

1 Introduction

At the end of the eighteenth century, Guillaume André Villoteau observed that Arab music evoked powerful emotions. Leading a musicological research team as part of Napoleon's scientific mission to Egypt (1798–1799), he described a typical performance that he and his team had attended. As he noted, when the religious singers prolonged certain syllables, rendered their melodic creations with lavish embellishments, and repeated some passages several times at the request of the ecstatic listeners, they provoked bursts of enthusiastic exclamations and highly impassioned gestures. Admitting his lack of appreciation for the music, and even his team's annoyance at what to them seemed a bizarre display of passion and unreasonably extravagant praise for the performers, Villoteau declared that the phenomenon he had witnessed was integral to the musical disposition of the Egyptians. He stated that such responses were difficult for outsiders to comprehend or appreciate, adding that "it is pointless to pass an absolute judgment against the taste of a whole nation" (1826: 209).¹

Later, an Easterner had an opportunity to experience European music closely and to record his own impressions. Visiting the island of Malta in 1834, then London in 1854 and France in 1855, the celebrated Arab writer Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq attempted to explain how music of the West compared with its Eastern counterpart.² Discussing the variety of ways in which the two musics differed, for example in the use of notation and harmony in the former as compared to the emphasis on modal variety and rhythmic flexibility in the latter, he took special notice of how each of the two musics affected the listener. As he explained, whereas Europe's music was ideally suited for representing images and concepts, music of the Arab Near-East specialized in the evocation of intense emotions. Accordingly, the latter, which was "concerned entirely with tenderness and love"

¹ After his visit to Egypt, Guillaume André Villoteau (1759–1839) published a number of works on Egyptian music. Among them were two volumes of the collection *Description de l'Égypte*, which contained the various reports of the Napoleonic Expedition.

² al-Shidyāq played the *tunbūr*, a long-necked string instrument for his own leisure. He also made frequent references to the music and dance practices of the time, particularly in Egypt (see al-Maṭwī 1989: 768–777 and al-Shidyāq 1966: 96–99).

relationship between music and trance cross culturally, spoke in superlative terms of the Arab predisposition toward trance experiences. He stressed that of all world peoples, Arabs make the strongest association between music and trance and that such association applied to both sacred and secular practices.⁵

In the Arab world, the comparative image painted by al-Shidyāq was echoed by later theorists, critics, and listening connoisseurs. Indeed, "East-versus-West" characterizations became quite prevalent. Since the late nineteenth century the Easterners' attempts to define themselves musically have been accompanied by a strong desire to emulate Europe as a "superior," or "culturally advanced" model of civilization, but at times also by an urge to defend the indigenous music and to recognize it on its own aesthetic terms. At the Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo in 1932, an event that brought together renowned composers, theorists, educators and musicologists from Europe and the Near East, one Egyptian participant, Muḥammad Faṭḥī, pleaded that the mostly-European Congress Committee on Musical Instruments fully condone the introduction of European instruments into Arab music, because such instruments possessed tremendously varied expressive means and depictive powers. He added that the "Oriental" instruments were suited for nothing except the expressing of love and infatuation.⁶ By comparison, the mid-twentieth century theorist and violinist Tawfiq al-Ṣabbāgh of Syria chided those who, as he put it, give up Near-Eastern music in favor of Western music, considering them not only culturally biased but also ignorant of the emotional essence of their own musical heritage. Al-Ṣabbāgh argued that unlike European music, which he contended placed the highest premium on technical perfection, Near Eastern, or "Oriental," music was first and foremost an emotive expression.⁷

Despite the differences in the sentiments expressed, the above statements are similar in that they both allude to an essential affective component within Arab music. In various degrees, such declarations are polemical and political, as well as Western inspired and referenced. Even the concept of "Orient," as Edward Said writes, was a European invention embracing what Westerners deemed to be "exotic," or dramatically opposed to their own culture.⁸ Nonetheless, intercultural encounters often prompt informative self-analyses. Like those of Villoteau and of al-Shidyāq, who wrote through "an ear attuned to Arab melodies and an eye dazzled by European technical achievements" (Cachia 1973: 42), the above constructs are revealing

⁵ Rouget 1985: 255.

⁶ *Kitāb Mu'tamar al-Mūsīqā al-'Arabiyyah* 1933: 427. See also Racy 1991a. For more information on the nationalist and intellectual climate of this period refer to Hourani 1991: 333–349.

⁷ al-Ṣabbāgh 1950: 15.

⁸ Said 1978: 1–2.

(Cachia 1973: 45), generated an emotional state that was deeply felt by the Arab listeners.

As these two accounts show, first impressions can be quite telling. Through a mixture of spontaneity and scholarly acumen, Villoteau and al-Shidyāq shed some interesting light on each other's musical cultures. Keeping in mind that first reactions can be highly impressionistic and stereotypical, the two at least implicitly agree in their characterizations of European art music (as being "depictive," "cerebral," "emotionally reserved," and marked by discreet modes of listening) and of Arab music (as an art that emphasizes emotional extroversion, the evocation of powerful sensations, and direct interaction between performers and listeners). Such characterizations are significant in part because they are reflexive, in other words indicative of the musical attitudes of those who made them. Villoteau's sense of shock, as well as notable air of scholarly objectivity, clearly informs us on this European's musical upbringing and his intellectual background, which was rooted in the climate of the enlightenment that engulfed late eighteenth century Europe. Similarly, al-Shidyāq's encounter with European music, which left a deep impression upon him, highlighted his consciousness of his own music and illustrated the special aesthetic lens through which he interpreted the Western musical experience.

Moreover, the two impressions are noteworthy because they are consistent with those made by contemporaneous and succeeding Western and Arab musicians, critics, theorists, and musicologists. Since Villoteau, the apparently overwhelming emotional effect of Arab music and the highly ecstatic behavior marking Arab musical events continued to intrigue and fascinate Europeans. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the eminent British Orientalist Edward Lane observed the distinct state of rapture that Egyptians experienced during musical performances and commented on the listeners' frequent impassioned exclamations, which they addressed to the vocalists and instrumentalists.³ Similarly, during the second half of the nineteenth century, George Moritz Ebers reported that a German lady who attended a performance by the Egyptian female celebrity Almadḥ was amazed at the singer's tremendous emotional impact upon her female audience. As "she sang a few verses at a time" (1879: 316), the listeners responded with highly animated expressions of approval. Also around that time, Francesco Salvador-Daniel, musicologist and Director of the Paris Conservatory, explained that in order for him to learn Arab music as a theoretical system and to appreciate it aesthetically he had to learn to feel its distinctive and powerful emotional effect.⁴ Later, the modern French ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget, in a seminal work that investigates the

³ Lane 1860/1973: 354.

⁴ Salvador-Daniel 1915/1976: 44.

because they are both projective and self-reflective. Certainly, it can be argued that Western music, or for that matter all music, is in one way or another emotive and affective. However, specifically in the case of the Arab world, one is struck by the centrality of emotional evocation both as a musical aesthetic and a topic of concern.

Throughout history, Near Easterners in general have associated music with extraordinary powers. In antiquity, Babylonians and Egyptians linked musical sound to the cosmological fabric of the universe and in certain Semitic cultures musical modes were connected to various celestial and terrestrial entities. In ancient Biblical traditions, we encounter ample testimony to the efficacies of music and musical instruments. Also, in pre-Islamic Arabia, music embraced magical associations and similarly, musical sound conjured powerful spirits and was thought to exert tremendous influence upon humans and other living beings. Throughout Islamic history, religious chanting, which is not considered "music" as such, has evoked profound spiritual feelings within members of the religious community. Similarly, secular music has been recognized for its unmistakable transformative powers and at times feared and condemned for its sensuous connotations and its potential for generating emotional excesses and disagreeable behaviors. In medieval Islamic courts, singers and instrumentalists are known to have cast an overwhelming emotional effect upon their audiences. Medieval Arabic treatises on the science of music sometimes spoke of an organic connection between music and other aspects of the broader cosmos. Like their ancient Greek counterparts, the medieval authors often discussed the phenomenon of *ethos*, or in Arabic, *ta'ṭhīr*, namely music's moral, cosmic, and therapeutic influence. Music appealed directly to the spiritually connotative sense of hearing and had fundamental affinities with the human soul, which in turn was endowed with supreme otherworldly properties and distinct susceptibility to musical sound. Similarly, in Islamic Sufi traditions, music assumed a special position as a medium of spiritual transcendence. For almost a thousand years, numerous mystical practices have incorporated music and dance as catalysts for experiencing *wajd*, or religious ecstasy.⁹

Today, the direct association between music and emotional transformation pervades the performers' and listeners' world. Modern Arab musicians and musical connoisseurs stress that above all, Arab music must engage the listener emotionally. Frequently heard are statements such as *al-fann ihsās*, which means "art [namely music], is feeling." After a performance that took place in Los Angeles, I heard a young Arab man explain to his Western companion: "This music is different; it really forces one to become immensely involved both emotionally and physically." In a small gathering,

⁹ For further historical information, see Henry George Farmer 1929/1973 and 1943.

after hearing an improvisation I performed on the *nāy* (reed-flute), one middle-aged Arab woman said: "The music makes me cry, the sound of the instrument is overpowering." In the same gathering, an Arab university professor described his profound emotional reactions somewhat philosophically: "There is something powerful, almost sinful about this instrument." Similarly, members of the musical public utilize various emotion-based criteria for judging the performances of the traditional vocalists and instrumentalists. Listeners often describe their own musical sensations through such metaphors as becoming intoxicated and losing the sense of time. Comparably, musicians speak about a haunting state of inspiration they sometimes experience before and while performing.

The emotive orientation of Arab music is also "played out" during the traditional performance events. Unlike the formal Western classical concert, the Arab performance tends to be highly interactive and emotionally charged.¹⁰ The listeners' reactions to the music are quite demonstrable and often appear involuntary and virtually uninhibited. Furthermore, the music elicits a distinct variety of vocal exclamations, typically voiced by the listening connoisseurs, gestures that remind us of the performances that were held at the opulent courts of Baghdad during the 'Abbāsīd era.¹¹

Certainly, modern technology and Western cultural and artistic values have made deep inroads into Arab life. During the early twentieth century, Arab music witnessed the growing influence of European music theory, the use of Western notation, and the assimilation of various Western instruments, compositional techniques, and methods of musical instruction. By World War II, many indigenous musical genres and performance mannerisms had gradually disappeared or had been drastically transformed. In some cases, comments such as "music is feeling" are intended to bemoan, and indirectly attest to the erosion of the traditional musical aesthetic. Today, some may argue that the emotive emphasis of Arab music is something of the past, or that such emphasis becomes more obvious the further we go back in time. However, despite the recent climate of change, the affective dimension continues to dominate certain performance repertoires and to have a strong influence upon music related outlooks and behaviors.

In Arab culture, the merger between music and emotional transformation is epitomized by the Arabic concept of *ṭarab*, which may not have an exact equivalent in Western languages. Widely encountered in medieval writings on music and musicians, it is still current today and denotes a number of closely related phenomena. First, the word is used generically as a reference to the indigenous, essentially secular music of Near-Eastern Arab cities. In

¹⁰ For this reason I have found it preferable not to use the word "concert" in reference to traditional Arab performances.

¹¹ See Sawa 1981: 73–86, and 1989: 159–164.

other words, it denotes the theoretically based, modally structured, and professionally oriented tradition of music making, a domain that Western scholars sometimes refer to as "art music." The term *ṭarab* is similar in meaning to the word *fann*, which literally means "art," or "craft," and has been used in reference to the local urban music.¹² Quite prevalent is the expression *fann al-ṭarab*, which means "the art of *ṭarab*" and similarly denotes the music as an artistic domain. In a more specific sense however, the word "*ṭarab*" refers to an older repertoire, which is rooted in the pre-World-War I musical practice of Egypt and the East-Mediterranean Arab world and is directly associated with emotional evocation.

The term "*ṭarab*" also describes the musical affect *per se*, or more specifically, the extraordinary emotional state evoked by the music. In this sense, the term has been frequently used in medieval and modern writings on music and musicians. Similarly, the word *muṭrib* (female, *muṭribah*) is a standard designation for the *ṭarab* singer, or the provider of *ṭarab* ecstasy. Comparably *ālāt al-ṭarab*, which means "tools of *ṭarab* music" or "instruments of *ṭarab* evocation," refers to musical instruments, especially those associated with *ṭarab* music.

In familiar terms, *ṭarab* can be described as a musically induced state of ecstasy, or as "enchantment" (Danielson 1997: 11–12), "aesthetic emotion" (Lagrange 1996: 17) and "the feeling roused by music" (Shiloah 1995: 16). In this book the familiar term "ecstasy" is used because it appears relatively flexible and capable of being redefined to fit the musical phenomenon being studied. In fact, the word "ecstasy" has been included in some English–Arabic dictionaries as one of the equivalents of *ṭarab*.¹³ Furthermore, the basic nuances and connotations of the word "*ṭarab*" as commonly used today are consistent with the concept of "ecstasy" as explained in standard English sources. Accordingly, ecstasy, like *ṭarab*, implies experiences of emotional excitement, pain or other similarly intense emotions, exaltation, a sense of yearning or absorption, feeling of timelessness, elation or rapturous delight.¹⁴ Moreover, the term "ecstasy" tends to fit the various conditions associated with *ṭarab* as a transformative state, for example those connected with intoxication, empowerment, inspiration, and creativity.¹⁵ The term has also been commonly used by modern ethnomusicologists to indicate states of consciousness that are musically based, and in some cases also mystically oriented.¹⁶

¹² For more information on *ṭarab* as an urban mainstream and on other stylistic domains in Cairo largely prior to the mid 1980s see Racy 1981.

¹³ See for example Doniach ed. 1982: 115.

¹⁴ See James 1902/1929: 370–375; Sharma 1978: 11; Furguson 1976: 51; and Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* 1966: 720–721.

¹⁵ See for example the section on "Ecstasy and Rapture" in Underhill 1955/1974: 358–379 and the discussions in Waugh 1989: 132 and Ghose 1982: 788.

¹⁶ See for example Becker 1983: 75 and During 1988.

This book explores *ṭarab* as a multifaceted domain within which the music and its ecstatic influence are conceptually and experientially interlinked. The setting is the East-Mediterranean or Near-Eastern Arab world.¹⁷ Although many of the observations and conclusions apply to urban Arab music in general, or to a variety of regional idioms in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and West Asia, the center of attention is the secular practice in such cities as Cairo, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, and to some extent Baghdad.¹⁸ The work primarily addresses the modern period, roughly from the late nineteenth century to the present. Envisaged as a moving target rather than a phenomenon fixed in time, *ṭarab* music of the Near-Eastern Arab world is studied as an art of creating ecstatic sensations. A basic premise is that emotive considerations, although by no means the sole motive for making music, have shaped the form and content of the indigenous music. Given its thematic focus, my research aims at developing a qualitative understanding of traditional Arab music, and therefore would complement other more general works on music of the Arab world or the Near East at large.

My overall presentation embraces a distinct experiential component. A Lebanese-born performer of Arab music and a trained ethnomusicologist, I tend to view this book as a self-reflexive statement. To a large extent, the underlying insights have developed since my early formative years, through such processes as learning to play the *buzuq* (long-necked fretted lute), the *ūd* (short-necked lute), and the *nāy*, and learning to *feel* the music and to correlate musical feeling with certain behaviors and verbal responses. At the same time, this book speaks about a broader cultural milieu, as it draws together the opinions and individual experiences of a vast number of *ṭarab* makers and audience members from such diverse places as Beirut, Cairo, New York, and Los Angeles. In my narratives, I attempt to create a balance between speaking from the inside and communicating from the outside. In other words, I seek "a productive distancing" (Rice 1994: 6) from my own object of study without abandoning my intuitions as an insider. Furthermore, I present the various interpretations in the form of a theoretically unified "polyphony" with a few conspicuous "leading voices," namely those of key artists and experts on the topic.

In the process of eliciting information on *ṭarab* as a musical experience,

¹⁷ The concept of "Near-East," or for that matter "Orient" is obviously Eurocentric, or Western conceived. Essentially, I use such familiar and rather convenient concepts as "Eastern," or "Near-Eastern" Arab world to differentiate this area from other Arab areas, particularly in North Africa.

¹⁸ The indigenous Iraqi tradition centers around a distinct repertoire and theoretical legacy known as *maqām ʿIrāqī*. This tradition and some of the instruments associated with it, for example the *saṇṭūr* (hammer-dulcimer) and *jawzah* (spike-fiddle), have counterparts in the musics of Iran and Central Asia. However, the urban music of Iraq shares many significant practices and outlooks with the East-Mediterranean, Arab musical mainstream.

I came to realize that the duality of my position as an investigator and as a member of the community being investigated, as a music researcher and as a practicing musician, can create certain methodological complications. Our rootedness in the musical cultures we study usually gives us valuable access to the data and grants us a special air of credibility. At times, however, playing the double role of performer and investigator, or alternating between the participatory and the observational postures, tends to place the scholar-insider in an unnatural position vis-à-vis other insiders. Furthermore, the researcher's duality of roles tends to impose a comparable duality upon the "others," both as fellow musicians or fellow listeners and as subjects of questioning. Our "academically" conceived, formulated, and presented modes of inquiry can produce certain distancing and repositioning. Also, because as native performers we are expected to understand or intuit the music, our inquiries may strike those whom we are presumably studying as being contrived, and the issues we raise as being nonissues.

My research is further challenged by the nature of the subject matter. In Arab culture, the phenomenon of musical ecstasy is essentially experiential and seldom isolated and discussed in direct or clearly articulated terms. In many cases, neither I nor the individuals I interviewed seemed to possess a standard vocabulary for communicating about musical sensations as such. What *ṭarab* listeners feel can be compared to the mystical state, which American philosopher, psychologist, and writer on religion William James (1842–1910) described as being inherently ineffable.¹⁹ Although *ṭarab* as an artistic commodity has been socially consumed, informally discussed, and widely written about in books and popular magazines, *ṭarab* as musical emotion tends to operate within the realm of practice, through a somewhat autonomous path of creation and recreation comparable to what Pierre Bourdieu describes as "an acquired system of generative schemes" (1990: 55). For that reason, *ṭarab* related sensations are most often expressed through metaphors, similes, and familiar analogies, as well as implied in performance related conversations, musical analyses, and observable physical and emotional responses to the music.

Furthermore, I came to realize that musical emotions are not only transient and conceptually elusive, but also private and context-bound. As an ecstatic experience, *ṭarab* tends to occur in relatively distinct social venues, in specialized contexts that are separate from the flow of ordinary daily life. With physical and emotional manifestations that can be quite noticeable, *ṭarab* ecstasy is usually approached with an air of discretion. When it becomes excessive or when publicly displayed, the musical emotion can provoke social ridicule, if not moral and religious criticism. Thus, direct questioning about personal ecstatic experiences may seem out of context.

¹⁹ James 1902/1929: 371

after the fact, and hypothetically conceived. More importantly, it may strike a note of impropriety or appear to intrude into the individual's private psychological "space." Particularly when related to socially suspect activities, for instance the use of drugs, such questioning may make those questioned too self-conscious and uncomfortable, if not distrustful of the questioner and his or her motives. Similarly, awareness of being observed and analyzed, or at times photographed, during a *ṭarab* event may adversely interfere with the natural or spontaneous modalities of performing and reacting to music.

With these various considerations in mind, my data was by and large assembled informally and through extended exposure. Although in certain cases focused probes were conducted, my role as a researcher looking for causalities, correlations, and concrete proofs often yielded to a dialectical mode of intercommunication with others who "felt" the music. I often found myself collaborating with fellow musicians and listeners in an effort to find the most feasible frameworks for explaining music as affect, as well as discovering together how enigmatic the entire phenomenon of musical ecstasy can be. On many levels, my informants, or as I prefer to call them "communicators," were musical analysts in their own right. On various occasions I was able to share with them my own knowledge and perspectives, particularly as someone who is academically trained and who had done extensive research on the music of early twentieth century Cairo. I remember one such occasion in New York City in the early 1980s, when I played the *nāy* in a small ensemble that included the late *qānūn* player Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād of Egypt, then in his seventies. During intermission, as the musicians conversed about earlier Egyptian artists, al-ʿAqqād was so moved by my knowledge about his grandfather, who incidentally was one of the highly celebrated *qānūn* players of Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that he pointed at me and said to the rest of the group: "This man is a hundred years old!" In turn, al-ʿAqqād became one of my major sources of information.²⁰

Such communications provided valuable insights into the performance practice, but also revealed the extent to which music and its ecstatic sensations appear to influence the musicians' self-image, professional attitudes, opinions about creativity, and performance strategies. As a whole, the field research provided a panoramic vision of *ṭarab*, as a complex that embraces an aesthetic-experiential core, but also intertwines with a thick network of

²⁰ In this book I refer to both this artist and his grandfather, who carried the same name, but later was given the title "al-Kabīr," namely "Senior" to differentiate him from his grandson. Unless obvious in the text, I usually distinguish between them by adding the designations Jr. and Sr. to their names. Born sometime before 1915 the younger al-ʿAqqād died around 1992. During the last several decades of his life he lived and worked in the United States, primarily New York City.

cultural values, economic relationships, and social hierarchies. The preparatory work also furnished a framework for interpreting related sources of information, not only local musical biographies, critiques, and textbooks, but also theoretical writings and cross-cultural studies on music as an emotive experience.

The task of establishing meaningful and mutually informative links between the *ṭarab* phenomenon and a relevant body of knowledge that seems overwhelmingly extensive and diversified calls for a pertinent methodology that is both practical and broadly conceived. In this work, the *ṭarab* complex is treated as a research design. Accordingly, I envision and subsequently pursue four complementary lines of inquiry, namely: 1) a contextual base of some sort, be it a broader physical or geographical setting, or a certain expressive orientation similar to what Villoteau had described as "the taste of a whole nation," or a specific milieu directly linked to music making; 2) a performative dimension, in other words the process of making music and by extension the physical and temporal "space" within which the music is usually presented; 3) a musical substance, which includes sung poetry and is directed toward the evocation of musical ecstasy; and 4) the ecstatic sensation itself. Thus, the *ṭarab* design resembles a prism through which light is refracted into separately identifiable colors. The overall conglomerate can also be compared to a group of concentric circles that narrow down gradually, first the broader setting, then the performative process, then ultimately the experiential core. In turn, this core may be subdivided into the music followed by its ecstatic effect, if we envision ecstasy as the end result of music making, or into the ecstatic effect followed by the music, if we recognize music as the quintessential ingredient of the *ṭarab* experience. Although I address other related domains, such as musical composition and text writing, this four-part design provides both an analytical base for investigating the *ṭarab* phenomenon and a vantage point for interpreting related theories and world models.

In the following chapters, the *contextual base* is studied largely in terms of what Kwabena Nketia (1981) has described as "musical culture," as compared to culture in general.²¹ In other words, I paint an overall picture of *ṭarab* as a milieu, or musically specialized subculture. Essentially, such realms as professional jargon, musical training, and music related codes of

²¹ Others have defined "context" in various ways. For example, such transformative experiences as spirit possession and shamanism, and by extension the ecstatic subcultures that embrace them, have been explained in terms of natural habitat (Goodman 1988); evolutionary-neurophysiological factors (Laughlin et al. 1979: 1-116 and Lex 1979); social and religious institutions and tensions between the sexes (Lewis 1971/1989); and value systems in different world communities (Bourguignon 1976). Meanwhile, Lomax (1968), who viewed singing as a prime emotive expression, has correlated specific singing styles with individual techno-environmental culture types throughout the world.

behavior are examined in order to demonstrate how in its totality, the *ṭarab* culture feeds into, as well as socializes and streamlines the ecstatic musical experience.

From a wider perspective, I examine the relationship between this cultural domain and Arab culture in general. Specifically addressed is the extent to which the former can be considered an extension to, or a reflection of its surrounding societal landscape, or conversely, how it may differ from other Arab or Near-Eastern cultural domains. In theoretical terms, do such transformative states as ecstasy, or trance, which are emotionally distinct, as well as culturally relevant, or which embrace "feeling," as well as "meaning" (Geertz 1973: 134–135), grant the cultural practices that uphold them a sense of individuality and power, although at times also render them socially or morally threatening?²² Are such practices empowered to modify or reverse conventional relationships and hierarchies? Also historically, has the culture of *ṭarab* provided an emotional alternative to other more formal, verbal or intellectual facets of Arab life, as the late French sociologist Jacques Berque has suggested?²³

With respect to *performance*, I investigate the primary settings and processes of music making; when and where performing takes place and what characterizes the typical *ṭarab* musical event. More specifically, the discussions address the performance structure; the usual human and physical ambiance; the role of extra-musical sensory modes of stimulation, including the consumption of food and alcohol; the listeners' characteristic behaviors; and the dynamics of interaction between the performers and the audience. Similarly, explored are such significant departures as playing for one's own ecstatic gratification, without the physical presence of an audience; the role of sound recording in creating new modalities of listening to *ṭarab* music; and the channeling of *ṭarab* feeling through the technological media. Of special interest throughout the various inquiries are the ways in which the performance event both propagates and shapes the ecstatic message.

More broadly, the *ṭarab* performance is viewed vis-à-vis its cultural backdrop. Indeed, the concept of performance is complex and multidimensional; probing it closely, like using a camera zoom can reveal numerous thematic subcategories each with its theoretical nuances and implications. In a sense, the musical event is an interface between sound and society, a set of recognizable behaviors that link music to various broadening social and expressive spheres. With this in mind, I study the *ṭarab* performance both in context and as context. Basically, I use ritual, or secular ritual, as a

²² The distinct efficacy of ecstatic or artistic systems of expression has been recognized by ethnomusicologists. See Herndon and McLeod 1979: 120–124, Blacking 1980: 64–87, and Becker 1983: 65–76.

²³ Berque 1964: 211–236.

referential model, particularly since ritual and performance, as concepts and processes are closely interlinked.²⁴ Thus, I ask if the *ṭarab* event reflects broader societal patterns and worldviews as well as stands out as being distinct or special.²⁵ In the latter sense, does it, for example, utilize specific symbols or emulate the separation-transition-incorporation progression generally associated with rites of passage?²⁶ Does it embody "efficacy," which has been associated with ritual, as compared to "entertainment," which has been attributed to theater (Schechner 1976: 196–222)? I also consider the elements of flexibility, spontaneity, and improvisation, which are widely encountered in world rituals.²⁷ Ultimately, my probe takes into account the aesthetic content of the *ṭarab* event, more specifically the ways in which the underlying ecstatic dimension of the performance contributes to both its cultural connectedness and its individuality as a social process.

The realm of *ecstasy* is investigated along a number of related paths. First, I look into the basic characteristics of the *ṭarab* experience, for example the physical, emotional, and musical conditions that lead to its fruition; who feels it; how it is expressed or exteriorized by the various listeners; and the role played by audience–performer interactions throughout the ecstatic process. The discussions are referenced by commonly held notions about ecstasy, for example that: it is found pleasurable or desirable by those who seek it; it has physiological as well as psychological components; it can lead to heightened mental or creative abilities; it is often difficult to isolate or distinguish from other "ordinary" states; and its manifestations, meanings, and functions may differ cross-culturally.²⁸

Also, given the focal position of ecstasy in both secular and sacred traditions, the state of *ṭarab* is viewed in relation to its counterparts in the world of religious mysticism. Mystical states are known to vary considerably in their durations and, as William James (1902/1929) has explained, are transient, noetic (in other words leading to some form of higher knowledge), and passive, as well as ineffable. They may be metaphorically or directly linked to intoxication, or mind-altering substances, and may render those who experience them particularly susceptible to various creeds or agendas, a phenomenon that Arnold Ludwig has referred to as "hypersuggestibility"

²⁴ Interpretations of ritual in terms of performance are outlined in Bell 1997: 72–76, whereas studies of performance from the perspective of ritual are discussed in Carlson 1996: 13, 20–21.

²⁵ For information about the relationship between ritual and culture see Moore and Meyerhoff eds. 1977, and Herndon and McLeod 1979: 27.

²⁶ See Van Gennep 1960: 11–13 and Turner 1969: 94–203.

²⁷ The informality of certain rituals is discussed in Rosaldo 1984: 184–193 and furthermore, the flexible nature of verbal performance is addressed in Bauman 1986: 4.

²⁸ Such traits of ecstasy are discussed, sometimes under the concept of trance, in Tart 1969: 2, Rouget 1985: 326, Herndon and McLeod 1979: 120, and others.

(1969: 19–20). Mystical states are also associated with artistic creativity and genius, sometimes in the form of divine inspiration.²⁹

Furthermore, I explore the emotional basis of *ṭarab* and by extension, *saḥṭanah*, an ecstatic state that enables the performers to produce highly affective musical renditions. I investigate the listeners' and performers' views on *ṭarab* as feeling and look critically into other emotion-related interpretations. Although fundamentally agreeing with Rouget's direct linkage between the *ṭarab* condition and the musical-aesthetic stimulus, I question his profiling of *ṭarab* as "trance," or for that matter his strict dichotomy between "trance" and "ecstasy" and the models he uses for representing Arab "trances." Thus, I modify or differ with some of Rouget's constructs and provide my own alternative perspectives and analyses. Similarly examined are theories that explain the causes of ecstatic or trance-related transitions, for example, theories of sensory deprivation and sensory overload.³⁰ In the same vein, I revisit the common emotion-based terminology and reassess its applicability to the study of *ṭarab*.

Also addressed are issues of representation, specifically the relationship between ecstasy and its broader contextual base. Notably, *ṭarab* has been attributed to a variety of local agents that presumably make it characteristically Arab. Whereas Rouget has linked the Arabs' exceptional proclivity toward trancing to indigenous sociocultural factors,³¹ William Kay Archer (1964: 20, 23, 28) has spoken of "Arabitude," as a quintessential Arab trait directly linked to the notion of *ta'thīr*, or "musical influence." Comparably, a European by the name Muhammad Asad (1954) has explained the profound ecstatic nature of Arab music in terms of the indigenous peoples' inner psyche, their Islamic spiritual ethos, and their desert, or nomadic-based unitary transcendentalism.³² In this book, I provide my own outlook on such culture-specific interpretations, or profile theories.

The *music* is analyzed qualitatively, in terms of how the various musical

²⁹ These and other attributes of the mystical state have been presented in Sharma 1978: 16, Huxley 1954, Winkelman 1986, and Myerhoff 1975, as well as in James 1902/1929. Furthermore, the relationship between mystical ecstasy and artistic creativity has been expounded in Underhill 1955/1974, Khan 1988, Nasr 1987, and the various excerpts in Godwin ed. 1987.

³⁰ Theories of sensory deprivation and sensory overload have been widely discussed and applied. See for example Tart 1969, Ludwig 1969, Crapanzano 1973, and Besmer 1983, as well as Rouget, who associates trance with overload and ecstasy with deprivation (1985: 3–12). Rouget, however (1985: 315–326) rightfully cautions against assuming direct or predictable causalities between music and possession trance, for example those established by Neher 1962 and Needham 1967/1979. Similar caution is expressed in Blacking 1968 and 1980, Erlmann 1982, and DjeDje 1984.

³¹ Rouget 1985: 298.

