

Chapter One

Sources of Middle Eastern Music, historical Background and influences:

Arab music: music history, treatises, genres and instruments as well as musically related philosophies, attitudes, and social contexts within the Arab world.

Arab music geographical area:

Turkey, the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine), Mesopotamia (Iraq), and parts of the Sahara in Africa (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria), to the Arabian Gulf region.

Strong Aspects of Unity:

- Sharing old musical heritage
- Presence of common elements in the various Arab musical traditions

Arab musical heritage gained sophistication during the height of the Islamic Empire between the 8th and the 13th century.

Since the spread of Islam towards the middle of the 7th century until present century, Arab music has been shaped by **five principal processes**, some intellectual and cultural, others political:

1- Contact with Assimilated Cultures

During the early centuries of Islam, with the growth of the cultural centers in Syria (under Umayyads 661-750) and in Iraq (under the Abbasids 750-909), the ethnic blending that occurred brought music of Arabia into close contact with the musical traditions of Syria, Mesopotamia, Byzantium, and Persia which resulted in the cultivation of the new Arab music that:

- Kept the singing of poetical lyrics in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an.
- Got new performance techniques, new aspects of intonation, and new musical instruments.

Court affluence and acquaintance with the worldly splendor of conquered empires stimulated humanistic interests and artistic and intellectual tolerance on the part of the Arab rulers. In a short time court patronage of poets and musicians became common practice, in contrast to the antipathy of some early Muslims towards Music and Musicians.

The Abbasid Caliphs al-Mahdi (reigned 775-85) and al-Amin (reigned 809-13) were known for their fondness with music and musicians. As a result of that was the emerging of court artists that were often well educated and from distinguished backgrounds unlike the Quaynat or slave female singers who were prevalent during the early decades.

Example: Ishaq al-Mawsili (767-850) famous singer-composer and court musician
(he used to train the slave singing girls)

2- Contact with the Classical Past

During the 9th century, the scholars of the Islamic world were introduced to the treatises of the ancient Greek many of which had probably been influenced previously by the legacies of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun(reigned 813-33) established *Bayt al-Hikmah* (the house of wisdom), a scholarly institution that was responsible of translating into Arabic a vast number of Greek classics including musical treatises by major Pythagorean scholars and works by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus.

The outcome of the exposure to the classical past:

- The Arabic language was enriched and expanded by a wealth of treatises and commentaries on music written by prominent philosophers, scientists, and physicians.
- Music or *al-musiqā*, a term that came from Greek, emerged as one of *al-ulum al-riyadiyyah* or “Mathematical sciences”.
- Musical nomenclature (from Greek) were translated to Arabic and retained in theoretical usage until the present day.

Theoretical treatises were written in Arabic between the 9th and the 13th century and inspired generations of scholars.

Among the major theorists:

- *Al-kindī*: Proposed adding fifth string to the ‘Ud which was commonly used by theorists to illustrate intonation and pitch ratio.
- *Abu Nasr al-Farabī*: Philosopher, eminent theorist, and practicing Musician. He treated performance practice from a musicological viewpoint in his famous book “*Kitāb al-Musiqā al-Kabīr*”
(The grand book of Music)

- ***Abu al-faraj al- asbahani***: Outstanding narrator of musical events. He depicted so well in anecdotal form the music and social life of the period in his monumental ethnographical document “ ***Kitab al-aghani*** ” (The grand book of songs).

3- Contact with the Medieval West

The third major process affecting Arab Music was the contact between the Islamic Near East and Europe at the time of the crusades (11th, 12th, and 13th centuries) and during the Islamic occupation of Spain (713-1492).

This contact had a widespread impact on both Islamic and European traditions:

a- Influence on medieval Europe

The westward movement of scientific scholarship into Muslim universities of Spain is known to have influenced the Christian west and to have promoted the translation of Arabic works.

Although it is difficult to assess precisely the nature and extent of the Near Eastern musical impact upon medieval Europe, scholars such as **Henry George Farmer** (British musicologist specializing in Arabic Music and writer of the history of Arabian music) have argued that big influence existed in areas ranging from rhythm and song forms to music theory, nomenclature and musical instruments.

