



***Sleep Song:
Iraq, War and Artistic Creation***

**A Conference at the
Columbia University Maison Française, New York City
in connection with *Sleep Song* performed at Harlem Stage**

November 28-29, 2012

**Co-presented by the Columbia Maison Française, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences
Sociales, Royaumont Foundation, and Harlem Stage
In partnership with Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the U.S., French Ministry
of Foreign Affairs, French Cultural Ministry, and Institut Français, Edwin H. Case Chair
in American Music, Columbia, and Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia**

**Discussions Moderated by
Denis Laborde, CNRS / EHESS, Paris
Presentations in English and French (with English translation)**

Poet, slammer, and musician Mike Ladd has conducted formal and informal interviews in the U.S. with over 30 Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans since 2009. This fieldwork was preparation for a poetry and music collaboration with Vijay Iyer titled *Holding It Down: The Veterans' Dreams Project*. En route, he encountered two other poets: Maurice Decaul, Iraq War veteran of the United States Marine Corps, and Ahmed Abdul Hussein, originally from Baghdad, where he now is at the head of the House of Poetry. In summer 2011, Ladd and his fellow poets were in residence at the Royaumont Foundation, located north of Paris, France, with world-class musicians Vijay Iyer, Serge Teyssot-Gay and Ahmed Mukhtar. Together, they gave voice to the dreams and nightmares haunting those who lived through the Iraq War. In this French abbey, founded in 1228 and transformed into a multidisciplinary arts center that invites creative personalities to work together in a transcultural perspective, they collaborated to create a dialogue on the meaning of war and how to make a path toward peace. Out of this work, *Sleep Song* was born.

This performance was given several times in France after its premiere on September 30, 2011, and will have its American premiere at Harlem Stage in New York City on November 30 and December 1, 2012. In connection with this performance, a conference of three roundtables with artists, academics, and cultural administrators will take place at the Columbia University

Maison Française on the theme of War and Artistic Creation. Each of the three panel discussions will address a specific theme.

Panel 1: November 28, 2-5 p.m.: *Sleep Song*: Creating a Work

Panel 2: November 29, 10 am - 12 pm: Art Against War?

Panel 3: November 29, 2-4 p.m.: Trauma: Once the Guns are Silenced

November 28, 2012

2-5 p.m.

***Sleep Song*: Creating a Work**

Patricia Cruz has been the executive director of Harlem Stage since 1998. For 30 years, the organization's unique focus has been to identify visionary artists of color and support them by commissioning, presenting and producing their vital work that responds to the social and political conditions shaping our lives. Their work at times extends into more direct social and political arenas, as evidenced by the fact that Nelson Mandela visited there in a town hall meeting with Ted Koppel upon his release from prison in June, 1990.

The story of a work of art is distinctly linked to the institutions that support its creation and presentation. Every work of art is the fruit of a collaboration between artists and cultural entities, with the goal of reaching an audience. In this first panel, we will look at nature of the working relationship between *Sleep Song* and Harlem Stage, by listening to the perspectives of the artists and cultural institutions that made this project possible. How did the initial material, consisting of interviews with Iraq War veterans, meet with the activist position of Harlem Stage? Two French doctoral students from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, Paris), who have followed this project for more than a year, will discuss the transcultural process that occurred in the creation of this musical and poetic work.

Panelists:

Mike Ladd, poet, performer, artistic direction

Ahmed Abdul Hussein, poet, performer, director of the House of Poetry in Baghdad, Iraq

Maurice Decaul, poet, Iraq War veteran

Vijay Iyer, pianist, composer

Serge Teyssot-Gay, guitarist

Ahmed Mukhtar, oudist

Patricia Cruz, Director, Harlem Stage (New York City)

Frédéric Deval, Director, Transcultural Music Program, Royaumont Foundation (France)

Annelies Fryberger and **Marta Amico**, PhD students, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, Paris)

November 29, 2012

10 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Art Against War?

This panel is not about seeing art as an idealistic alternative to military engagement, nor is our intention to paint a heroic portrait of the artist, capable of combatting the murderous force of states involved in armed conflict with a flick of the pen or paintbrush or a musical gesture. Nonetheless, the work of artistic creation can help us preserve or rekindle peaceful dialogue. Maurice Decaul has borne witness to this, as we will have heard the previous evening, and he

shows us that the question of the role of art is key to the support provided to veterans by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Many other initiatives have been brought to fruition elsewhere, in the visual arts, poetry, or theater. Can art rekindle a peaceful dialogue between yesterday's enemies? Theater directors and specialists in oral history will discuss their experience in this field.

Panelists:

Frédéric Deval, Director, Transcultural Music Program, Royaumont Foundation (France)

Glenn Novarr, Assistant to the Dean for Special Projects and Veterans Affairs

Jean-Louis Fabiani, sociologist, Directeur d'Etudes, EHESS, Paris, *Doing Music Together in a Disenchanted Mediterranean*

Mary Marshall Clark, Director of the Center for Oral History, Columbia University

Jason Sagebiel, composer, guitarist

Jon Pieslak, composer, City College of New York, *American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*

November 29, 2012

2–4:30 p.m.

Trauma: Once the Guns are Silenced

Some more militant forms of artistic activity aim to take war on directly. Art generally gains strength from its role as witness to the ills of society. How can survivors convey their experience to those who have not lived through war? How does the trauma of war shape the way a work of art is received? Trauma is a multifaceted notion: it is accompanied by related feelings of suffering, mourning, resilience, victimhood, forgetting... How are such notions embodied by efforts to memorialize trauma and by artistic activity? We will attempt to reply to these questions by looking at architectural spaces that present memorials in urban areas (Berlin), narrations of war, legal tools that aim to shape memory, and reconciliation policies undertaken in different areas around the world.

Panelists:

Mamadou Diouf, Leitner Family Professor of African Studies, Director of the Institute of African Studies (IAS), Columbia University, *Making Peace with Art in West Africa*

Saskia Sassen, Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology, Co-chair of the Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University

Jacques Revel, historian, Directeur d'Etudes, EHESS, *Time of Trauma, Time of History*

Mike Kim, Psychoanalyst and Trauma Readjustment Clinician

Waffa Bilal, Iraqi American artist, Assistant Professor, Tisch School of the Arts, NYU, *Making the Invisible Visible*

Sandrine Lefranc, researcher, CNRS, Institut des Sciences Politiques

November 29, 2012

4:30-5:00 p.m.: Concluding Remarks

Program as of 11/05/12