³² Asad, whose original name was Leopold Weiss, was born into a Jewish family in Galicia, now in Poland. A convert to Islam, he was a noted scholar and writer who traveled extensively in the Arab world and at one time was a correspondent for *Die Frankfurter Zeitung*, see "The Legacy of Muhammad Asad," n.d.: 18–19.

elements, techniques, and maneuvers operate ecstatically. Accordingly, I investigate such individual realms as texture, ornaments, text-music relationships, cadential patterns, improvisation, modality, microtonal subtleties, and rhythmic applications. Also studied are the ways in which the various musical components operate on the level of composition and in the context of actual music performance. Comparably, I provide an extended treatment of the lyrics. Incorporating numerous textual illustrations, the discussions introduce the essential poetical genres, the typical literary styles, and the basic thematic motifs. Most importantly, the study offers explanations of how the lyrics as sung love poems contribute to the overall ecstatic experience.

Meanwhile, I examine a number of theories that deal with music and emotion. Here, the underlying themes include a) how and why music affects us,³³ b) the connection between music's affect and its abstract, or nonrepresentational tendencies,³⁴ and c) the role of musical syntax in emotional arousal.³⁵ Similarly investigated are the correlations made between specific musical styles or compositional designs and ecstatic evocation.³⁶ In this regard, I do not agree with Rouget's assumption that semantics, or verbal meaning, is an absolute prerequisite for trance-related experiences among the Arabs and argue instead for a more flexible and multidimensional relationship between music and emotional transformation.

Finally, this book reintegrates the various components of the *ṭarab* complex and places them in a broader world setting. I allude to the connections between *ṭarab* and comparable phenomena outside the Arab Near-East, as well as between *ṭarab* music and local musical styles that emerged and became influential during the last few decades. Demonstrating the impact of recent intercultural contacts and patterns of globalization upon Arab music in general, I present an encompassing view of *ṭarab* as a world culture and aesthetic experience.

³³ For explanations of how or why music affects us emotionally, see for example Langer 1953: 125–132, Storr 1992: 64, and Tame 1984.

³⁴ Music's abstract nature and its unique ability to transcend literal representations or depictions of standard emotions was particularly expounded by Susanne Langer (1942/1979: 219) and similarly argued for in Scruton 1974, Newcomb 1984, Budd 1985: 175, Kivy 1989: 258, and Davies 1994. The notion that music defies semantic representation was advanced by ethnomusicologist and music thinker Charles Seeger (1961: 77–80).

³⁵ Discussion on musical syntax and emotional arousal appear in Meyer, 1956.

³⁶ Along these lines Rouget observes that trance-related musics are generally part of the local cultures' prevalent or mainstream musical language, but also display such typical features as abrupt rhythmic changes or breaks, gradual acceleration in tempo, and *crescendo*, namely gradual increase in volume (1985: 94–104 and 81, 91). Meanwhile, "Redundancy through time" has been discussed in Herndon and McLeod 1979: 113–114. As far as compositional processes are concerned, Robert Jourdain speaks of the necessity of achieving a balance between stability and consistency on the one hand, and deviation and variation on the other (1997: 312).

2 Culture

Ṭarab can be viewed as a specialized cultural domain. Sometimes referred to as *‘ālam al-ṭarab*, “the world of ṭarab,” this domain encompasses artists, repertoires, and music related ideologies, attitudes, and behaviors, including ways of listening and reacting to music. The ṭarab culture is also associated with a craft-based jargon pertaining to social, technical, and professional aspects of music making and with certain musical values and outlooks. Public ambivalence toward the ṭarab profession is deeply rooted, but often yields to, or coexists with full recognition of the established ṭarab artist. Although members of the ṭarab community tend to come from relatively low economic and social ranks, successful male or female artists, especially singers, may rank among the wealthy and influential members of Arab society.

As a group, *ahl al-ṭarab*, “the people of ṭarab,” incorporate an indigenous professional milieu of vocalists, instrumentalists, composers, and text writers. This category may also be extended to peripheral specializations, for example makers of ṭarab instruments such as the *‘ūd*, *qānūn*, and *nāy*. Also somewhat tangentially, it includes Arab-music academicians and conservatory staff-members. Although the concept of ṭarab has strong professional overtones, the ṭarab world tends to overlap with the domain of the accomplished ṭarab amateurs, who perform for their own gratification. Indirectly attached to this world are the local music critics, journalists, and biographers and even recording engineers. Meanwhile, the intellectual endeavors of the music theorists essentially remain distinct from the world of the hard-core musical entertainer. Theorists, whose published works usually take the form of editions or commentaries on medieval treatises, or convey abstract and systematized melodic and rhythmic theories, belong to a community basically separate from that of the radio-station composer, nightclub instrumentalist, and the like. Totally extraneous to this domain are Western and Arab performers and composers of European music. Finally, the world of ṭarab embraces the *jumhūr*, or “audience,” particularly the listening connoisseurs. The performers and their public are interconnected economically, socially, and emotionally.

Essentially, ṭarab is an urban phenomenon native to cities such as Cairo,

Beirut, and Damascus. *Ṭarab* artists are either born in these cities or have lived a good portion of their lives in, or were amply exposed to, urban centers where *ṭarab* had been established as a craft. After World War II, with the growth of urbanization, the popularization of *ṭarab* music through the modern mass media, and the emulation of Cairo's musical model in neighboring urban communities, the practice and appeal of East-Mediterranean *ṭarab* music has been widely expanded.

Gender roles

At least outwardly, *ṭarab* projects a strong male orientation. In the medieval courts, many women excelled in singing and playing the *ūd*, some even amassing considerable fame and prestige. However, throughout history the position of female entertainers has been directly challenged by conservative attitudes. Commenting on the status of female professional musicians in Tunisia, L. JaFran Jones wrote:

Perhaps never adequately isolated within a blurred gamut of "pleasures" – divine and profane – music has always been a controversial legal and social issue in orthodox Islam. While its attraction for peoples under the domination of Islam has been irresistible, the compulsion on the part of pious guardians of public probity to condemn it has been equally inevitable. (1987: 69)

In traditional Arab society, women are expected to demonstrate the virtue of *ḥasham*, or "propriety as a voluntary gesture that earns them respect and raises their position in a male dominated society" (Abu-Lughod 1986: 103–117). It is generally believed that for women, pursuing music professionally is incompatible with private family life and with the established norms of social decorum, as the life of the *ṭarab* singer Almaḍḥ (1860–1896) illustrates. When her male singing competitor 'Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī (1841–1901) married her, he felt compelled to prevent her from pursuing the singing profession altogether, although he himself continued to lead an active career as a singer and composer.¹ A comparable attempt to uphold the common standards of decency was made by Umm Kulthūm (ca. 1904–1975) and her family at the very beginning of this singer's performance career. When she saw her picture at the center of an advertisement announcing her performances, she reportedly cried of embarrassment. Her father, Shaykh Ibrāhīm, who permitted her to sing only a religious repertoire consisting mostly of *qaṣā'id* and *tawāshih*, refused to allow her performances to take place until

¹ Al-Khulā' ca. 1904: 144.

the performance manager had removed her picture from the advertisement.² In her earliest public performances, while singing with her father and brother as vocal accompanists, she appeared garbed in traditional male attire, thus projecting a modest demeanor or perhaps toning down her image as a woman artist. For several years she sang while wearing the *'abāyah* (male gown) and the *kūfiyyah* and *'uqāl* (male head-dress).³

However, several factors account for the special appeal of women as *ṭarab* artists. To begin with, female singing is recognized as an effective conveyor of musical ecstasy. In various historical epochs, male audiences have marveled at women who sing, partly because the ecstasy conveyed by their voices was supposedly reinforced by their physical appearance. In a book on *ṭarab* in the Mameluk period, we read that:

the princes used to prefer the female singer over the male singer and so did the upper class and the common people . . . Undoubtedly, the *jawārī* (female slave-singers) had an attribute that made them rise above the male singers, that is if they enjoyed a suitable and beautiful voice, and certainly if they were attractive. It is [physical] beauty, added to the beauty of the voice, that gave them distinction above the male singers and made them preferable. In the case of the former [the females], the listener is undoubtedly captivated by two things, whereas in the case of the latter [the males] he is captivated by one thing, namely the beauty of the voice and nothing else . . . Indeed, Plato was not far off when he said that the singing of beautiful females evokes desire and ecstasy (*ṭarab*). (al-Baqlī 1984: 65–66)

Female singing retained its mystique during and after the nineteenth century. It seems ironic that al-Ḥāmūlī, who barred his wife from entertaining in public, had married her reportedly because he was deeply enamored by her singing. Even those who criticized the female singers on musical bases sometimes admitted that these singers' sexual identity was a factor in their popularity. In the early twentieth century, Kāmil al-Khulaṭī (1880–1938), an Egyptian composer, theorist, and musical thinker, wrote an encompassing treatise in which he attempted to familiarize his generation with the rudiments of Near-Eastern music and to reform the musical culture in light of the modern scientific and cultural accomplishments of the West. In it, al-Khulaṭī remarked with characteristic pessimism that, "as typical everywhere and at all times," the female singers are pathetically ignorant of their art and that in the eyes of many "nothing redeems them except that they are women" (ca. 1904: 91).

Since the early twentieth century, the status and visibility of female singers has improved significantly. Many achieving fame as recording artists

² See Buṭrus 1967: 127.

³ See Fernea and Bezirgan eds. 1976: 145. For further information about the professional dilemmas of female singers and dancers in Egypt, see Nieuwkerk 1995.

and film stars, modern female artists have been working closely with male accompanists, composers, and lyricists. Some teach at public and private academies and occupy powerful positions in various music related pedagogical and government bureaucracies.⁴ Above all, countless women have excelled as *ṭarab* artists. Notwithstanding the historical centrality of the male perspective and the tensions that have surrounded female artistry, the *ṭarab* culture grants women qualitative importance in an area considered quintessential to affective *ṭarab* making, namely singing.

Learning *Ṭarab*

Ṭarab performers tend to share certain learning experiences. The long process of becoming a *ṭarab* artist usually consists of five different phases: 1) the appearance of talent, usually during childhood; 2) musical obsession, accompanied by struggle against family and cultural barriers; 3) family and societal recognition of budding talent, and in some cases reluctant acquiescence to the novice's musical desires; 4) training of some sort; and 5) the undertaking of a performance career. These general phases do not always follow a strict linear order and may overlap or coincide with one another.

Talent

In the *ṭarab* culture, music making is believed to have a quintessential prerequisite, namely talent, or *mawhibah*, literally, "gift" or "endowment." Musical talent may also be referred to as *mayl*, literally, "inclination" or *raghbah* literally, "desire." Showing musical talent constitutes the earliest sign of a person's potential as an artist. Talent is generally considered innate and predetermined. Individuals are simply born with it, and thus they either have it or do not have it.⁵

Belief in the innate nature of talent is expressed in various ways. In his early twentieth century treatise *Kāmil al-Khulaʿī* presented an old anecdote that explains musical talent and, as it turns out, sheds significant light upon the general ideology of *ṭarab*. After referring to ancient philosophical arguments in favor of the auditory sense, al-Khulaʿī told the anecdote as

⁴ See Danielson 1991a.

⁵ This traditional notion of talent may differ from certain modern Western views that project a more liberal or egalitarian attitude toward musical ability. One such view is expressed in John Blacking's ethnomusicological writings (e.g. Blacking 1973).

follows: During a meeting in his royal court, one king claimed that humans learn to listen to music (*samāʿ*) by developing the habit of attending musical assemblies (*majālis al-ṭarab*). A sage in the group disagreed and said that humans appreciate music "due to a certain disposition, they are born with" (ca. 1904: 11). Dissatisfied, the king asked if the sage could substantiate his claim. The sage responded positively and asked that the court bring in one hundred babies ten months and younger from parents of different backgrounds, including ministers, scientists, writers, farmers, slaves, and others. The sage ordered that their nursing mothers stay away from them for half a day so that they become very hungry. Subsequently, he ordered that the babies be returned to their mothers and while they were busy feeding, the sage gave orders to have musical instruments (*ālāt al-ṭarab*) play at once. Consequently, some babies stopped nursing and focused their attention toward the sound as they moved their bodies and laughed. Others abandoned nursing but remained quiet and motionless, whereas some began to alternate between feeding for a short while and looking toward the source of the sound. Others began to move their feet and hands to the music without forsaking feeding, but there also were those who put all their energy into feeding and ignored everything else. As the story went, it was then that the king became convinced that musical disposition was inborn. Ending with the standard phrase "and God creates whatever He wills" (ca. 1904:11), al-Khulafī not only provided an explanation of talent, but also called our attention to important corollaries such as the different levels of musicality among humans and the variety of ways in which listeners respond to music, ways that, as the anecdote implied, are also predetermined. The anecdote also alluded to various visceral and emotional responses to music, which the author referred to categorically as *ṭarab*. As presented in this tale, the indicators of talent are manifestly psycho-physiological.

Talent is often linked to heredity. A musician is thought to acquire his or her talent from a gifted parent or a relative, typically, a maternal uncle. Often used to describe the hereditary nature of talent are folk proverbs such as *ḥarkh al-baṭṭ ʿawwām*, roughly, "a fledgling duck floats like a duck." Also sometimes, talent is seen as a correlate to ethnicity, for example Gypsies are presumably endowed with exceptional musical ability. When music aficionados speak about the virtuosity of the late buzuq players, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm (1905–1989) of Syria or Maṭar Muḥammad (d. 1995) of Lebanon, they usually hasten to point out that these artists are of Gypsy origins and to remark that musical virtuosity, and the buzuq itself, are "native" to Gypsy culture. Furthermore, musicianship may be associated with specific nationalities or geographical areas. For example, numerous musical connoisseurs stress that the Syrian city of Aleppo is *umm al-ṭarab*, literally, "the mother of *ṭarab*." It is also said that Egyptian performers have a natural affinity for *ṭarab*, as well as a good sense of rhythm and ensemble

coordination. "They have these things in their blood," or as one amateur female singer from Lebanon put it, "ṭarab was born in Egypt."

Attitudes toward talent tend to be ambivalent. Talent may be viewed as a natural inclination toward the craft practiced by one's own family and as such may be appreciated as an emblem of familial or ethnic continuity. Similarly, musical talent may be tolerated and even encouraged if the talented person intends to become a mere amateur, namely a *hāwī*, literally, "one who is enamored," or *ghāwī*, "one who is infatuated," or "obsessed." However, if the family is particularly sensitive to the negative stigma of professional music making, then musical talent may be considered threatening and basically undesirable. Yet even then, despite its long-term social and moral implications, genuine musical talent may be recognized as being mystically or metaphysically special. Actually, some musicians attribute talent to a force outside themselves, and similarly see their musicality as an endowment they are responsible for maintaining. As one elderly violinist from Aleppo reverently explained to me, music is an *amānah*, namely a "trust" or "consignment" that someone else (God) has left with us and entrusted us to care for. It is our moral duty to live up to that trust.⁶

Obsession and struggle

Musical talent usually manifests itself as a burning passion. A child destined to become a musician shows predilection toward singing or playing an instrument. Actually, his or her musical urge may verge on the bizarre or mischievous, as illustrated by the musicians' typical reports about their own experiences. In his memoirs, the renowned Egyptian singer and composer Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb (ca. 1901–1991) recounted that as a child he often missed school because he frequently gathered the neighborhood children and sang for them. To justify his truancies, he repeatedly gave the schoolmaster one single excuse, namely that his aunt had died, until his ploy was discovered after the school master investigated the matter with Muḥammad's father. As a result, the boy received a spanking from his father, but that did not dissuade him from following his musical urges, as demonstrated by one specific incident. One time, the famous singer Shaykh Sayyid al-Ṣafī (1875–1939) was invited to sing at a wedding in a *khaymah*, or performance tent, in Cairo. After walking into the tent in order to satisfy his musical curiosity, the young Muḥammad was soon discovered and chased out, "since children were not welcome at such events." However, in order to make his way back he offered to help an old waiter, who carried a food tray

⁶ From a conversation with the artist, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Tannārī, in Los Angeles in 1990.

on his head, by carrying the tray for him. As the waiter accepted what he thought was an admirable gesture, the young Muḥammad was able to go in, but for fear of being expelled again he hid under the *dikkah*, the performance sofa, upon which al-Ṣaffī sat while performing. He remained there all night listening to the performance.⁷

In a large number of cases, obsession is violently suppressed by the child's parents and dampened by social pressures. Consequently, the potential musician, especially the less obsessive (or the less talented), may relinquish music, at least as a serious concern, or perhaps maintain it as a hobby. However, in many cases talent affirms itself, thus leading to a general realization that a) the young person's obsession is too strong and attempts to stifle it are futile, and b) his or her talent is impressive enough to deserve recognition on the part of the parents, the family, and the community.

The following are three illustrative cases. The late qānūn player Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād told me that his father and grandfather, Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Sr.), although both were musicians, at first tried to prevent him from following the path of music.⁸ Their attitude was prompted by conservatism and by a feeling on the grandfather's part that one may pursue a profession only if he were to excel in it, or as the grandfather put it, "a good shoemaker is better than a mediocre musician." Looking toward a "decent" future, the family insisted on sending Muḥammad to a private French school. However, despite going to school, Muḥammad remained musically obsessed. The young boy used to tell his aging grandfather after an evening performance: "Why don't you leave the qānūn with me and I will carry it for you and bring it to your house tomorrow morning?" At his parents' home, however, he used to open the case surreptitiously and "experiment" with the strings; trying simple melodies by Sayyid Darwish (1893–1923), an innovative composer of songs and dramatic works, and by others. It was not long before he was discovered and beaten by his father. According to Muḥammad, the grandfather hated to see others play his qānūn, "as musicians in general were very sensitive about others using or touching their instruments."

Gradually, the young Muḥammad proved himself a serious learner. A man close to the family, Muṣṭafá Bey Riḍā, convinced the grandfather that the boy should join the Cairo Academy of Arab Music and pursue serious study under the qānūn teacher there, who happened to be the grandfather himself. Riḍā, who also played the qānūn and worked as a music instructor and administrator at the Academy, had himself been a student of the older al-ʿAqqād. He told the grandfather, "Look how you helped me and helped your son become respectable musicians. Why can't you allow the grandson to take a path similar to ours?"

⁷ The artist's memoirs appeared in Rifʿat ed. n.d. See pages 18–20.

⁸ From a conversation that took place in Los Angeles in the summer of 1984.

Eventually, the full recognition of Muḥammad as a prospective qānūn player took place through a symbolic, yet very significant gesture. Toward the end of his life the grandfather (d. 1931) gave a well-attended performance at the Academy of Arab Music. At the end of the performance, the old man rose from his seat and placed his qānūn in the lap of the young Muḥammad. The gesture signaled the old musician's decision to retire but also his acceptance of his grandson as a musician and successor.⁹

Another illustration comes from a published interview with a Palestinian composer who worked for many years in Syria and Lebanon. Riyāḍ al-Bandak traced his artistic life back to elementary school in Bethlehem, particularly to the encouragement of his school principal, a violinist and music aficionado from Ramallah. When the principal wanted to form a choir of musically-gifted students, Riyāḍ was one of those chosen, although he was under eleven years of age. As al-Bandak explained, "I was the only one able to memorize any anthem that the principal taught us . . . That is why the principal had appointed me to sing for the students before they entered their classes every morning" (Munawwar 1989: 71).

Al-Bandak added that his love for music was a kind of a craze (*hawas*) and that he was able to learn immediately any song he would hear whether by Umm Kulthūm, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Shaykh Abū al-'Ulā Muḥammad, or others. As he explained, "Arab musical classicism was in my blood since I was very young, but the great obstacle was my father, who at the time was the mayor of Bethlehem" (Ibid.). The father stated emphatically that education came first, and after that Riyāḍ could do whatever he wanted. However, becoming a young man, Riyāḍ chose to follow his own passion. He attempted to find an artistic outlet through the Palestinian Radio Station in Jerusalem, which was directed by Yaḥyā al-Labābīdī, a well-known composer and administrator at the time. After auditioning and gaining admission to the radio station and becoming highly appreciated by the radio staff, he composed and sang a song that was broadcast by the station. Discovering his young son's intentions, the shocked father contacted al-Labābīdī and complained angrily, insisting that his son never be allowed to pursue "the path of artistry" (*ṭariq al-fann*). As al-Bandak vividly remembered, on the following day when he went to the station, the guard prevented him from entering, thus following the father's instructions. Upon returning to Bethlehem, he tried to satisfy his musical passion by performing at various local musical venues.

According to al-Bandak, a "miracle" brought him back to the radio station and eventually made him famous as a composer. In 1938 the British arrested

⁹ This ceremony was also described in the notes on an LP featuring qānūn performances by al-'Aqqād, the grandson. The LP, issued in New York, is titled "El Salam; Mohammad El Akkad, the King of the Kanoon" (El Akkad Records, Stereo RC 412).

his father and exiled him to Greece, thus giving the young artist full freedom to pursue his art. After World War II, when his father was returned to Bethlehem and became head of the local National Committee in 1947, Riyād refused the father's immediate orders to join the newly formed armed-resistance movement, which two of Riyād's brothers had already joined. Instead, the young artist left for Damascus, where his already established name enabled him to work with the radio station there and to compose songs for renowned vocalists such as Mary Jibrān, "the Umm Kulthūm of Syria" at the time (Ibid.).¹⁰

Finally, Souhail Kaspar, an accomplished *ṭablah* (Arab hand-drum) player now living in Los Angeles, grew up in a climate that was musically conducive, although not devoid of family concerns.¹¹ Born in 1950 in a small town in Central Lebanon, Mr. Kaspar came from a very musical family: his mother sang and his father played the *ūd*. At age seven, he showed phenomenal rhythmic talent, clearly demonstrated when he tapped the meters on a table as his parents performed. Souhail's father, deeply taken by his son's talent, bought him a small clay drum to play on, but was also worried that music was distracting the son from schoolwork. As Souhail remembered, "My father tried to hide the drum from me, but every time he left the house I was able to find it and play on it." Realizing that the son's obsession was impossible to ignore and feeling that if music were to be pursued it had to be learned properly, he enrolled his son at age thirteen at a music academy in Aleppo. Living with his maternal aunt's family in the Syrian city, Souhail studied at the academy for approximately three years and earned a certificate in percussion playing. After returning to Lebanon he performed with numerous artists, including very well-known singers and instrumentalists, thereby establishing himself as a career percussionist.

Obviously, there are notable exceptions to the various adverse circumstances. Certain *ṭarab* artists speak of encouraging parents who wish for their children to learn the musical trade and to master it. In the 1950s, one very musical father from Beirut reportedly used the following metaphor to explain his philosophy to his talented sons: "a head without any music in it might as well be cut off." The sons grew up to be highly accomplished amateur performers on *ṭarab* instruments.

¹⁰ Mary Jibrān was one of the most accomplished singers of the Arab world. Born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1911, she traveled to and worked in Egypt, where she learned the older *ṭarab* repertoire from such master artists as Dāwūd Ḥusnī, and Zakariyyā Aḥmad. Later on, she lived and worked in Syria. See al-Jundi 1954: 279–280.

¹¹ From an interview with Mr. Kaspar (Suhayl Kasbar) in Los Angeles on October 7, 1998.

Discovery and recognition

The stories presented above are typical in their depictions of obsession, struggle, and triumph, and in their portrayals of the processes through which potential artists are initiated into the path of artistry. More specifically, they allude to a very important phenomenon, namely the "discovery," or *iktishāf*, of the budding talent. *Ṭarab* performers generally cite at least one memorable incident marking their own early discovery by other performers. Similarly, elder musicians and musical connoisseurs often take pride in mentioning the names of established young artists whom they had discovered themselves. The discovery process usually constitutes a point of departure, marking a transition from troubling uncertainties to full confirmation of the authenticity and promise of the novice's talent. It may also put an end to personal and familial tribulations by ushering the budding artist into a road of specialization, although even then the artist may continue to be haunted by the prospects of professional struggle and social rejection. The discoverer, or as often is the case, numerous discoverers, is usually a senior musician who, after recognizing the talent, may take the talented person under his or her wing, and sometimes introduce him or her to the public.

Biographies of *ṭarab* artists, as well as the artists' own reports, are replete with discovery stories. Among the more famous of these stories is 'Abduh al-Ḥamūlī's vocal talent being discovered by Mu'allim Sha'bān, a nineteenth-century teacher and reportedly a very selfish impresario.¹² Also well-known is the story of Umm Kulthūm's discovery by the famous singer Shaykh Abū al-'Ulā Muḥammad (1878–1927). We are told that hearing the young girl sing his songs when he met her at one of her countryside performances, this senior artist was so touched that he had tears in his eyes and added his enthusiastic support to those insisting that Umm Kulthūm perform in Cairo. He reportedly told her father "Oh, Shaykh Ibrāhīm, it is a pity for the girl to remain here, she has real talent, she is a treasure" (Fu'ād 1976: 101–102). In the early life of Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb there were a series of comparable encounters, the one with the celebrated poet Aḥmad Shawqī (1868–1932) in Alexandria around 1925 being a watershed in the young artist's career. Shawqī took 'Abd al-Wahhāb as his protégé and introduced him to exclusive literary and political circles and to European, particularly French, culture. Writing modern lyrics for 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the Egyptian poet encouraged the young artist to create new and innovative musical works.¹³

The artist's "discovery" usually paves the way for a certain training process. Natural talent, although quintessential to artistic ability, is consid-

¹² Kāmil 1971: 8–9.

¹³ Rif'at ed. n.d.: 64–94.

ered crude and in need of refinement. The craft-oriented word *khāmāh*, which literally means “raw material” or “uncut stone” or “fabric,” is widely applied to talent in its unrefined natural state. Promising artists whose talents have not received the proper attention yet are referred to collectively as *khāmāt*, or “raw talents.” Such artists may for example appear on television talent shows, which have also been credited with discovering budding musical talent.¹⁴ The concept may also apply to the voice when it is rough yet potentially good. A young, musically untrained singer may possess the right *khāmāh*, namely a type of voice that has demonstrable artistic merit.

Like a raw piece of diamond a *khāmāh* needs *ṣaql*, or “polishing.” In other words, natural ability to sing or play an instrument needs refining, or as the musicians’ jargon goes, *tanḍhif*, literally, “cleaning up.” What is implied here is that the material to be “cleaned” is of desirable quality to begin with. Another related need is recognized, namely, *tawjīh*, or professional “guidance.” The tasks of “guiding,” “polishing,” or “cleaning” may be performed or at least initiated by the discoverer of the talent. However, in most cases they are part of a prolonged effort that involves a number of teachers and formal and informal modalities of learning.

The learning process

Traditionally, learning ṭarab music has been linked either directly or indirectly to religious contexts. Before World War I, a large number of Egyptian singers developed their vocal artistry through the performance of Sufi liturgies. Their Sufi training was usually reflected by the religious title “Shaykh,” which preceded their names. Similarly, in Aleppo, which was well-exposed to the music of Ottoman Turkey, many of the renowned composers and performers were affiliated with the city’s Sufi orders, including the Mawlawiyyah (Mevlevis).¹⁵ Also, famous singers such as ‘Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī and Shaykh Salāmāh Ḥijāzī (1852–1917), a ṭarab singer, actor, and one of the pioneers of the dramatic movement in Egypt, trained their voices through performing the call to prayer from the top of the minarets. Prior to sound amplification, the *mu’adhdhin* (or caller-to-prayer) needed to

¹⁴ In the last twenty years or so, one example has been the weekly talent show *Studio al-Fann* on Lebanese television. In Lebanon, this show is known to have discovered and initiated a large number of amateur and professional musicians, especially singers.

¹⁵ We are told, for example, that toward the late nineteenth century, Aleppo had more than forty *takāyā*, or Sufi worship centers (from a report quoted in Bin Dhurayl 1969: 131). Among those who were directly influenced by Aleppo’s Sufi music were composer ‘Umar al-Bajsh (1885–1950), composer and theorist Shaykh ‘Alī al-Darwish (1872–1952) and nāy player ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Nabakī (b. 1875). The latter two had certain connections with the Mawlawī order (see al-Jundī 1954: 284–289, 326–327, and 328).

develop a powerful voice, which was a real asset in secular performance settings as well. A further traditional path toward vocal proficiency has been Qur'anic chanting. The art of *tajwīd*, or the melodically elaborate recitation of the Qur'ān, entails mastering certain rules for proper enunciation and textual delivery, developing knowledge of the *maqāmāt* (or melodic modes), and cultivating effective improvisatory skills.¹⁶ Similarly, in some communities, learning has been acquired through the mastering of other religious repertoires, for example certain church liturgies.

Ṭarab music has also been learned through essentially secular professional paths. During the Ottoman Period, members of various professions, including musicians belonged to individual professional guilds that in turn granted them protection and structured their learning and work patterns. This was the case in major Near-Eastern cities. Historical sources provide little information on how guild musicians learned their craft, for example how systematic the learning process was. However, it is generally shown that the mastery of the craft was assimilated gradually through an extended apprentice-master relationship, which led to an initiation ceremony that gave the learner formal access to professional work.¹⁷

In Egypt, apprenticeship centered around the *takht*, the small ensemble that was prevalent in Arab cities before World War I. Young and promising individuals treated the *takht* ensemble as a learning context and as a stepping stone toward becoming accomplished performers. As indicated by older musicians and earlier writings, male novices learned from male *takht* musicians, whereas females learned from members of the *awālīm*, or female performing, groups. Moreover an instrumentalist, for example a qānūn player, learned from an established professional instrumentalist, whereas a vocalist learned from an accomplished singer, typically someone who was Sufi trained. For example, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, the Egyptian singer and composer Muḥammad al-Muqaddam, who mastered the liturgy of the Laythī Sufi order, had taught a number of Cairo's singers at the time.¹⁸

During the twentieth century, apprenticeship as a traditional form of musical training gradually lost its appeal. As we learn from Philip Schuyler's research on Moroccan music, the decline of the apprentice system stemmed in part from the diminished mutual trust between masters and pupils, the waning of the older repertoires, the rise of conservatory teaching, and the fading interest in old and prolonged teaching methods.¹⁹ Also to be considered is the appearance of the recorded disc, which served as a convenient teaching device, since the recorded content could be reproduced repeatedly and

¹⁶ See Nelson 1985.

¹⁷ For further information on Ottoman guilds, see Von Hammer ed. 1846/1968, Ḥafīḍh 1971: 192, Racy 1983a: 159, and Baer 1964.

¹⁸ Kāmil 1971: 9.

¹⁹ Schuyler 1979: 25–27.

learned as such. To these factors may be added the eventual collapse of the guild system and the strong impact of Western cultural values and institutions.

After World War I, some musicians continued to learn their craft through prolonged exposure to teachers, or in some cases from performing parents or relatives. In this instance, learning would still have relied upon informal processes of emulation and coaching. However, the traditional modalities of apprenticeship generally moved closer to, and in many cases were replaced by, the modern practice of tutoring. Inspired by Western musical pedagogy, tutors have provided systematic instruction through private lessons and sometimes through printed textbooks that employ Western notation. Furthermore, tutoring on *ṭarab* instruments such as the *ʿūd* and the *qānūn* have coexisted in the same cities and even same city quarters, with tutoring in Western music by both native and Western teachers.

