



# REEP

Religions & Environment  
Education Projects

## Marrying Tudor and Sufi Music at the Shore to Shore festival

Catherine Groom, [Passamezzo](#)

I'm in Morocco with Elizabethan/Jacobean music specialists Passamezzo for an extraordinary project. Shore to Shore, now of many years' standing, is wide-ranging in its remit, calling itself 'an exploration of life, the senses, faith and the environment' and aiming to create dialogue between English and Moroccan young people through concerts, art exhibitions and workshops in theatre, dance, instrument making, storytelling, cookery, gardening, art and photography. We're exploring links there may be between our two cuisines, the gardeners lots of plants. We musicians are frankly on a roll – one workshop at the University of Marrakech has yielded some astoundingly fruitful discussion into the spiritual effects of melisma in Christian plainchant and Islamic Sufi music, despite being conducted in a mixture of some fairly tentative French (ours) and some embarrassingly impressive English (the students').

Passamezzo's involvement is on the basis of the project's focus on the late 16th and 17th centuries, a period when trade links between the two countries were particularly active (we all know of the shipping of spices to England from North Africa; less widely known is that English slaves were taken to the Barbary Coast in large numbers). Flowerings in literature and music in both countries during this period (Shakespeare, for a start) give the project a powerful cultural basis.

We spent our first week in Essaouira, a beautiful fishing port on the west coast of Morocco, where Shore to Shore has its basis and its direction at the hands of Diana Lazenby and the British foundation REEP. We have been playing in Passamezzo's natural formation in our own concerts (weaving countermelodies and haunting harmonies around such ballads as 'The Three Ravens' and 'The Maiden And the Stone'); in 'loud' line-ups of shawms and pipes in carnivalesque processions through the streets; in consort formation at showcases of the gardeners' work; and improvisatorially, illustrating the street theatre and puppetry devised by the team of actors. Most exciting of all for us, though, has been the musical

collaboration between Passamezzo and Sufi singer Abdou el Haak, with his Ensemble Mogador. There aren't really words to describe the spine-tingling sound of his heartbreaking melismas weaving around our own sober and quiet iterations of Ravenscroft psalms, and one particular rehearsal as the sun set over the harbour will stay with me forever.

Educational workshops have also been an important element of the tour for us. In Essaouira we worked with the students of the El Jadida College, who launched themselves with verve and enthusiasm into such diverse projects as making rommelpots (look it up if you aren't sure), learning Playford dances and singing sea shanties. Among the El Jadida students were some phenomenal young exponents of Gnawa, Morocco's ecstatic rhythmic spiritual music centred around the gimbri (three-stringed lute) and qraqab (large iron castanets). We were overwhelmed by the sheer energy and feats of memory achieved by the young musicians studying in both the Sufi and Gnawa traditions, and were impressed by the indefatigable headmaster's commitment to music in the school.

We're now in Marrakech for a second week of similar events and workshops. The stand-out moment for me here so far has been the afternoon we spent at a school for blind and visually impaired children on the outskirts of the city. Ostensibly there to play for the opening of a sensory garden created by the seemingly inexhaustible team of gardeners, we were rapidly surrounded by dozens of children with percussion instruments, all desperate to play along with us. We started a rousing chorus of 'Tomorrow The Fox Will Come TO Town' from Thomas Ravenscroft's Deuteromelia, assuming it would run for half-a-dozen verses, but we just weren't allowed to stop. Having exhausted all the conventional farmyard animals, our on-the-spot lyric invention took on a distinctly 'early music' flavour as we introduced a prawn playing a shawm, and a turtle playing a curtal. A long way from our daily-bread questions of tuning and temperament at home, yet I can't imagine a more fruitful early music scene.

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