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JRMC 4460-01

Interviewee: Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan
Interview date: April 8, 2021
Time: 10:21

[00:00:00] Maya Abouelnasr

Thank you for agreeing to do this, So, I first have a couple of simple survey questions that I would like to ask, if you're comfortable with answering them. And of course, if there's anything you're not comfortable with answering, just let me know. So- so, first of all, what is your age?

[00:00:18] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

My age is 84... 83 actually.

[00:00:23] Maya Abouelnasr

And where in Egypt do you live? Do you live inside or outside Cairo? Or in Giza?

[00:00:30] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

When... What?

[00:00:31] Maya Abouelnasr

Where in Egypt do you live? Inside or outside Cairo? Or in Giza? Which governorate?

[00:00:39] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Here I live in Dokki.

[00:00:41] Maya Abouelnasr

Ok, and how long have you lived in Egypt? Have you lived anywhere else?

[00:00:46] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Yes, of course, I've lived in many countries in Europe and in England.

[00:00:53] Maya Abouelnasr

And what is the highest educational degree that you've completed?

[00:00:58] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

I've got a doctorate in medicine... endocrinology... on a fellowship to the Royal College of Physicians of London and of Edinburgh.

[00:01:11] Maya Abouelnasr

Alright. And was this also- was there any part of this that was completed in Egypt?

[00:01:19] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

What?

[00:01:19] Maya Abouelnasr

Was there any part of this that was completed in Egypt?

[00:01:22] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

No, no, no, no. This was a graduate education and degrees are in the U.K. and in Scotland.

[00:01:30] Maya Abouelnasr

Ok, and what is your current employment status?

[00:01:36] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

I'm on a pension. You know, I'm retired, I was a doctor and a professor at the university, but I'm retired.

[00:01:46] Maya Abouelnasr

And how long were you a professor and a doctor, like, in the capacities when you were actively working?

[00:01:55] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

I have been a doctor since 1960.

[00:02:00] Maya Abouelnasr

Ok, and was this all in Egypt or was it also in other places? Was this only done in Egypt, or was it also done in England and in all the other various countries that you've lived?

[00:02:14] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

In Egypt and in the U.K.

[00:02:17] Maya Abouelnasr

Alright. And my final question, just for these survey questions, is how would you say your education has helped you discover your convictions? How has it helped you discover your skills and your talents?

[00:02:37] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Well, it allowed me the skills and the knowledge necessary to apply my interests.

[00:02:46] Maya Abouelnasr

Alright. So, I will try to be as quick as possible with the old op- the Opera House questions. So, my first-

[00:02:59] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

But this sounds like a- an investigation rather than an interview,

[00:03:05] Maya Abouelnasr

That- this part, this half of it goes to the archive sections just for a background on the various people who are interviewed. But I will now ask the questions that are properly about the Opera House, if that is alright.

[00:03:21] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Fire ahead.

[00:03:22] Maya Abouelnasr

Thank you. So, I know you are a composer and a musician, but I was wondering if you ever went to the old opera house when you were younger, and perhaps how often did you go when you were very young? Was there anything in particular that made you interested.. in-

[00:03:39] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Yes, of course, I went to the Opera House.

[00:03:42] Maya Abouelnasr

And did you go frequently?

[00:03:44] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Yes.

[00:03:46] Maya Abouelnasr

So, if you don't mind, could you tell me a little bit more of your memories of the old Opera House in terms of perhaps, like, how it looked, how it smelled, the overall vibe and the feel that you would get when you attended perhaps... Of the kinds of people who would attend the productions...

[00:04:01] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

It was a lovely, lovely, lovely opera house with lovely acoustics.

[00:04:13] Maya Abouelnasr

And was it perhaps, like... was it mainly suited for a particular audience perhaps? Were there certain notable performances that you remember as being particularly noteworthy?

[00:04:26] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

[unintelligible] season once a year in the winter where the Italian opera came and performed the "Jewels of Opera" repertoire.

