

News and Reviews Vol. 7, No. 2 Spring/ Summer 2004

From Africa to India: Sidi Music in the Indian Ocean Diaspora

>> A film by Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, 2003. 74 minutes.

T his excellently informative documentary of the history, music, and religion of the Sidis is the latest in a series of valuable educational videos by the noted ethnomusicological team Amy

Review Although Sidi people are diverse and their specific

historical origins varied, "Sidi" remains a common term in the Indian subcontinent for all people believed to be of African descent. Some Sidi musical and ritual terminology can be traced to Swahili; other terms derive from Arabic. The video commences with a narrative of Sidi history, illustrated with paintings and maps, and interspersed with maritime clips. Some teachers might wish to summarize this material orally and skip to the most gripping musical examples, for the opening narrative may be too dry and detailed for the young viewer. Some facts are exciting and surprising, such as the Sidi group who conquered Bombay in 1689, only to lose control after 16 months.

The videographers began the project hoping to find traces of African heritage in Sidi music. Viewers are left largely to draw their own conclusions about these traces—probably a good tactic, for the musical data remain ambiguous. Informative subtitles alert one to "call and response singing in thirds," for example. Some such antiphonal forms are typical among non-Sidis as well, especially in the performance of *zikr* (literally "remembrance"; here, reiterative verbal *From left:* Filmmakers Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy, and Abdul Hamid Sidi (Sidi research assistant, second cameraperson, and dancer in the tour group).

formulas). Parallel third singing is a better marker of otherness, since parallel harmony is relatively uncommon (but not unheard of) in South Asia.

The video proceeds from Uttara Kannada in the Deccan, where Hindu, Christian. and Muslim Sidis use music

in their various educational, social, and religious practices, to Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, where Muslim Sidis are descendants of a regiment known as the "African Cavalry Guards." The bulk of the video centers on Sidis of Western India. The patron saint of Muslim Sidis of Gujarat, Bombay, and some other regions is Gori Pir (or Baba Gor), whose emblematic instrument is the musical bow (*malunga*), a prototypically "African" musical

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Ethnomusicologists Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy present examples of Sidi music and dance in *From Africa to India: Sidi Music in the Indian Ocean Diaspora*.

Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find audiovisual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia, and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. In addition to *AEMS News and Reviews*, published quarterly, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

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What's New?

Annual Advisory Board Meeting

EMS and the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies have had a busy spring semester. AEMS held its annual Advisory Board meeting on March 3, the day before the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies began. We were fortunate that AAS was held in San Diego this year and those of us from the Midwest were able to enjoy some sunshine in addition to the good company of our Board members and other associates. As always, our Board members had lots of good advice and ideas for future projects, which we will be letting you know about in the coming months.

This year, we welcomed a new Board member, **Gary Mukai**, Director of the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). Gary has more than twelve years of experience teaching K–12th grades and has published numerous books and articles that focus on the Asia/Pacific Region and U.S.–Japan relations. In 1997, he was awarded the Franklin Buchanan Prize for the development of curricular materials on Asia and U.S.–Japan Relations. His knowledge of K–12 teaching needs and curriculum material development has already proved to be a great asset to AEMS and we look forward to working with him.

I would like to thank Diana Marston Wood and Sharon Wheaton, Board members who have resigned over the past year. Both have served on the Board since its inception. Diana, who is currently the Assistant Director of the Asian Studies Center at the University of Pittsburgh, brought to AEMS an understanding of the needs of K–12 teachers and helped AEMS effectively expand its outreach to better meet their needs. Sharon has worked in educational technology for many years and has worked with David Plath on several MPG productions. Her expertise has proved invaluable

to AEMS.



The staff of AEMS and the Center thank all our Board members, past and present, for the help and encouragement they have given us over the years.

Transnational Chinese Cinema Series

In March, the Center hosted its second annual Asian film series. This year's series was titled "Transnational Chinese Cinema," and featured films from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China. For a complete list of the films we screened, please see www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML /calendarS04.html (and check back periodically for information about next year's series!). ◆

—Sarah I. Barbour, Editor

Japanese Feature Film Clips Project



A new web site at **www.umich.edu/~wittevee/filmlist.html** is the early stage of a low-tech project intended to list especially rich passages in Japanese feature films that one may cue for classroom use. If well used, the web site may be a model for other world areas, too. In this shared

project, the idea is for each person to contribute at least one example that gives time marks along with a remark about what may interest others who are learning about life in Japan. One day the entries could be set in a database for easy keyword searching. But for starters, a simple list of significant observation spots is the goal.

