour Wal Amal, and the things they have accomplished, not despite, but through their disabilities:

> The orchestra has given a couple of concerts in past weeks yet there is a strong need for a more dynamic presence in the field, for musical as well as economical, social and psychological reasons. Concerts are an important part of the orchestra's life. Through practice and performance, the musicians gain a sense of accomplishment. On the other hand, music activities provide them with income, especially needed for female musicians responsible for households and children. The orchestra's presence – even if virtual – in the

[43] Ati Metwaly, "Women of Al Nour Wal Amal Orchestra: A Vibrant Plethora of Musicians, Talents, Personalities." *Ahramonline*, August 18, 2017, https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/5/0/275578/Arts--Culture/0/Women-of-Al-Nour-Wal-Amal-Orchestra-A-vibrant-plet.aspx.

> Oficina de Música de Curitiba (Curitiba's Music Workshop) is an important step reassuring the ensemble's value and presence in the international scene, against all odds.[44]
>
> The Al Nour Wal Amal are not just a unique orchestra, "the fourth pyramid of Giza" or "a human miracle" as international media impressed by their performances have called them. They are not only artists dedicated to their craft and the music they play; they are also — or predominantly — wonderful human beings who turn every challenge into an opportunity. They are also girls enjoying their carefree youth, wives who take care of their households, mothers bringing up children with whose futures, education and well-being they are preoccupied...Despite the packed programme and three concerts, the travels bring a lot of joy to the orchestra…[45]
>
> For the women of Al Nour Wal Amal, music is not limited to accumulating success. It is an enriching life journey, both collective and individual...Music enriches the lives of all the girls and women playing in Al Nour Wal Amal, but it would be wrong to think they hide in music to escape from their impairment. Though naturally many ladies rely on support from sighted people, none of them sees herself differently as they lead very dynamic lives. Having completed their education at the association, they pursue their studies at university, work, start families, while their impairment only encourages them to do their best. For them music is not only a passion but also a serious responsibility…[46]

This focus on what the members of the orchestra gain from their participation, as well as the emphasis on what the women in the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra do outside of performing (working,

[44] Metwaly, "Egypt's Al-Nour Wal Amal Blind Women Orchestra Opens Brazil's Music Festival."
[45] Metwaly, "Women of Al Nour Wal Amal Orchestra."
[46] Metwaly, "Against All Odds."

studying at university, and/or starting families) helps to mediate the relationship between the audience and the performers. The above excerpts show audiences that the Al-Nour Wal Amal orchestra does not just exist to give blind Egyptian women something to do; it is a source of income for the members. This fact can also help to reassure audience members that the orchestra plays at a high level, since this is a job for the members. In addition, the focus on the lives and successes of the orchestra members outside of playing music helps to humanize them to the audience. It shows the readers that being blind does not stop these women from desiring the same things that sighted people desire, and it shows that being blind does not stop them from being able to pursue these goals either.

While many articles about the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra address the issue of learning to play the WAM repertoire without sight, but Maddy Shaw Roberts misrepresents the orchestra members' abilities, saying that "…[although] they can't read music or see the conductor, the women have learned, through special memorizing techniques and hours of practice, to play without music or a physical guide,"[47] a statement that implies the orchestra does not use any form of notation at all to learn their parts. Her vagueness also creates an air of mystery around the group's performance practice that perpetuates the stereotype that blind people are inherently better musicians. So much better, in fact, that, in the case of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra, blind musicians can learn and memorize Western orchestral music by ear, and they can play together (and, as seen in König's film and other videos, with all of the same bowing directions in the string sections) without any guidance from a conductor.

On the other hand, in her article, "An Intimate Glimpse into a Remarkable Egyptian Orchestra for Blind Women," Karen Frances Eng reports on an interview with Bahia Shehab, a Lebanese-Egyptian artist who created a video about the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra. When Eng asked about

[47] Maddy Shaw Roberts, "Egypt's Orchestra for Blind Women Is Challenging Stereotypes with Incredible Music-Making." *Classic Fm*, March 4, 2021, https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/egypt-orchestra-for-blind-women-challenging-stereotypes/.

how the musicians have negotiated their visual impairments with learning to play WAM, Shehab described the process of learning music from a Braille score and the conductor's role in their rehearsal.[48] This response from Shehab is free of the stereotypes or implications that were present in Roberts's article and it clearly and simply describes the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra's methods for learning and rehearsing WAM in a way that would be understandable for non-musician readers.