[00:04:43] Maya Abouelnasr

And how significant would you say the old Opera House was to the society at the time? Like, how loved was it? How influential was it on society?

[00:04:53] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

It was very loved between the, uh, in the higher echelons of society who could pay the tickets and also pay for the clothes necessary to go to the opera.

[00:05:11] Maya Abouelnasr

And if you don't mind, could you tell me a little bit of your memories of the burning? Like, do you remember perhaps where you were or how you found out or how you felt when you found out that it was burnt in 1971?

[00:05:28] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

I heard from somebody and I went- I drove to the site and watched the embers.

[00:05:40] Maya Abouelnasr

And how would you say it affected the society, like, ultimately? Like, I've seen videos, for instance, of people crying when they're watching it burn. So, that really gives a deep impression of just how much it meant.

[00:05:52] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

People who realized what an opera meant... what it meant and how precious it was cried very deeply.

[00:06:02] Maya Abouelnasr

And how do you say directly affected Egypt's music scene after the burning? Like, was there a significant shift, would you say, in music afterwards? In the quality of the music and also in the society as a whole in terms of perhaps the interests in music?

[00:06:19] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

The Opera House ballet group, the Opera group, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra... It housed a lot of very precious artistic activity and that was cut short with the fire of the opera.

[00:06:39] Maya Abouelnasr

And so, I know that the new Opera House was completed in 1988, and so, I was wondering, what was your official involvement in that and for how long?

[00:06:53] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

I was invited to be the director of the National Cultural Center, of which the new opera was a part.

[00:07:04] Maya Abouelnasr

And how long were you in this position?

[00:07:07] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Two years.

[00:07:09] Maya Abouelnasr

And if you don't mind me asking, what was it like? Like, how does it perhaps compare to your experience with the old Opera House?

[00:07:18] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Did what?

[00:07:20] Maya Abouelnasr

And how does it perhaps a compared to the old Opera House in terms of the experience, in terms of-

[00:07:25] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

It's a completely different affair because it's a modern building. It's good and well-designed. And very equipped with modern equipment, but the old Opera House had its- was built essentially of wood, and it had the magic of the old Opera houses.

[00:07:54] Maya Abouelnasr

And so, I get this impression that the old Opera House was definitely a place that... is very much linked to the imperial past of Egypt in terms of just... Not the imperial past, but it was a very magical place. It yielded a lot of talent that is very unique to that time and sort of has not since been reproduced, or has there- has anything close come since?

[00:08:20] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

The times have changed. That's impossible to replicate a masterpiece like that.

[00:08:29] Maya Abouelnasr

And my final question is what you think the future of opera is in Egypt? Particularly, like, with the new Opera House, like, seeing as there are a lot of talents like, let's say, Fatma Said on the world stage, Egyptian opera singers. But would you say that there is anything locally that, um, has a lot of promise at the moment?

[00:08:53] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Yes, there's a lot of talent locally... a lot of talent, and a lot of talent that goes inter- international... and a lot that stays still... local.

[00:09:05] Maya Abouelnasr

And so you wouldn't say that there is a trend of people necessarily simply only performing in Europe; that there is more that's happening here?

[00:09:14] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

No, no, no No. A lot of talent that [are in?] Locally.

[00:09:24] Maya Abouelnasr

Alright, um, and so, do you think that opera is... obviously, I don't think it's necessarily as well loved or the same— It perhaps maybe isn't as integral a part of the society as it once was, but do you think that it still holds a certain regard today, or is it perhaps really not as much? That it is only for a certain class? Or do you think there is perhaps a way to make it more accessible?

[00:09:56] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

It is not more accessible today.

[00:10:02] Maya Abouelnasr

Well, I believe that is all of my questions, so I would like to thank you so, so much for agreeing to speak to me and for giving these lovely answers. I truly appreciate it.

[00:10:12] Dr. Tarek Ali Hassan

Thank you and have a good interview, and, uh, good marks for your work.

[00:10:20] Maya Abouelnasr

Thank you.