The late Itami Juzo's many social satires are rich ground, of course (*The Funeral, A Taxing Woman, Tampopo*). Yoji Yamada's *Otoko wa Tsurai Yo (Tora-san)* series is another obvious gold mine. If each volunteer would view and annotate a favorite film, it will not be long before an educator could find scenes such as the environments of school, home, workplace, or examples of popular culture (food places, karaoke sessions, neighborhood festival events). For more details visit the web page, or write directly to Guven Witteveen with your film title or any questions at wittevee@umich.edu. \blacklozenge



Night Girl

>> A film by Yingli Ma. 2001. 45 minutes.

N ight Girl presents the poignant story of Han Lin, a 17-year old prematurely made to enter into the workforce as a Go-Go dancer in order to help her family eke out a living in modern-day Peking...Han Lin is mature beyond her years and

faces an enormous burden of responsibility unfamiliar to most young women in the West. Straddling the fine line between girlhood and adulthood, she is exposed to the lure of economic independence promised by the sex industry and the lack of opportunities for women in the working world..."

Reading the description of *Night Girl* provided by the

distributor, I expected a grim tale of exploitation and hopelessness, but I was pleasantly surprised. American high school and college students may actually find a great deal of common ground with Han Lin, the engaging young woman who is the focus of this documentary. Like many young people in the United States, she works, parties with her friends, hangs out with her boyfriend, and enjoys a close relationship with her parents and grandparents. Han Lin works late nights in a disco as a dancer, both on stage and in the audience, and lives with her parents and grandparents in an apartment in Beijing. Her grandmother is an educated woman from a once-wealthy family, but the

American high school and college students may actually find a great deal of common ground with Han Lin, the engaging young woman who is the focus of this documentary. family now lives in reduced, though not quite impoverished, circumstances. Han Lin's father is unemployed, though at some point during the making of the film he found a job in a shoe store which, he says, pays reasonably well. Her mother would obviously prefer that Han Lin did not work in a nightclub, but she is realistic about her daughter's prospects. Overall, the family seems to have

accepted Han Lin's job and to trust her choices, and they treat her with affection and respect. Of all her family, Han Lin seems the most comfortable in China's new economy. "Permanent work, what's that? It doesn't exist anymore," she says, referring to the days of her parents' youth when citizens could expect the government to provide a lifetime of jobs and housing. "Those days are over." Whereas her parents seem slightly bewildered by the new emphasis on capitalism, Han Lin seems right at home.

Han Lin does, in fact, come across as "mature beyond her years." Some of her dancing is suggestive, and she is shown drinking beer and smoking. Her boyfriend is married, and Han Lin seems realistic about their prospects for the future. She acknowledges that there is drug use, corruption, and prostitution in some clubs, but swears she would never work in a club that expected her to provide sex to patrons. But she does not appear to have been overly jaded by this exposure to the seedier side of the entertainment industry, and the maturity she displays comes across as sensible rather than cynical. For her, dancing is simply a job, better paid and less physically demanding than other jobs that she could get as a young woman without a college education. She shares some of the money she makes with her family and keeps the rest of it for herself. She tells the interviewer that she hopes to save enough to start a small retail business when her dancing days are over.

The family's apartment building is being torn down and they are being forced to move elsewhere. Throughout the film, there are several references to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and to the fact that the city is being "cleaned up," old buildings torn down and new ones erected, often disrupting the lives of ordinary citizens. Beyond that, however, there are few direct references to political or social events. Han Lin's story is told entirely though conversations with her and her family, conducted by an off-screen interviewer. There is no voice-over narration and no attempt to situate Han Lin's story in the greater context of China's rapidly changing society. As a film, Night Girl is stronger for this and Han Lin's story is more universal; like millions of young people around the world, she is simply doing her best with what she has. However, Night Girl lacks the facts and figures that would make it a stand-alone educational tool. Educators who want to use the film in classes about recent Chinese history, sociology, or economics will have to provide supplementary material if they want students to understand the larger context of Han Lin's life, how society has changed since her parents were young, and what political and economic forces are shaping her life. 🔶

Sarah I. Barbour is the Program Director for the Asian Educational Media Service.

Night Girl is available from Women Make Movies. Price is \$195 for purchase and \$60 for rental.