In one autobiographical novel, a modern Syrian writer (Mīnah 1978) described his own early efforts to become an instrument player, but also his lack of patience for learning how to play. Sometimes quite satirical, the narratives illustrate the salient musical attitudes in Damascus in the early 1940s. Furthermore, they depict the tensions between two methods of musical learning, a Western mode that was considered structured and serious, and a local rote approach that appeared informal and old-fashioned. The author mentioned his short lived attempts to learn the piano, the *nāy*, and the *ʿūd*. After beginning to take lessons on the violin with an Italian teacher who taught through Western notation, the author met an old barber who tried to win him as a student. The latter tried to dissuade him from studying with the European teacher, claiming that he himself taught "the genuine Eastern art," *al-fann al-Sharqī al-aṣīl*. Although probably fictitious, one account shows the traditional teacher's desperation, as well as caricatures the old ways of teaching and listening to Arab music:

With the barber I learned some *dawālīb* [singular *dūlāb*, an instrumental genre], as he also used to accompany me on the *ṭablah* in order for the *bashraf* [an instrumental genre] to become well-established in my mind. Toward the end of the lesson he would teach me what he called *taḥmīlah* [an instrumental genre]. He used to shake his shoulders while playing. I asked him why. He said "the shaking of shoulders is for becoming [musically] involved (*insijām*) . . . Eastern music!; it is *ṭarab*, *insijām*, tunes that cause the body to shake." I said: "the Italian teacher confirmed to me that music is something from the spirit, from the brain." He then stopped playing and shouted: "what an animal! Why didn't he say from the belly too? How would you learn the *basharīf* [plural of *bashraf*] which are the foundation? Music is from the body . . . learn the shaking of the shoulders, but don't say this to others . . . I can teach you the rudiments of the craft (*uṣūl al-mihnah*) in its entirety." (23–24)

The twentieth century also witnessed the proliferation of modern conservatory training. By the early decades of the century, music academies began to

appear in cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Today in almost all large Arab cities there are music conservatories that are typically sponsored by the local governments. These institutions tend to share such features as: the existence of two sections, one for teaching "Occidental," or European music, the other for "Oriental," or Arab music; instruction on specific work days; a specialized administrative staff; and the teachers' reliance on government salaries, rather than on the students' usually nominal registration fees.

In some respects, conservatory training illustrates the traditional modalities of instruction. Many conservatory teachers are practicing musicians who had taught apprentices before. Despite the contractual and less personal nature of the student-teacher relationship, some instructors still expect a certain loyalty from the students and follow teaching methods that are reminiscent of the earlier apprenticeship practice. As bearers of the indigenous musical traditions, conservatories teach men and women to play *ṭarab* instruments such as the *ʿūd*, *qānūn*, violin, *nāy*, and *riqq*, and sometimes provide courses in the analysis of the *maqāmāt*, and the traditional compositional forms. They also instruct students in instrumental genres such as the *dūlāb*, *bashraf*, and *samāʿī*, and other vocal ones, particularly the *muwashshah*, a preparation considered basic to the musical background of a traditional Arab performer.

Representing a balance between formal instruction and direct emulation was the conservatory experience of Souhail Kaspar. In Aleppo's official music and acting academy, which he entered as a *ṭablah* student in 1963, Kaspar studied with Muḥammad al-Qabbānī, a middle-aged teacher who played the *riqq* (small tambourine) and other percussion instruments. Percussion students studied on four week days, three of which were devoted to in-house individual and group instruction. The students were taught a large number of metric modes, which they were expected to perform and simultaneously to sing *muwashshahāt* (plural of *muwashshah*, a vocal genre typical of the city of Aleppo) that employed these modes. However, on one of the four instruction days, the students were taken to a meeting place of one of the Sufi orders in the city in order to learn through musical participation. As Mr. Kaspar recounts, the *mashāyikh* (members of the Sufi sect) sat in a circle, played large frame-drums (*tārāt*, singular *tār*), and sang *muwashshahāt* as well as other genres that typically followed a call-and-response pattern. The conservatory students formed a circle around them and tried to emulate their performance, while similarly playing large frame-drums, which are characteristically used in Sufi performances. Accordingly, the religious men were averse to using such secular instruments, as the *ṭablah* and the *riqq*, whose percussive qualities they considered incompatible with the feeling of reverence associated with the mystical performance. The students were instructed to play whenever they felt musically comfortable, and were allowed to stop if they found a certain meter too complex or

difficult to follow. Eventually, the conservatory student, who received structured and often extremely rigorous class instruction, was able to assimilate some of the musical skills that the dervishes themselves had mastered.²⁰

At the same time, the modern conservatory establishment represents a significant departure from the traditional ways of musical learning. Inspired by the European pedagogical model, the conservatory format tends to formalize, as well as limit the contact between the student and the teacher, or teachers. Furthermore, using European notation as a basis of instruction, the Arab musical curriculum may incorporate Western theory, Arab and Western *solfège*, and in some cases, courses in keyboard technique, in polyphony, and in "the harmonization of the Arab *maqāmāt*."²¹ Most important perhaps, conservatories essentially teach precomposed pieces rather than improvisatory skills, which are relegated to the area of modal practice. The music student whose interest lies totally in the performance of traditional *ṭarab* music often joins a conservatory after he has already begun to absorb the elements of *ṭarab* from mere musical exposure or from informal contact with musical role models.

Furthermore, some *ṭarab* artists do not go to conservatories altogether, thus relying on extended methods of musical assimilation. Others pursue both formal and informal modes of learning either simultaneously or at different times in their lives. The latter situation seems to apply to a large number of contemporary artists whose skills and abilities are developed through a combination of the following: informal contact with other musicians; listening to recordings and radio broadcasts; private tutoring on an instrument; joining a private music academy or a government conservatory; singing or playing with a semi-professional group; learning pieces from published notated anthologies; and listening to criticism or praise from peer musicians. Moreover, actual performing remains an important mode of learning. I am often told by musicians that the nightclub is the best place to learn the trade. One Lebanese *nāy* player and nightclub veteran usually tells novice performers "roughing it up (*da'k*) for a few years in the cabaret is what makes you a good musician."²²

Today's *ṭarab* artists also tend to be musically eclectic. Many are either quite familiar with, or even well-versed in Western music. In fact, some

²⁰ Regarding instruction at this academy, namely *Nādī Shabāb al-Urūbah li-al-Funūn wa-al-Tamthīl*, Mr. Kaspar stresses the rigor of the instruction and alludes to students who make mistakes or who are lax being separated momentarily and compelled to drill vigorously on their instruments and even to repeat certain patterns for extended periods of time. Incidentally, Kaspar's descriptions did not specify the sect that the dervishes belonged to. The information is from the same 1998 interview with Mr. Kaspar.

²¹ I found that to be the case in Cairo in the early 1970s. A topic of continued interest for Egyptian music educators, instruction in *maqām* harmonization has probably continued throughout the ensuing years.

²² From a conversation I had with this artist in Beirut in the early 1980s.

highly accomplished *ṭarab* artists are bi-musical, an example being Simon Shaheen. A violin and *ʿūd* virtuoso, Simon assimilated the rudiments of Arab music from his father, Hikmat Shaheen, who directed an Arab musical ensemble in Haifa. Simon also received formal training in European art music. Now living in New York, where he leads an active teaching, composing, and performing career, he explains that the two sides of his musicality coexist without one detracting from the other. "In the same recital I may switch from one idiom to the other. When I reset my violin strings from the Western to the Arab tuning, my mind makes the shift accordingly."²³

My own musical learning is typical at least of those who grew up in post-World War II, pre-civil war, cosmopolitan Lebanon. As the following glimpse illustrates, my own experience with *ṭarab* was to a large degree informal and multi-tracked. The technical, social, and emotional facets of the *ṭarab* culture were assimilated gradually and through prolonged and unstructured ways. During my formative years, essentially from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s, I was exposed to three types of music simultaneously. One was the folk music of Ibl al-Saqī, the village of my birth in southern Lebanon, music that was performed by shepherds, Gypsies, and local farmers, at weddings and other festive occasions. Another type of music was the urban largely pan-Arab style. In this case, the modes of learning included listening to the radio, to my parents' 78-rpm-disc phonograph, to older amateur musicians including my mother and two maternal uncles who all performed either on the violin or *ʿūd*, and to one highly skilled *buzuq* player and maker from the same village. Meanwhile, I experienced Western music through a wide variety of means, including taking private lessons on the violin and listening to recordings. In fact, the phonograph discs I heard at home included such varied items as *qaṣā'id* by Shaykh Amīn Ḥasanayn of Egypt, early film songs by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb, tango hits, and symphonic classics.

In Beirut, my musical education was similarly multifaceted. There, I continued to receive Western musical training by taking music courses at the American University of Beirut, receiving music lessons at one of the city's private academies, and attending classes at the Lebanese National Conservatory. My Arab musical skills, however, were further developed through direct exposure to established local artists and by performing with various mainstream musicians in private and public venues, including Beirut's television stations.

²³ From a conversation I had with Simon Shaheen in Maine in the late 1980s. Incidentally, during the last twenty years or so I have performed with this artist frequently. Shaheen has produced a number of CDs, including *Turāth*, which features Near-Eastern instrumental classics. He has also performed on the CD *Tuqāsim*, which, released by Lyricord Discs Inc., contains improvisation duets for the *ʿūd*, by Shaheen, and the *buzuq*, by Ali Jihad Racy.

My assimilation of the *ṭarab* culture occurred through informal musical encounters, some of which left lasting impressions. During the early 1960s my brother Khaled and I met frequently to play music with two highly talented friends, also brothers themselves, a violinist, and an *ūd* player. During our musical "jam sessions" at their house, our friends' elderly father, himself a retired performer, always sat quietly in a somewhat dim and distant corner of the room virtually unnoticed except for an occasional glimpse of his bald head and thick white mustache. Following our inclinations as young musicians, we played what was fashionable at the time, including Westernized introductions to the then current songs of Umm Kulthūm. Soon after we started to play, we usually heard a murmur from the dark corner. As the sons explained, the father was saying: *Qassim!* which literally meant, "Play *taqāsim!*" or "Improvise!" To fulfill the father's requests, which we accepted with an odd combination of humor and respect, we took turns at playing traditional modal improvisations. But eventually we would slip back into our modernized renditions, soon to hear the murmur again. For us, the father embodied the *ṭarab* culture. Reaffirming the value of modal improvisation, he also represented a musical link between his generation and ours. His mediating role gave us direct access to a musical tradition that valued critical listening, spontaneous music-making, and direct interaction between performer and listener. Indirectly, it also commented on the multifaceted nature of Beirut's music in the 1960s.

Musicians' jargon

The traditional musical jargon provides insights into the *ṭarab* learning-process and sheds light on *ṭarab* entertainers as a professional group. Reminiscent of, and apparently rooted in, the earlier guild culture, the jargon is craft-based and essentially presents music as a type of manual labor. For example, it embraces such expressions as *shughl* which literally means "work," but denotes performing music especially in professional contexts. *Yūsuk ālah* or to "carry a tool," may also mean "to play an instrument," especially in a less formal, or "make-shift" performance, or when the performer is less skilled on the specific instrument being played, for example when he is asked to play an instrument that is not his main specialty. *Fihā shughl*, or "it has work" is said of a musical piece with intricate workmanship. *Nadhīf*, literally, "clean," describes a flawless rendition of a musical piece. The jargon also identifies the instrumentalists through craft-related expressions that point literally to the mechanical aspect of working or to the working tools themselves, for example: a *raqqāq* for a *riqq* player, a *qānūnjī* for a *qānūn* player, *nāyātī* for a *nāy* player, and so

forth. In these expressions, the suffixes are similarly used in words that refer to the practitioners of manual professions in general.

Other usages may reflect a historical correlation between music and speech. For example, singing is referred to as "*qawl*," literally "saying." Similarly, the expression *yaqūl jumlah*, which is used for "singing a short musical passage" literally means "to utter a sentence."²⁴ The profession oriented words *muṭrib* (male singer) and *muṭribah* (female singer) are favored by the professional performers. These two expressions may be used by nonmusicians to ridicule or stereotype professional entertainers. However, they imply due recognition of the "learned," or professionally established, ṭarab vocalist. In fact, they are preferred over such potentially offensive designations as *mughannī* and *mughanniyah* which mean, "male singer" and "female singer" quite literally and are usually connotative of the less sophisticated or pedestrian public entertainer.²⁵

The musical jargon promotes cohesion within the professional ṭarab community. It also establishes symbolic boundaries between two distinct yet mutually dependent groups, the musicians and the general public. Through specialized speech, the performer can reinforce his or her status of professional insider. By comparison, a person who uses ordinary speech or reacts to music through such passionate or romantic expressions as "beautiful," "sweet," "I could listen all night," may be recognized by the musicians as an outsider, but also as someone who is professionally nonthreatening, and in a more positive vein, as a faithful follower or supporter. Incidentally, the diehard musicians tend to be circumspect in their verbal, or for that matter, physical reactions to music, unless such reactions are shown out of politeness to encourage an amateur musician. Highly demonstrable gestures are usually the prerogative of the listening connoisseurs, and as such they tend to differentiate the ṭarab receiver from the ṭarab provider.

In recent decades, however, the musical jargon has lost a great deal of its consistency and currency. Not all young musicians seem accustomed to, or familiar with, the various in-group expressions. Furthermore, indigenous theoretical terms, such as the Arab and Persian names of the modal steps, are now intermingled with Western terminology, for example the European note-names. Also becoming indispensable are such designations as "bass," "treble," "reverb," and "echo," that are inspired by the ubiquitous technology of recording and sound amplification.

²⁴ Incidentally, in other Near Eastern traditions the song-speech correlation is prevalent. For example in Iraq, the term *qārīʿ*, literally, "one who reads" or "recites," describes the singer in the Iraqi maqām tradition, a usage that reminds us of the Persian term *khāndan* which refers to both reading and singing.

²⁵ For more information on these and other musical expressions and their connotations see Racy 1986.

Musical manners

In the ṭarab culture, artistry must be refined through proper socialization. Ideally speaking, performers and listeners are expected to observe what is generally known as *ādāb* (singular, *adab*), translated roughly as "manners" or "codes of behavior." Prescribing desirable conduct and emphasizing moral or professional virtues, *ādāb* rules have appeared in conjunction with various professional and religious groups, particularly Sufi orders. In the latter case, the *ādāb* have set behavioral guidelines, for example in relation to *ṣamāʿ* and *wajd*.²⁶ Musical *ādāb* in particular, have addressed both the musicians and the listeners.

Musicians

The notion of a socially fit musician has deep historical roots. In the ʿAbbāsīd era, the court singer was expected to possess qualities that made him a perfect social companion. On the basis of al-Isfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, George Sawa points out that such an artist was appreciated for his role as a *naḍīm*, or "close-companion." Quite often, he amused the ruler or patron and educated him about various aspects of life. He had to be knowledgeable, sociable, and entertaining.²⁷

Concern about the performers' behavior was later expressed in a nineteenth century musical treatise written in Egypt by Muḥammad Shihāb al-Dīn (1795–1857) followed in the early twentieth century by a chapter on the subject in al-Khulāʿī's all-encompassing book on Arab music.²⁸ In this latter source, the author criticized what he described as the morally deplorable behaviors of musicians and listeners. He also lamented the musical entertainers' bad image in the eyes of the Egyptian public during and before al-Khulāʿī's time, a phenomenon incidentally well-observed by Edward Lane some seventy years earlier. Furthermore, the Egyptian author outlined what

²⁶ For such Sufi codes see al-Ghazālī (n.d.: 236–269), namely his chapter titled *Kitāb Ādāb al-Samāʿ wa-al-Wajd* (The Book of the Manners of Listening and Ecstasy) and al-Suhrawardī's *Kitāb al-Murīdīn* (A Sufi Rule for Novices) in Mitson 1975. For a more recent version by Salāmah ibn Ḥasan Salāmah (b. 1867), founder of the *Ḥāmidīyyah Shādhiliyyah* order in Egypt, see Gilsenan 1973: 208–241.

²⁷ Sawa 1989: 119.

²⁸ Al-Khulāʿī's chapter (ca. 1904: 78–83) was titled, "Faṣl fī Ādāb al-Mughannī wa-al-Sāmi" (Chapter on the Manners of the Singer and the Listener). Here, as in other parts of his book, al-Khulāʿī borrowed generously from ancient and medieval sources. He also referred to the discussions on *ādāb al-naḍīm*, "the manners of the close companion" in Shihāb al-Dīn's earlier work. Notably, al-Khulāʿī's book appeared around the time when Salāmah compiled his Sufi rules.

he considered to be desirable social, moral, and musical attributes of musicians and audience members. Among the traits that he detested were the musicians' bitter professional jealousies and the prevalence of intoxication, especially among a group of performers known as *ṣahbaḥiyyah* (from *ṣahbā'*, a generic name for wine, or alcohol). The author similarly chided those who entertained at *qahāwī al-ḥashīsh*, or "ḥashīsh coffee-houses," a category of artists he considered particularly vulgar and ignorant of the principles of the musical art. Meanwhile, al-Khulaṭī addressed the composers whom he implored, among other things, to learn *muwashshahāt*, *bastāt*, and *adwār* (traditional compositional genres) in a variety of *maqāmāt*, to know the rhythmic modes well, and also to learn to appreciate the compositions of the foreigners, or *al-ajānib*, a term that basically refers to Westerners. "That will make it possible to tell what is good and what is bad in their music" (ca. 1904: 81).

The modern *ṭarab* culture tends to embrace comparable performer related ideals. Obviously now, and probably at al-Khulaṭī's time, practicing musicians learned about such ideals not from books and manuals but rather through extended processes of socialization. Furthermore, these standards may not be universally followed or lived up to, and may very well be exceptions to the rule. In reality, they may have always represented the less-common, albeit idealized, decorum. Nevertheless, they can be studied as part of a broader worldview, a prescriptive behavioral and moral ideology that comments on the visions, tensions, and contradictions that characterize the *ṭarab* culture.

The contemporary public, or more specifically the ideally minded listeners, embrace a variety of artist related criteria. Visual appeal is important. Elegance and fashion have played a noticeable role in the careers of leading singers and movie stars such as Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Statements praising good conduct appear quite often in musicians' conversations, and similarly voiced are criticisms of bad behavior. Often bemoaned is greed over money and the musicians' attempt to undercut one another. In various gatherings it is common to hear such phrases as *al-mūsīqā akhlāq*, "music is good manners," and *al-fannān lāzim yakūn mu'addab*, "the artist must be polite," or "well-mannered." Likewise, a good *muṭrib* must be *'azīz al-naḥs*, "of high morals," or "dignified" and *muḥāfiḍh 'alā karāmtuh*, "preserving his own dignity." An immoral artist is said to constitute an *iḥānah lil-fann*, "an insult to the art."

Likewise, generosity and self-negation are highly praised. Indeed many stories are told of singers donating their salaries to humanitarian causes or supporting needy fellow musicians. By the same token, a reputation of being stingy or tight-handed (*bakhīl*) can give an artist notoriety in artistic circles, although many famous *ṭarab* singers are known for their materialistic passions. Another common and frequently praised trait is wit. Modern

artists, particularly instrumentalists tend to show great fondness for humor, and often possess a vast repertoire of jokes. Joke-telling, like jargon, tends to function as a mode of bonding among members of the same ensemble and among musicians in general. Sometimes, musicians are also lauded for their religious piety or reserved behavior. According to one of his elderly admirers, the early-twentieth-century qānūn player Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Sr.) was so conservative that he often became uncomfortable if he noticed a woman in the audience.²⁹ Many become more religious later in their lives, a phase during which their religiosity may inspire aversion to, and ultimately abandonment of music, at least as a professional pursuit.

Among the musical virtues is also good rapport with the audience. The singer, for example, must understand that his role is to please and provide *ṭarab*, as the word "muṭrib" clearly suggests. Musicians' behaviors and verbalizations betray a certain hierarchy of roles. Usually, the patrons are ranked on the top and then come the patrons' guests, particularly those distinguished by social or economic rank, although tacitly a good portion of the performer's attention is directed toward the listening connoisseurs in the audience. Within the performing ensembles, the muṭrib, who is typically the most highly paid, enjoys the main prerogative and responsibility of communicating with the listeners or of shaping the content of the performance in ways that satisfy the audience as a whole.

The above social hierarchy notwithstanding, *ṭarab* musicians may not always fulfill the wishes of their listeners and patrons. For example, a celebrated muṭrib may resent being asked by an audience member to perform a song by a rival artist or by a lesser singer or even to sing a song that is totally incompatible with his own style. Some musicians expressed a great deal of respect for one highly established Syrian singer because he refused to honor the request of a politically influential yet musically uninitiated listener to perform one of the later hits of Umm Kulthūm. The singer politely declined on the basis that he only sang his own *lawn*, or "style" (literally, color). Accomplished musicians may also proclaim that they are "amateurs," or *huwāt*, in order to show that they perform only for their own gratification and furthermore to justify their refusal to perform in less dignified contexts.

Indeed, certain artists have been viewed as role models to be emulated and admired. The medieval epochs have presented us with numerous such exemplars. And similarly, the last hundred-and-fifty years have witnessed many highly attractive personalities, the musician written about most proverbially being the Egyptian ʿAbduh al-Ḥamūlī.³⁰ As portrayed by music historians, ʿAbduh fits the profile of the gentleman musician. His personal

²⁹ From personal conversation with Maḥmūd Raʿfat in Cairo in 1972.

³⁰ For writings on al-Ḥamūlī, see al-Khulāʿī ca. 1904, Rizq ca. 1936 and ca. 1938, Mansī 1965, al-Jundi 1984, and Kāmil 1971.



Egyptian singer 'Abdub al-Ḥāmūlī (1841–1901). From al-Khulafī ca. 1904.

attributes, the auspicious milieu he lived in, and his musical abilities all made him a legendary figure for the succeeding generations. We are told that he became a favored court companion to Khedive Ismā'īl (r. 1863–1879), whom 'Abduh accompanied on some official visits to Istanbul, where this celebrated singer reportedly sang before the Ottoman Sultan. He possessed charisma and physical charm and appeared fashionably dressed in a modern Western suit usually with the traditional fez, or headdress. He was pious, conservative, and self-respecting, having once resisted the Khedive's insistence to have the celebrated female singer Almadh, by then 'Abduh's wife, sing at the court. Furthermore, he was generous, chivalrous, and supportive of his fellow musicians. He was also endowed with phenomenal musical talent and a powerful voice that exerted tremendous emotional effect upon the listeners. 'Abduh was both a prolific composer who had to his credit dozens of *adwār*, and a musical innovator known for having introduced new *maqāmāt* into Arab music. Al-Hāmūlī was the subject of numerous elegiac essays and poems by Aḥmad Shawqī, Khalīl Miṭrān and others.³¹ Furthermore, one of Cairo's streets was named after him.³²

Comparable attributes have distinguished more recent artists. In her extensive study on Umm Kulthūm, the Egyptian author Nī'māt Fu'ād attributed this artist's successful career to her exceptional personality, as well as to her musicianship. Accordingly, when Umm Kulthūm entered the public arena, she was a model of female decency. As a woman, her conservative religious background, the image of chastity she projected, and the full protection of her own family all accorded her great respect. Accordingly, "when she stood up to sing, there was in front of her an invisible sign that read 'Do not touch!'" (Fu'ād 1976: 174). She was learned and cultured, refined and faithful to her art in ways that differentiated her from the female singer Munīrah al-Mahdiyyah (d. 1965), who reportedly had frequently returned to the public their admission fees because "she was not in the mood for singing" (*mā lahāsh mazāj*) or because the number of attendants was too small. Umm Kulthūm, whose career was associated with great composers and lyricists, was also known for supporting various national causes, and on a personal level, for being remarkably witty.

Listeners

The idea of promoting a cadre of good listeners has concerned the musicians and the musical critics alike. In the early twentieth century, al-Khulafā

³¹ Some of these elegies are included in Rizq ca. 1936: 77–92.

³² Kamīl 1971: 44.

stressed that the public must be cognizant of the musicians' needs, how they feel when they perform and what circumstances are best suited for their performing. He also emphasized that such knowledge is only useful when combined with good listening habits and a positive outlook toward music and musicians.

More specifically, the listeners were implored to refrain from disrupting the performances by voicing their musical requests. As he explained, when performing the musician becomes deeply attuned to the *maqām* of the performance, a clear reference to the state of *saṭṭanah*, or modal ecstasy. Therefore, a request would be improper, particularly if the requested piece was in a different *maqām*. Accordingly, requests must be made before the instruments are tuned.³³ Al-Khulaʿī added that the singer does not have time to fulfill everybody's demand, and moreover, "if the singer was not possessed by *ṭarab* himself he would not be able to instill *ṭarab* in anyone" (ca. 1904: 83). Further, criticism was directed against false pretense. In other words, audience members should refrain from pretending that they know "the fundamentals of the modal science," for example, saying, "please repeat (*Allāh kamān*) this phrase in [mode] *Jahār kāh*, when in reality that phrase is in [mode] *ʿIrāq*" (ca. 1904: 83). Similarly, al-Khulaʿī spoke against audience members who merely pretend that they are enjoying the music, a stance that reminds us of al-Ghazālī's displeasure with those who display disingenuous ecstasy.

Furthermore, al-Khulaʿī deplored drunkenness among the listeners, the vulgarity of "mediocre poets" who interrupt the performance by reciting bad poetry, the duels of curses and ridicules that "our people call joking (*tankīt*)," coming to the performance merely to show off one's apparel or jewelry or to gaze at windows, through which women may be noticed in their privacy, and showing lack of interest in the music, for example, "bothering to bestow upon the singer every half an hour an utterance of *āh*! [a gesture of appreciation] totally out of context" (ca. 1904: 84). On the contrary, as the author maintains, the listener has an obligation to take into consideration the feelings of the performer, and to instill within him the right mood through affectionate words of approval. "That is what gives the singer the sense of comfort and the right disposition to engender *ṭarab* within you inasmuch as God [at the moment] has enabled him" (ca. 1904: 83).

Modern critiques of the public are not very different from those outlined by al-Khulaʿī. Often lamented is the patrons' indifference toward, or disrespect of, the musicians, or their reluctance to remunerate them adequately.

³³ The sudden introduction of a new mode would have been technically difficult since, at al-Khulaʿī's time, the *qānūn* did not have tuning levers and had to be tuned ahead of time to the mode of the performance to come. Further information on the *qānūn* and its tuning is included in the discussions on pitch in Chapter 4.

Also bemoaned is a general ignorance about the exigencies of music making. In musicians' circles it is frequently said that the listeners need to be more appreciative of the performers' need to have an ambiance appropriate for producing affective music. Often cited is the lack of truly active performer-listener communication and the domination of one of two extremes: apathy (the worst enemy of *ṭarab* according to most musicians) or excessive excitation, often marked by drunkenness, dancing, clapping, and singing loudly with the *muṭrib*, antics that may stifle the delicacy of the musical process and annoy those interested in a finer level of listening. Once I asked a famous violinist from Lebanon why he did not play *taqāsim* in public anymore and instead presented medleys mostly of metrically animated popular tunes that the public often dances to. His answer was that in the old days when he used to play, people used to listen attentively and cry, but now they "listen through their feet."³⁴ In a related vein, one Egyptian musical connoisseur described to me Umm Kulthūm's disappointment with her audience when she sang somewhere in North Africa. According to the description, she sensed right away that the audience was by and large "not with it," because it exploded with cheers and whistles at times uncalled for from the musical point of view. The audience also showed no noticeable reactions precisely when such reactions would have been musically and emotionally pertinent, for example, at a climactic point following a powerful cadence.³⁵ As implied by the report, proper listening requires the display of reactions that are both genuine and idiomatically correct.

The performers' self-image as public entertainers tends to embrace a certain duality. This is most notable in recent decades, at a time when the Arab musical scene has been dominated by new, popular-oriented styles. Typically, *ṭarab* musicians accommodate the public's common musical denominator, but also express such sentiments as "that is what they want," or "that is what goes (*māshī*) these days," or "we have to satisfy the needs of the market (*al-sūq*)." As they do so, they tend to live in two separate worlds: professional reality marked by what may be perceived as artistic expediency, and an ideal or imagined world of music making. The latter world is lived somewhat vicariously through memorable past experiences, or virtually through conversations, reminiscences, and at times informal jam sessions with other musicians who share their artistic worldviews.

³⁴ From an informal conversation that took place in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

³⁵ From an informal conversation in Doha Qatar in 1988.

The Sammī'ah

The colloquial word *sammī'ah* (singular, *sammī'*) refers to the diehard ṭarab listeners, or literally, those who listen well.³⁶ Derived from the verb *samī'a*, "to hear" or "to listen," this usage underscores the symbolic importance of listening in Arab and Near-Eastern civilizations in general. Musicians usually praise audiences and individual listeners through expressions that are linguistically and conceptually related to listening. Among such expressions are *biyisma'ū*, "they listen," and *biyisma' kwayyis*, "he listens well." By the same token, a good listener may politely ask a musician to perform by using listening-related expressions such as *sammī'nā*, "allow us to hear," or something like "delight our ears," and *kullinā sām'in*, or *kullinā sama'*, both meaning "we are all listening" or "attentively ready to listen." As part of the musicians' jargon, the concept of *sammī'ah* appears frequently in musicians' conversations and represents one of the most important entities within the ṭarab culture.

As theaters, radio stations, and record companies provide the economic base for ṭarab making, the *sammī'ah* form the emotional and artistic lifeline of ṭarab artistry. Although the dividing line between them and the rest of the public is not always clear cut, the *sammī'ah* tend to share certain recognizable characteristics. Generally, they constitute a minority within the ṭarab public. They may either cluster together as a substantial constituency in a small musical gathering or may be "sprinkled" as individuals or small "pockets" of individuals within large audiences at public performances. They may come from different social backgrounds as well as include some amateur performers. However, in terms of their common interest and comparable levels of musical initiation, the *sammī'ah* can be viewed as an in-group, somewhat like members of a Sufi order, or brotherhood.

A *sammī'* is believed to have a special talent for listening, a gift that has been developed through musical exposure and proper polish. He or she is considered naturally predisposed to feeling and responding emotionally to the music, an attribute symbolically illustrated by al-Khulāṭ's aforementioned anecdote about the sage and the babies. The *sammī'*'s unmistakable proclivity toward listening can be illustrated by the following example. A young man from Lebanon spoke to me about business trips he made to Egypt with a business partner. As he put it, whenever they walked across the crowded Tahrir Square in Cairo, at times when religious chanting was being broadcast through loudspeakers he would stop and listen very attentively. He explained that for him, the experience was profoundly transforming.

³⁶ The feminine of *sammī'* is *sammī'ah*, which is also the plural form, either masculine or feminine.

"Although he and I are from the same culture, my business partner totally ignored the chanting and never stopped. I used to lose sight of him completely and end up walking alone."³⁷

The *sammī'ah* tend to be musically informed. Many, for example, are totally familiar with the main performance genres, and take full notice of the technical maneuvers that musicians make, although much of their knowledge is intuitive rather than theoretical. For that matter, those who do not perform may not recognize the various *maqāmāt* by name. Furthermore, the ability of the *sammī'ah* to listen and feel is manifested in a culturally established vocabulary of gestures, facial expressions, body language, and verbal exclamations, that all express their genuinely felt *ṭarab* sensations.

In context, the *sammī'ah* put their musical knowledge into practice. Forming the basis for meaningful performer–listener interactions, their knowledge leads to higher musical expectations and thus prompts the artist to excel. Describing to me the relationship between the informed listener and the performing artist in earlier decades, the celebrated Aleppo singer Ṣabāḥ Fakhūrī (b. 1933) used a phrase commonly heard in *ṭarab*-related conversations, namely *muḥāsabah*, which means "following attentively and judiciously."³⁸ A listener who exercises *muḥāsabah* through appropriately communicated gestures is considered musically connected, as well as ecstatically involved.

