

Nadine El Shiaty
 The Battle in Heavy Metal
 Audio Documentary
 Script

LEAD-IN:

A small journey into the Heavy Metal scene in Egypt where we get to explore the nature of their music, the troubles they encounter, the challenges they face while performing their music and the reasons behind them being outcast or often labeled as Satanic.

“THE UNFORGIVEN III,” –METALLICA—FADE IN

Narration: If you are a stranger to the world of Heavy Metal and take an outer look upon it, you probably might not like what you see or hear. Viewing those people dressed fully in black, strumming roughly with their electric guitars and growling their lyrics could most likely scare you. Their music carries so much energy and the nature of their songs has always made them surrounded by massive criticism, controversy and a constant chase from the government. Who are these people? Why is the heavy metal a struggling form of art? Are they misunderstood artists who simply use music as a form of expression? And why are they always associated to Satanism? This is a journey to explore the Heavy Metal scene in Egypt, their subculture, the nature of their songs and the ongoing battle they face with both the society and the government.

*“THE UNFORGIVEN III,” –METALLICA—FADE Out
 “ELECTRIC GUITAR ARPEGGIO,” –FADE IN*

Narration: Heavy Metal started in the late 60s at the United States and the United Kingdom. The loud distorted guitars that could be heard in the music as well as the eccentric appeal that was seen in some of the bands made Heavy Metal a genre that is always under the spot light. Journalism student Mostafa El Ezaby who plays guitar and happens to be a Metalhead, a label for huge heavy metal fans, explains what made him interested in the genre.

***Ezaby:** “To a lot of people it’s a way of life. To me, it used to be a way of life until I realized that it’s not supposed to dictate how you live but it helps you understand a lot of things about life. Like the philosophies that people discuss within it. Heavy Metal especially tries to go beyond the idea of, the simple idea of ‘Oh I love you. Oh you love me. Oh I miss you. The simple context of music that is just bordered and limited by emotion. They try to go beyond emotion. They try and go into philosophies of what is God? What is life? Why are we alive? That doesn’t mean that they defy religious views. Sometimes they support it. Sometimes they criticize it. The main idea that I see behind it is that they don’t like to limit themselves by either emotion or religion.” (:42)*

“ELECTRIC GUITAR ARPEGGIO,”—FADE OUT

“CALLING DR. LOVE,” –KISS –FADE IN

Narration: Firas Al Atrachchi, Associate Professor of Practice at the American University in Cairo, a heavy metal player and a long time musician, said that his passion for heavy metal started in the eighties.

Al-Atrachchi: “By chance, there were few, you know hard rock, heavy metal songs that I heard here and there that I liked. For example, one would be a song by the band Kiss, which I heard in the early eighties and I really liked and it was called Calling Dr. Love.” (:16)

“CALLING DR, LOVE,” –KISS –FADE IN

Al-Atrachchi: “I remember listening to Iron Maiden and totally hating what I was listening to. But I couldn’t stop listening to it. And now, 25 years later, Iron Maiden is my number one band. I mean, I live by that band. So, Heavy Metal, is really my life. To put it in as simple terms as I possibly can.”

“CALLING DR LOVE,” –KISS –FADE OUT

“FEAR OF THE DARK,” –IRON MAIDEN –FADE IN

Narration: The history of Heavy Metal in Egypt goes back to the early nineties. Al Atrachchi recalls how heavy Metal started in Egypt by the year 1993.

Al-Atrachchi: “At the time there was also some bands were performing in clubs here and there, at bars here and there. I attended a couple of their concerts and they were really good and all they would do is play covers. The first Monsters of Rock festival, I had been playing guitar for about four years before then and trying to put a band together and my band sort of got their act together and we came up with the name called Masque. But the reason we came up with the band Masque was because we felt at the time that society was two-faced, that hypocrisy ruled the day, that people didn’t follow God’s law or nature’s law, we were flaunting everything, ruining everything and so basically society was wearing a ‘Masque.’ I think there were maybe 7000 people who attended and performed at the closed stadium and it was such a hit. It was so popular.” (:45)

Narration: With massive controversy surrounding the genre, it was important to know what is it about Heavy Metal that makes people think it is Satanic.

