

# ISSA AJI

Curriculum Vitae  
issaaji@utexas.edu

## EDUCATION

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- 2020–present Ph.D., Music Theory, University of Texas at Austin  
Dissertation: “Ecstatic Listening: Theorizing *Ṭarab* in the Arab Diaspora” (tentative title)  
Committee: Robert S. Hatten (co-advisor), Chelsea Burns (co-advisor), Sonia Tamar Seeman, Kathleen M. Higgins, Marianne Wheeldon
- 2020 M.M., Music Theory, Temple University  
Thesis: “Understanding Musical Frisson: A Methodological Study in Musical Semiotics and Hermeneutics” (advised by Michael L. Klein)
- 2016 B.M., Music Composition (with honors), Rowan University

## PUBLICATIONS

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- forthcoming “Rhythmic-Temporal Disruptions and the Feeling of *Ṭarab*,” *Theory and Practice* (anticipated publication 2025)
- 2024 “Who’s Listening? The Role of Genre in the Creation of Musical Meaning and Emotion” (co-authored with Tyler Howie) in *European Perspectives on Music Education, Vol. 12* (special collection on “Music & Meaning”), eds. Isolde Malmberg and Milena Petrović (Helbling Publishing), 51–63
- 2023 [“A History of Ecstatic Listening: What Arabic \*Ṭarab\* Has Taught Me about Musical Emotion,”](#) *History of Music Theory Blog*, December 19 (invited)

## FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND GRANTS

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- 2024–25 The Presser Foundation Graduate Music Award (\$10,000)
- 2020–25 Kent Kennan Endowed Graduate Fellowship, University of Texas at Austin  
Student Excellence Fund Scholarship for Theory, University of Texas at Austin  
College of Fine Arts Student Excellence Fellowship, University of Texas at Austin
- 2022 Patricia Carpenter Emerging Scholar Award given to “The Making of *Ṭarab*: Emotion as Temporal Disruption in Umm Kulthūm’s ‘Alf Leila wa Leila’” at the Music Theory Society of New York State (MTSNYS) Annual Meeting, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY, April 9–10
- 2022 Irna Priore Prize for Student Research (co-winner) given to “The Making of *Ṭarab*: Emotion as Temporal Disruption in Umm Kulthūm’s ‘Alf Leila wa Leila’” at the Music Theory Southeast (MTSE) Annual Meeting, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, March 18–19
- 2022 Meyerson Professorship Scholarship (\$1,000 for intensive Arabic-language study), University of Texas at Austin

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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- 2024 “‘The Feeling of Being’: Rethinking Musical Emotion and Affect through the Arab Concept of *Ṭarab*,” Society for Music Theory (SMT) Annual Meeting, Jacksonville, FL, November 7–10
- 2023 “*Ṭarab* and the Kinesthetic Understanding of Arabic *Maqāmāt*,” Analysis of World Musics & History of Theory Joint Interest Groups Meeting, American Musicological Society (AMS) and Society for Music Theory (SMT) Joint Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, November 9–12
- 2023 “Musical Affect and the Realm of (Emotional) Discourse,” The 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Semiotic Society of America (SSA), University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX, October 11–15
- 2022 “Who’s Listening? ‘Framing’ Stylistic Competency for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Listener” (co-authored with Tyler Howie), The 29<sup>th</sup> Annual European Association for Music in Schools (EAS) Conference, Kolarac University, Belgrade, Serbia, May 18–21 (online)
- 2022 “The Making of *Ṭarab*: Emotion as Temporal Disruption in Umm Kulthūm’s ‘Alf Leila wa Leila”
- Conference of the International Society for Research on Emotion (ISRE), University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, July 15–18
  - Music Theory Society of New York State (MTSNYS) Annual Meeting, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY, April 9–10
  - Music Theory Southeast (MTSE) Annual Meeting, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, March 18–19
  - Rocky Mountain Society for Music Theory (RMSMT) Annual Meeting, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO, March 11–12
  - Texas Society for Music Theory (TSMT) Annual Meeting, University of North Texas, Denton, TX, March 4–5
- 2021 “[Frisson, Emotion, and Synthetic Gestalts: The Emotional Implications of Expressive Meaning in Debussy’s Cello Sonata](#),” Midwest Music Research Collective (MMRC), March 26–27 (online)
- 2019 “A Non-Conventional Act of Heroism: The (mis)Placement of the Second Theme in the First Movement of Sibelius’s Second Symphony”
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Student Music Conference, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, February 15–16
  - Music Studies Colloquium, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, February 1
  - The 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Music Theory Forum, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, January 19
  - Mannes Graduate Student Conference, Mannes School of Music, New York, NY, January 13