Furthermore, cognizant of the performer's mental and emotional needs when performing, the *sammī'* may either refrain from making musical requests or may voice such requests politely and at musically opportune times. During an informal gathering of friends to honor the late Egyptian-trained Tunisian singer 'Ulayyah al-Tūnisiyyah (d. 1990), I was invited to play the 'ūd. As soon as I picked up the instrument, one young man in the group requested that I perform something by Farīd al-Aṭraṣh. However, that person's request drew an immediate, but polite admonition from 'Ulayyah herself. As she put it, "you don't tell the *fannān*, or "artist," what to play. You let him play what is on his mind [or agreeing with his disposition, *illī bi-mazājuḥ*]."³⁹ This reference to the artist's tendency to perform best and most comfortably music that agrees with his mood at the time of performing, reminds us of al-Khulā'ī's advice to young listeners some eighty years earlier and underscores the ecstatic implications of good listening habits.

Finally, the ecstatic reactions of the *sammī'ah* may vary in intensity and in the manner in which they are expressed, depending upon the music itself, the context of listening, and the disposition of the listener himself or herself. However, when they listen, the *sammī'ah* usually display distinct musical

³⁷ From an informal conversation in the middle 1980s.

³⁸ From an interview with Ṣabāḥ Fakhūrī in Los Angeles on January 24, 1990.

³⁹ This musical gathering took place in Los Angeles toward the middle 1980s.

focus. They also seem genuinely to feel the music and to express what is felt in ways that enhance the creative flow of the performance. Their mode of responding to the music reflects a certain composure and betrays an equilibrium between emotional expressivity and rational control. Their demeanor is not unlike the mystical trait that al-Ghazālī had extolled, namely to be serene on the outside, yet from the inside, to be agitated by the flame of divine love.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, n.d.: 266.

3 Performance

Throughout Arab history, musicians, philosophers, theologians, biographers, and mystics have for various reasons expressed interest in the musical process: where music is performed, when, for whom, and on what occasions. It may be sufficient to browse through the writings of al-Iṣfahānī, al-Ghazālī, and al-Khulafī and in the popular music magazines of Lebanon and Egypt to sense the centrality of the performance event in the ṭarab culture. To a large extent, the visions of those who have prescribed ādāb for listeners and artists, or who have explained how music affects different individuals, have been directed toward the performing process. Whether at an 'Abbāsīd court, or a modern Cairo nightclub, the performance event is recognized for its multiple connotations, as well as for its distinctive social and artistic character.

Early venues

In the late Ottoman Period, which extended into the early twentieth century, the musical life of cities such as Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo centered around a few typical performance venues. Sufi groups, usually with leading vocalists, accompanying choruses, and in some cases instrumentalists, performed on various religious holidays. Secular performances were also prevalent. Some were hosted by wealthy individuals or local government officials. Reminiscent of the medieval court performances, these musical events shared some overall characteristics. They tended to be exclusive, being attended mostly by the patrons and their families and friends, and taking place within the confines of the patrons' homes or the rulers' palaces or courts. In some instances, the musicians were the protégés of the patrons and enjoyed their direct financial and moral support. Often such events occurred in contexts of festivity, for example, wedding parties, circumcisions, religious holidays, and receptions of officials. They entertained music lovers and added glamour and prestige to the patron's assembly, or *majlis*.

Tarab making was also enjoyed on a more popular level. It was often

featured at the *sahrah* (or evening musical party) typically held as part of a *farah*, or wedding celebration. A prime arena for Egypt's guild performers, the *sahrah* was closely associated with *takht* entertainment. The patron or host was not necessarily a musical connoisseur himself and neither was the hosting family necessarily musical. In addition, the interactions between the patron and the musicians may have been indirect, and based on the intervention of a guild master, although often the musicians, who traditionally performed in small (*takht*) ensembles, were well-known to their clients. Held either in the open courtyard of the client's home or in a colorful, cloth tent (*khaymah*, also called *sirdāq*, or *shādir*), specially erected outside the client's house, the performance was not strictly private or exclusive and tended to attract individuals from surrounding neighborhoods. Thus, the musical parties were likely to include non-sammī'ah, or even individuals who displayed the types of conduct that al-Khulafī had bitterly criticized. In fact, this Egyptian writer stated clearly that, to his displeasure, such behaviors were predominant at wedding parties.

On the other hand, the wedding provided ideal conditions for *ṭarab* making. As a collective celebration marked by socializing and feasting, it generated an atmosphere of elation (*bast*, or *kayf*) perfectly suited for producing and listening to *ṭarab* music. Also physically, the courtyard or the tent constituted a relatively self-contained setting for the *ṭarab* process, thus facilitating intimate contact and direct communication between the performers and the listeners. Furthermore, the wedding performances were not devoid of sammī'ah, many of whom followed the musicians faithfully from one performance to another. For example, the famous nineteenth-century Egyptian singer Shaykh Sālim al-'Ajūz, who lived for over a hundred years and continued to sing throughout the later years of his life, maintained a group of sammī'ah who came with him to his performance locations throughout Egypt.¹ Such a practice was followed by most early twentieth-century celebrities, Munīrah al-Mahdiyyah and others. Older musicians and music historians speak proverbially of such sammī'ah, particularly of their high level of musical initiation and positive influences upon the performers. In the same vein, writers such as Qisṭandī Rīzq and Aḥmad Abū al-Khiḍr Mansī, both of whom had witnessed the zenith of the so-called *qadīm* (literally "old") musical tradition of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Cairo, used highly laudatory, sometimes poetic, language to describe the captivating musical renditions created by 'Abduh al-Ḥamūli and others at wedding parties.

It is difficult to ascertain the frequency of wedding performances in pre-World-War-I cities such as Cairo, Damascus, and Aleppo, or whether all weddings had *ṭarab* music, or even professional musical entertainment

¹ Fu'ād n.d.: 158.



Early recording-artist Shaykh Yūsuf al-Manyalāwī (1847–1911), front center, and his takht ensemble, with a phonograph in the background. To the front right is Muḥammad al'Aqqād (Sr.) holding a qānūn, which used no tuning levers; to the front left is Ibrāhīm Salūn holding a Stroh violin, which was specially designed for acoustic recording. A publicity photo.

altogether. In fact, weddings were known to be seasonal and irregular. Reportedly, in order to have more access to performing and thus to keep his voice from getting "all rusted," Shaykh Yūsuf al-Manyalāwī (1847–1911) volunteered every Tuesday night to sing at a *ḥadrah*, or Sufi ceremony, held at Sitt Fāṭimah al-Nabawīyyah in one of Cairo's quarters. Accordingly, the wedding was "the outlet for everyone, sammī'ah and ṭarab singers alike" (Fu'ād n.d. 157). Furthermore, the wedding was the main arena for the *ʿawālīm*, or female entertainers, whose performances are known to have incorporated ṭarab, as well as folk and popular song and dance entertainment. As indicated by a number of nineteenth-century Western travelers,² the female wedding performances were no less lively and ecstatic than the men's.

Another context prevalent in the large cities, was the *qahwah*, or coffee house. Toward the mid-nineteenth century, Lane described the Cairo coffee house as a popular place which males of modest social and economic backgrounds had frequented. In it, the *shā'ir*, a poet-singer, typically accompanied himself on the *rabāb al-shā'ir*, or "poet's fiddle,"³ as he sang traditional epics, such as the one about the medieval Arabian hero Abū Zayd al-Hilālī. By the end of the century, there were numerous coffee houses that presented ṭarab related repertoires and had attracted a certain segment of the ṭarab public.

Although fulfilling specific social needs, the *qahāwī* (plural of *qahwah*) were portrayed negatively by critics such as al-Khula'ī. To begin with, music coffee-houses were public and often located in less prestigious, or morally suspicious quarters of the cities. Furthermore, the entertainers included female singers and dancers, who were frequently stigmatized as prostitutes.⁴ Such considerations would have given these establishments a dubious image within the sexually segregated society of the time. Furthermore, the coffee houses, within which alcohol was often consumed, were considered unbecoming of respectable performers. It is not surprising that some celebrated

² See for example Lane 1860/1973: 355 and Ebers 1879: 316.

³ In nineteenth-century Egypt, the *rabāb* was an upright fiddle that had a quadrilateral sound-box with the front side covered with skin. The poets are known to have used one string on their instrument, whereas the singers used two, their instrument being identified as *rabāb al-mughannī*, "the singer's *rabāb*." Incidentally, by the early twentieth century, Egyptian folk musicians had abandoned the quadrilateral fiddle in favor of the *kamanjah*, a spike fiddle that was originally used by the urban musician; see Lane 1860/1973: 356. The adopted instrument was renamed *rabāb* or *rabābah*, after the older folk instrument. Meanwhile, the Western violin had already replaced the *kamanjah* as an urban (*takht*) instrument and usurped its name.

⁴ As Karin van Nieuwkerk shows, the female staff of the Cairo café-chantant, or early night-club, usually sat with male customers and enticed them to purchase alcohol. Although many were not really prostitutes, they had to contend with the public image of them as fallen women (1995: 43–99).

takht musicians refrained from working in the coffee houses except out of dire financial necessity.⁵

During the early twentieth century, the domain of public entertainment was expanded. In Egypt, which was under British control between 1882 and 1922, the Azbakiyyah Garden was a prime location for open air military-band performances and European-modeled nightclubs. Furthermore, in addition to the traditional coffee houses, the city witnessed the rise of Western style theaters, some of which were managed by women and had held weekly matinee performances for female audiences.⁶ Presenting various music and dance genres including *ṭarab*, musical comedy, and vaudeville, these places usually carried such modern and somewhat formal designations as *masrah* (theater), or *ṭiyātrū* (from Italian for theater), *kāzīnū* (casino), and *ṣālū* (hall, or auditorium).

These were some of the main venues that dominated the *ṭarab* world before and during the early twentieth century, but continued to exist in one form or another in later decades. Other venues must have also existed. There is no reason to exclude such less formally structured events as the intimate musical gatherings of connoisseurs and the private performances of the amateur musicians and apprentices.

Ṭarab, ḥaṣhish, and alcohol

Studies on social and artistic life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveal a certain association between music making and intoxication. By exploring this association, we may gain insights into the nature of the *ṭarab* process, and for that matter, dispel some of the stereotypical misconceptions about *ṭarab* music. According to various historical accounts, *ḥaṣhish* use in the region is centuries old and is known to have existed among members of certain Sufi orders.⁷ Referred to as, "the poor man's wine," it was eloquently described and often praised by poets, especially in

⁵ For example, one Egyptian biographer was saddened that Amīn al-Buzārī, a celebrated *nāy* player, at one time member of al-Hāmūlī's takht ensemble, was obliged to perform in a coffee house due to pressing economic need aggravated by the gradual loss of his eyesight. We are told that al-Buzārī, who came from a Christian background, was the son of an eminent ministry-of-foreign-affairs official who was in turn a companion to Khedive Ismā'īl. Al-Buzārī's grandfather was the Khedive's special physician (Mansī 1965: 250–253).

⁶ See Danielson 1991a.

⁷ For example, we are told that in Egypt the use of *ḥaṣhish* became established toward the middle of the twelfth century, during the Ayyūbid period, through the arrival of mystics from Syria. See al-Maghribī 1963: 56–59 and Khalifa 1975: 199. Similarly, it is said that in Islamic history hemp has been somewhat tolerated because many Muslims have felt that, unlike alcohol, it was not explicitly outlawed by Qur'anic law (Zakī 1986: 189).

the Sufi literary circles of the thirteenth century.⁸ Similarly, Lane noted the prevalence of hemp and to a lesser extent opium, especially among musicians.⁹ Moreover, in Egypt the local *hashish* culture has been linked to a type of "folklore" that incorporated humor, poetry, and music, as well as interactive drug-related etiquettes.¹⁰ In fact, *hashish* was the topic of numerous popular songs, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, a period that witnessed an increase in the use of drugs, including cocaine and opium.¹¹

Hashish songs embraced a variety of characteristic themes. Usually speaking on behalf of the *hashshāshīn*, or *hashish* users, they described this social group's carefree lifestyle and portrayed the drug and its effect in delightful, often humorous ways. For example, in a song by Shaykh Sayyid Darwīsh, presented in one of the plays of the famous comedian Najib al-Rihānī, a group of actors who play the role of *hashish* addicts appear sickly and poverty stricken, but sing gleefully about *hashish* and intoxication. Furthermore, in this song, criticism of the political and social system, as well as vows to give up *hashish*, are voiced.¹²

Comparably, in Arab literary history alcohol became the topic of a poetry genre called *khamriyyāt*, roughly, "wine poetry," from *khamr*, a generic name for "wine," or "alcohol." In popular culture, the consumption of alcohol has occurred in conjunction with music making and within a variety of contexts, ranging from medieval 'Abbāsīd circles, as al-Isfahānī's portrayals testify, to modern nightclubs. Lane mentioned that although alcohol was forbidden by Islam, a few Egyptians drank it discreetly and that a local liquor called *buza* (or *būḍḥah*) was typically consumed by the Nile boatmen and other members of the lower classes. He added that the male professional musicians (*ālā'iyyah*) of his time tended to drink excessively:

They are people of very dissolute habits; and are regarded as scarcely less disreputable characters than the public dancers. They are, however, hired at most grand entertainments, to amuse the company; and on these occasions they are usually supplied with brandy, or other spirituous liquors, which they sometimes drink until they can no longer sing, nor strike a chord. (1860/1973: 354)

The above associations between intoxication and music foreshadow al-Khulāṭī's admonitions against musicians' drug abuse. They also anticipate the present-day link between music and the use of mind altering substances. In the modern *ṭarab* culture, *hashish* and alcohol are sometimes used in connection with music-making. Listeners, particularly in festive musical

⁸ al-Maghrabī 1963: 56–57 and Ḥusayn 1964: 171–175.

⁹ Lane 1860/1973: 335.

¹⁰ al-Maghrabī 1963: 56–59 and Khalifa 1975: 199.

¹¹ al-Maghrabī 1963: 155.

¹² Ibid.

gatherings, may treat such substances as part of the overall listening "ritual" and use them to promote a feeling of *basf*, or elation.¹³

In certain ways, the intoxicative and the musical experiences are comparable. For example, the typical *hashish* smoking session, like a musical gathering, is collective and attended by individuals sharing compatible interests and inclinations. In essence, both are "in-group" activities. Also, in general ways, the two processes are patterned and marked by distinctive group behaviors and interactions.¹⁴

Moreover, both experiences are highly transformative, and may produce a variety of physical, mental, and emotional reactions. For example, despite the prevailing sense of togetherness, the state of *hashish* intoxication prompts a wide gamut of individual behaviors, thus reminding us of the musical anecdote about the babies related by al-Khulafī to describe the various inborn reactions to music. Stating that the participants' innate personality traits and tendencies are emphasized when intoxication occurs, al-Maghrabī mentions several types of responses: elation (*inbisāt*), melancholy accompanied by wandering thoughts (*shurūd*), and others.¹⁵

More specifically, an experiential link seems to exist between *hashish* and music as an auditory experience. As various studies indicate, the linkage is manifested in three related ways: 1) the intoxicated individual experiencing an urge to sing or perform music; 2) the intoxicated person similarly experiencing a strong desire to listen to music; and 3) that person developing altered perceptions of what he performs or listens to. These transformational modes seem to explain the often heard concept of *aghānī taḥshīsh*, or "hashish-using songs." This term generally points to a loosely defined musical trait found in songs which may or may not have been created or performed under the influence of *hashish*. What is implied here is that the drug causes the melody to become more fluid, or metrically and accentually more flexible, so as to "shadow" rather than rigidly follow the underlying meter or accent. And similarly, the textual delivery becomes somewhat slurred. Reminiscent of, or perhaps induced by intoxication, such musical looseness is known to generate irresistible ecstasy.

Furthermore, the two worlds share certain verbal expressions. In both *hashish* and *ṭarab* cultures, elation is described through such key words as *basf* and *kayf*.¹⁶ Also, the modern *ṭarab* public utilizes a number of

¹³ According to Khalifa (1975: 203), modern *hashish* users look down upon the consumers of alcohol and various hard drugs on the basis that the consumption of these substances becomes an addiction and causes people to lose their mind and their respect, not to mention also, alcohol is strictly forbidden by Islam.

¹⁴ For details on the typical *hashish*-smoking session, or *jalsat al-hashish*, see al-Maghrabī 1963: 154–156 and 283–321.

¹⁵ al-Maghrabī 1963: 155.

¹⁶ According to Lane, the word *basf* was used to describe a type of *hashish* preparation (1860/1973: 333–334). Similarly, the word *kayf* is used to describe a certain type of *hashish*.

intoxication related metaphors to describe the *ṭarab* state. Accordingly, both *ḥaṣhīsh* and *ṭarab* music are felt physically as well as emotionally. Music that instills profound *ṭarab* sensations is sometimes described as *bit'abbī al-ra's*, or "it fills the head," an expression also used for describing the effects of intoxicating substances, especially the smoking of *ḥaṣhīsh*. Such parallelism underlies Muhammad Asad's poetically engaging description of a *takht* performance he had attended in Damascus. The author discussed the intoxicating powers of the music, albeit in a symbolic or mystical sense:

It rather seemed to me that I was not so much listening to a musical performance as witnessing an exciting happening. Out of the chirping tones of the string instruments there grew up a new rhythm, rising in a tense spiral and then, suddenly, falling down – like the rhythmic rising and falling of a metallic object, faster and slower, softer and stronger: in dispassionate persistence, in endless variations, this one uninterrupted happening, this acoustic phenomenon which trembled in a restrained *intoxication*, grew up, spread out powerfully, *went to the head*: and when it suddenly broke off in the midst of a crescendo (how early, much too early!) I knew: I was imprisoned [*italics mine*]. (Asad 1954: 142)

However, despite such parallels and overlaps between the two realms, *ṭarab* is not necessarily drug bound or intoxication based. Whether out of religious observance or mere physical and mental aversion, the *ṭarab* culture embraces a distinctly purist and drug-free approach to the creation and appreciation of music. Islamic mysticism, as demonstrated by the authoritative writings of al-Ghazālī and others, have focused the novice's attention on the power of *samāʿ*, in other words, on religious ecstasy that is musically induced. And similarly, the various themes and images of wine and intoxication are treated primarily as metaphors for spiritual transcendence. For that matter, we may look at the puritanical anti-drug stance of al-Khulafī, an accomplished musician and composer himself. Biographers and elder musicians point out that many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century artists were totally averse to mind altering substances. Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Jr.) recalled that as a rule early-twentieth-century music masters drank just enough to establish a condition of *baṣṭ*. He explained that "if you are in an elated mood you do not get drunk easily, but if you are not you are more likely to get drunk and lose control of the music." Establishing a distinction between "emotional conditioning" and outright drunkenness, al-ʿAqqād also indicated that those who refrained from drinking were viewed as noteworthy exemplars.¹⁷

¹⁷ From the conversation with Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād, in Los Angeles in 1984. ʿAqqād's statement can be illustrated by a specific incident humorously described by the late well-known Egyptian composer and singer Sayyid Makkāwī. Accordingly, a well-known early-twentieth-century singer consumed hemp oil before performing at a wedding tent and consequently completely forgot the words of the song as his chorus members kept waiting for him to start singing. From a conversation I had with Mr. Makkāwī in Los Angeles on May 30, 1994.

In today's culture, the same holds true. Indeed, a large number of well-established singers and instrumentalists do not use alcohol or *hashish*, and in a few cases do not drink coffee or smoke tobacco. Many stress that although alcohol and drugs may reduce inhibition, they also pose a threat to concentration, particularly when the performer must render precomposed works accurately and in full coordination with other members of the ensemble. One young violinist adds that music is capable of producing its own "high." Notwithstanding the historical connections and metaphoric links between music-making and intoxication, it is basically shown that the musical experience stands on its own.

Modern contexts

Since the 1920s, the contexts of performing have become increasingly varied. Furthermore, through the modern media networks they have grown more interconnected. The different venues have fed into one another, and typically artists who have performed at live events have also recorded commercially and in some cases appeared in film. Obviously, listening to *ṭarab* music has extended beyond the conventional contexts of music making. The media have created new and unprecedented settings for listening, and in significant ways have changed the overall *ṭarab* practice, including the live music.

The informal gathering

In cities such as Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, and Baghdad, performing and listening to *ṭarab* music may take place in intimate social settings. Musicians and listeners speak of a *jalsah* or *qa'dah*, both meaning "a sitting" or "get together," or *jalsat ṭarab*, roughly, "*ṭarab* gathering."¹⁸ In some ways reminiscent of the musical sessions that took place in the confines of the medieval courts, *jalsah* gatherings have certain common characteristics. They may occur regularly, for example, on a certain day of the week or month, but often take place irregularly and without much preparation, as friendly encounters in which music "happens to occur." A *jalsah* usually takes place in the evening – in this case, it might be called *sahrah*, or "evening party." It is safe to say that *ṭarab* events are largely nocturnal. The consumption of food, appetizers, and sometimes alcoholic beverages is very

¹⁸ The word "*jalsah*" comes from *jalsā*, "to sit," and is linguistically related to the word *majlis*, namely "place of sitting," or "assembly."

common. Usually consisting of no more than ten or fifteen men or women, and in many cases both, a *jalsah* group typically meets in a private home. The group members may either take turns in hosting the event, or may gather primarily in the house of a music-loving, relatively well-to-do host. The attendants may come from a variety of social and professional backgrounds. In some cases, however, they are united mainly by family ties or by vocational affiliations, factors that do not always guarantee compatibility in the levels of musical initiation and may even dampen the overall musical atmosphere, as illustrated by the following example.

One gathering I attended in Cairo in 1971 took place on a late afternoon at the home of a man who pursued a highly respected nonmusical profession, but was also an accomplished performer on the *buzuq*. The group consisted of about a dozen individuals, including other professionals, government employees, and one music theorist who also played the *ūd*. The *jalsah* conversations touched upon a variety of social and intellectual issues, but also tangentially upon topics related to music theory and instrument making, and were followed by a performance of *taqāsim* by the host. The musical performance may have occurred partly due to the presence of the theorist-musician, who had brought me along and who introduced me as a music performer and researcher. It was clear to me that the attendants, whose relationship to the host was based on professional rather than musical collegiality, were mostly non-sammī'ah. Indications that the ambiance was tilted toward polite, non-interactive, and non-ecstatic "listening" were made obvious through the reserved demeanor of the guests and through the performer's own behavior. After starting to play his instrument, the host stopped every few minutes to make brief comments. His verbalizations, covering issues related to the philosophy of music and to the history of the instrument he was playing, may have been prompted by a desire on the host's part to maintain some form of polite communication with his musically uninclined guests. However, during that same year, I heard a recording of a live performance that the host himself had given at a small theater at the Cairo Music Academy. The recording captured an outstanding display of artistry before a lively audience that responded with well-synchronized verbal exclamations and had clearly incorporated a large contingency of sammī'ah.

Ideally, at musical gatherings, the participants listen attentively and appear totally immersed in the process. Furthermore, the performers are able to determine or negotiate the times appropriate for them to perform and to choose repertoires they feel inspired or prepared to perform with relatively little interruption from the listeners. The performances emphasize small ensemble or solo playing. The instrumentalists may take turns in playing, or may perform together, for example when accompanying a singer. Traditional, especially improvisatory, genres are frequently chosen.

Moreover, the typical atmosphere of the jalsah is amicable. For one thing, the performers tend to feel at home while performing nonprofessionally within their own circles of friends, admirers, students, and family members. The event itself may become a memorable experience, one that the individual participants talk about or remember for years. At the end of one lively musical evening that took place in my parents' house during the early 1960s, one elder music lover commented: "these moments will go with me to the grave." In the aftermath of such a performance the attendants may give music even deeper philosophical or universal meanings. After a musical gathering in Cairo, the celebrated Egyptian riqq player Muḥammad al-'Arabī explained to me that music was love in the broadest sense, love for one's wife, love for one's family, love for everybody. He added that "love is everything and that if the artist did not love he would be nothing," an explanation that conjured distinct mystical overtones.¹⁹ After a performance in Los Angeles, a percussionist from Syria explained to me that if there were more *ṣunna* in the world there would be less evil and fewer wars. At the end of a musical jalsah in Baghdad, an event during which I played the buzuq and only for a number of intellectually sophisticated and musically initiated listeners, I encountered a number of noteworthy reflections. One person attributed the love of music to a natural predilection of the human soul, an attribution clearly reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's eleventh-century writings on *ṣunna*, while another person made reference to Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954), in which the author's own intoxication presumably caused him to undergo a deep mystical state.²⁰

In its entirety, a jalsah event tends to embody a sequence of gradually unfolding and organically linked phases, an order of events that contributes significantly to the jalsah's transformative purpose. In Cairo, I have attended a few informal music sessions at the home of a local composer and music aficionado. These sessions usually took place either in the late afternoon or evening in a rather small reception room where *ūd*s, *nāys*, and *riqq*s were hung on the wall, and which constituted a self-contained enclosure furnished with sofas, coffee tables, and ashtrays, thereby providing an ambiance that seemed physically and visually conducive to music-making. The gatherings occurred usually once a week and involved a more or less steady core of individuals, namely about a dozen local professional and amateur musicians and performing and nonperforming listeners, and occasionally a few visitors and guests such as myself. The attendants were basically all male but women could also sit in or listen in an adjacent living room. The ages of the participants tended to range from forty to seventy years, although one musician occasionally brought his son, who was in his twenties and was also a career

¹⁹ From a conversation that took place in May 1989.

²⁰ This event took place in September 1989.

musician. The following is a rough description of one such jalsah whose internal sequential flow is typical, although by no means fixed or totally predictable.²¹

That event seemed to unfold in a gradual and seamless fashion. The guests began to arrive around nine o'clock in the evening. They greeted the host and each other. Some embraced. The first half-hour represented a carry-over from prior daily affairs and thus incorporated an ordinary exchange of platitudes and discussions of mundane concerns, especially benign ones such as: "I have tried calling you several times in the past few days. Is your phone out of order?" Reestablishing a sense of comfort and collegiality among the different group members, such preliminary exchanges were accompanied by other forms of mental and physical "conditioning": drinking coffee, tea, or soft drinks; smoking cigarettes; and so on.

This preparatory period eased itself smoothly into the performance proper. Toward the end of the mundane verbal exchanges, one celebrated singer and composer arrived and was warmly greeted and shown to his seat. At that time, a middle-aged 'ūd player had his instrument in its cloth bag leaning against the wall next to his seat. As he picked it up to move it to another place in the room, he explained that he had been taking it to the repairman to have the neck fixed and had hoped that this time it was fixed for good. His explanation led to further discussions on instruments, for example what plectrums and what strings were best and ended with the performer taking the instrument out of the bag in order to show the repairs to his eager colleagues and demonstrating what the 'ūd sounded like after the repair. The middle-aged musician played a few phrases that outlined the scale of one of the maqāmāt and seemed well-suited for testing his newly repaired instrument. The instrumentalist's demonstration, although brief, was met with verbal gestures of admiration from some audience members, who begged him to continue to play. The instrumentalist modestly declined and voiced such remarks as: "you don't want to have me take up the time since we are enjoying chatting this evening." Then one of the guests, a more or less steady member of the group, suggested that the attendants hear a friend of his, a young amateur 'ūd player who was visiting from another Arab country and was joining the group for the first time. Everybody applauded the idea and the young 'ūd player obliged. He played for about ten minutes, mostly skillfully rendered semi-improvised pieces, and received a good round of compliments at the end. Here, the musical discussions and the young musician's performance served as the final and major thrust into the main musical segment of the evening.

At this point, the guests begged to hear something from the singer, "whatever he wished to sing," and voiced their pleas through commonly

²¹ This performance occurred on May 29, 1989.

heard polite expressions such as: *Aṭḥifnā*, "Cast your gems upon us;" *Iḥḥakkil*, "Grant your benevolence;" and *Āyẓīn nismaʿ*, "We would like to listen." Some members of the audience urged the middle-aged ʿūd player to start performing, as his music had to set the mood for the singer. The ensuing segment began with *tāqāsīm*, during which the ʿūd player established one of the *māqāmat* and in the process drew many ecstatic responses from the audience members. The *taqāsīm* came to a natural cadence followed by a burst of complimentary responses and then started again, at this point basically serving as a prelude to the singing. Here, some of the exclamations addressed the singer by name, thus giving him added recognition and encouraging him to start. Subsequently, the singer began his performance which, incorporating a medley of several ʿūd-accompanied songs, lasted for about forty-five minutes. During the performance the listeners did not request songs outright, but at times discreetly slipped in the names of some of the songs that the singer specializes in singing, particularly when these songs were of the same *maqām* that was being performed at the time.

Moreover, the *sammīʿah* were truly "at work." During the song segment there were emotionally charged silences punctuated by animated and seemingly involuntary physical and vocal gestures. The various responses differed in their levels of intensity from one person to the other, but on the whole seemed genuine, as well as emotionally profound. They were also synchronized with one another, and seemed to instinctively emulate the climactic build-ups and resolutions of the musical phrases. The verbal exclamations were usually released toward the termination of, or after the *qatlāʾ*, or cadential motifs ending certain phrases. Sometimes these gestures were accompanied by raising a hand or lifting both arms and occasionally by nodding the head or laughing discreetly as a sign of admiring or "figuring out" an intricate modulation or an unusual *qafḥah*. At times also, a man whose listening style was relatively more demonstrable looked at some others including myself and expressed his admiration of the singer through statements such as, "What is that?" "It is impossible!" and "He is a legend!" Others expressed their *ṭarab* in a somewhat subdued manner, without talking to each other or looking each other in the face. Here, as well, the variety of reactions displayed brings to mind al-Khulafī's illustrative anecdote.

As the vocal performance came to a stop, the ʿūd accompanist made a humorous comment as if to break the silence and prevent an anti-climactic feeling from setting in. The comment led to about a half-hour episode of joke telling by different members of the group. The jokes were not factual and did not mention any specific individuals, but instead poked fun at social stereotypes, particularly the *Ṣaʿīdīs*, or Upper Egyptians, whose alleged naiveté is the butt of numerous Egyptian jokes. These were short jokes, but had poignant punch lines sometimes ending in puns or double meanings. Jokes were told by practically all attendants except the singer and to some extent

the 'ūd player, who both listened and seemed to enjoy the joking performance, which again was exhausted and in turn came naturally to an end. At that time, the host and two of the guests who all knew me well, and had heard me perform on the buzuq before, insisted that I play something. Since I did not have my own instrument, the host handed me one that he owned, but that needed repair. After apologizing for the condition of the instrument, I played a taqāsim performance that lasted for a few minutes and aroused enthusiastic responses followed by lavish praise from the singer.

Subsequently, the group expressed interest in another musical "set" by the singer and his 'ūd accompanist. Obliging, these two performed again for twenty minutes or so. Then, after a momentary feeling of repose had set in, the host, an amateur 'ūd player as well as a composer, remarked humorously that since he owned the house and paid the utilities, he was therefore entitled to play at least one of his tunes. He picked up his own 'ūd and accompanied himself in a song that he had recently composed. Rather than reacting with the same emotional intensity exhibited earlier, the audience made their complimentary responses after the performance had ended and commended the composer for his clever compositional applications. In return, the host briefly discussed the background of his composition and linked his attempts to record it commercially to an earlier incident that was humorous and involved a specific person who was not present at the gathering but whom most of the guests knew very well. At that point, the sama' mood began to unwind, as the group members listened to and sometimes exchanged factual stories about that same person, stories that poked fun at his excessive frugality, his odd social mannerisms, and the like.