Al-Atrachchi: “The nature of the music. For example, using the E minor Chord that tends to give a darker kind of tone to the music that’s played. I think that Heavy Metal has been an opportunity for society to ask questions that most people would not dare ask.” (:17)

Ezaby: “I’ve come to realize that people, people are scared of what they don’t understand. Okay let me compare it to film for example. A lot of people don’t like horror movies. Why don’t they like them? Because it scares them. They watch it and feel like it’s threatening their psyche or their safety. But a lot of people do like it. Because, one, it indulges a part of you that you don’t really face a lot and it makes you think of concepts that normally you wouldn’t.” (:24)

“FEAR OF THE DARK,”—IRON MAIDEN—FADE OUT

Narration: According to Professor Al Atracchi, by the time the heavy Metal scene prospered in Egypt, dreams and thoughts of change began to grow among the youth.

“ELECTRIC GUITAR ARPEGGIO”—FADE IN

***Al-Atracchi:** “In 1990. Was it 1995? I remember had a new band and uh, we performed a song and the number of people at this concert was something like 18,000. So, can you imagine like 18000 young Egyptians or rock enthusiasts coming to music festival? I met a lot of uh, young kids and older kids and to me it seemed like there was this group of young people who was starting to move away from traditional Egyptian society and think for themselves. I believe that the seeds of descent were planted during this time. So these kids were thinking for themselves, the type of music they were writing, they would look out to the world and see ‘Wait a second, why is the minister of education making so much money where the education system in Egypt is bad? Why is Mubarak still in power? The music that was encouraging people to think for themselves was moving over into activism. My belief is that the activism that we saw in Tahrir, in 2011, the seeds of it were planted in the nineties. And the government realized this. They had like tens of thousands of young Egyptians who could form a political force that would ask for rights. Or ask for the situation to change. So they needed to clamp down on that.” (1:19)*

“ELECTRIC GUITAR ARPEGGIO”—FADE OUT

“GHOSTS OF PERDITION,” — OPETH—FADE IN

Narration: And with the massive attention that the media gave to some topics like Satanism, devil worshippers and witchcraft and its possible connection to Heavy Metal, troubles started escalating.

***Al-Atracchi:** “So Rose Al-Youssef started to publish a number of inflammatory articles. You know, just rumors and here-say (phone ringing) and digging up witchcraft in 15 century Europe and, you know, trying to create hysteria among Egyptian society. They even got a hold of one of the songs that I had written which was called ‘Even Death May Die’. Even Death May Die is based on a poem by H.P Love Craft, (puts coffee cup on the desk) and it’s about like how even in the end days, at the end of days, death will die. There will be no death. There will be no life. There will be nothing. You know, that’s when we, we answer to God. So they seize that and they said this is a satanic song which is completely the opposite. It’s basically saying that we all answer to God. You know, ‘Inna le’Allah wa enna Elayhi Raje’oon’ so basically means like even death which was life and death was created by God and at the end of days life and death will return to God. There won’t be death anymore. They didn’t understand that of course and they, they tried to translate it into Arabic which was a hilarious attempt. And so here they are trying to, to look at wherever Egyptian bands existed and trying to paint a very wrong picture of them.” (:58)*

“GHOSTS OF PERDITION,”—OPETH—FADE OUT

Narration: Al Atracchi then recalls his experience amid the massive arrests of 1997.