Wedding Through Camera Eyes: A Trilogy of Wedding Photography in Korea

>> A film by Kijung Lee. 2002. 45 minutes.

his documentary features one of the most popular and interesting cultural practices in contemporary South Korea: the making of a photo album with photographs taken before, during, and after the wedding. Through interviews with three couples and their professional photographers, the film introduces a trilogy of wedding photos, underscoring the centrality of such visual records in the rite of passage. Following a brief introduction of each couple and the filmmaker himself-a native Korean author and recent recipient of a Ph.D. in visual anthropology-the documentary unfolds the stories of the newlyweds over the pre-wedding, wedding, and honeymoon photography, evenly divided into three 15-minute segments.

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The film suggests that the particular manners in which such popular and highly commercialized wedding photography is practiced can reveal certain social values and ideas that are embedded in contemporary South Korean culture.

door shooting." A professional photographer leads the prospective bride and groom to a number of carefully selected locations, such as the exotic amusement park Lotte World and a traditional palace ground, to create romantic images of the couple through photography. When interviewed at their new home, with an enlarged prewedding photo hung on the wall, the groom explains his motive and satisfaction in making the pre-wedding album which gave him the opportu-

nity to make his dream come true when he held his bride in her wedding dress for the camera. An interview with the photographer follows, elaborating on the meticulous skill and technique required to create these permanent images of the couple through photography. While making their best

photos from their traditional Korean ceremonial greeting, or *p'yebaek*, which consists of the last part of the wedding hall's ritual package, are particularly interesting: the bride recollects her feelings of unfamiliarity toward the "traditional" Korean ceremony not knowing much about the meanings of the detailed practice, while the groom tries but keeps failing to identify some of his extended family members in the photos who were receiving his traditional bow according to their age and genealogical ranks. The bride also recalls that her family was not allowed to participate in the traditional bowing due to the opposition from a wedding hall employee who claimed that there

is no such practice in "tradition."

The film then takes us to a photographed honeymoon of a couple at Jeju island, one of the most popular destinations in South Korea, for the last story of the trilogy: "Wedding into Tourism." The three-day honeymoon package includes a tour bus and professional photography service. The newlywed tour group visits various popular shooting locations that are predetermined by the Jeju Tourist Association. The photographer claims that "honeymoon tour means nothing without photographing," while the

KIJUNG LEE COURTESY OF PHOTO Filmmaker Kijung Lee

> efforts to follow the carefully staged poses and expressions for the photographer, the one-day hero and heroine change their costumes several

times throughout the photo-shoot from Western style ceremonial clothing to hanbok, traditional Korean clothing.

The second segment, "Wedding as a Rite of Passage," takes place in a commercial wedding hall. It begins with an introduction of the chronological order of the Western style wedding ritual, and moves on to talk with the bride and groom about the elaborate photographing practice during and after the ceremony. Their comments on the

young couple express their expectation for the role the honeymoon photos will play in their married life-however awkward they have felt during moments of rather unnatural construction to create romance and intimacy while in the eye of the public following the photographer's detailed directions. The groom recalls the uneasy feeling he had one time thinking, "Do we really need to do this much for the sake of photos?" Yet the couple seems to treasure their honeymoon photographs as a visual record of their very special moments together.

The film suggests that the particular manners in which such popular and highly commercialized wedding photography is practiced can reveal



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Follow Jade! Series: Let's Visit Chinese Kindergarten and Let's Go to Market in China

>> Produced by Master Communications. 2003. 30 minutes each.

F ollow Jade! is an excellent set of video tapes designed to teach Mandarin Chinese to young children. The tapes are best suited to the preschool level. Follow Jade! Let's Visit Chinese Kindergarten teaches children greetings and names, counting to 10, colors, and how to ask for water, juice, and milk.

I watched the tapes with my 9-year old daughter. Both of us thought that the atmosphere was similar to that of *Sesame Street*, educational yet highly entertaining. way to bring many children into the action. The words are repeated with different faces and different voices, which adds novelty and interest. Little viewers feel that they are included, and get a sense of "I can do it, too."

My 9-year-old said that the *Kindergarten* tape is not for

Follow Jade! Let's Go to Market in China introduces body parts, fruits, farm animals, and actions such as clapping and stomping.

I watched the tapes with my 9-year old daughter. Both of us thought that the atmosphere was similar to that of *Sesame Street:* educational yet highly entertaining. The programs are filled with songs, actions, and bright colors. The tapes were done professionally with excellent quality in audio and video recording. Each tape is a little over 30 minutes, a good length for preschool children.