Influence in the case of instruments is indicated by name derivations:

Lute from *al-‘Ud*

Nakers or Kettledrums from *Naqqarat*

Rebec from **Rabab**

Anafil or natural trumpet from *Al-nafir*

b- The influence of Moorish Spain to Arab music:

The contributions of Moorish Spain to Arab Music were profound and far-reaching. The easterners' adaptation to a new Physical environment and the introduction of Eastern science and literature into settings of wealth and splendor, as represented in the courts of Seville, Granada, and Cordoba, were inspirational to the new artistic life of al-Andalus.

Zaryab: freed slave who moved from Baghdad to Cordoba and became highly respected singer, 'Ud player, and music teacher.

Zaryab is credited with compiling a repertoire of 24 *Nawbat* (singular *Nawba*) each of which was a composite of vocal and instrumental pieces in a certain melodic mode (associated with different hours of the day).

Nawba tradition was largely transported to North Africa by Muslims who were expelled in the late 15th century.

Nawba: A two-part musical suite in a single mode or maqam. 13 *Nawbat* make up the core of Tunisian Maluf.

Moorish Spain also witnessed the development of a literary-musical form that utilized romantic subject matter and featured strophic texts with refrains, in contrast to the classical *qasidah*, which followed a continuous flow of lines using a single poetical meter and a single rhyme ending. The ***Muwashshah*** form also emerged as a musical form and survived as such in North African cities and the Levant. In this area the ***Muwashshah*** became particularly popular in Aleppo, Syria.

4- Ottoman Turks

Arab music was influenced by the hegemony of the Ottoman Turks over Syria, Iraq, the coasts of Arabia, and much of North Africa (1517-1917 four centuries).

Arab music interacted with Turkish music. This interaction was most obvious in larger cities, particularly Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo.

- The **Sama'i** and the **Bashraf**, both instrumental genres used in Turkish court and religious Sufi music, were introduced to the Arab world before the late 19th century
- Instrumental and possibly vocal and dance forms were transmitted partly through the Mevlevi, a mystical order established in Konya, Turkey, in the 13th century.
- Arab and Turkish musical systems overlapped with respect to theory and nomenclature. Melodic and Metric modes in Turkey and in the Arab world, particularly Syria, have exhibited and still exhibit strong similarities.

5- Contact with the Modern West

The most recent process is the contact between Arab music and the modern West following the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt (1798-1801) and the subsequent cultural and political interaction during the 19th centuries.

- The first manifestation of westernization in the Arab music was with **Muhammad Ali**'s importation of the European military-band concept into Egypt in the early 19th century and establishing military schools in which western instruments and musical notation were employed.

- **Khedive Ismail** (reigned 1863-1876) built the Cairo Opera house that became a symbol of westernization in the Near Eastern Muslim world.

Ismail, who sought to Europeanize Egypt, patronized and promoted the fame and social status of Egyptian Artists such as the female singer *Almaz* (1860-1896) and the male singer *Abduh al-Hamuli* (1843-1901)

- The 20th century experienced an increase in the role of Western theory, notation, instruments and overall musical attitudes. It also marked the continuation and growth of a medium that had begun in the 19th century and flourished in Egypt: **The musical theatre**.

Dramas mainly by European authors were Arabized and presented as combinations of acting, singing, and sometimes dancing).

Among the theatrical artists was the Syrian-born *Abu Khalil al-Qabbani* (1841-1902) and the Egyptian **Shaykh Salamah Hijazi** (1852-1917), a sufi trained singer and stage actor whose theatrical songs were heard on early recordings throughout the entire Arab World.

- Between World War 1(1914-1918) and the late 1920s, a new theatrical form appeared in Cairo. It was a type of **musical play** that combined comedy and Vaudeville (compared to the European Operetta) and **Sayyed Darwish** (died 1923) was among the prime contributors to this form. He is now considered the father of modern Egyptian music. By the early 1930s, the impact of westernization on Egyptian music was considerable, as testified to in the reports issued by the congress of Arab Music held in Cairo in 1932.

With the emergence of independent Arab States following European domination, many Arab governments accepted

Western music as a fine art and a component in formal music education.

In many Arab capitals today, traditional Arab music and Western music are taught in government institutions and conservatories.