After these exchanges, the event seemed to come to an end. Some members glanced at their watches, and expressed their utter surprise at how fast time went by, how several hours were gone without being noticed. The guests also began to thank the musicians and the host and to note how important such evenings are, uttering statements such as "music is food for the soul." As the guests bid farewell to the host, who walked them to the outside gate, the conversation – despite a few additional exchanges of compliments and humorous remarks – included brief projections concerning the business that had to be pursued the following day.

As definable occurrences in place and time, jalsah events transform the participants both mentally and emotionally. Yet in order for that to happen, the various "players" must perform specialized but also complementary roles. Both listeners and musicians need to become part of an organic and a highly dynamic performative process. The transformational qualities of the jalsah also stem from the implicit ordering of micro-events, repertoires, and modes of behavior. In the case just described (see Figure 3.1), the jalsah began with an *ordinary phase* then gradually moved to an *entry phase*. A common behavioral mindset marked by mundane conversations progressed

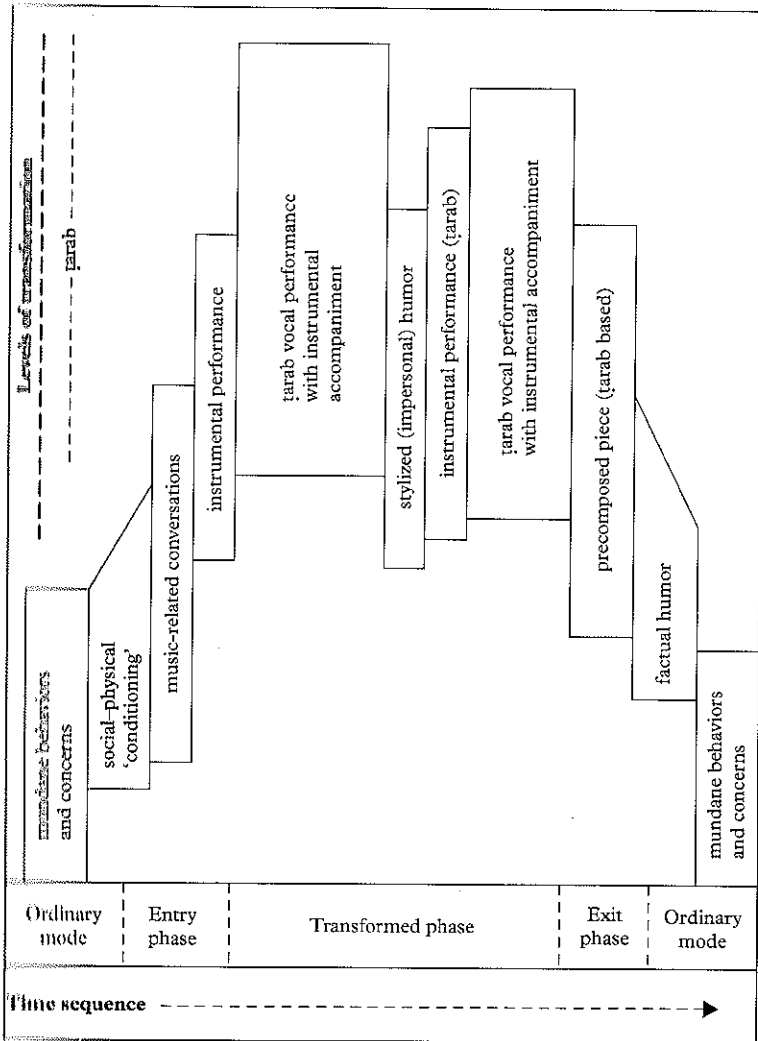


Figure 3.1 Analysis of a jalsah event

into a musically conducive state of physical and psychological preparedness. Furthermore, delving more deeply into the topic of music in their discussions, the participants recognized the presence of the less established guest 'ud-player, and gave him a chance to participate. His performance provided a suitable segue to the *central phase*, namely the 'ud accompanist's solo and the emotionally charged performance of the celebrated singer. Representing what may have been the highest point of tarab in the jalsah, this phase was

marked by physical and emotional conditions that made the farthest departure from the participants' ordinary modes of consciousness. The musical performance, including the symbolic love themes of the texts and the abstract instrumental improvisations and vocalizations by the singer, transformed the behaviors and emotions of the group most radically.

The humorous verbal interlude that followed seemed to offer expressive variety, as well as "dramatic relief." Significantly, in the form of short depersonalized and stereotyped vignettes, the jokes did not seem to distract from the abstract transformational mood prevailing at this phase of the *jalsah*. In effect, they provided an opportunity for participants other than the musicians to "perform," as joke-telling in Egyptian social gatherings constitutes a communal verbal performance that requires a certain level of talent and skill, and as al-Khulafī had earlier stated (to his great displeasure), often surfaced in musical contexts. After that, the insistence that I perform on the *buzuq* may have served the double purpose of enabling the group to acknowledge me musically as well as socially and of providing further *ṭarab* before the second vocal set was presented by the singer and his *ūd* accompanist. In effect, the second set, which seemed less emotionally charged and less climactic than the first set, prepared for the *exit phase* which was effectively established by the host through his tactful and properly timed request of the guests to hear his new tune. Furthermore, the ensuing episode of humor, which employed factual subject matter, facilitated the participants' gradual return to their *ordinary phase* of consciousness. As this interpretation, or "thick description" (Geertz 1973: 6) reveals, the *jalsah* is delicately engineered, but also spontaneously and creatively played out.

Finally, in today's informal gatherings attentive and highly responsive listening is becoming less common. Quite often, *jalsah* events are dominated by non-sammī'ah, who may enjoy, or tolerate one or a few "listening-type" pieces by the musicians, but would soon convert the *jalsah* into a "sing-along," "clap-along" occasion. In such instances, the repertoire often veers toward the more "popular" and musically accessible songs or song fragments. The more established instrumentalists, who tend to become mere accompanists or whose playing would have to follow the party's collective musical flow, may feel reluctant to perform, or may even stay aside and just observe. Indeed, when true sama' events occur they are usually savored, cherished, and fondly remembered by the sammī'ah and the performers alike.

The public performance

Today, the word "*ḥaflah*," which roughly means "ceremonial gathering," or "celebration," is used to describe the large, publicly advertised *ṭarab*

performance. At least conceptually, a ḥaflah is treated as a festive event and is linked to a nonmusical context, for example a religious or national holiday. However, in most cases, such linkage becomes perfunctory and is often forgotten or ignored by the ḥaflah goers.

In terms of ambiance and structure, the ḥaflah has a number of characteristic traits. For example, the program may feature several performing groups, a female dancer, a comedian, possibly a master of ceremony, and a number of vocalists, including one or more ṭarab singers. At times also, only one singer and his or her *firqah*, or accompanying ensemble, are presented. This was typical of Umm Kulthūm's *ḥaflāt* (plural of *ḥaflah*). Normally, the event takes place in the evening and would be introduced as *ḥafl ṣāhir*, or "evening festive gathering." It may occur at a theater, which was the usual setting for Umm Kulthūm's performances. It may also take place in a hotel ballroom, large restaurant, or public park, venues that most often have table seating and include food and drinks. Typically the audience is large, ranging from a hundred or so to a thousand or more. An exception is the private event (*ḥaflah khāṣṣah*), which is usually small and restricted to members of a specific organization or family and guests. Ḥaflah-goers usually come from different backgrounds. They may include rich patrons, government officials, military personnel, and ordinary citizens, both male and female.

Obviously, the public nature of the event and its celebratory connotations attract individuals of a wide variety of musical dispositions. This phenomenon was noted by Umm Kulthūm, who reportedly stated that around 1925 when she first launched her professional career she used to feel very nervous in front of the sophisticated *sammī'ah* of that time, but much later she developed greater confidence, and even began to find pleasure in facing her audience members, "as if I were at a school and the listeners were pupils" (Purād 1976: 302–303). At the same time, she was able to study their personality traits, "as if I were watching an entertaining film" (Ibid.: 303), and to divide them into four main types, which she described with her own touch of satire.

Accordingly, the first type of listener is extremely tender and becomes wondrously transported. "I see him swim in a space of absent-mindedness (*shurūd*) and moan, then all of a sudden he comes back to his senses when he hears the others applauding and joins them in their applause" (Ibid.: 303). The second type displays fast changing moods. He is extremely tranquil, but as soon as he hears the singing he is overtaken by ṭarab and becomes highly excited. "He shouts between phrases and says: '*Kamān yā Sitt!*' (Repeat once more, oh Madam!), but is not satisfied with that as he jumps on top of his seat because of excessive elation (*nashwah*), and instead of showing his appreciation by applauding, like everyone else, he throws his *ṭarbush* (fez) up in the air" (Ibid.: 303). Umm Kulthūm presented one variation, namely the man who comes to the ḥaflah not wearing any headdress, but in a



Umm Kulthūm in performance. Photo courtesy of Dār al-Ṣayyād.



c



Photos a, b, c: Listeners at a performance by Umm Kulthūm.
Photos courtesy of Dār al-Şayyād.

moment of high excitement he grabs someone else's *ṭarbūsh* and throws it in the air. The third kind of listener likes to sing along somewhat strenuously, but with great passion. "So often when I stop singing suddenly before the end of a passage in order to see what he will do, I see him look around smiling as if trying to hide his embarrassment in front of his fellow listeners" (Ibid.: 303). The fourth type she called *muharrij*, or "clown," someone who comes to the performance probably not to listen to her but rather to attract attention. As she put it, this strange type of person does not clap like the others, but rather pounds a wooden stick against the floor or against his seat every time he is overcome by the elation of *ṭarab* (*intashā ṭaraban*). "He doesn't say 'repeat' like everyone else, but unleashes an extended ululation [high-pitched vocal cheer] that brings about laughter throughout the hall" (Ibid.: 304).

Umm Kulthūm added that these and other types of listeners, whom she had encountered throughout her professional career, are all part of an audience that liked her and in turn she had liked. We are told that this Egyptian singer was so inspired by some of her devotees, that she bestowed upon one of them, Ḥāj Ḥāfiḍ al-Taḥḥān, the title *al-Sammī' al-Awwal*, "The First Sammī'."²² Appearing to dwell on the extreme manifestations of listening, these descriptions nevertheless illustrate the wide range of desirable or even tolerable listening behaviors, and again remind us of al-Khulafī's listening related anecdote.

The ḥafḥah performer faces a typical set of logistical and musical challenges. For the pre-microphone takht singers, such as al-Ḥamūlī, loudness of the voice was not only desirable but also necessary. Reportedly, in 1932 when a microphone was put in front of Umm Kulthūm at the Azbakiyyah Theater, she indignantly threw it off the stage.²³ Later, the introduction of sound amplification enabled the singer to entertain large audiences, and made it possible for him or her to be better heard against an ensemble that had increased significantly in size and had incorporated new string, percussion, and in some cases electronic, instruments. For the modern ḥafḥah artist, the sound system has been an indispensable mediator.

Also in view of the "theatrical" atmosphere of the ḥafḥah, the ideal muṭrib or muṭribah can benefit greatly from having appealing looks and commanding stage presence. Similarly appreciated are proper facial and hand gestures. It is often heard that an entertainer must not look *jāmid*, namely "frozen," or "expressionless," on stage. In addition to knowing a very large repertoire, the *ṭarab* artist must also possess exceptional physical stamina. The celebrated Syrian singer Ṣabah Fakhrī is well-known for being able to

²² Firād 1976: 300.

²³ Firād 1976: 157.

perform for up to ten hours without stopping.²⁴ Actually some performers sing long enough to outlast most of their listeners, except for the persistent *sammī'ah* who remain eager to hear them at their best, usually during the latter portion of their performance.

At a *ḥaflah*, the *muṭrib*'s primary support comes from the *sammī'ah*. As Umm Kulthūm's description demonstrates, *ḥaflah* singers are fully conscious of the connoisseurs who inspire them through the active participatory role they play. However, given the public nature of the typical *ḥaflah*, the number of *sammī'ah* in the audience is quite unpredictable. For that reason, many modern *ḥaflah* singers have continued the earlier practice of bringing their own small entourage of faithful listeners to their own performances.²⁵ In the 1920s, Umm Kulthūm was reportedly surrounded by a clique of people who followed her to every *ḥaflah* she gave. Furthermore, before she accepted any performance contracts, she insisted that these individuals be allowed to come along even to the private *ḥaflāt*. We are told that those individuals instilled great confidence and comfort within her. Similarly, "their gestures became contagious and brought about great enthusiasm into the rest of the listeners, who in turn were encouraged to applaud and cheer" (Fu'ād 1976: 181). I witnessed a similar situation when I attended a specially arranged performance of Iraqi *maqām* by the late celebrated singer Yūsuf 'Umar in Baghdad in 1975. Since most of the listeners were musically noninitiated, including polite and highly appreciative Europeans, Americans, and others attending an international music symposium in the city, the singer had apparently requested to have a few of his followers join the audience. As it turned out, these followers provided the appropriate musical responses and the interactive dynamism the event so urgently needed.

In turn, the singer needs to develop a general sense of who his listeners are and to establish good rapport with them. As he stands on the stage, he needs to look at the audience members and determine their overall level of musicality and general mood. In Fakhri's words, "a *muṭrib* must also be a psychologist."²⁶ One of Fakhri's vocal accompanists maintains that Fakhri himself is well-known for his ability to "study" his audience. In order to create a comfortable *jaww*, or "atmosphere," the *muṭrib* may begin by saying a few words, usually familiar platitudes that prepare the listeners emotionally and arouse their enthusiasm.

²⁴ Fakhri's endurance is spoken of proverbially. One Arab-American newspaper, *al-Akhhār* (32) June 20, 1997: 19, wrote that Fakhri was noted in the *Guinness Book of Records* for having sung for ten uninterrupted hours at a Caracas theater in Venezuela, as he stood on his feet from ten at night until eight in the morning while performing for an Arab immigrant audience there.

²⁵ Some Egyptians refer to such "implanted" audience members sarcastically as *muṭay-yabāṭiyyah* in reference to their uttered expressions of approval, namely *tayyib*, roughly "sweetening." In fact, one such expression is "*tayyib!*" which literally means "delicious," "healthy," "good-hearted," and "wonderful."

²⁶ From an interview with Mr. Fakhri in Los Angeles on January 24, 1990.

Particularly in the large ḥaflāt, the muṭrib also needs to locate the sammī'ah, or clusters of sammī'ah in the audience and to maintain direct visual and musical contact with them. In order to achieve that, he may make a few musical trials. As Ṣabāḥ Fakhri explains, his ḥaflah really does not begin until after about one hour of singing has passed, because until that time, he would have been trying pieces in different styles, muwashshahāt, qudūd, adwār and others to help him ascertain the existence and location of the sammī'ah, as well as to sense the dominant tastes and inclinations in the audience as a whole. Fakhri adds that such musical scanning is accompanied by continued visual surveillance, which enables him to constantly monitor the audience's reactions and to fashion or adjust the repertoire accordingly.²⁷

Once a healthy rapport is established, the artist attempts to keep the audience emotionally engaged. He would present his repertoire in such a way as to prevent the ṭarab momentum from slackening or dissipating. For example, if the singer felt his mawwāl was becoming too long he would follow it immediately with a highly animated metric song. In the process, he may introduce what I call "signal pieces," essentially well-known songs of a "lighter" character, for example certain *qudūd* (plural of *qadd*, an Aleppo-based strophic song with a colloquial text). Such songs function as ecstatic capsules, or musical "aphrodisiacs," whose associative energy throws the audience, particularly the non-sammī'ah, into an instant participatory frenzy. Signal pieces are often treated as climactic "treats," but also many singers resort to using them as "crutches," for example, if they are not very skilled or whenever they are physically exhausted or uninspired. The typical responses, clapping with the beat, dancing, and singing along, are usually triggered as soon as the signal piece is begun or even when it is still being verbally announced by the singer. Essentially, the Western notion of background, or soft "dinner" music is alien to the ṭarab culture, whose practitioners tend to view direct and continued interaction between performer and listener as a prime condition for good entertaining.²⁸

In the process of selecting their repertoires, the performers try to navigate through widely ranging musical tastes and backgrounds. Consequently, the musical items are often quite varied and the order in which the material is presented is rather unpredictable. However, in Ṣabāḥ Fakhri's own performances, the evening usually opens with an instrumental prelude followed by

²⁷ From the same 1990 interview. For that matter, at a ḥaflah held in the same year in a hotel ballroom in Los Angeles, Ṣabāḥ Fakhri reacted firmly against the routine dimming of the lights in the hall. Consequently, the lights were kept on throughout the performance, thus enabling the singer to maintain visual contact with the audience.

²⁸ I suspect that the musicians' interest in keeping their audiences engaged at all times and their discomfort with performing for nonattentive, usually chatty audiences, are among the reasons why in many ḥaflāt, for example dinner parties, the musicians turn up the sound amplification to such a high level, making the music painfully difficult to ignore.

listening-oriented metric pieces, usually including muwashshahat. Similarly, pieces whose content is more ecstatic, such as vocal improvisations, tend to appear sporadically, in alternation with lighter songs. Also, the more ecstatic pieces often become more prominent toward the end of the ḥaflah, supposedly when the muṭrib has reached a high plateau of saṭṭanah, typically late in the evening. When a number of artists are featured, the lighter presentations normally pave the way for the main ṭarab attraction. In some cases, a boisterous or musically unfocused atmosphere predominant during the early phases of a ḥaflah suddenly yields to a listening-oriented, jalsah-like mood as soon as the featured muṭrib comes to the stage.²⁹

The nightclub

The modern Arab nightclub, known by such names as *kabarēh*, "cabaret" or *malhā laylī*, literally "a night place-of-entertainment," has provided another outlet for ṭarab music, as well as for other musical styles and entertainment genres. Today, Arab night clubs are found in various large urban centers such as Cairo, Damascus, and Beirut, and in Western cities such as Paris, London, and New York. They are usually located in special "red-light" districts, in tourist places, in summer-resort areas, and in large fashionable hotels. The nightclub audience tends to be transient, heterogeneous, and largely anonymous. The clientele is likely to include many uninitiated listeners, or sometimes curious foreign tourists.

The nightclub repertoires vary considerably and may incorporate a wide array of Western and local popular music and dance genres. However, certain presentations are typical. When included, the ṭarab segment is usually presented toward the end of the evening. As in the ḥaflah, it serves as an emotional crescendo or musical finale for the entire show. Whereas the earlier "light" portions of the program are usually attended by the casual onlookers or entertainment seekers, the later segment serves those who, motivated by their musical interest, may remain in the club for hours waiting for an admired muṭrib or muṭribah to appear, typically after midnight. Obviously, the club owners can derive added financial gains from presenting the featured celebrities at the end of the show. At the same time, the order of presentation as such demonstrates a certain recognition of ṭarab as a late-night activity whose time becomes ripe after a long period of

²⁹ For example, this was the case at a variety performance during which I played the nāy as part of an ensemble that accompanied Sayyid Makkāwī. The event took place in Los Angeles in 1994. When this blind celebrity was brought to the stage, an unmistakable listening mood prevailed.

musical preparation accompanied by eating and drinking.

At the nightclub, *ṭarab* musicians may apply the same skills and strategies they use at the *ḥaflah*. A singer may talk to the audience members in order to establish basic rapport with them. He or she may also use the first few musical "numbers" to assess the listeners' musical orientation and to determine the existence and size of the *sammī'ah* contingency among them. Detecting the presence of the *sammī'ah*, a female singer may, for example, introduce an Umm Kulthūm song classic or a vocal improvisation. Otherwise, a singer may present a "lighter" repertoire of songs for the general audience to sing or dance to or even just listen to passively while eating, drinking, and chatting.

The physical atmosphere of the nightclub adds a peculiar dimension to the *ṭarab* experience. The nightclub ambience relies on intensified levels of stimulation, for example through bright colors and striking decors, including those portraying Orientalist Arabian themes, psychedelic stage lighting, dimmed or candle floor-lights, and thick cigarette smoke. These factors complement or conceivably enhance, the purchase and consumption of alcohol, yet another medium of stimulation. Such diverse interventions are reinforced by staging effects: various, and sometimes fast changing, numbers; dazzling beaded attire; colorful dance costumes; sexually suggestive clothing; exaggerated facial make-up; stylish hairdos; colorfully dyed hair; lavish display of jewelry; and others.

Such modes of stimulation serve different functions. On a certain level, they provide a sensory vehicle for stirring up an audience that is highly transitory and diversified: customers who may not know the performing musicians or may not be directly interested in the music per se. Simultaneously, the music itself may become "sensationalized" by emphasizing the percussive component, utilizing electronic instruments, and performing at a high level of sound amplification. In effect, *ṭarab* is experienced and appreciated, at least by some, as part of a visual, gastronomic, erotic, and intoxicating package. The resulting musical-sensory revelry may modify the customers' immediate awareness of time and place. It may also inspire them to forgo ordinary social and even economic scruples and consequently indulge more freely in the overall ecstatic process, as well as spend more liberally on food and alcohol and generously tip the entertainers, waiters, and cloak-room attendants.

For the musical purist, the club experience may seem socially and emotionally contrived, and even aesthetically compromised. Of the three main contexts discussed, the nightclub event is probably the least memorable, despite its high level of excitation. The musicians tend to conduct their nightclub performances merely as work, often describing it as being tedious if not demeaning and thankless, and similarly some audience members may think of the event as yet another night out. Nevertheless, for many the club

provides a unique context for experiencing ṭarab music and its emotional affect. It also offers musicians, composers, and producers a primary arena for both economic gain and artistic creativity.

Performing for oneself

Ṭarab performances do not have to be group events; playing alone is extremely common. The immediate reasons for playing without the physical presence of an audience are numerous. The phenomenon of "practice," as we know it, for example through the use of scalar or melodic patterns in Western art music, or the regimen of *riyaz* (from Arabic *riyāḍ*, meaning "exercise") in classical Indian music, seems to play a minimal role in the ṭarab experience. Similarly, systematic drilling or technique building is atypical of ṭarab artists, except for the virtuosity-minded. Instead, performance dexterity is usually developed through actual musical work or by playing at a *brova*, namely a work session or rehearsal.³⁰ However, a musician may play alone in the guise of doing something else. An instrument-maker may perform in his workshop to try out a new instrument he has made. A qānūn player may play to "break in" a new set of strings or to repair certain defects with the tuning levers. And an artist may perform for the conscious purpose of composing. Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī (1906–1981), who composed some of Umm Kulthūm's best admired songs, is said to have played his 'ūd alone in his bedroom with a small tape recorder intended to capture the tunes that may emerge.³¹ And of course, musicians play alone in order to satisfy an urge to play, or simply perform for their own pleasure.

Ṭarab musicians realize that playing in socially constructed musical contexts is "the real thing." For example, they recognize that the stringent technical demands posed by formal performances can be tremendously beneficial. A Lebanese nāy maker offered me a piece of advice that I found quite valuable as a nāy player. He insisted that in the final result you can best determine the quality of an instrument by playing it in a formal performance context, with an ensemble and for qualified listeners. Presumably in such a context the player faces emotional and musical exigencies that challenge the very mechanics of playing and expose the true limitations and capabilities of the instrument. The nāy maker added that for him the nightclub where he used to work provided a perfect ground for testing his newly made instruments.³²

³⁰ It is not known exactly when the term "brova," from Italian *prova*, namely "proof," or "rehearsal," became part of the local musical parlance. Incidentally, the word is also locally used to mean "film negative."

³¹ I learned this about al-Sunbāṭī from the late 'Alī Reda (Riḍā, d. 1993) in the early 1980s.

³² From a conversation in Beirut in the early 1980s.

Nevertheless, playing for oneself can be extremely creative. Being alone with an instrument or with one's own voice offers the performer, especially the improviser, an opportunity for experimentation without external interventions. In such a context, the musician is able to allow more room for his intuition, as well as to explore the potentials of his instrument or voice, or for that matter, of his musical mind. Being alone can free the artist to be his or her "feeling" self.

Moreover, playing alone can be profoundly ecstatic. It entails a certain "built-in" feedback within the performer, as a musician and listener at the same time. Lone music makers tell about the deep absorption they experience and indicate that they lose track of time and feel somewhat detached from their immediate surroundings. Similarly, they describe the jarring sensations that occur when others intrude. Accordingly, as soon as an "external" listener becomes involved, the performance may completely change direction, or depending upon the listener's musical disposition, or personal "energy," the performer's level of ecstasy may decrease drastically or vanish altogether. The emotive efficacy of playing for oneself seems embedded in the artist's ability to function as one's own musical springboard. The performer who plays alone appears to set in motion a relatively undisturbed cyclical process within himself, a dynamic through which the music is directly felt and generated.

Ecstasy and sound recording

In the modern history of Arab music, one of the most significant developments has been the appearance and proliferation of sound recording. By the turn of the twentieth century, the invention of the phonograph enabled some *ṭarab* artists to make their own home recordings on wax cylinders and soon after, some cylinders became commercially available. Around 1904 the pre-recorded flat disc began to dominate the Arab market. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, millions of 78-rpm discs were produced, advertised, and disseminated by major European and Near-Eastern record companies. Large international business firms such as Gramophone (later His Master's Voice) of England, Odeon of Germany, and the locally owned Baidaphon became a major source of income for many musicians. Creating a massive record audience through rigorous advertising and dissemination strategies, they dramatically enhanced the popularity of certain *ṭarab* singers, Shaykh Yūsuf al-Manyalāwī, Shaykh Salāmah Hījāzī, Shaykh Sayyid al-Ṣafī, Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Ḥayy, Umm Kulthūm, and many others throughout the Arab world.³³

³³ For more information on the history of recording in the Arab world, particularly Egypt, see Racy 1976 and 1977.

The Egyptian musical film first appeared in 1932, and was inaugurated with a production that featured the actress and female *ṭarab* singer Nādirah. Subsequently, Cairo witnessed impressive growth in its motion picture industry, as Egypt's musical films played throughout the Arab world and featured singers such as 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Umm Kulthūm, and sister and brother Asmahān (1912–1944) and Farīd al-Aṭrash (1915–1974). After World War II, the Arab cinema continued to present well-known male and female vocalists, although the singing styles of many film stars became further removed from the traditional *ṭarab* stream. The radio provided another channel. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Cairo's private radio stations broadcast live performances as well as played available commercial recordings. Later, the official Egyptian Radio Station, established in 1934, offered various types of music, including *waṣlāt* (plural of *waṣlah*), specially prepared for the station by well-known *ṭarab* singers, Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Ḥayy (1896–1962) and others. More recently, Arab radio stations, specifically those run by local governments, have introduced and recorded music by various artists and have generally kept their own archives of old and new recordings. Among their regular payroll staff have been singers, composers, lyric writers, and instrumentalists, as well as musical producers, announcers, and sound engineers. The mainstream music has been broadcast regularly from different Arab radio stations, although some stations have also featured weekly programs devoted to the *qadīm*, or early *ṭarab* repertoire.³⁴

The period extending from the 1950s through the 1970s witnessed the rise of the LP and the 45-rpm discs and the proliferation of television, which began largely as a localized medium for broadcasting various musical and nonmusical programs. Similarly, the reel-to-reel magnetic tape became the primary medium for studio and home recording. During the last decades of the twentieth century, the cassette tape emerged as one of the most effective media of musical dissemination, largely because cassettes are relatively cheap to buy and easy to duplicate, store, and transport, or for that matter to bootleg.³⁵ The 60- or 90-minute cassette tape has been used widely to record live *ṭarab* performances and to copy songs from radio or to duplicate available recordings, an advantage that the present digital technology continues to provide.

Within the *ṭarab* culture, the ability of the record medium to communicate *ṭarab* feeling has been a topic of concern. When sound recording first appeared, there was a general feeling in the Arab world, as well as in the West, that the "talking machine" was a delightful novelty and a scientific

³⁴ One of the most remarkable examples is a regular weekly program that has been broadcast from Cairo for at least the last twenty-five years. Titled *Sahrat Alḥān Zamān* (An Evening of Tunes from the Past), it is prepared by the well-known music historian Maḥmūd Kāmil and presented by Ḥālāh al-Ḥadīdī.

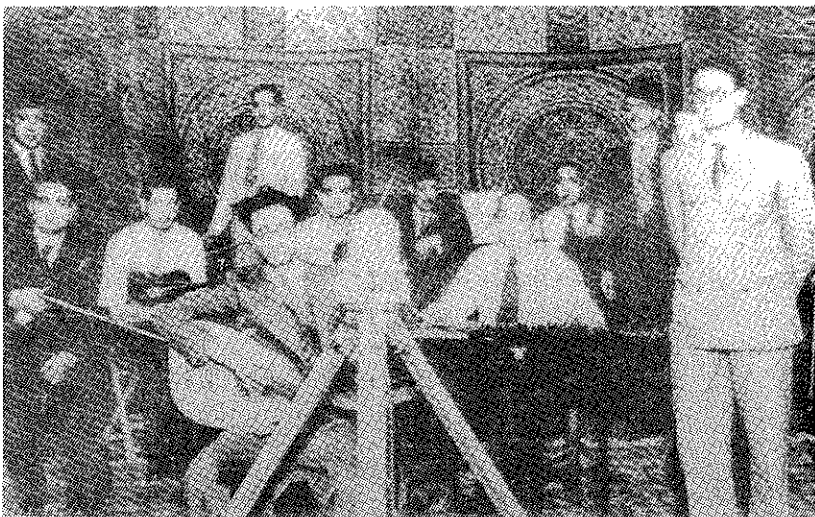
³⁵ See El-Shawan 1987.

marvel, but not a viable musical medium. In a chapter on acoustics, Kāmil al-Khulafī included a footnote in which he differentiated between listening to live music and listening to the wax cylinder, and considered phonograph records as inferior replications of reality. He criticized the phonograph precisely because of its acoustical limitations and because the exigencies of recording deprived the performer of both the appropriate human ambiance and the physical comfort needed for creating *ṭarab*. In his words, "listening to the phonograph is like eating with false teeth" (ca.1904: 24).

At the same time, al-Khulafī's judgment left open the question of whether or not the concept of recording per se was objectionable. Thus, had it not been for the technical barriers and artistic limitations confronting the performers, could recorded sound be enjoyed outside the traditional contexts of listening, without seeing and interacting with the performers directly? During the early decades of the twentieth century, the *ṭarab* culture gradually came to accept the record as a musical medium. The attitudes of the artists and the listeners, and the staggering disc sales showed that: recorded music, especially with improved acoustical fidelity, can communicate tremendous musical affect. Equally important, the communicability of *ṭarab* feeling is possible if the original performance had been ecstatically charged to begin with. In other words, musical ecstasy, generated through a feeling of *saṭṭanah* on the part of the recording vocalist or instrumentalist, could somehow be sensed or decoded by the musically initiated record buyer.

The channeling of *ṭarab* was enhanced by the early recording artists' attempts to create emotionally conducive climates amidst uninviting recording conditions. For one thing, the recorded vocal exclamations punctuating the various performances were intended to inspire the performers and may have been voiced by an intimate group of *sammī'ah* or by the record companies' local staff. Most often, these added gestures appeared genuine, well-timed, and musically well-deserved, although in certain instances they seemed exaggerated or contrived, gimmicks that remind us of the "canned" laughter heard on American television comedies. Meanwhile, some artists may have conducted musical warm-ups before recording or may have rehearsed the material with their *takht* accompanists so as to create a better mood for performing.

