

Rim Banna

Voice Of Resistance

KKV DL

Rim Banna, who died in March, was a Palestinian musician too little known outside the Arabic speaking world. This is a pity because her work – a combination of composition, performance and poetry – placed her firmly in a musical world that reached into the experimental realm. Her extraordinarily powerful voice travelled between song and extended vocals and, at its most dramatic, took on incantatory qualities similar to those of Sussan Deyhim. Banna reached a wider audience via *Lullabies From The Axis Of Evil*, producer Erik Hillestad's 2003 collaborative riposte to the inane realpolitik of George W Bush. This is the album that established a working relationship with Hillestad, which in turn led to close collaborations with the Norwegian pianist Bugge Wesseltoft. Both Norwegians return for *Voice Of Resistance*, written and recorded between 2015–18 in Banna's hometown of Nazareth and Oslo, continues these collaborations, leaving an electrifying legacy.

The sonic representation of Palestine – thematically and materially – is Banna's theme, and she undertakes her project in a way that is inseparable from that region's contested histories. The sonics of *Voice* work on dual, entwined levels: the personal and the political. For the first, we have Banna's voice, throatier (the result of cancer treatment) than on earlier recordings, singing, declaiming and, above all, present. The compositional use of data sonification – in this case, Banna's medical records – to provide beats and atmospheres frames the political body of this work. Indeed, it provides a metonymic extension of the singular corporeal and its latent sounds into the plurality of peoples. Sonification, as a way of transliterating data from one format into another and, in the case of sound, of making the inaudible audible, is

a method that's been around for decades. In the case of recent experimental musics alone, Annea Lockwood, Alvin Lucier and Milton Mermikides are but three composers who have used, in their hugely different ways, sonified data as a way of expanding the universe of sound. However, rarely has the method been used so poignantly – or politically – as it is here. Checkpoint 303, the collective of radical sound artists known for their "sound-catching" from Arab streets, borders and the like, are the team responsible for the sonifications. In their hands, Banna's PET scans and X-rays are turned into a bricolage of rhythms that are sometimes gentle, other times more urgent: there's an early Stooges quality to the pounding piano and beats on "Rim", for example.

Banna herself uses cancer as a Sontagian metaphor for hostile takeover. On "I Don't Care", where she makes a rare incursion into English, the resistance of her title spells out its emphatic meanings: "*I am trying to fight against the sickness of the cells, like I am fighting against occupation*".

Louise Gray