Overall, the reviews of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra are overwhelmingly positive, but many reviewers emphasize the musicians' visual impairments through the use of stereotypes or implications that they have an innate musical talent solely because they are blind. These stereotypes are harmful to blind and other disabled people because they are rooted in the belief that a person is only valuable if they can contribute to society in some (typically economic) way, and so these stereotypes assign a specific role to disabled people they are expected to fulfill, but not go beyond. The women in the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra are much more than their music, and their performance on stage does demonstrate this, but many of the reviews neglect the non-disability aspects of their identity. The members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal Chamber Orchestra do not just perform WAM, but also their blindness through their lack of music stands or a conductor, and their gender, religion, and ethnicity by wearing hijabs on stage. The whole picture is altogether an uncommon sight in WAM, and the brightly colored hijabs' contrast to typical orchestral musician's dress suggests an invitation to the audience to look directly at the women and acknowledge them: as women, as Muslims, as Egyptians, as blind people, but first and foremost, as musicians.

[48] As Eng writes, "The association translates all of the music score into Braille, and the girls are taught to read these notes with their fingers from a very young age. The musicians memorize all the notes, and the conductor counts the beat. They then rely on listening and intuition to keep them together for the rest of the piece." Karen Frances Eng, "An Intimate Glimpse into a Remarkable Egyptian Orchestra for Blind Women." *TEDFellows*, September 27, 2018, https://fellowsblog.ted.com/an-intimate-glimpse-into-a-remarkable-egyptian-orchestra-for-blind-women-23f6c1c9444f.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the rehearsal and performance practices of the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra through the lenses of disability, intersectionality, and performativity. In the first chapter, I found that disability is performed in a similar way as gender, but there is a key difference between the two: namely, Judith Butler asserts that there is no "core essence" of gender,[1] but this is not the case with disability. Proponents of both the social and medical models of disability acknowledge that there is a biological basis to most disabilities. Because of this, society's concept of an "ideal" body plays a very large role in determining what is and is not a disability. In the west, this is typically the straight, white, able-bodied male, but, as Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein demonstrates, this is not the case elsewhere, particularly in Islamic societies where the definition of perfection is highly complex and based on each individual person,[2] rather than an abstract idea of what the perfect human looks like. Music performance only exacerbates identity performance because of the strict norms of WAM and because of the audience's role in constructing the performer's musical persona.

Through my discussion of the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra's rehearsal practices, as well as the foundations of music and identity rehearsal (notation, culture, stereotypes, and WAM conventions), I found that the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra has its own, uniquely blind orchestral practice. This is because of the intersectional nature of the members' identities and because of how far the members lie outside of WAM's "ideal" body. Aspects of rehearsal such as notation, stereotypes, and culture influence the ways that musicians negotiate their identities with the

[1] Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 2002), 163-80.
[2] Elsayed Elshabrawy Ahmad Hassanein, "Religion and Disability," in *Inclusion, Disability and Culture*, Studies in Inclusive Education, Volume 28, (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2015), 1-21.

expectations of their audiences. In the case of disability and WAM, this often means finding ways to accommodate one's disability so as to make it inaudible and/or invisible, or presenting one's disability in a way that is palatable and not threatening to the audience.[3] The Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra does this in a way that is a little unconventional—instead of wearing black hijabs to further blend in and fit into the conventions of WAM concert attire, the women wear bright, sparkly hijabs that draw attention to their faces. This, along with the absence of music stands and a conductor, draws the audience's attention directly to the performers' faces, inviting them to stare.

In chapter three I found that the members of the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra perform all aspects of their identity while performing WAM, but not separately or one-at-a-time. The members of Al-Nour Wal Amal live at the intersection of their womanhood, blindness, and Islam, and this shines through in the way that they present themselves for their audiences, despite attempts of some reviewers trying to boil them down to just their disabilities. The success of the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra, not despite their disability identity, but through embracing blindness and inviting their audiences to watch and experience the reality of blind WAM musicianship, proves that there is space in WAM for those who do not fit into the profession's concept of the ideal body.

This thesis can serve as a starting point not only for further research on the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra, but also in music and disability studies in general. Most of the literature on the Al-Nour Wal Amal chamber orchestra is dated at this point—between 10 and 22 years old, so there is a very large need for more research on what the orchestra is doing now. In addition, the field of music and disability studies is still growing, so there are many gaps in the literature that need to be filled,

[3] Joseph N. Straus, *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 128.

especially in terms of disabled WAM musicians, disabled woman musicians, and the impact of other minority identities on disability and musicianship.

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