Especially in the 1920s, the competing record companies made systematic efforts to commission, copyright, and record vast numbers of original musical works. Their efforts contributed to the ascendancy of a type of song that was short (78-rpm-disc length) and fully precomposed, most often in a "lighter" strophic format. Thus, the record content shifted further away from the live *ṭarab* aesthetic, as precomposition had begun to overshadow context-bound flexibility. By the mid-1930s, with the gradual disappearance of recorded exclamations and the elimination of the celebrities' pictures from disc labels, a feature that was originally intended to evoke the live presence



Egyptian singer and composer Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb (ca. 1901–1991), seated in front, recording for Baidaphon Company in an ornate tent in the early 1930s. A publicity photo.

of the recording artists, many ṭarab songs became fixed media “pieces.” Among these were the works of Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb, who exemplified the media-conscious ṭarab artist. Such pieces, as represented for example by 'Abd al-Wahhāb's disc songs and his short often programatically conceived film songs, gained their own place within the contemporary ṭarab aesthetic. Indeed, many media-inspired, musical compositions are appreciated for their emotional content, as well as for the intricate technical workmanship and the modern features they often display.

Certainly, the culture's predilection for the live musical experience continues to prevail, as best illustrated by the large number of live recordings in the ṭarab market today. Such recordings, including many by Umm Kulthūm, sometimes carry the descriptive title *taṣjil ḥayy muṭawwal*, “extended live recording.” In addition to these commercially available releases, the connoisseurs are known to exchange tapes of live recordings, some being cassette duplicates of older reel-to-reel tapes. Such recordings are highly prized, especially those that connoisseurs consider rare or commercially unavailable, as the home recordings of Zakariyyā Aḥmad, (1896–1961), one of Umm Kulthūm's major composers who also sang occasionally, or those of 'Abd al-Wahhāb singing informally with his own 'ūd accompaniment. Particularly cherished are those made when the performers had been in a state of *saṭṭanah* and had performed renditions that are exceptionally ecstatic, for example some live performances by the late Syrian singer Muḥammad Khayrī. The connoisseurs may attribute the exceptional

affective power of a live recording to the desirable setting in which the performance had occurred. In the case of a recorded *jalsah*, some of the attending *sammī'ah* may be recognized by name, and similarly acknowledged may be a musically initiated patron in whose house the performance had taken place. A recorded *ḥaflah* may also be identified with the place in which it had been presented. A live recording by a certain singer may be highly acclaimed because the recorded performance had occurred in a city such as Aleppo, traditionally known for its musically sophisticated public. Some *ṭarab* vocalists and instrumentalists may collect tape copies of their own performances during which they were highly inspired, largely due to the existence of a good and highly interactive audience.

Furthermore, live recordings are often appreciated as extensions of the original live events. This is reflected in the order in which recorded pieces are sometimes listened to. Customarily, local radio stations have presented "light" non-*ṭarab* pieces in the mornings and perhaps early afternoons, but typically assigned to evening hours the *ṭarab* proper, as the live *ḥaflaṭ* of Umm Kulthūm, Ṣabah Fakhri, and Muḥammad Khayrī. Often, members of the public have structured their listening accordingly. When Radio Cairo used to broadcast Umm Kulthūm's live performances in the evening of the first Thursday of each month, millions of Arabs planned to be by their radio sets. In Beirut in the early 1960s I remember seeing taxi cabs stopped by the street sides, as the drivers and other nearby enthusiasts listened to these broadcasts on the car radios. One Palestinian woman described to me that at the times of these broadcasts her father followed certain ritual-like observances, as he sat and listened with a glass of *'araq* (a local alcoholic beverage) and *māzah* (appetizers that are traditionally served with *'araq*).³⁶ When hearing *ṭarab* music on recordings, the connoisseurs may display familiar live-performance antics, such as facial gestures or signs of deep absorption, although perhaps in a less demonstrable manner. They may also try to avoid interruptions. One *ṭarab* lover indicated to me that he cannot fully enjoy an ecstatically moving recording in the company of individuals who do not know how to listen or to feel the music.

By the same token, many listeners concede that at some level, recordings are not as ecstatic or at least not as engaging as live performances. Media experts generally attribute such a discrepancy to a variety of factors. Live performances provide the opportunity for direct performer-listener interaction; they are physically self-contained, thereby focusing the listeners' attention directly upon the performance; they impart a certain collective "energy," an infectious mood that engulfs the entire audience. Moreover, the customary live setting tends to allow for an extended and gradual process of mental and musical conditioning that is likely to intensify the listening

³⁶ From a conversation in Los Angeles in the middle 1980s.

experience. For that matter, one Arab listener indicated to me that his rich uncle, a diehard *sammī*, used to take a plane from Beirut to Cairo to attend Umm Kulthūm's monthly performances live, even though these performances were broadcast across the entire region.³⁷

However, *ṭarab* remains unmistakably potent as a mediated experience. For one thing, sound recording has broadened the scope of the listening experience and added to it new emotional or physical nuances. A professional musician who lives in New York City and spends a great deal of time on the road states that he finds listening to *ṭarab* recordings most enjoyable when he is driving on the highway late at night, but adds that he would not listen to such recordings while battling the traffic in downtown Manhattan.³⁸ For the introspective listener, recordings may even take precedence over live performances, in which a variety of extraneous distractions, including noisy gesturing and rowdy conduct, may prevail.³⁹ Recorded performances also allow the listeners to create their own images of the original live contexts or even to reduce such contexts to mere impressions or abstractions. In the case of many recent *ṭarab* recordings, the original context is little more than a "high-tech" studio or a mixture of digital soundtracks.

³⁷ From a conversation in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

³⁸ From a conversation in the late 1980s.

³⁹ In public performances, fights sometimes occur, as when those interested in listening ask noisy audience members, who often are under the influence of alcohol, to be quiet.

In Arab culture, the concept of *ṭarab* brings to mind a certain musical idiom, or musical style. Similarly, it implies special musical applications or interpretations. In a large measure, musical evocation can be explained in terms of the "what" and "how" of music making. Whether it is al-Isfahānī describing a medieval court performance or Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād reflecting on the musical mastery of his grandfather, those who speak about music and its influence allude to both substance and style, form and expression, craft and feeling. In this chapter, I similarly explore both the general fabric of *ṭarab* music and some of the basic processes that enable the music to "speak," or impress emotionally. Understandably, it is difficult to distinguish between the idiom as such and the individual emotive application since the two work together as part of a broader affective syntax.

The links between the contemporary practice and the pre-World-War-I musical legacy are extremely significant. For modern composers and performers, *takht* music has served both as a model and a point of departure. As summed up by Sayyid Makkāwī (1926–1998), who is known for his ecstatic singing and his musical compositions for Umm Kulthūm and others, the old (*qadīm*) style is the foundation (*asās*).¹ From the *takht* tradition, which incorporated Sufi vocal elements and various indigenous and Pan-Ottoman secular ingredients, the modern musical ensemble has borrowed its basic Arab instruments. Similarly, the modern practice has derived from *takht* music basic ecstatic techniques, especially those related to mode and modal improvisation. Obviously, modern departures from the older expression have been extensive. Nonetheless, as a musical model, the *takht* not only represents the musical aesthetic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also informs us about the dynamics of ecstatic evocation in *ṭarab* music in general.

¹ From the conversation with Mr. Makkāwī on May 30, 1994.

Abstraction and lyricism

Ṭarab music tends to be abstract; its substance is neither inherently programmatic nor necessarily evocative of entities (such as visual images, mythical plots, pantheons of saints and spirits) outside itself. Although programmatic allusions are often made, especially by the Western-minded composers, the intrinsic message is usually nonreferential. This trait is best illustrated by the modal improvisations and the various *bashraf* and *samāʿī* compositions, which are identified primarily by their generic names, the names of their composers, and the *maqāmāt* in which they are composed.

Given its individual-centered emotionality, ṭarab music is also highly lyrical. Although manifest in the various musical genres, its lyricism is epitomized by the vocal component, namely ṭarab songs that impress through self-referenced amorous themes and images. In combination, abstraction and lyricism appear to orient the music more directly toward the listener's realm of feeling. The resulting affect is usually expressed through the self-reflexive exclamations that punctuate the musical performances. As a rule, such gestures do not analyze or make evaluative statements about the music or objectify the technical-emotive ability of the performer, except indirectly. Essentially, they erupt as symptoms, or manifest "side effects," of the ecstatic condition and feed back into and energize the musical-evocative process. In short, the music's proclivity toward abstractness and lyricism highlights its emotive core and grants its ecstatic message certain centrality and directness.

Individuality and togetherness

Ṭarab music gives prominence to individuality and collectivity, two complementary dynamics that contribute to the music's ecstatic efficacy. Individuality is clearly illustrated by the role of leadership that the singer usually assumes within the traditional ensemble. It is also displayed most vividly when an instrumentalist leads or improvises either alone or against other accompanying instruments. In some respects, individuality streamlines the ecstatic performance and brings the emotionally evocative material to the forefront. Similarly, the individual artist who creates music on the spot appears to convey his ecstatic message most directly. His manner of delivery is likely to grant him added maneuverability as a ṭarab maker.

Notably, the aesthetic of individuality is consistent with timbral specialization within the traditional ensemble. The *takht* specifically is a collection of *khāmāt ṣawtiyyah*, "sound timbres," that are individually distinguished as well as imbued with ecstatic connotations. Incorporating one of each type of

instrument, for example one 'ūd, one qānūn, one nāy, one violin, and one riqq, the takht amounts to a few layers of discernible timbral-acoustical lines. Thus, it can be contrasted with such "unitimbral" but register-separated combinations, such as Europe's Renaissance recorder or viol consorts, or for that matter the classical string quartet.

To illustrate, the 'ūd, a fretless short necked lute, often given highly impressive epithets such as *amīr al-ṭarab*, or "the prince of ecstasy," is particularly praised for its affective sound quality. Recognized as an *ālat naqq* (plucked instrument), the 'ūd produces a relatively low register, in Western theoretical terms the bass clef, an octave lower than the treble register of the violin. In this case however, the individual register of the instrument must be interpreted as a factor of sonic definition rather than as a function of harmonic specialization.

Like the 'ūd, the qānūn, a type of plucked zither, enjoys a distinctive timbre in part because of its open triple-courses of nylon and metal-wound-silk (formerly all gut) strings, and because its bridge rests upon spaces over which pieces of thin fish skin are stretched. Most often, it is played in the treble register by the right hand while the left hand frequently echoes the melody on the bass register an octave lower. The strings are plucked by two horn plectrums, each individually held against an index finger through a metal ring. Praised by al-Khulaī for its superb ability to produce *ṭarab*,³ as well as noted for providing clear tonal references through its open, essentially unstopped strings, the qānūn is the preferred instrument for accompanying singers during their vocal improvisations.

The violin, a nineteenth century Western import, is highly prized for its emotional expressivity and resemblance to the human voice.³ Spoken of as *dhāt saḥb* (an instrument of sustained sound), it provides yet a different tonal quality. The bowing gives it the ability to produce long notes, while its fretless neck as well as its conventional Arab tuning enables the player to produce tonal nuances with great agility.

The nāy, an open-ended, obliquely held reed-flute, is another instrument of sustained sound, one that enjoys special emotional powers. Spiritually significant, it has been used in some Sufi rituals. Also, when properly played, it is associated with overwhelming *ṭarab* sensations. As one young Syrian musician puts it: "This instrument defines us as a culture."⁴ The nāy is distinguished by its breathy, or reedy timbre, its characteristic trills, and its highly ornate style. It plays mostly in a pitch level an octave above the treble register.

³ al-Khulaī ca. 1904: 55.

³ For further historical information on the violin see Chapter 3, Note 3.

⁴ From a formal pre-performance presentation by qānūn player Sāmīr Farah in Los Angeles on December 6, 1998.

Similarly, the *riqq*, a small, but relatively heavy tambourine with five sets of brass cymbals and thin fish skin (more recently plastic), produces a variety of timbral effects that are used to form the beat patterns, namely the *iqā'āt*, or "metric modes." Traditionally, the strokes are discretely produced, yet projected as crisp and distinctly heard taps on the skin. They constitute complex acoustical effects that combine the membranophonic skin sounds with the idiophonic vibrations of the cymbals, which are indirectly activated by the tapping, although sometimes are also hit directly. Also called *daff*, the *riqq* is the *ṭarab* percussion instrument *par excellence*. Today, especially, in the more popular groups, the *riqq* is joined by the *ṭablah*, a vase-shaped single-headed drum directly related to the folk *darabukkah*, which in Egypt has been associated with folk music that usually accompanied female dancing. The introduction of the loud, high-strung modern *ṭablah* has created a new sound aesthetic that shifted *riqq* playing somewhat from the artful subtleties of the *takht*-based style toward a more percussive approach that gives more prominence to the brass cymbals. Incidentally, such added percussive layering has coincided with an overall growth in the size of and instrumental variety within the typical urban ensemble.

The same form of acoustical differentiation can be extended to the singing voice. Obviously, singing gains special definition through the uttered text, as well as through the distinctive timbral quality of the voice itself. Furthermore, in the presence of an accompanying small chorus, for example, as part of the *takht* performing group, the *muṭrib*'s voice usually stands out through its dynamic prominence, interpretive freedom, and higher level of ornamentation and complexity. Similarly, in religious choral groups, the *munshid* may occasionally switch registers, for example rising an octave above his accompanists.

Togetherness contributes to the *ṭarab* effect in a number of ways. The collective modalities of performing give individuality a suitable framework or contextual reference, for example when ensemble passages prepare for or alternate with solo passages. Moreover, togetherness allows the various performance components mutually to enhance one another. Collectively, members of a performance group may experience a creative synergy that manifests itself within the overall musical product. Additionally, the collective musical process enables the role of leadership to shift from one musician to another whenever desirable.

Togetherness is achievable primarily because the performance media are technically and dynamically compatible, as well as timbrally and acoustically differentiated. In a sense, the *takht* is a confluence of congruous musical means and abilities. *Ṭarab* instruments, with the exception of the *riqq*, which is sometimes referred to simply as *iqā'*, namely "beat" or metric pattern, share with the singer's voice and with one another, basic stylistic properties. The *ūd*, *nāy*, *qānūn*, and violin are all equally equipped to perform as solo

instruments, for example rendering self-contained performances of *taqāsīm*. They are also well suited for interpreting a vocal composition instrumentally and for accompanying a featured singer individually or collectively. Depending on the musical context, each single instrument may assume the role of a leading soloist or may accompany less conspicuously, for example, by holding a drone or producing an ostinato in the background. Similarly, the violin, *ūd*, *qānūn*, and *nāy* are all capable of playing essential *ṭarab* ornaments and microtones, although perhaps not on the same level of agility and versatility. For that matter, apart from the *riqq*, the *takht* model includes no instruments that are purely for accompaniment such as the drone-producing *tambura* in Indian classical music. The *ūd*, violin, *qānūn*, *nāy*, and *riqq* also possess comparable levels of loudness, as well as individual timbres that complement and blend effectively with one another. Roughly speaking, the melodic instruments share the same working melodic range, about two octaves. In performance, these instruments play in tessituras that are either on the same pitch level or one or two octaves apart. In terms of both melodic range and tonal alignments, they are also compatible with the singing voice. In light of such compatibilities, it is not surprising that in the professional parlance, the instruments are treated as metaphors for the singing voice. As mentioned earlier, the verb *yaqūl*, "to say," also means "to sing" and by extension "to play" a melodic instrument, in a sense to "utter" the vocal material instrumentally.⁵

This combination of compatible yet differentiated entities can also be understood in human terms. Members of the *takht* ensemble, who often were individually recognized by the public, were also united by social rank, economic status, level of musical training, and performance experience. The very concept of "*takht*," literally, "platform" or "elevated area" upon which the musicians performed, can be viewed as a physical embodiment of the social, economic, and musical commonality among the *takht* members as a musical team.⁶ In fact, the compatibility and reciprocity in the musicians' performance roles was linked directly to the ensemble's ability to perform effectively. During the 1930s, the Egyptian critic and biographer Qisṣandī Rizq, alarmed by what he viewed as an erosion of aesthetic finesse among musicians, made an urgent plea to Egypt's Royal Academy of Arab Music:

For more information on these aspects of individuality and compatibility among the *takht* instruments see Racy 1988.

It is not known when the Persian-Ottoman term *takht* became part of the Arab musical parlance. It appeared in al-Khulāʿī's book. A comparable term in Egypt was *dikkah*, which also referred to the raised area upon which musicians sat. Also, it is not clear when *takht* musicians began to sit on chairs, as they have done since the early twentieth century. Prior to that, Lane had shown drawings of performing musicians sitting cross-legged.

The Academy is entrusted not to give the takht directors (*ru'asā' al-tukhūt*) license to replace performers who have previously worked in their ensembles with new performers who are ignorant of these directors' playing methods. Each ensemble director has a particular style, special attributes, and a distinctive spirit. For example, the takht of Master (*Ustādh*) Muḥammad al-'Aqqād never used to work except under the leadership of [the singer] 'Abduh al-Ḥamūlī . . . Each leader had a special takht with special players, as substitutions were obviously harmful because new musicians were unable to tune their instruments with equal facility and to perform in such a way as to allow the sounds to blend perfectly. (ca. 1936: 15)

As implied by the above plea, personal, artistic, or perhaps "spiritual" harmony among members of the same group is indispensable for effective music making. By the same token, the inclusion of one or more incompatible or incompetent performers is likely to affect the collective process of performing and consequently diminish the ecstatic quality of the performance as a whole.

Heterophony

As a cultivated form of artistry, heterophonic interplay is a primary feature of takht music. In practice, heterophonic texture exists in two closely related formats, an overlapping type and a simultaneous type. The first occurs when a leading musical part, typically a vocal improvisation, is accompanied, for example, by an instrument such as the qānūn. In this case, the accompaniment "echoes" the leading part at a slightly delayed pace, or in a rather "out of sync" fashion. The second type applies mostly when ensemble members produce slightly varied renditions of the same musical material at the same time. This happens when takht instruments perform the same basic composition together, but with each one rendering it differently through subtle variations, omissions, ornamental nuances, syncopations, anticipations, and so on. In the process, the performers produce interlocking melodic structures and intricate heterorhythms. A musical "note" may be deliberately dropped out by one instrument to be provided by another, or sometimes an instrument may play a certain portion of it, thus leaving it for another instrument to "pick up" the other portion. Realized spontaneously in actual performance, heterophony is a highly coordinated process rather than a mere confluence of isolated musical renditions or a collection of simultaneous variations of one fixed tune.

As an interactive process, heterophony is consistent with the intimate nature of the takht format. The takht ensemble is small enough to allow for its members to be heard and appreciated both as individuals and as a tightly knit musical group. For one thing, the timbral acoustic differentiation among

the instruments enables the various heterophonic subtleties to be more discernible. Furthermore, the small performance-platform provides the individual musicians an intimate physical context ideally suited for establishing direct visual contact and exchanging various music related cues.

A trademark of the accomplished takht musician, heterophony has become less prominent in the modern musical mainstream. Heterophonic subtleties, which represent a small-group, or "chamber," aesthetic tend to be less obvious within, or perhaps less suited for, the typical post-1920s ensemble, which often performs fixed compositions and incorporates well over fifteen or twenty instruments. Within such a group, heterophonic nuances are likely to be muddled. More importantly perhaps, the emerging nonheterophonic relationships appear to coincide with further separation between the roles of the composer and the interpreter, and with an increasing sense of formality among the performers, whose stage seating is somewhat inspired by the European symphonic seating.⁷ Less suited for heterophonic differentiation has been the duplication of instruments of the same type, epitomized by the use of several violins, often a dozen or more, and sometimes cellos and a double bass, in addition to various other instruments. This overall mixture has limited the timbral and acoustical transparency that typified traditional takht music. All of these factors have contributed to a somewhat evenly layered texture of parallel octaves and unisons that became well-established as an orchestral sound aesthetic.⁸

Heterophony constitutes a powerful tool of ecstatic evocation. It is generally felt that heterophonic interactions energize the musical content. In group performances, they give prominence to each of the individual parts, but also bind them together as an organic unit. In this respect, they represent an affective union between individuality and togetherness, or rather, individuality through togetherness. Furthermore, the ecstatic effect of heterophony stems from the textural fabric as such. The coordinated discrepancies among the individual parts, or differently stated, the performers' artful division of musical labor, generates a delectable sense of activity, a collective dynamism that is deeply enchanting.⁹

The direct relation between heterophonic interplay and emotional arousal

⁷ The rough resemblance appears for example in having a violin section to the left of the stage with cellos or a double-bass when available close to the right. However, conventionally the percussion is located at the extreme right, whereas the original takht instruments are placed in the middle.

⁸ It would not be totally accurate to say that the newer texture consists of exact parallel unisons and octaves. In effect, the unsynchronized bowing, along with some heterophonic nuances give the modern sound its characteristic opaque, or thick, quality, a new urban Arab texture distinct in itself.

⁹ Arab writers seldom conceptualize or analyze heterophony. However, it is briefly discussed by Samiha Elkholy (Samḥah al-Khawli); see Elkholy 1978. For additional information on the role of heterophony in takht music see Racy 1988.

is demonstrable on a vast number of early 78-rpm recordings. For example, impassioned verbal gestures are voiced in the middle of dawr performances, when the leading singer takes obvious heterophonic liberties or improvises several variants against reiterations by the chorus and the rest of the ensemble. Similarly illustrative are recordings of group instrumental genres such as the *taḥmīlah*, in which artists, typically of comparable stature and ability, produce complex heterophonic textures thus prompting a plethora of animated and distinctly heard vocal exclamations.¹⁰ Further representations are displayed in Umm Kulthūm's live recordings from the 1940s and 1950s. In certain middle sections during which heterophonic activity becomes particularly prominent, a suspenseful and musically focused mood engulfs and audibly moves the singer's avid admirers.

The art of leading

In ṭarab music, certain hierarchies shape the musical content and render it more effective. In musical terms, the role of leadership is manifested in two basic formats, linear and vertical. In the linear format, the leading part, for example a singer's voice, is given prominence through the sequential order in which the musical material is presented. To illustrate, the leader's performance proper is usually prefaced by either precomposed or improvised, solo or ensemble instrumental preludes. Similarly, interludes, which tend to occur profusely throughout the performance, provide the featured performer with a sense of musical reference without undermining his or her role as the center of musical attention. In a vocal improvisation, a *tarjamah* (literally, translation), namely an improvised instrumental interlude that largely emulates a preceding vocal phrase, grants the leading vocalist suitable moments of repose between the improvised vocal phrases. It also reinforces his ecstatic message without disturbing his creative train of thought. Similarly, in a metric piece, for example in some compositions from the 1920s and 1930s, the *lawāzīm*, or short instrumental "fillers" (singular, *lāzimah*)¹¹ add emphasis to the main beat and quite often outline the melodic structure of a preceding phrase by the leading artist. In some instances, a *lāzimah* may serve as a *kubrī*, or "bridge," as it moves toward a new tonal center or a new maqām, thus paving the way for the featured performer to make a full-fledged tonal shift or modulation. Typically however, the leading artist, who

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of a *taḥmīlah* performance see Racy 1988.

¹¹ The term *lāzimah* is related to the verb *lāzama*, namely to "accompany" or "stick to faithfully," and to the verb *lazima*, "to be needed." The abstract noun *mulāzamah* refers to the act of keeping company, and similarly the word *mulāzīm* (feminine, *mulāzimah*) refers to someone or something that is retained, or perhaps constantly reintroduced.

represents the forefront of the ecstatic process, is granted the prerogative of a musical vanguard. Particularly in improvisatory genres, he or she is expected to initiate the various modal phases of the performance, to explore the new tonal areas of the mode, to introduce modulations to other maqāmāt, and to usher the return to the original mode of the performance.

The vertical format appears when heterophonic patterning enables the leader's individual musical line to stand out. More specifically, this happens when the heterophonic support provided by the rest of the ensemble is relatively subtle or sparse, particularly while the leading artist is actually performing. In turn, the leading artist tends to figure prominently on account of both the complex features of his performance and the greater fluidity of his creations vis-à-vis those of the accompanying ensemble. For example, in Sufi ritual groups, a munshid may sing more ornately and melismatically than the rest of the group. He may sing only intermittently and momentarily "pull away" from the accentual pattern maintained by the rest of the ensemble. Similarly, a tarab singer may gain emphasis by improvising somewhat freely against a drone (or intermittent drone effect) or against an ostinato pattern.

Essentially, the role of leading demands a high level of group consciousness. Although it grants the featured artist considerable creative license, it requires good musical rapport within the entire ensemble. Healthy synchrony between the leader and the accompanists is a prerequisite for affective music making.

The art of accompanying

When called for, musical accompaniment plays a crucial role in the creative process. Basically, an accompanying performer must be musically effective without being too prominent or obtrusive. Musicians usually describe the good accompaniment as *tawrīq*, a term that implies subtlety and evokes the image of filling spaces somewhat sparsely with ornamental leaf designs (as in the case of calligraphy), or covering something with a thin film of paper or plaster. For example, a qānūn player accompanying a layālī and maṣwāl performance must resist the temptation of competing with the vocalist. He must refrain from moving ahead of the singer by anticipating the higher tonal areas of the mode, or playing more loudly than the vocalist, or producing melodic lines that are technically more complex or more ornate than those being accompanied. It is often stated that the accompanist must have *dhawq*, namely "taste" or "courtesy."

Tarab musicians devote a great deal of attention to the dynamics of accompanying particularly by praising the discreet and supportive accompanists and finding fault with those whom they consider musically

self-centered, aggressive, and intent on soliciting attention. The latter type of musicians are criticized although their performances may be highly impressive from a purely technical point of view. Performers are often assessed in terms of their level of sensitivity as accompanists. During the 1930s the singer Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb reportedly lost his patience with a well-known violinist for displaying excessive showmanship while accompanying him.¹² During one of his visits to Los Angeles, the elderly qānūn virtuoso Ibrāhīm Salmān was invited to listen to a young qānūn player perform, as the latter accompanied a local Arab singer. Asked about his impressions, Salmān described the young musician as having good technique, but his main problem was as follows: *bīqūl kathīr ma' al-muṭrib*, literally "he says too much with the singer," a jargon-based expression that referred to the younger musician's excessive performing when he accompanied.¹³ Musicians in Los Angeles describe the impertinent showmanship of a young violinist by citing a specific incident, which they often reenact in order to make their point clear and to poke some humor. Accordingly, when a visiting vocal celebrity sang a layālī phrase, perhaps a short one in Rāst, one that began on the tonic, ascended to the fifth and cadenced back on the tonic, the violinist's "tarjamah" moved quickly to the fifth note then advanced to the octave note above the tonic. Also while descending, the violinist "threw in" a few accidentals, for example flattening the upper subtonic and momentarily raising the fourth step, before dropping to the lower tonic through a "flashy" qafḻah more elaborate and quite different from the one that had been performed by the singer. Not surprisingly, such exhibitionism reportedly offended the singer and was suddenly noticed and scoffed at by the rest of the musicians.

It is generally felt that such display is disrespectful of the artist being featured. As it usurps his or her prerogative as a principal ṭarab initiator, it violates an established musical hierarchy. Certain anticipations by the accompanist, for example, leaping into a new pitch level ahead of the muṭrib or modulating to a new maqām, are sometimes called for by the composers. However, particularly in improvisatory contexts, such liberties could indicate that the accompanied performer is being rudely treated or looked at as being musically incompetent.

Most significantly perhaps, the manner of accompanying affects the ecstatic quality of the performance as a whole. Positively speaking, good accompanists inspire the muṭrib by instilling within him a feeling of saṭṭanah and helping him maintain that feeling throughout the performance. They furnish musical support that is succinct, yet stylistically eloquent and

¹² From an interview I conducted with Muḥammad al-'Aqqād in Los Angeles in the summer of 1984. Reportedly, the violinist concerned was Sāmī al-Shawwā.

¹³ Salmān, who is blind, is an Iraqi Jewish performer now living in Israel. He enjoys phenomenal technical mastery and outstanding ability to evoke feeling on the qānūn.

eminently conducive. In a sense, a good accompanist is a creative minimalist who utilizes his musical means economically to achieve the maximum ecstatic impact. His craft calls for finding the ideal balance between brevity and efficiency, correctness and aesthetic excellence. As qānūn player Muḥammad al-'Aqqād explained, early takht musicians seemed to possess magical powers. Through their highly effective executions of short preludes, such as the *dūwālīb* (plural of *dūlāb*), they were able to instill in the recording artists an immediate sense of modal transformation, thus enabling them to produce highly ecstatic performances.¹⁴ By the same token, many recordings by brilliant singers have been ecstatically compromised, and for some connoisseurs even ruined, by the detrimental effect of one or several over-zealous accompanists.

In the course of performing, accompanying with taste requires a great deal of musical perceptiveness and ability to receive and respond to various nonverbal cues. It also entails the careful implementation of performance strategies that are called for by specific performing circumstances. These aspects of accompanying are illustrated in actual musical terms by Michel Haddad Hakkouk, a well established riqq player who performed and recorded widely in Lebanon, and was on the teaching staff of the Lebanese Conservatory during the 1960s and 1970s.

Mr. Hakkouk maintains that the riqq player must keep the beat constantly. However, he adds that at certain times the percussionist needs to hold back, contrary to what theorists and notated scores tell you, namely that the down beat (*dhumm*) must remain predictably or uniformly strong. He explains that he himself would soften the accents so as not to overpower the textual delivery of a leading singer, particularly when the latter is about to delve into a delicate and emotionally involved passage. Accordingly, "when rigidity is avoided the feeling comes out." As he further clarifies, when the muṭrib enters into a phase of *tatṛīb* (a term that means creating powerful ecstasy and implies the stretching out of syllables or pulling away in calculated ways from the regular beat pattern), or when he appears particularly overtaken by the feeling of the text he is singing, that is the moment to hold back. In his words, "the worst thing I could do at that time is to blast the singer with strong beats. Therefore, I resort to a more reserved mode of playing until the right moment comes for bringing back the full effect of the *iqā'*."

Hakkouk admits that at times such discretion disturbs ensemble directors, who think that the beat must not be altered or softened, probably fearing that such interventions will throw them or some of the musicians off. However, he hastens to add that first of all, the riqq player is not a machine and that machine-like playing does not produce feeling. Moreover, when the muṭrib is in a deep emotional state he cannot be bogged down by a rigid or

¹⁴ From the 1984 interview mentioned earlier.

excessively imposing beat pattern. In other words, a good percussionist knows when to offer the leading performer the "space" needed for moving into a profound ecstatic state, or "as a percussionist you have to give and take."¹⁵

In short, accompanying is an art that feeds into the ecstatic flow of the performance. Generally speaking, affective accompanying occurs in two related ways. Firstly, through a combination of sound musicianship and stylistic circumspection, the accompanist provides the leading performer with direct aesthetic stimulation before and during the performance without disrupting his or her internal creative process. Secondly, good accompaniment produces the basic rhythmic and melodic backdrop against which the creative leader can make synchronized digressions that in turn excite the ecstatically minded listener. In either case, the accompanist is an organic part of *ṭarab* evocation.

The role of ornaments

Ornaments, which some modern literary sources refer to as *ḥilyāt ṣawtiyyah* (or, "sound embellishments"), are among the most effective tools of ecstatic stimulation. The types of ornaments used and the frequency of their occurrence depends largely upon the musical style and the historical background of the *ṭarab* artist. Typically, early-twentieth-century singers such as Shaykh Salāmah Hijāzī, Munīrah al-Mahdiyyah, and Faṭḥiyyah Aḥmad tended to use ornaments profusely. In more recent decades, certain types of ornaments have practically disappeared, and furthermore, the renditions of singers have generally become less ornate.