The teacher Jade Qian has a talent for connecting with children. She uses props to introduce new words, and follows up by teaching them to a few young students. Then she incorporates art works and games to reinforce the words, and finishes up with songs and activities. It is a great her (understandably), but she enjoyed the market scene and the farm animal section in *Let's Go to Market in China*. If you are looking for Chinese learning videos for young children, this set is worth considering. For grade school children, get the *Let's Go to Market* tape. \blacklozenge

Chilin Shih is Assistant Professor of Linguistics and East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Illinois.

Follow Jade! Let's Visit Chinese Kindergarten and Follow Jade! Let's Go to Market in China are available from Asia for Kids. Price is \$19.99 each or \$35.98 for both in VHS format, or \$24.99 each or \$45.98 for both in DVD.



For more information, visit http://followjade.com.



Wedding

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certain social values and ideas that are embedded in contemporary South Korean culture. For example, what do they tell us about the weddings as a socially and historically transformative site? What kind of particular images of gender, marital ideals, and family relations are projected and constructed? How is "tradition" reproduced or invented through the rituals? How does the social hierarchy, professionalism, and commercialism manifest in such cultural practice? Although these issues are discursively present throughout the film, the primary focus of the documentary remains the role of photography in the weddings in contemporary Korea. Thus, while the documentary provides a welcome and important addition to inform and intrigue any student of Korean culture and society as well as the visual anthropology in the realms of modern rituals, it falls short of providing the specific social and historical background and the dynamics in the emergence and the development of the cultural practice of wedding photography in Korean society. In this sense, the documentary invites future production of films that can extend and facilitate the discussions on these issues further, thereby bringing forth comparative aspects in the manifestation of such practices of visual cultures. Using this film with other historically informed and contextually specific readings on related topics will provide a more nuanced understanding of the cultural phenomenon of a "trilogy of wedding photography" in modern Korea. Those interested in Korean culture and society, weddings, and the role of photography in ritual practices will find this film worth watching. �

Jin-hee Lee received an M.A. in Asian Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1996. She is currently enrolled there in a Ph.D. program in East Asian Studies. Her studies focus on the images of China in late Choson Korea and Tokugawa Japan through the eyes of Japanese and Korean political and cultural leaders.

Wedding Through Camera Eyes: A Trilogy of Wedding Photography in Korea is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is \$195 for purchase and \$50 for rental.



Friends in High Places: The Art of Survival in Modern Day Burma

>> A film by Lindsey Merrison. 2001. 88 minutes (56 minute version available).

F *riends in High Places* documents the lives of spirit mediums in present-day Myanmar. Mediums, called *gawak-nats*, channel *nats*, spirits "between Buddha and humans" who are for the most part nobles murdered by kings and lords.

People pay the mediums to help them gain the help of the nats in solving troubles which range from husbands in prison to ungovernable daughtersin-law. Successful intervention calls for a *pwe*, an elaborate, dramatic and expensive performance by the medium and his group which includes dance, music, food, song and drinking. As one of the narrators confides, "most people are interested in nats only because of the mediums."

And the mediums are indeed interesting, cross-dressing homosexual men who get drunk to advise clients on their problems, stage the dramatic *pwe* performances, dress up as their patron *nats*, and give readings of the future all the while supporting their large extended families. The film's primary focus is the medium Ah Swan, but it also features a number of others to give some sense of the variability within the profession: some mediums are more reserved and closer to Buddhist monks, others are younger and more like pop stars. The movie of course covers the medium's performances and professional duties, but in inter-

The makers of Friends in High Places have created a beautiful and fascinating film. The cinematography and editing are superb.... The film illuminates rather than narrates.

they apprentice in the profession and see one medium-bride's marriage to his nat. The film introduces some of the complications of life as a medium, the stress of repeated encounters with troubled people, the patronage by people who prefer to remain anonymous, and the medium's marginal and yet powerful social position. One medium says, "My clients bring their problems into my

views we also learn how

home. I don't need to go out on the street to learn how cruel life can be." Yet, as Ah Swan tells the camera with a fifth of brandy in one hand and a foreign cigarette in the other, "I do what I want."