Al-Atraqchi: "It was Ramadan. January 27th 1997, I get a phone call from a friend of mine. It was four O'clock in the morning. He's like; Firas don't leave your house. They're starting to round up, you know, people we know. Guitarists, musicians, singers, people wearing black shirts, fans, and they're accusing them of Satanism."(0:15)

*"GHOSTS OF PERDITION,"—OPETH—FADE IN
"GHOSTS OF PERDITION,"—OPETH—FADE OUT*

Al-Atraqchi: "(coughing) Of course, I was like, scared. Every time I'd walk from like my house to my friend's house or to the grocery store, I'd look over my back to see if somebody was following me, or something like that. Because people I know very well were arrested and you know the irony of it is at the time in Egypt, it was if you had a beard and were religious you are arrested. Now if you didn't have a beard and you were into Western music you were arrested. So it was giving no way out to the youth of Egypt. It was basically sending a message you'll only do what the government tells you to do and you'll conform to what the government tells you to conform to. I actually know a story of a guy who came out of 'Taraweeh' prayers and was arrested, for Satanism. Now how insane is that?!" (:38)

"MAKE ME SICK,"—DESTINY IN CHAINS—FADE IN

Narration: Over 150 people were arrested that day, January 27, 1997. The government interrogated them and released about a hundred right away. The rest were jailed, tortured, humiliated and had their heads shaved. If you played Heavy Metal in Egypt during the nineties, your life would have been an utter nightmare. Just the very idea of someone playing or listening to Heavy Metal became a thrash. Heavy Metal was envired with massive backlash from both the government and the Egyptian society. Some players were threatened with execution and were constantly followed by state security officials. And so with the 1997 events, the genre merely started vanishing from the mainstream.

"MAKE ME SICK,"—DESTINY IN CHAINS—FADE OUT

Narration: For the next six years, Heavy Metal went slightly underground, away from the government's eyes. Bands played in isolated places like Sakkara, Al-Marioutya or in some small casinos in Cairo and Alexandria.

NATSOUND "ORIGIN" BAND CONCERT—FADE IN

Narration: It was not until the early 2000s when Heavy metal was back in the game. In 2003, a place known as Al Sakia Cultural Wheel, which is a center for arts and entertainment located in Zamalek, embraced underground music and allowed many Egyptian artists to express themselves. The center opened doors for a newer generation of Heavy Metal to step into the light and display their music. A new wave of Heavy Metal was awakening in Egypt and the years have brought newer bands with newer metal genres. The new generation nowadays has a bigger arena of fans. Heavy metal players from bands like Destiny in Chains, Origin and Mascara talked about the emergence of genres like Metal Core, Black Metal and Oriental Metal. Dressed in casual outfits during their interviews, it seemed that the Egyptian Heavy metal players do not fit the stereotypical image connected to heavy metal. Ahmed

Abdel Moneim, was the first to talk about the music he plays in his band Destiny in Chains and what he likes the most about Heavy Metal.

Moneim: *“It’s not only about the lyrics. It’s about the music itself. Uh, the heavy guitar riffs, the fast drums and the double peddle, all that, all of that. To me, it’s more of the music itself. The music I get drawn to the most was Metal Core. That’s what we play in Destiny in Chains.”(:18)*

Narration: The minute you would probably think that the heavy metal scene in Egypt was in a safer atmosphere, troubles started escalating once more. The danger that surrounded heavy metal players during the late nineties was back again when a Muslim Brotherhood lawyer filed a case against several Heavy Metal bands that played in Al Sakia Cultural Wheel and accused them not only of Satanism, but also promoting ideas that are ‘destructive’ to the society.

“DAYS OF CREATION,”—ORIGIN—FADE IN

Narration: Singer and Music student Nesma Mahgoub, who is also the vocalist of an oriental heavy metal band called Origin recalls the incident that happened at the festival.