The evocative power of ornaments, although seldom articulated as such, is tacitly recognized and appreciated. When properly placed and executed, for example as part of a cadential motif or in the course of a prolonged note, ornaments tend to elicit observable listening responses. They appear to draw the listener's attention closely to the music, as well as to qualify the performer as a "genuine artist." Rendered either vocally or instrumentally, embellishments exist in a wide variety, ranging from subtle grace-note effects to long held tremolo-like gyrations. They may also coexist with various other effects, such as the subtle portamento (or sliding between notes) and the wave-like manipulation of individual notes, in contrast to the

¹⁵ From a conversation with Mr. Baklout (Mishāl Mirhij Baqlūq) on Sept. 1, 1997. Having worked extensively with the Raḥbānī Brothers and the singer Fayrūz in Lebanon, Baklout now lives in New Jersey. In this report, Baklout attributes his strategy to the legendary riqq player and renowned Umm Kulthūm accompanist, Ibrāhīm 'Afīf, with whom he had conversed at an earlier time about the "secrets" of good accompanying.

rapid classical-European vibrato, which in the context of *ṭarab* music would be considered inappropriate or even distasteful.

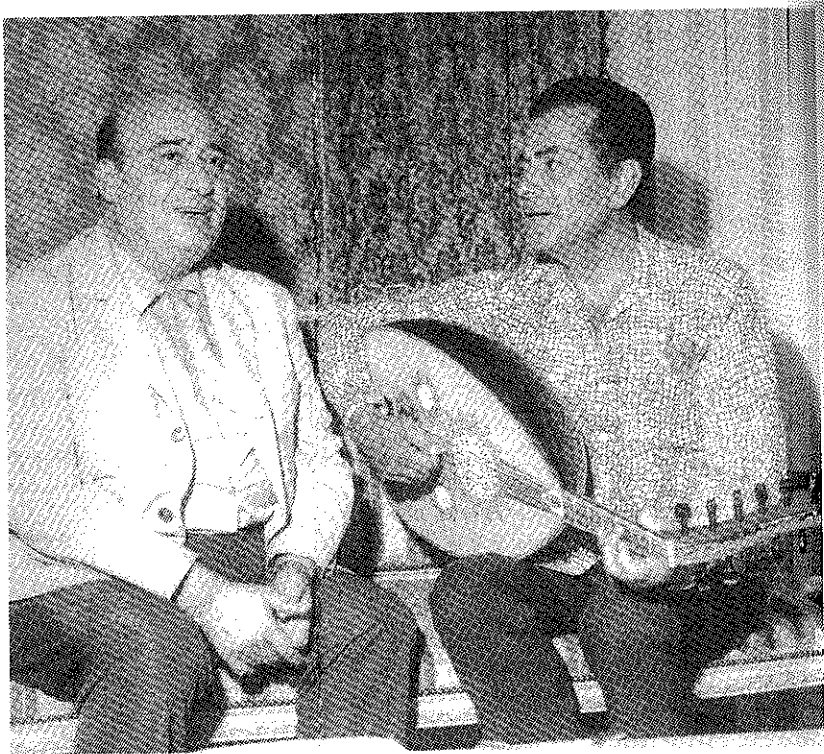
The use of ornaments reflects both individual preference and established convention. We are told, for example, that among the secrets of Umm Kulthūm's success early in her career was her judicious use and careful timing of ornaments, a trait that granted her *ṭarab* delivery a refreshing sense of structure and refinement. When guiding a traditional Lebanese female singer toward the path of professional success, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb is said to have advised her to be more circumspect in the use of ornaments. Nevertheless, the role of embellishments in the process of *ṭarab* making remains quintessential. Having reminded some medieval writers of the melancholic singing of the nightingale, *ṭarab* ornaments entail various sorts of tonal, rhythmic, dynamic, and timbral applications. When properly executed, they generate irresistible aesthetic stimulation, delectable agitation that is highly ecstatic.

The vocal ethos

In the *ṭarab* culture, the *ṣawt*, or "voice," is recognized as a supreme medium of evocation. In a short but highly indicative statement appearing in a chapter on the acoustical and stylistic properties of musical instruments, Kamāl al-Khulafī wrote:

You must keep in mind that the best mode of musical execution is the human voice. It is the most magnificent of all musical media (*a'dhamuha*). Suffice it to say that when it is available, instruments can be dispensed with, and that instruments are in need of it. Moreover, it delivers to the mind meanings in the form of sung lyrics. It also causes great musical enchantment and produces more *ṭarab* than do other performance media. It is also more supple than the others in view of its ability to fulfill various technical needs and to do so with great mastery. (ca. 1904: 59)

Ṭarab voices share particular musical characteristics, but also vary within a certain margin of acoustical acceptability. In the early twentieth century, the voices of the male singers were by and large strident and relatively speaking high pitched. The female voices, for example that of Sakinah Ḥasan, tended to be low-pitched as well as strongly projected. In terms of timbral variety, Munirah al-Mahdiyyah for example was famous for her "seductive" husky voice and characteristic *baḥḥah* (literally, "hoarseness"). The more contemporary male voices range from being brilliant and relatively high-pitched (as illustrated by the voice of Syrian singer Ṣabaḥ Fakhri) to being mellow and relatively low-pitched (for instance the voice of Egypt's Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb later in his life). Such variety is to some extent applicable to the



Singers and composers Wadī' al-Šāfi (b. 1921) and Farīd al-Aṭrash (1915–1974) performing informally in Beirut in 1970. Photo courtesy of Dār al-Šayyād.

modern female singers. Similarly, ṭarab listeners today may savor the charming rasp of such late singers as Šālih 'Abd al-Ḥayy and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, or the “weeping” vocal quality of the late Farīd al-Aṭrash. Comparably, one connoisseur explained that the late Syrian singer Muḥammad Khayrī sang in an enchantingly “grainy” voice that shifted and developed progressively as the performance went on. Accordingly, his voice had a kind of roughness and variability that made it ecstatically irresistible.¹⁶

Certain types of vocal production are considered basic to ṭarab singing. Underlying the various timbral profiles is an affinity for the “natural” vocal register for either women or men. What is traditionally valued can be roughly described as a full, somewhat throat-controlled chest voice, in contrast to the “head,” or falsetto voice (*ṣawt musta'ār*, literally, borrowed or

¹⁶ From a conversation in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

artificial voice), which in ṭarab singing is deemed aesthetically objectionable, or at least recognized as being alien to ṭarab vocal artistry.¹⁷

Furthermore, modern ṭarab listeners cherish voices that are supple and able to produce ornaments and various rhythmic and tonal effects with full ease. In the musicians' jargon, the expression *fiḥ 'urab*, roughly "it has microtonal nuances," is used to describe the voice of the ecstatically engaging singer, specifically the ability to render the various microtonal inflections accurately and with great mastery. Also praised are singers who seem to enjoy an exceptionally wide melodic range. Historians recount somewhat proverbially that in the course of one performance 'Abduh al-Hāmūlī continued to ascend melodically until his qānūn accompanist threw up his hands in utter amazement as he "ran out of strings."¹⁸ However, it is extremely important that the voice maintain its richness and timbral consistency in both low and high registers. As musicians put it, a good ṭarab singer needs to be good in both the *qarārāt*, the lower-octave notes, and the *jawābāt*, the upper-octave notes. A further, and no less significant advantage lies in the singer's ability to enunciate the sung text properly. As in the Islamic religious tradition, the ṭarab culture places a high premium on clear utterance. Indeed, clarity of textual delivery, as well as the correct pronunciation of classical Arabic consonants, are among the trademarks of an effective ṭarab singer.¹⁹

To close, the efficacy of ṭarab singing is multidimensional. The voice produces an extraordinary impact through its distinctive timbral quality, melodic fluency, and intonational flexibility. Furthermore, it enjoys special symbolic significance as a supreme religious medium and an auditory link between the secular and the mystical realms. Ultimately, it combines an emotive literary idiom with an affective message that is purely musical.

Textual stretching

As a rule, the sung lyrics are sparse. A muwashshaḥ which takes five or more minutes to sing often has no more than a few couplets of text. A mawwāl that

¹⁷ Influenced by Western classical pedagogy, which upholds the European operatic paradigm, a certain falsetto quality is noticeable in the delivery of some young female, especially Lebanese, singers. This phenomenon has drawn criticism from traditional music connoisseurs and performers.

¹⁸ From al-Jundi 1984: 42.

¹⁹ When using classical Arabic, singers (and for that matter public speakers), especially in Egypt and among the Lebanese urbanites, sometimes mispronounce certain consonants, specifically by changing the "th" sound into an "s", the "dh" into a "z", and the "qḥ" into a "c". Such conversions tend to disturb the linguistically trained ear and detract from the ecstatic flow of the vocal performance.

could last for more than ten minutes usually consists of seven or fewer short lines of poetry. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a *qaṣīdah* singer sometimes based his entire performance on a few selected lines from an older and much longer love poem. The hundreds of Egyptian *adwār*, each of which could have taken more than forty-five minutes to perform in a live context, generally incorporated no more than a handful of poetry lines each. In these various genres, the sung texts are stretched out musically by the composers and performers.

The stretching of texts acquires different forms. To begin with, in the actual vocal performance, a variety of instrumental preludes and interludes are interjected. In the singing proper, vocal stretching is represented to a large extent by the profuse application of vocal melismas, or the singing of many notes per single syllable of text, usually a vowelised consonant (as compared to syllabic singing, when only one or a few musical notes correspond to a single textual syllable). As *ṭarab* devices, melismas prevailed in the Egyptian *dawr*, which developed into a highly sophisticated musical genre in the late nineteenth century, but gradually died out in Egypt after the 1920s. Toward the middle of the *dawr* performance, melismas were best represented by the several vocalizations on the sound *āh* by the singer and the chorus, passages that were known collectively as the *āhāt*. Accordingly, the singer led the chorus members into a sustained note against which he created his own vocalizations. He then led them into another sustained note, typically one step higher upon which he vocalized again, and so on.

Melismatic stretching also occurs in the *layālī*, which is one of the prime improvisatory genres in *ṭarab* music. Typically preceding and leading seamlessly into the *mawwāl*, which is similarly improvised but has a regular poetical text, the *layālī* performance consists in its entirety of vocalizations, on a minimal number of syllables, in particular *yā layl*, or *yā laylī*.²⁰ In a single phrase, for example, it is typical to stretch the *yā* syllable across a large number of notes and then to end with the word *layl* less melismatically.

Textual stretching also stems from the practice of inserting into the original texts certain verbal fillers. Usually referred to as *tarannumāt*, or *tarannum* (from the verb *rannama*, roughly, to chant devotionally or to sing in an enchanted manner), these additions include such expressions as *amān*, *lallī*, *layl*, and word combinations such as *lallī aman*, *yālā lallī amān*, *amān yā lā lallī*, and *jānim amān*. The *tarannumāt* are most typically used in the metrically complex, precomposed, *muwashshah* genre. Structurally

²⁰ The literal meaning of *yā layl* or *yā laylī* is "oh, night!" or "oh, my night!," and that of another often used expression, namely *yā 'ayn* or *yā 'aynī* is "oh, eye!" or "oh, my eye!" Contrary to some popular theories that explain the use of these expressions solely in terms of their literal meanings, the prevalence of such utterances as *layl* and *laylī* and the comparable expression *lallī* may have to do with their singable quality and highly enchanting sonic effects.

speaking, they serve as tools for stretching out the sung phrases. As such, they give the compositional process greater elasticity in terms of fitting texts in specific poetical meters to metric modes of determined lengths. Usually melismatically rendered, the tarannumāt add a great deal of emotional efficacy to the composition. Musical theorists and critics often correlate these and other, mostly nonlexical, devices directly with *taṭrib*. Being semantically less descript, they also provide temporary relief from regular textuality, and perhaps enable the text proper to make more impact when it reappears in the course of singing. Furthermore, such standard expressions impress through their inherent auditory properties. As sung utterances, they possess a certain flow that makes them distinctly enchanting.²¹

Texts are also stretched through fragmentation and repetition. Sometimes the same textual phrase would be repeated either with slight melodic variation or in a different melody altogether. Also, a singer (or, in the case of precomposed vocal works, a composer), may repeat a certain poetical fragment, word, or even syllable more than once. Breaking the text into fragments of different lengths was quite common in the large middle section of the *dawr*, particularly in the passage (or passages) known as the *hank*. Here, the leading vocalist sang a textual fragment, usually one or two words, then "tossed it" to the chorus members to be reiterated throughout several call-response, or solo-chorus exchanges. In these exchanges the singer was free to create melodic and even modal variations in alternation with, or sometimes against, the choral responses.²²

To conclude, textual sparsity and elasticity contribute to the ecstatic efficacy of *ṭarab* vocal music. Representing a deeply rooted aesthetic, word economy establishes a workable balance between textual-semantic evocation and vocal-musical stimulation. This balance precludes the stifling effect of excessive wordiness or extreme semanticization, thus giving the music more space to "breathe." Similarly, textual stretching enables the composer to break away at least momentarily from the rigidity of the poetical meters and the verbal patterns of accentuation. It grants him freedom to plot his own melodic, metric, and accentual path without deviating totally from the overall textual framework. Contrastingly, when singing is syllabically confined or textually saturated it tends to move away from the evocative mode of *taṭrib*, although it may still be appreciated for its declamatory

In recent decades, certain music transcribers and chorus leaders in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt have attempted to rid the *muwashshahāt* of "the reminiscences of Ottoman influence" by purging out such tarannumāt as *amān*, *jānim*, and *imrim*, and replacing them all with *layl* or *yā layl*. In pure musical terms, such symbolic and largely politicized practice compromises the evocative richness of the idiom and leads to a form of redundancy that tends to encumber the vocal expression and limit its overall ecstatic impact.

The word *hank* may be related to the Persian-Ottoman word *āhang*, namely "tune" or "something tuneful or harmonious." For more information on the *dawr* structure, see Note 60 below.

"energy." Indeed, the use of brief but musically stretchable texts grants *ṭarab* singing tremendous ecstatic fluidity. In a sense, it allows the music to be more musical.

Interpretive liberties

The ability to create one's own rendition of an existing musical model is highly praised. The concept of *taṣarruf*, which usually refers to the taking of legal or literary liberties, or simply to the practice of individual discretion, is also applied to the music. *Taṣarruf* constitutes an artistic skill that a genuine *ṭarab* performer applies intuitively and effectively at the time of performing. By the same token, *takht* composers tended to leave room for the interpreters' input, and probably expected them to add their own nuances and embellishments to the composed works. Although particularly common in the Egyptian *dawr*, interpretive liberties occurred in various vocal and instrumental genres. An integral part of the final compositional product, such liberties made the difference between a dull performance and a highly engaging one.

Recent decades have witnessed an increasing preference for fixed compositional format. Similarly, with the dominance of Western-based pedagogy and the prevalence of large performing groups, fewer young performers seem interested or fully competent in the art of *taṣarruf*. Nevertheless, interpretive liberties are still displayed by the traditionally trained *ṭarab* musicians. When interpreting a musical score, for example, performers may add their own ornaments and melodic and rhythmic nuances. In this case, their reading is truly a process of "translation," or conversion of the notation into music. As some musicians explain, the added nuances bring to the music "sweetness" (*ḥalāwah*) and feeling. It is said that after the performers had fully learned his composition from a musical score, the famous composer Zakariyyā Aḥmad told them, "from now on take the notation away and give me *mazāj*," roughly "mood" or "feeling."²³

In technical terms, when musical works are flexibly interpreted several evocative devices are at work. Performing with *taṣarruf* implies adding certain ornaments, inserting slurs between the notes, producing prominent heterophonic variations against other musical parts, lengthening or shortening some syllables, de-emphasizing or shifting the position of some accents, and creating a sense of drama by momentarily switching to a more

²³ This was conveyed to me in September, 1998 by Salim Saḥḥāb, a Lebanese conductor who currently leads an Arab choral group in Egypt. Accordingly, the incident happened when the performers were learning the song *Yā Ḥalawī id-Dunyā*, sung by Zakariyyah Ḥamdān.

declaratory style of delivery or adding subtle but expressive dynamic inflections. The performer may also temporarily break away from the regular meter, or in the case of vocal music may substitute a word or expression in the lyrics with another of his own, often to add a touch of humor or to create a startling twist to an all familiar text. In extreme cases, the practice of *taḥṣīn* veers more closely toward outright composition. The singer for example may improvise or compose an entire new section within an existing work.

To conclude, flexible musical interpretations produce tremendous ecstasy through the use of highly evocative musical devices. Basically, they convert the mere act of reproducing music into an instantaneous and contextually inspired mode of recasting it creatively and evocatively. In the course of performing, an ecstatically conceived musical composition may both realize its full ecstatic potentials and gain new efficacies. Furthermore, such interpretations render the overall compositional process more dynamic while preserving its collaborative essence. More specifically, it accommodates both the "work" as a prior musical design and the interpretation as a spontaneous and individualized, artistic endeavor. The interpreter teases out the compositional form without breaking it, tantalizes musical expectations without totally violating them, and presents refreshing departures without effacing their essential points of reference. In all, the manipulation of preconceived structures renders the musical message more potent. Ecstatically speaking, it brings out the "real music."

Improvisation as evocation

Improvisatory genres are primary vehicles of ecstatic arousal. Created in performance, improvised music follows the overall melodic designs embodied in the various melodic modes, namely the dozen or more *maqāmāt* that are commonly employed today. Improvisations, whether instrumental or vocal, are typically through-composed, in other words, nonstrophic, or devoid of verse-like repetitions; solo-oriented; and nonmetric, or "rhythmically free," although in some cases, for example when *ostinato*-accompanied, they may display noticeable metric patterning. Improvisations can be heard as separate pieces or in conjunction with other nonimprovised genres. Traditionally, improvising is viewed as a highly sophisticated art, an affective expression that requires extraordinary skill, talent, and inspiration.

In recent decades, improvising has become less prevalent. A case in point is the diminished role of vocal improvisation in the repertoires of Cairo's modern-minded and media-conscious artists. As Egyptian musicologist Samira Elkholy explains, the gradual decline of the *takht* tradition after

World War I, the importation of Western musical values, and the preference for large ensemble formats all had an adverse effect on modal improvisation, as well as on the traditional practice of heterophony.²⁴ These developments notwithstanding, modal improvisation continues to exist, especially among the more traditionally oriented *ṭarab* performers. In Egypt, both improvisation and heterophony are also common in certain dance related instrumental genres and in the performances of some urbanized folk ensembles.²⁵

The extraordinary emotional impact of modal improvisations is often quite observable. During a *taqāsīm* or *layālī* performance the serious listeners' attention tends to be exceptionally focused. Similarly, their verbal gestures seem profound, as well as perfectly synchronized with the musical content. In religious contexts, such responses have been noted for example during the masterful Sufi *qaṣīdah* and *tawshīḥ* performances of Shaykh Ṭaha al-Faṣhānī. In secular events, they may punctuate the *mawāwīl* (plural of *mawwāl*) of renowned vocalists, Ṣabaḥ Fakhri, Wadī' al-Ṣāfi, and others.

The distinct emotional efficacy of modal improvisation has also been articulated by members of the *ṭarab* culture, music educators, theorists, and *sammī'ah* alike. Toward the middle of the twentieth century, the Syrian theorist, composer, and violin virtuoso Tawfīq al-Ṣabbāgh (1892–1964), criticized the Western-trained local musicians whose improvisations fail to create true feeling, and added that “the *taqāsīm* are the most sublime component in instrumental performing in general” (1950: 104). This view was echoed by another Syrian scholar some forty years later. According to Maḥmūd 'Ajjān “good *taqāsīm* have a magical effect and are considered among the most beautiful, tender, and desirable types of instrumental music.” He added that this artistic expression is “among the most ecstatic (*aktharuhā ṭaraban*), and among the dearest to a healthy connoisseur spirit” (1990: 69). These and other similar statements testify to the *ṭarab* culture's premium on modal improvisation, especially the *taqāsīm*, as a medium of *ṭarab* evocation.

The manner in which improvisation creates ecstatic feeling is complex, partly because improvised performances utilize a large variety of components: tonal, intervallic, temporal, and structural. Generally, the improviser appeals to his or her listeners in two closely related ways. The first can be described as the artful use of familiar modal material. In this case, the

²⁴ Elkholy 1978: 11 and 24.

²⁵ In Egypt today, these musical techniques may be found in the so-called *titt* music, which is folk-dance oriented and may utilize the accordion and some brass instruments, in addition to a few local instruments. Also both improvisation and heterophony are predominant in the performances of urbanized folk ensembles that play a combination of timbrally diverse instruments, including the *rabābah* (spike-fiddle), the *arghūl* (chanter-and-drone double-pipe) and the *mizmār* (double-reed instrument). These ensembles retain a style of playing that reminds us of the earlier *takht* music.

improvisatory practice offers the performer "a kind of table of contents of the mode" or a set of ingredients that are "at least to a degree obligatory" (Nettl 1974: 12, 13). In specific terms, it provides access to such phenomena as typical beginning notes, stylized cadential motifs, likely sequential patterns for ordering the shorter and longer phrases, and common overall progressions, for example those displaying gradually ascending then gradually descending contours. In addition there are characteristic intervallic structures, notes of emphasis, and likely modulatory scenarios. On a finer level, improvisations also incorporate a vast number of small motivic structures that reappear in numerous variations from one performance to another, and to some extent, from one mode to another.²⁶

The ways in which such familiar components are introduced and manipulated to create powerful emotions can be observed through the listeners' gestures vis-à-vis the improvising performer. In her study on Qur'anic chanting in Egypt, Kristina Nelson indicates that typically, the highly responsive listeners implore the shaykh to fulfill certain expectations:

Listeners would also shout out their requests, and these were particularly revealing of their expectations: "Again, so we can memorize it!" "How about the higher register?" (ig-gawāb), "Give us (maqām) Shūrī!" "(maqām) Şaba! By the Prophet, we're waiting for Şaba!" Where there were musical references to other reciters, knowledgeable listeners would shout out the name of the reciter quoted in delighted recognition, with such comments as, "He's taken us back thirty years!" (1982: 43)

Nelson adds that reciters rely on their audiences for guidance in such matters as dwelling on certain modes or moving to others that the listeners happen to like or to request. She also notes that reciters who respond to the listeners and recognize them as a source of guidance and inspiration are those whose musical delivery is more moving.

The second mode of evocation requires introducing components that are novel, as well as aesthetically fitting. In other words, the improviser must avoid structures that are extremely redundant or predictable. In a number of Arabic sources we encounter direct correlations between ecstatic feeling and improvisatory freedom. For example, al-Şabbāgh writes:

A *taqsim* [singular of *taqāsim*] is a tune that is nonmetric and improvised (*murtajal*). It is the fruit of the performer's imagination and taste and therefore is unlimited. The *taqāsim* performance is the litmus test of the performers' talent, a medium through which their ability and scope of imagination can be ascertained. It is the greatest thing in all music. If the performer is skillful in the *taqsim* and possesses strong feeling (*ihsās qawī*), broad imagination, and healthy taste he can evoke in

²⁶ Nettl and Riddle (1973) show for example that the *taqāsim* vary in such areas as performance length and may or may not incorporate modulations, but display considerable unity in the use of detailed melodic and rhythmic motifs and sequences.

the listener the magical influence of the most magnificent orchestra in the world. (1950: 140–141)

The author elaborates even further upon the direct correlation between novelty and ecstasy, as he stresses that if the improvisation is less imaginative and less novel, in other words less improvised, it loses its emotional value considerably. Similarly, 'Ajjān recognizes the direct connection between flexibility and *tarab* feeling. "The *taqāsīm* must be created at the spur of the moment (*min waḥī al-khātīr*) and improvised according to the performer's own inclination." He adds that the *taqāsīm*, which "express the artist's inner emotional tribulations (*infī'ālāt*), attest to the breadth of his knowledge, and reflect the ambiance surrounding his performance, can generate superb influence and pleasurable reactions" (1990: 70).

Musically, the manifestations of improvisatory freedom are both extensive and diverse. For example, it is generally felt that good improvisers must avoid sounding too stereotypical. Accordingly, "a musician who wishes to create ecstasy (*yuṭṭrib*) must not limit himself to customary or familiar modulations. He has to include unfamiliar surprises, which in turn arouse the enthusiasm and admiration of the audience" (Qūjamān 1978: 87).²⁷ The same can be applied to other components, such as melodic progressions and the use of accidentals and cadential patterns. Such surprises are appreciated for being ecstatically moving, as well as for being witty or clever. Needless to say, what differentiates a successful surprise from an unsuccessful one is not always easy to pinpoint. Similarly, the task of presenting modally convincing and ecstatically moving surprises can be musically challenging and even risky. However, excessive redundancy and the absence of creative novelties can rob an improvisation of its ecstatic potentials or render it emotionally static.

To close, improvisation operates on a variety of compositional, performative, and symbolic levels. The improviser presents the common modal vocabulary in ways that satiate, as well as tantalize, the listener's modal expectations. He also seeks to introduce novelties that stretch out the idiom's artistic potentials. By and large, he produces ecstasy by skillfully combining the notion of what *is* with the realization of what *can be*.

Modality as ecstatic substance

Modal stimulation derives impetus from the modal substance itself, namely the individual ingredients and microprocesses that make up the actual modal

²⁷ For specific information on modulatory patterns see Marcus 1992.

compositions. In other words, the modal "building blocks" (Nettl 1974: 12–13) are known to possess certain emotive relevancies, or as Habib Hassan Touma explains they constitute the "raw material" through which "the Arab musician creates emotional climates . . ." (1976: 33–36). Accordingly, the musical vocabulary can be viewed as ecstatic stuff.

Individually, the building components operate in a variety of ways. For example, "tonal fixation," or the treatment of a specific note as a tonal base, provides the performance with a tonal anchor, a *qarār* or "tonic," literally "place of repose" or "stopping." On a certain level, tonicity generates mental resonance that in modal terms is both delectable and compositionally stimulating. In the mind of the modally experienced artist it can offer both a sense of tonal referentiality and a certain urge for potential melodic creations to unfold. Providing tonal footing for a vast number of melodic-progressional possibilities, it tends to induce and ecstatically charge the linear, or melodic drive. In turn, linear motion, in other words the fleshed out intervallic-scalar track, embodies aspects of both tonicity and tonal variety. If tonal fixation stands for the vertical grounding that gives the modal performance its resounding focus, movement represents the horizontal flow that grants the modal work its engaging kinetic energy.

In its most basic, or least contrived form, modal movement is temporally flexible, in other words devoid of metricity. Similarly, it can be textless as well as "tuneless," that is to say, compositionally "neutral," or unbound by a specific preset tune.²⁸ In certain theory books, the *sayr*, literally "path," namely a brief written sketch describing how each mode unfolds, clearly implies that the most direct realization of the essential modal design lies in the realm of "pure" melody, or flexible melodic motion epitomized by the *taqāsim*. Although far from being rhythmically, motivically, or structurally amorphous, modal improvisation appears to gain tremendous efficacy from its meterless, declamatory fluidity.

Comparably, textlessness may grant the melodic dimension added versatility. Although sung lyrics add their own type of emotional affect, their absence tends to highlight the modal substance itself, whose brand of ecstasy seems to have paramount appeal to the trained *ṭarab* ear. Indeed, genres that are textless or in which texts are used minimally, for example the *layālī*, the

²⁸ The notion of modal improvisation as being "tuneless" or compositionally "neutral" safeguards religious texts from the imposition of external, or humanly contrived, compositional creations. Tuneless music allows the sacred words themselves to structure the performance, as well as to accommodate the desirable melodic embellishments of the talented reciter. In a similar vein, Sayyid Makkāwī mentioned that Shaykh 'Alī Maḥmūd, who is best known for recording improvised Sufi *qaṣā'id*, composed the music for one of 'Abd al-Wahhāb's early strophic songs, *Khāyif Aqūl illi fī Qalbi*, but declined to take credit for it in order to avoid the spiritually unbecoming connotation of being a musical composer. From the conversation with Mr. Makkāwī in Los Angeles on May 30, 1994.

āh vocalizations of the *dawr*, and the stretched out *tarannumāt* within the *mawashshahāt*, are all considered prime vehicles for the practice of *taṭrīb*. Similarly viewed are the long and florid melismas that, when artfully displayed for example by Sufi performers such as the late Shaykh Ṭaha al-Fashnī of Egypt, tend to invoke a tremendous elative frenzy among the diehard listeners. Basically, textual sparsity and rhythmic flexibility give the modal artist added freedom of movement and direct connectedness to the melodic content. Less fettered by the various semantic and syntactic interventions, the inspired improviser is provided further room to reflect inwardly into his own stream of modal consciousness, a process of musical "soul searching" implicitly recognized through the verbal expressions commonly used to describe the improvisatory process. Accordingly, an improviser who is endowed with "great imagination" (*khayāl wāsi'*) and "strong feeling" (*ihsās qawī*) (al-Ṣabbāgh 1950:14) receives his inspiration "from the realm of inner consciousness" (*min waḥī al-khāṭir*), experiences "inner tribulations" (*infi'ālāt*), and derives his musical ideas "from the depths of his psychic feeling" (*min a'māq shu'ūrihi al-nafsī*) ('Ajjān 1990: 70).

Melodic motion benefits from other evocative devices, for example those related to phrasing, pauses, intonation, accidental notes, and cadences. The emotive potentials of these devices are usually recognized and at times debated by musicians and music critics. This is particularly true in the case of the basic microtonal steps found in some of the commonly heard *maqāmāt*, for example *Rāst*, *Bayyātī*, *Sikāh-Huzām*, and *Ṣabā*. Frequently voiced is the opinion that *maqāmāt* with such "neutral" steps, embody ecstatic qualities that are extraordinarily potent.²⁹ Accordingly, these "genuinely Arab" or "Near-Eastern" modes (*maqāmāt Sharqiyyah aṣīlah*) are difficult to fathom and subsequently to reproduce ecstatically by the nonnative or nontraditional musician. Upon hearing that some Western students have been learning how to play Arab music, one Lebanese violinist asked a typical question: "Do they really feel the microtonal steps (or *arbā'*, literally 'quarter-tones')?" In other words, can they experience the emotive sensations of the neutral steps in order to play Arab music with feeling?³⁰

²⁹ See, for instance, al-Jundī 1984: 16. Here, the concept of "neutral" is used to refer to tonal degrees that fall roughly in the middle between two diatonic steps, for example one intervening between the minor-third and the major-third steps. In modern theories, such neutral degrees are usually presented as notes lowered or raised by roughly a quarter tone. They are typically indicated by special half-flat and half-sharp signs. To illustrate, in relative pitch, the *Rāst* octave scale is generally represented as *c, d, e-half-flat, f, g a, b-flat* (or half-flat), *c'*; *Bayyātī*: *d, e-half-flat, f, g, a, b-flat* (or half-flat), *c', d'*; *Sikāh-Huzām* (or *Sikāh 'Arabī* as al-Ṣabbāgh calls it), which is usually played more like *Huzām*: *e-half-flat, f, g, a-flat, b, c', d'*, *e-half-flat*. Sometimes *Sikāh proper* (pure *Sikāh*) is also played, in this case with the notes *a-natural* and *b-flat* (or half-flat), although most often the two formats *Sikāh* and *Huzām* are blended together, thus forming what can be conveniently called "*Sikāh-Huzām*."