Mediums enjoy a privileged place in society because of their dramatic skill and, as the filmmakers imply, because of their "friends in high places," which may refer to their contact with the *nats*, but may also refer to their influence with members of the military government. One well-off woman who sponsors a *pwe* tells how her husband was thrown in jail "for what we don't know—bad luck, I think," but who was released after she went to see Ah Swan. The ambiguity of her narrative and Ah Swan's posing during the telling suggest that more went on than she is willing to tell.

The makers of Friends in High Places have created a beautiful and fascinating film. The cinematography and editing are superb, the writing, pacing and development of the story reveal the character of the profession steadily and gracefully, and the cut-aways during interviews reinforce the mood of the piece and strongly convey the context of the events. The film illuminates rather than narrates. In many cases the mediums themselves tell us their story: where an outside voice is required, a two shot of bilingual "aunties" (who are still subtitled in a very clever capsule of bilingual interviewing) gloss ideas and practices while adding measurably to the charm of the film. This style may bother some: it has a classic anthropological indeterminacy to it, but it appears to be very true to experience. Likewise, the filmmakers have inserted dramatic performances for the camera by mediums that are affecting and appropriate to the story, but are unusual in ethnographic documentary.

Complex and compelling, this film would be best for college audiences, although upper high school grades would also enjoy it. Both students and researchers in Visual Anthropology, Performance Studies, Gender and Gay Studies, Study of Religion and Myth and specialists on Myanmar would all benefit from seeing this fine film. \blacklozenge

Patrick Dowdey works at Wesleyan University as Curator of the Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies and Assistant Professor of Anthropology.

Friends in High Places is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is \$225 for purchase or \$65 for rental.

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From Africa to India

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trument. Musical culture of these Sidis is not limited to this one instrument, however, but embraces several instruments, genres, and performance contexts of the Indian subcontinent. Striking was the piece sung in Qawwali style "I'm in Baba Gor's intoxication," a variation of the song "Dam Mast Qalandar Mast Mast," made famous by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

In a future video or publication the producers might wish to make more explicit some of the relationships between specific Sidi groups and their immediate, or more recent, local contexts. For example, large segments of the video are devoted to documenting performances of the damal ritual and its associated music. Further discussion might center on Sidis of the Makran region of Baluchistan, where the damal ritual thrives. Damal is probably not "African," but a reinterpretation of an ecstatic dance/drum rhythm called *dhamal* and performed throughout many parts of Pakistan, particularly in Sindh and the Panjab. Similarly, the drums tasa and marpha are not distinctively Sidi (unlike the malunga), but are common in many parts of south Asia.

This video represents groundbreaking research and presents stimulating results.





The final segments of the video document the results of collaborations between the ethnomusicologists and the Sidi communities: a conference, performance tour, and publications. This video project opens up new avenues for research and paves the way for the Sidis to better their economic and political position as minorities in the subcontinent. It would be useful to know something of the recent history of Sidi self-awareness and the extent to which Sidis may be using modern means to accentuate their Africanness. Are the very "African" looking dances, characterized by bird-like body motions and sudden, long, stifflimbed gestures, the result of reconstruction or revival along the lines of other dance forms in the subcontinent, or can they be read truly as holdovers from ancestral times?

A few technical glitches impair the documentation of the conference; and some of the camera work lacks the smoothness of a professional hand. But this does not detract at all from the usefulness of the video, which should excite students of many ages. This video represents groundbreaking research and presents stimulating results. It may be fruitfully used in a unit on African diaspora culture or in an Indian music course. For high school students and undergraduates, I would recommend showing short excerpts of the video in class. Graduate students would benefit from careful viewing and reflecting on the video in a writing assignment.

Richard K. Wolf is the Harris K. Weston Associate Professor of the Humanities at the Music Department of Harvard University.

From Africa to India: Sidi Music in the Indian Ocean Diaspora is available from Apsara Media for Intercultural Education. Price is \$90.

Suggested Reading

Catlin-Jirazbhoy, Amy and Edward A. Alpers, eds. Sidis and Scholars: Essays on Aftrican Indians. Tranton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 2004.

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Asia for Kids, 4480 Lake Forest Dr. #302, Cincinnati, Ohio 45242. Tel: 800-888-9681. Fax: 513-563-3105. E-mail: sales@afk.com. Web site: www.afk.com.

Documentary Educational Resources,

101 Morse Street, Watertown, MA 02172. Tel: 800-569-6621. Fax: 617-926-9519. E-mail: docued@der.org. Web site: http://der.org.

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