Middle Eastern musical intersections in contemporary Israel

Some of the most exciting musical innovation in the mixing of Middle Eastern musical traditions with Israeli and Western popular, classical, and folk (to use old-fashioned, but readily intelligible categories) has been taking place in Israel over the past two decades. I focused on one area of this in Playing Across a Divide: Israeli Palestinian Musical Encounters (Oxford University Press, 2009), the musical interactions of Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians. Israel has changed politically, socially, and culturally since 2003, when I completed the bulk of the research for that book. It is high time to take stock of the new situation. In a brief research trip in December 2013 I renewed contacts, attended performances, and found fundamental changes. The elaboration of musical networks whose formative stages I documented in the book has continued apace, with new players entering the scene and new collaborations emerging even as the support structures have altered considerably, with the worldwide collapse of the recording industry and the informal boycott of Israeli musicians at many venues abroad. Of course, the political situation has affected the Jewish-Arab music-making on which I focused my attention before and I am anxious to learn firsthand the impact that this has had. At the same time, as I note in my research plan below, the educational infrastructure for Middle Eastern music has matured and produced an unprecedented number of highly trained performers who are experimenting with novel ways to juxtapose or blend this music with many of the various other styles of music practiced in Israel.