

Kabul Beauty School

Beauty is more than skin deep.

BY SAMANTHA LEAL

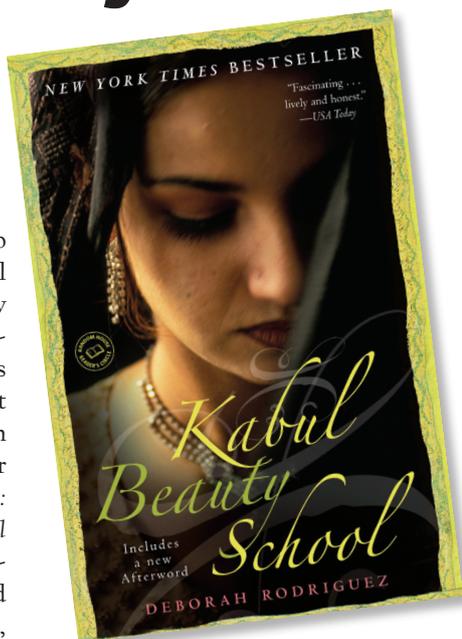
When Deborah Rodriguez decides to travel to Afghanistan in 2002 after the fall of the Taliban, she has little idea of how much her life is about to change. Intending to treat wounds and broken limbs as a nurse's assistant, she soon finds that her skills as a hairdresser are in much higher demand, setting the premise for her nonfiction book *Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil* (Random House, Dec. 2007, \$14.95). Initially for Westerners in Afghanistan, and then later for the Afghans themselves, Rodriguez's beauty and hair treatments end up bringing out a side of these women she hasn't seen before. Upon returning home, Rodriguez petitions companies for sponsorship of her new, somewhat bizarre foreign-aid project: a beauty training school in Kabul.

In a city where many women wear *burqas*, a garment covering the entire body including the face, this may seem like a radical idea, but Rodriguez is adamant. Having been divorced twice, she knows that a beauty school can foster self-reliance among these women.

"I knew from my own experience as a hairdresser back home that a salon is a good business for a woman—especially if she has a bad husband," Rodriguez writes in the book.

Afghani women attend training school, and as they learn about hair dye and makeup, the author learns about their personal lives—filled with beatings, rape, and loveless marriages to old men.

Rodriguez begins to understand the life of an Afghani woman as she spends time with her students. But her school is met with criticism from male mem-



bers of the community. The Taliban had closed all of the country's beauty salons, saying they made women look like prostitutes. Rodriguez, however, writes that she believes that they actually closed the schools "because they gave women their own space where they were free from the control of men."

Despite objections, it seems that her training school is a success: Rodriguez, who lives in Kabul and still runs the school today, claims that her graduates often go on to increase their family incomes by a staggering 400 percent.

Written in a colloquial style of prose that is reminiscent of gabbing with your own local hairdresser, Rodriguez's memoir is both funny and heartwarming. Ranging from hilarious moments—like Afghani women opening a box of thong underwear—to heartbreaking accounts—like Rodriguez's unsuccessful attempt to save a teenager from sexual exploitation—*Kabul Beauty School* is a glimpse at a post-Taliban Afghanistan, through a woman's eyes. It shows how the least likely of talents can foster identity and hope for so many people.

Global Music Guru

BY AMBER SASSE

Mahewa. Ongaku. Múzik. Sangit. However you pronounce it, one thing is certain: Music is a distinctive and unifying feature of any culture. If you want to fully immerse yourself in a country's customs, it may be helpful to familiarize yourself with the local music scene before you go abroad.

Music is an international language, and like any new language, if you want to be fluent you have to do your homework. Fortunately, the once distant international music scene is now readily accessible. Thanks to the Internet (and a few helpful websites), global music trends no longer have to seem so, well, foreign.

If your idea of international music stops with Enrique Iglesias or the British Invasion, there is a lot to learn. And online radio programs are a free, easy way to discover popular artists abroad.

AOL radio offers a World/International station with 22 channels, featuring music from 11 countries. Some of the stations are dated and a tad cliché, but the French scene, Japanese pop, and Urbano-Reggaeton streams play fresh, contemporary songs you can almost imagine blasting at a club in Nice, Tokyo, or São Paulo. iTunes Radio also has an international channel with 184 streams featuring everything from Parisian Electronica to Persian pop. Listeners beware: the streams are fairly Eurocentric and the non-European streams are rather Americanized. But the variety of stations allows for exploration.

For those who prefer a little more musical guidance, "Passport Approved" is a fantastic resource. This internationally syndicated and imported radio show—which you can access for free on Yahoo! Music—is the brainchild of British-born, Los Angeles-based D.J. Sat Bisla. D.J. Bis-