## INVITED PRESENTATIONS

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- 2023 “Musical Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” UGS 303: Music, Protest, and Social Movements (Eric Drott), University of Texas at Austin, November 28

- 2022 “Music, Emotion, Attitude: An Introduction to Arab Music,” MUS 306M: Elements of Music (Stefanie Bilidas), University of Texas at Austin, November 18
- 2021 “Frisson, Emotion, and Synthetic Gestalts: The Emotional Implications of Expressive Meaning in Debussy’s Cello Sonata,” MUS 388S: Theories of Emotion in Music (Robert S. Hatten), University of Texas at Austin, September 15

## TEACHING

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### UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN (Instructor of Record)

- 2024 (fall) MUS 411A: Ear Training and Sight-Singing III  
 2024 (fall) MUS 306M: Elements of Music (for non-music majors)  
 2023 (spring) MUS 612B: Structure of Tonal Music (Music Theory IV)  
 2022 (fall) MUS 612A: Structure of Tonal Music (Music Theory III)  
 2022 (spring) MUS 605B: Musicianship (Music Theory II)  
 2021 (fall) MUS 605A: Musicianship (Music Theory I)  
 2021 (spring) MUS 411B: Ear Training and Sight-Singing IV (online)  
 2020 (fall) MUS 411A: Ear Training and Sight-Singing III (online)
- \*2021–22 Designed first-year aural skills (MUS 605A/B) curriculum and lesson plans and supervised teachings assistants.

### UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN (Teaching Assistant)

- 2024 (spring) UGS 303: Introduction to Music and Film Sound  
 2023 (fall) UGS 303: Music, Protest, and Social Movements

### TEMPLE UNIVERSITY (Teaching Assistant)

- 2020 (spring) MUST 1712: Theory II  
 2019 (fall) MUST 1711: Theory I

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPATION

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- 2024 “Global Music Theory (As an Insurgent Practice),” Society for Music Theory (SMT) Graduate Student Workshop led by Chris Stover, Jacksonville, FL, November 8
- 2022 “Rhythm and Meter in Popular Music,” Music Theory Society of New York State (MTSNYS) Conference Workshop led by Nicole Biamonte, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, NY, April 9
- 2019 “Bridges to Free Composition,” The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Student Music Conference Workshop led by Kofi Agawu, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, February 15
- 2018 “Code Shifting, Chromaticism, and Modality,” Society for Music Theory (SMT) Graduate Student Workshop led by Dmitri Tymoczko, San Antonio, TX, November 2

## RELATED EXPERIENCE

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### SERVICE

2023 Graduate Student Representative for Music Theory Faculty Search Committee, University of Texas at Austin

### PERFORMANCES OF ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS (SELECTED)

2018 *Post-Tonal Study (Pastiche)*, Temple University Competitive Faculty Review, performed by Dr. Cynthia Folio and Michael Shingo Crawford  
 2016 *Bell Phase* for Percussion Ensemble, performed by Rowan University Percussion Ensemble  
 2016 *Short Piece for Loved Ones* for Clarinet and Piano, performed by Rowan University Contemporary Music Ensemble  
 2016 *Past Voices* for Chamber Ensemble, performed by Rowan University Contemporary Music Ensemble  
 2015 *Movements for Woodwind Quintet*, performed by Rowan University Faculty Woodwind Quintet  
 2014 *String Quartet No. 1*, performed by Rowan University Contemporary Music Ensemble  
 2013 *Praeludium* for Brass Quintet, performed by Bethel Baptist Church Brass Quintet (NJ)  
 2012 *Entrance* for Solo Marimba, Burlington County College (NJ), performed by Dr. James Ieraci

### PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE (SELECTED)

2024–present Ghandoura Band, eight-piece Arab music ensemble comprised of musicians from across the Arabic-speaking world based in Austin, TX  
 2022–23 Bereket Middle Eastern Ensemble, University of Texas at Austin  
 2013–16 University Orchestra, Rowan University (principal double bass, 2015–16)  
 2013–16 Contemporary Music Ensemble, Rowan University  
 2013–14 Chamber Music Ensemble, Rowan University

### TEACHING

2014–18 Instructor of Piano, Double/Electric Bass, Guitar, and Music Theory, Conservatory Without Walls (NJ)  
 2012–14 Private Teacher for Piano, Double/Electric Bass, and Guitar

### LANGUAGES

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English: native  
 Arabic: proficient speaking, reading, and writing knowledge (2022 Arabic Summer Institute, University of Texas at Austin)  
 German: elementary reading knowledge

### PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

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International Society for Research on Emotion (ISRE)  
 Music Theory Society of New York State (MTSNYS)  
 Semiotic Society of America (SSA)  
 Society for Music Theory (SMT)  
 Texas Society for Music Theory (TSMT)