Mahgoub: *“Someone came to the concert in Sakia and they saw something that they don’t know, something that they don’t understand. Something that they’re not used to listen to or to see or to encounter in their lives and there’s a saying in Arabic “الإنسان عدومايكره” (Literally: A human being is the enemy of what he hates). So a person is always against something that he doesn’t know. He thinks it’s bad he thinks it’s wrong. He thinks it’s, I don’t know, uh, maybe sinful. So when somebody comes and listens to something or sees something that he doesn’t know, they should research it first and at least, at least listen to the lyrics. You come and tell us that we’re like devil worshippers and we’re talking about Prophet Mohammed and what he did? And about the days of creations? Ya’ani, what is that supposed to mean? Like, you didn’t even listen to what we say and we even brought a Tanoura on stage and we were all like ‘Hay! Hay’ (A way to worship God in Islam). Is that devil worshipping?!(:51)*

Narration: It was important to ask whether the recent allegations have anything to do with the nature of Egypt as a conservative Arab society or the government’s attempt to oppress musicians.

“DAYS OF CREATION,”—ORIGIN—FADE OUT

Ezaby: *“As a culture we are conservative. We’re not very open to understanding that which seems threatening to our traditions. But at the same time the government feeds that. The government feeds that through media, controls through fear. They encourage the fear that you have of the unknown. Oh these people they’re wearing black, they’re listening to thrashy music, they must be devil worshippers or Satanists, or whatever they call them. So the government wouldn’t be able to do this if the culture didn’t have these beliefs within it.”(:27)*

Narration: Commenting on the two incidents that took place within the heavy metal scene, Sherine Amr, the vocalist of a band called Mascara said that both cases are completely different in concepts.

Amr: “You can never compare between the two cases. What happened in 1997 was something that came out from the government because they were actually at the same time they were arresting a lot of people from the Muslim Brotherhood and since these are the two extremes in the society, in our society, Metalheads and the Muslim Brotherhood. You’d find two people with two different concepts. So they were arresting these and these as well. It was just an attempt to give them excuses to arrest people in the street more. What happened a couple of months ago, and that was nothing. It was just a stupid lawyer that does not even represent the party that came and filed a case that wasn’t even accepted. That’s it. No one got threatened, no one got arrested. And if the bands will keep on talking about this bullshit, they will make a big propaganda out of it and this will not help our case at all.” (:41)

NATSOUND TRAFFIC –FADE IN

Narration: It seems that the attacks on heavy metal were due to two main factors. One is the society which opposes the genre because it defies its conservative identity and the second is the government which constantly battles heavy metal in fear of creating a generation of youth that revolts the system.

“AB’AAD MAKAN,”—MASCARA—Fade IN

Narration: Egypt is currently undergoing major changes and with its new Islamic leaders in power, the future of the country and its artistic scene is yet to be known. We might not know if the struggle of those musicians will eventually end or not. But we know this. These musicians are ready to do anything in order for their music and their voices to be heard.

“AB’AAD MAKAN,”—MASCARA—Fade IN

Narration: Thank you for listening. I’m Nadine El Shiaty and this was “The Battle in Heavy Metal” Audio Documentary.

“AB’AAD MAKAN,”—MASCARA—Fade IN

Narration: Songs of the bands Metallica, Kiss, Iron Maiden, Opeth, Destiny in Chains, Origin and Mascara were used to produce this documentary.

“AB’AAD MAKAN,”—MASCARA—Fade IN

Narration: Special thanks to Firas Al-Atraqchi, Mostafa El Ezaby, Ahmed Abd El Moneim, Nesma Mahgoub, Sherine Amr and Karim Mounir for contributing their stories for this project.

“AB’AAD MAKAN,”—MASCARA—Fade OUT

Music Credits:

The Unforgiven – Metallica
Calling Dr Love – Kiss
Solo Electric Guitar Arpeggio
Fear of the Dark – Iron Maiden
Ghosts of Perdition— Opeth
Make Me Sick— Destiny in Chains
Days of Creation – Origin
Ab'aadMakan – Mascara

Interviewees:

Firas Al-Atraqchi
Mostafa El Ezaby
Ahmed Abd El Moneim
Nesma Mahgoub
Sherine Amr