³⁰ The word *rub'*, singular of *arbā'*, is sometimes used to mean a neutral step. Incidentally, this comment was made in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

In a broader sense, the *maqāmāt* are represented as autonomous ecstatic packages. Performers and listeners generally view all the modes as being ecstatic, but also speak of them as individual emotive entities. They tend to give them dissimilar ecstatic profiles and even maintain that some are more ecstatically engaging than others. During an informal musical gathering, the late Tunisian female singer, 'Ulayyah al-Tūnisiyyah echoed a certain feeling among musicians that the modes *Hijāz*, *Sikāh-Huzām*, and *Šabā* produce an extraordinary level of *saṭṭanah*, or modal-ecstatic domination over the performer and the listener.³¹ Also, "popular" *maqāmāt* such as *Bayyātī* are thought to produce ecstatic influences that are more potent than those of other relatively more "academic" modes, such as *Nakriz* and *Nawā Athar*, especially among the less sophisticated listeners. As the Egyptian music historian Maḥmūd Kāmil explains: "If you were to perform for a group of ordinary listeners you are more likely to choose such *maqāmāt* as *Bayyātī*, *Rāst*, and *Hijāz*, rather than something like *Hijāz Kār*."³² Similarly, one Syrian singer from the city of Ḥimṣ remarked that, whereas *Bayyātī* appeals to *ṭarab* listeners in general, it usually takes a *sammī'* to truly appreciate *Nahawand*.³³ Meanwhile, asked why he relied so much on *Bayyātī* for evoking *ṭarab*, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb explained:

Indeed, *Bayyātī* is more saturated with *ṭarab* than any other *maqām*. Providing the foundation for all the Eastern modes that we sing in, it has close connections with *dhikr* and other forms of religious song, whose deep effect upon us we cannot resist. Even when the *mashāyikh* recite the *Qur'ān*, they begin with the mode *Bayyātī* and close with it. (Saḥḥāb, Ilyās 1980: 88)

In a comparable vein, musicians may feel attracted to certain modes, or seem particularly vulnerable to their ecstatic effects. In one musical get together in Cairo, one 'ūd player who admitted having a passionate love for, and a constant urge to play in, *Kurd* explained that a friend of his, apparently a traditional *sammī'*, was annoyed at this 'ūdīst's bizarre obsession with such a "relatively less ecstatic *maqām*."³⁴ In another context, a well-known Egyptian *riqq* player explained that he succumbs to a state of profound elation whenever *Nahawand* is performed. When asked why he reacted in

³¹ In conventional listings *Hijāz* has the following notes: *d*, *e*-flat, *f*-sharp, *g*, *a*, *b*-flat (or half-flat), *c'*, *d'*. *Šabā* has: *d*, *e*-half-flat, *f*, *g*-flat, *a*, *b*-flat, *c'*, *d'*, (or *d'*-flat). This gathering, which was referred to earlier, took place in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

³² The octave scale of *Nakriz* is usually described as: *c*, *d*, *e*-flat, *f*-sharp, *g*, *a*, *b*-flat, *c'*; *Nawā Athar*: *c*, *d*, *e*-flat, *f*-sharp, *g*, *a*-flat, *b*, *c'*; *Hijāz Kār*: *c*, *d*-flat, *e*, *f*, *g*, *a*-flat, *b*, *c'*. The quote is from a conversation I had with Maḥmūd Kāmil in Cairo in the early 1970s.

³³ The octave scale of *Nahawand* is presented as: *c*, *d*, *e*-flat, *f*, *g*, *a*-flat, *b* (or *b*-flat), *c'*. The comment came up in a conversation in Los Angeles on November 21, 1986.

³⁴ The octave scale of *Kurd* (or *Hijāz Kār Kurd*) is usually defined as *c*, *d*-flat, *e*-flat, *f*, *g*, *a*-flat, *b*-flat, *c'*. This mode has a typical descending tendency. The above report comes from a conversation I had with the artist in Cairo in May, 1989.

this way he answered poetically, that when he hears Nahawand, he feels as if someone has laid on the palm of his hand a jewel of breathtaking beauty, thus causing him to become spellbound and unable to move his sight away from that jewel.³⁵

Establishing modal feeling

In modal music, whether precomposed or improvised, the generation of ecstasy requires the creation of strong modal presence. The *maqām* must "reign" fully so as to move and engage the listener. Inherent in the conventional *sayr* progressions of the various *maqāmāt*, the idea of unequivocal modal feeling is usually referred to as *rukūz al-maqām*, "the stabilization of the mode," or *iḍḥār shakhṣiyyat al-maqām*, "bringing out the character of the mode." Implied is the establishment of a strong tonal center, for example by emphasizing the tonic through reiterating it, frequently going back to it, cadencing upon it, and in some cases sounding it as a drone. Modal presence also means that the intervals of the mode are produced accurately and that the modal progression is presented gradually rather than rushed through.

The correlation between modal stability and ecstasy is well recognized by the practicing musicians and their initiated listeners. In 1972 the late Egyptian *qānūn* player and maker Maḥmūd Ra'fat, who continued to perform on a *qānūn* without tuning levers, following the tradition of his late-nineteenth- early-twentieth-century "idol," *qānūn* player Muḥammad al-'Aqqād (Sr.), performed for me an almost half-hour-long *taqṣīm* that stayed in Bayyātī without modulating to other *maqāmāt*. Ra'fat explained that staying in the same *maqām* for a long time, if the music is executed properly, can have tremendous emotional power, adding that young musicians who are impatiently eager to modulate expose their weakness as well as fail to produce real *ṭarab*.³⁶ Ra'fat's criticism of premature or uncalled-for modulations is reminiscent of a report by a young *nāy* player regarding a performance he and his group gave in Buenos Aires before a musically initiated audience of Syrian Jews. When this *nāy* player made a fast departure from Rāst, the original *maqām* of a *taqṣīm* he had been performing, to another mode, one well-seasoned *sammī'* provided him with friendly criticism: *Shabbi' al-Rāst bil-awwal*, literally, "First have Rāst fully satiated," in other words do not modulate so soon, before allowing

³⁵ From a conversation I had with the artists in Cairo in May, 1989.

³⁶ The performance of Mr. Ra'fat was at his home in Cairo in the summer of that year. At the time, Ra'fat was probably in his eighties.

the original maqām of the performance to take its full natural course.³⁷

In fact, modulation is of great concern to critics and artists interested in the ecstatic dimension of *ṭarab* music. Frequently stressed is the importance of establishing the maqām fully before moving to other maqāmāt and eventually returning to the original maqām. Tawfiq al-Ṣabbāgh, who repeatedly argued that *ṭarab* is not a matter of mere technique or the outcome of mechanical display of versatility, explains that the maqām must be carefully nurtured before any departures are contemplated: "Indeed, the excessive change of modes and the abrupt shifting from one mode to another dispel the [modal] influence; As soon as you begin to savor a mode, another one comes and washes away its influence" (1950: 141). Accordingly, the modulations need to be properly prepared for, the modes modulated to must not be dwelled upon for too long, and moreover, the original mode of the performance must be occasionally returned to.

At the same time, excessive modal emphasis must be avoided. The artist needs to safeguard the modal creation against the adverse extremes of both understating and overstating. Y. Qūjamān presents some of the notions subscribed to by Iraqi Jewish musicians. On the basis of interviews with these musicians, who are totally at home with the mainstream *ṭarab* practice, the author reports on several approaches to modulation. According to one such approach, the performer must maintain the sense of *saṭṭanah* (or modal ecstasy) created by the original maqām more or less throughout the entire performance. In other words, when introducing a new modulation, a musician must resist the temptation of developing or elaborating upon the new mode to the extent of causing it to impose its own dominant *saṭṭanah*. Accordingly, if it does so, it diminishes or wipes out the *saṭṭanah* of the original maqām within the performer and the audience members. A rule of thumb is presented: one instrumentalist is quoted as saying that while performing in maqām Rāst for example, if the listeners utter the ecstatic exclamation *Allāh!* during a modulation, say to Bayyātī on the fifth degree, the performer must know that he has overstated the modulatory part. "If I play a *taqṣīm* in Rāst I want the listener to remain in the atmosphere (*jaww*) of Rāst all the time, and to admire me basically as a performer of Rāst . . ." (Qūjamān, 1978: 88).

Modal emphasis is illustrated by a variety of traditional compositional structures. According to 'Ajjān, many of these structures aim primarily at evoking musical ecstasy, thus constituting what the author calls *ṭarab mubāshir*, or "direct *ṭarab*." We are similarly told that such designs follow psychological principles whose efficacy is demonstrable through scientific

³⁷ From a conversation with the *nāy* player in the mid-1980s. The performance took place in the early 1980s. When the *nāy* player asked the listener if he himself was a musician, the latter indicated that he was only a *sammī* and that he was Argentinian born.

experimentation.³⁸ One outstanding example appears in the *dūlāb*. In view of its short duration this introductory ensemble composition encapsulates the potent and most representative features of the *maqām*. Characteristically, it places due emphasis upon the central notes of the mode, presents the characteristic directional tendencies of the mode (albeit in an abbreviated form), explores the essential pitch areas, usually without extraneous accidentals, and then returns to the tonic through a firmly and unequivocally stated cadence. For this reason, the *dūlāb* is treated as a prime tool for instilling *saḥnāh*.

Of a more elaborate structure is the *bashraf* (Turkish *peşrev*), an Ottoman-based genre admired for its structural beauty, majesty (*fakhāmah*), solemnity (*waqār*), and direct ecstatic effect (*tāṭrib mubāshir*).³⁹ Musically speaking, the *bashraf* embraces aspects of both unity and diversity. Expected to bring out the character of the metric mode (*shakhṣiyyat al-īqāʿ*), in other words, of the rhythmic pattern that runs through the entire work, the *bashraf* consists of four variable sections (*khānāt*, singular *khānah*) each of which is followed by a reoccurring section, or refrain (*taslīm*). It has an overall rondo-like form that can be described as A x B x C x D x (with A B C D referring to the different verse-like segments and x to the consistently reappearing section).

As described in detail by theorists, including the Syrian 'Ajjān and others, the first *khānah* (A) establishes the character of the main *maqām*. Starting in a traditionally prescribed pitch area, it highlights the tonic or a similarly emphasized note or notes of the *maqām*, usually without introducing accidentals that may detract from the character of the *maqām*. The *taslīm* (x), which the first *khānah* must smoothly lead into, enhances the established modal feeling and explores it even further before coming to a natural conclusion. Stating that the *taslīm* should be played only once each time to avoid monotony (*ratābah*), 'Ajjān writes that the listener looks forward with anticipation to this refrain, because its attractive melody intensifies the listener's ecstatic feeling.⁴⁰ The second *khānah* (B) moves smoothly to a related *maqām* or may only make passing allusions to other *maqāmāt* before it reverts back to the main *maqām*. The third *khānah* (C) gradually explores the higher pitches of the *maqām* or may make an appropriate modulation to another *maqām*. Constituting a climactic modal phase, this section reaches a higher plateau of liveliness and complexity, at times posing special technical demands. We are also told that this section is usually filled with "heavenly ecstasy" (*nashwah 'alawiyyah*) ('Ajjān 1990: 86). Somewhat like a modal recapitulation, the fourth variable section (D) reestablishes the basic

³⁸ 'Ajjān 1990: 70.

³⁹ Ibid. 1990: 88.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 1990: 86.

character of the maqām and “recaptures the gist of the melodic content of the bashraf in a ripe manner” (Ibid. 1990: 86), in addition to smoothly paving the way for the final statement of the refrain.

In its entirety, the bashraf, which in traditional Ottoman music serves as an introduction to a *fāsil*, namely a compound or suite-like genre in a certain mode, constitutes a self-contained apparatus for producing modal feeling. In a section discussing the psychological foundations of the bashraf composition, ‘Ajjān states that one of the aims of this genre is to establish the character of the maqām and to cause the maqām to take hold of the listener’s psyche (*nafsiyyah*) in preparation for subsequent pieces, whether instrumental or vocal. “The bashraf enables the basic mode to be set firmly in the mind, thus augmenting the mode’s influence (*ta’thīr*) and its power of ecstatic evocation (*taṭrīb*)” (1990: 87). Comparable modal applications are found in the samāʿī, which shares with the bashraf a basic rondo-like structure.

Further patterns of consistency and variety can be found in vocal compositions such as the dawr. Referred to by the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Caireans as *sayyid al-sahrah*, or “master of the evening,” the dawr was particularly known for its highly ecstatic content. Its opening section established the maqām of the performance and paved the way for a middle section that included numerous modal digressions and was in turn followed by a brief segment in the original mode. Somewhat comparable is the *muwashshah*, a precomposed vocal genre that as a rule adheres to a specific metric pattern and musically follows a multisectional, often AABA, format. In this case, the restated A section presents a basic rendition of the maqām, usually emphasizing its tonal area. The B section, or *khānah*, tends to move gradually to other higher tonal areas and to modulate to a related maqām before gradually reverting to the original maqām, thus preparing for the recapitulatory final statement of the A section.

A similar pattern applies to a large number of modern instrumental pieces and songs, or *aghānī*. Examples include Umm Kulthūm’s songs, especially those from the 1940s and early 1950s, a period that many view as the “golden age” of the singer’s ṭarab career. We are told, for example, that Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī was fully conscious of the ecstatic function of modal satiation (*ishbāʿ al-maqām*). Accordingly, he was once surprised and disappointed to see one song he composed for Umm Kulthūm in 1943, despite its excellent lyrics by Aḥmad Rāmī and its fair amount of modal emphasis, overshadowed by the ecstatically evocative tunes (*alḥān taṭrībīyyah*) of Zakariyyā Aḥmad, who also composed for Umm Kulthūm at that time.⁴¹

⁴¹ From al-Sharīf 1988: 122.

The magic of cadences

Cadential patterns, especially in improvised performances, constitute powerful ecstatic devices. Known as *qaflāt*, (plural of *qaflah*, literally, "closure") *ṭarab* cadences are recognizable motivic structures that mark the endings of major musical phrases and are typically followed by short pauses. In terms of overall stylistic content, the *qaflāt* seem particularly dense and dynamic. They often pack many short notes, exhibit intricate accentual, rhythmic, melodic, and ornamental nuances, and display a relatively high level of melodic activity. Although largely improvised, *qaflāt* tend to be highly patterned, or cliché-like.

These structures also vary in length, ranging from small motifs of one or a few notes, to more elaborate configurations that span an octave or more. They typically last somewhere from a few seconds to fifteen or more seconds. Furthermore, they inspire various degrees of finality or resolution. Some, for example, are suited for less conclusive or momentary stopping, whereas others, being associated with a powerful sense of finality, would characteristically end on the tonic note and mark the termination of a major section if not an entire performance. The effectiveness of a *qaflah* depends significantly upon its timing, the precision with which it is executed, and the novel ways in which it is rendered. At a premium is the artist's ability to produce *qaflāt* that are emotionally effective, yet not hackneyed or overused by the artist himself or by others.

Arab listeners, music critics, and theorists generally view the *qaflah* as one of the distinguishing traits of *ṭarab* music. Some even state that it is a uniquely Arab phenomenon,⁴² while others describe it as an Egyptian trait *par excellence*.⁴³ Moreover, *qaflah* mastery is seen as the trademark of an emotionally effective artist. Umm Kulthūm's biographer Ni'māt Fu'ād describes the female singer's consistent ability to execute good *qaflāt* as one of the reasons for her supreme status as a *muṭribah*. She refers to 'Abd al-Wahhāb's comment that Umm Kulthūm's unfailing command of the *qaflah* is due in part to her artistic self-confidence when facing her audiences directly, a skill she had cultivated even before she had access to the microphone. At the same time, the biographer attributes Umm Kulthūm's mastery of the *qaflah* to her impressive grounding in the *ṭarab* tradition and her training under the major *ṭarab* singer Shaykh Abū al-'Ulā Muḥammad. She contrasts Umm Kulthūm with a variety of singers whose cadential deliveries are either inconsistent or ineffective.⁴⁴

⁴² Such characterization is provided for example by 'Ajjān 1990: 7. Similarly al-Ṣabbāgh maintains that the Arab *qaflah* has no exact parallel in the Turkish *taqsīm* (1950: 141).

⁴³ For example, it is described as such by Egyptian composer and music researcher Sulaymān Jamīl, quoted in Fu'ād 1976: 402.

⁴⁴ Fu'ād 1976: 402, 404.

The qafḥah is viewed as a magical device that charges the performance with ecstatic power. It is said, for example, that "the successful qafḥah enhances the aesthetic quality of the taqṣīm, and that no matter how correct a performance is, it can lose its artistic value if the cadencing (*qafḥ*) was not properly executed." Accordingly, the qafḥah grants "the melody elegance, beauty, exuberance, and life; the listeners wait for it in order to receive new charges of energy, thus when cadencing occurs utterances of exclamation and admiration are strongly voiced" (ʿAjjān 1990: 71). Based upon his field interviews, Qūjamān provides similar testimony to the emotional impact of the qafḥah upon the performance as a whole. Maintaining that the cadence is of crucial importance because it is the last portion of the phrase and the one that stays most vividly in the listener's mind, he explains that "an unsuccessful qafḥah may cause the entire phrase to be forgotten or to be considered unsuccessful, and conversely a successful qafḥah may cause the weakness of a phrase to be forgotten and may lead one to think that such a phrase was successful" (1978: 89).

In the course of performing, the cadences are artfully selected and utilized in order to stir the listeners' emotions. In her book, *The Art of Reciting the Qurʾān* (1985), Kristina Nelson describes the reciters' paramount interest in the qafḥah, or *waqf* (literally stopping), which is considered "the real test of the reciter's (and musician's) melodic skill," (1985: 127). Indicating that while performing, some mashāyikh think ahead in anticipation of the qafḥat which the listeners eagerly wait for, Nelson identifies some of the commonly recognized qafḥah types. There is the "calm" one, which basically uses no ornaments or melismas, and another, the "burning" type, which utilizes more notes and involves more artistic maneuvering thus creating tremendous emotional impact upon the listener. Stating that qafḥat are naturally found in the florid and highly melismatic *mujawwad* style of Qurʾanic chanting, particularly in phrases that end with vowelized syllables, Nelson also describes two cadential procedures. The first brings back a melodic phrase to its emphatic tonal base, thus completing the symmetrical contour initiated by that phrase and releasing the tension generated by that same phrase. The second heightens tension by ending the phrase ambivalently on a note less central to the maqām or on a note shared prominently by another maqām, thus creating uncertain modal anticipation, a feeling that listeners appear to deeply appreciate.

Similar patterns are encountered in the secular expression. Although the longer, elaborately worked out qafḥat tend to have a very powerful effect, particularly upon ordinary listeners, the subtle qafḥat in the form of clever or witty gesturing are specially valued by the musical connoisseurs. Qūjamān reports a consensus among his informants that more effective, as well as technically more demanding is the subtle and succinct qafḥah. Stating that the long qafḥah is often seen as the attribute of a weak taqṣīm, he describes a general

feeling that a well-executed and intelligently conceived few-note cadence can generate tremendous ecstasy, as well as evoke a clear sense of finality.

Emotionally speaking, the *qaflāt* operate in certain patterned ways. As best illustrated in the more conclusive and more elaborate *qaflah* type, the underlying effect is one of momentarily heightened anticipation followed by resolution. Typically, the movement toward a final tonal station takes a circuitous, or briefly digressive path. For example, a *taqāsim* player may rest on the tonic very briefly, but then quickly run up across the octave scale and down to end upon the final note in earnest. Thus, he would produce a tantalizing sense of delayed resolution but ultimately, an unequivocal repose on the final note. He may also create a feeling of anticipatory anxiety by temporarily stopping on, or dwelling upon, a less emphatic tonal station, for example the leading note or the second note above the tonic, before resting upon the final note. To close, as emotive microstructures, *qaflah* patterns energize the modal-melodic flow. Particularly in nonmetric improvisatory music, they grant the performance added structural definition but also make it particularly engaging.

Correct pitch and beyond

In *ṭarab* music, the ability to play or sing in correct pitch is another requisite for creating ecstatically effective performances. Essentially, few theoretical works describe the ecstatic role of intonation, despite the abundance of treatises and text-books that deal with tuning and modal scales. Furthermore, in such sources melodic intervals are most often presented in terms of the microtonally crude, largely Western inspired theoretical system of equal-tempered half-steps, three-quarter steps, whole steps, augmented seconds, and so on, intervals derived from a theoretical scale of 24 equal quarter-tones per octave. In actual practice however, *ṭarab* music exhibits an intricate and a highly patterned system of intonation. Proper intonation is usually acknowledged through common evaluative expressions, as well as through direct reference to pitch-related phenomena. For example, the concept most typically used to describe faulty intonation is *nashāz*, which roughly means "out of tune," "unharmonious," or "aesthetically offensive." Embodying the culture's intonational sensibility, this concept has a variety of derivative usages such as the verb *nashshaza*, "to go out of tune" and the noun *tanshīz*, "making intonational errors."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This word *nashāz* appears to come from Persian-Ottoman usage. Accordingly, the suffix *sāz* means "musical instrument," or "tune." Similarly, in Persian *nāsāz* means "out of tune" or "unharmonious."

Effective *ṭarab* music operates on a fine intonational level. Performing the "basic notes" may produce acceptable pitch correctness, or at times may seem barely passable or even outright *nashāz*. In fact, good intonation tends to cut across the artificial compartmentalization of equal temperament and to transcend the confines of fixed or gross tonal stations. The emotive role of microintonation as such is explained by the performance-minded and ecstasy-conscious Syrian theorist Tawfiq al-Ṣabbāgh. In his musical treatise *al-Dalīl al-Mūsīqī al-Āmm: fī Aṭrab al-Anghām*, or "General Musical Guide into the Most Ecstatic Melodies (or Modes)" (1950), the author discusses the Arab modal scales with special attention to the ecstatic connotations of proper intonation. Stressing that equal temperament, or the system of 24 equal quarter-tones, is a contrived construct highly detrimental to the generation of *ṭarab* and to Arab music altogether, al-Ṣabbāgh proposes a more detailed microtonal system. Specifically, he uses the Pythagorean-based *comma* (roughly, one-ninth of a tone) as a measuring device, which he borrows from medieval Arab treatises and describes as a pitch unit found in Byzantine church modes. On the basis of dividing the octave into 53 commas, al-Ṣabbāgh specifies certain sizes for the whole-step, half-step, neutral-step, and augmented-step intervals, and by extension the larger intervals that consist of combinations of these intervals. Incidentally, al-Ṣabbāgh's analytical tools are comparable to those applied by Turkish theorists and by some of his fellow Syrian theorists, although he makes a special point of matching his *maqāmāt* in terms of structure and ethos with Byzantine counterparts, which he appears to have experienced musically and ecstatically first-hand. Here, al-Ṣabbāgh indicates that his renditions (for example the large whole-step consisting of 9 commas, the small half-step 4 commas, the perfect fourth 22 commas, the perfect fifth 31 commas, and so on) assure certain intonational correctness, or at least a minimum degree of ecstatic effectiveness.

Beyond this basic level, however, the author demonstrates that certain microtonal readjustments or modifications can raise the musical expression to a higher ecstatic level. Accordingly, these procedures are dictated by the musician's own aesthetical sense, as well as proven by al-Ṣabbāgh's own experimentations on the violin. Furthermore, they are determined not only by the *maqām* being played, but also by the specific tonal area being developed at the time of performing. To begin with, al-Ṣabbāgh identifies a few basic *maqāmāt* in terms of fixed steps. More specifically, he represents the essential notes through familiar Near-Eastern and European names, in some cases with specific accidental designations, for example, "flat and a quarter" (*bemol wa rubʿ*) to indicate a very flat note and "quarter flat" (*rubʿ bemol*) to indicate a note that is only partially flattened, and so on. He then specifies the exact number of commas for each of the fixed scalar intervals within these *maqāmāt*. And subsequently, he sets up this somewhat

"tempered" but intonationally more detailed structure as a matrix within which he proposes small microtonal readjustments and describes their distinct ecstatic effects. The following is a selective illustration.

Hijāz Kār Kurdī (a mode with a scale that roughly resembles that of a Phrygian mode) is described as being: *c*, *d*-flat, *e*-flat-and-a-quarter, *f*, *g*, *a*-flat-and-a-quarter, *b*-flat-and-a-quarter, *c'*, or in terms of intervallic structure expressed in commas: (5, 8, 9, 9, 4, 9, 9). Al-Ṣabbāgh stresses that this mode does not cause *ṭarab* unless the performer is highly skillful. He also hastens to state that certain microtonal adjustments are of critical importance. Complaining that some musicians lower the second and third degrees above the tonic to such an extent that causes the listeners to be repelled by the mode, he maintains that if these two degrees were to rise slightly, "there would be tremendous increase in the *ṭarab* effect of the mode" (Ibid.: 44). He adds that judging by his own experience, it is preferable to raise the third step by one comma (in other words, to make the distance between the second and the third step 9, instead of 8, commas) during the regular *sayr* of the mode, but to keep that note in its regular position when used as a temporary point of repose (*rukūz*). As he explains: "those who try this specific procedure would experience more pleasure and ecstasy (*ṭarab*)" (Ibid.).

Comparable observations are applied to the mode Hijāz (*d*, *e*-flat, *f*-sharp, *g*, *a*, *b*-half-flat, *c'*, *d'*, or intervallically in terms of commas per interval: 5, 12, 5, 9, 7, 6, 9). We are told, "this is one of the most important and most ecstatic (*aṭrabahā*) of the Eastern maqāmāt, a mode that is very easy to comprehend, and one that enters into the make up of all other modes . . ." (Ibid.: 45).⁴⁶ Furthermore we are reminded that the second step (*e*-flat) in this mode is characteristically high and that special attention must be paid not to lower it, because if that note is lowered even very slightly (for instance by one comma, as for example should happen in some other modes using augmented seconds) the modal feeling of Hijāz would be lost. Al-Ṣabbāgh also calls our attention to the possibility of creating a deeply moving modal structure known as "Hijāz Gharīb," which is used widely by Turkish musicians and results from lowering the third step (*f*-sharp) by one comma and moving the already raised second step upward by one comma. In addition, he refers to a flattened fifth note (*a*-flat), which if used as an accidental and "touched" briefly at an appropriate moment, would have "an influence that is powerful and ecstatic" (Ibid.: 47).

Bayyātī (*d*, *e*-half-flat, *f*, *g*, *a*, *b*-flat-and-a-quarter, *c'*, *d'*, or in terms of commas: 7, 6, 9, 9, 4, 9, 9) is presented as one of the most prevalent maqāmāt. Accordingly, this mode, which is similarly incorporated in the rest

⁴⁶ Notably, this view of Hijāz as a particularly ecstatic mode is consistent with the previously mentioned statement by 'Ulayyah al-Tūnisiyyah, regarding the exceptional ecstatic efficacy of certain modes.

of the modes, demands great precision.⁴⁷ More specifically, in order to bring out its character properly and to produce *ṣarab* in it, it is advisable that the third note be raised very slightly. Furthermore, if the notes are played for example on a violin string on which the fourth note can be conveniently stopped (rather than produced on an open string, as often happens in the case of the *ūd*) it is advisable to lower the fourth note (*g*) by a tiny bit. Accordingly, "that will produce an emotionally effective *Bayyātī*" (Ibid.). The author adds however that when a group of instruments (for example *ūd*, *qānūn*, *nāy*, and others) play together it becomes impractical to produce this slight readjustment of the fourth note.

Comparably treated is *Ṣabā*, which the author describes as "one of the emotionally moving and melancholic modes" (Ibid.: 48). Al-*Ṣabbāgh* presents both the fixed format (*d*, *e*-half-flat, *f*, *g*-flat, *a*, *b*-flat-and-a-quarter, *c'*, *d'*, or in terms of intervals by commas: 7, 6, 5, 13, 4, 9, 9), and another rendition with fine readjustments. He states for example that the emotional impact of *Ṣabā* is augmented when the third note (*f*) is raised slightly, a move that should occur temporarily rather than on a permanent basis. The author also explains that, when the melodic progression proceeds upward from a point of entry somewhere around the *f*, a note highly emphasized in *Ṣabā*, the upper note *d* is lowered to *d*-flat, but when the modal progression moves entirely into the upper-octave region, the lower notes of the scale (including the lower tonic, *d*, natural) are all replicated in the upper octave. Regarding the modes that could be temporarily shifted to while in *Ṣabā*, the author includes "two of the most intricate and ecstatic modes" (Ibid.: 49). The first, which he explains as being between *Ṣabā* and *Bayyātī*, is caused by raising the fourth note, or *g*-flat, a bit to make it a *g*-half-flat, adding that "it is impossible for any mode whatsoever to influence the soul as much as this one" (Ibid.). The second is described as being between *Ṣabā* and *Ḥijāz*.⁴⁸ Accordingly, one must not move from *Ṣabā* to *Ḥijāz* without passing through this modal configuration. We are told that both of these modal patterns are illustrated in one specific *samā'ī* in maqām *Ṣabā*.

Such treatment is extended to maqām *Sikāh* 'Arabī, or "Arab *Sikāh*," which al-*Sabbagh* equates with the Turkish *Huzām* and describes as being formed of *e*-half-flat, *f*, *g*, *a*-flat, *b*-quarter-flat, *c'*, *d'*, *e'*-half flat, or in commas: 6, 9, 5, 12, 5, 9, 7. Accordingly, this "beautiful" and "pleasant" mode can express joy, but also melancholy "through a few minor adjustments" (Ibid.: 50). Especially at the time of cadencing, the note (*d*) just

⁴⁷ The notion of one mode embracing or influencing the make-up of other modes seems to refer to the reappearance of some basic intervals or intervallic clusters of that mode within the scalar constitutions of those other modes. Also, some modes are known to derive their tonics (and by extension intervals) from the different tonal steps of the *Rāst* scale.

⁴⁸ The author does not specify how this intermediary mode is produced. Presumably, it results from slightly lowering the second note of *Ṣabā* and slightly raising the third note.

below the tonic, and sometimes the note (*d'*) just below the upper-tonic, has to be slightly raised. Al-Ṣabbāgh also lists a number of modal patterns that can be incorporated in this maqām. Accordingly, one is similar to Hijāz Gharīb, which if constructed on the *g* step and eventually cadences on *e*-half-flat, as typically occurs when Turks play Huzām, the overall outcome is profoundly ecstatic.⁴⁹

A comparable discussion appears with Jahārkāh (*f, g, a, b*-flat-and-a-quarter, *c', d', e'*-half-flat, *f'*, or intervallically speaking: 9, 9, 4, 9, 9, 7, 6). Al-Ṣabbāgh begins by stressing that this mode acquires its distinctive character, which differentiates it from 'Ajām (a mode whose intervals resemble those of the Western major scale) through the use of the microtonal leading tone (the note called Sikāh, namely *e*-half-flat). He also states that sometimes it is permissible to lower the third and the fourth pitches by one comma each, readjustments "that inject into the performance distinctive pleasure" (Ibid.: 51).

The author suggests comparable treatments for two other modes. One is 'Ajām 'Ushayrān (which is comparable to a major scale constructed on *B*-flat), a mode he describes as having more grandeur than compassion and emotion. The other is 'Irāq (*B*-half-flat, *c, d, e*-half-flat, *f, g, a, b*-half-flat, or 6, 9, 7, 6, 9, 9, 7), which he says has magnificence similar to that found in 'Ajām. Accordingly, the latter ('Ajām) occurs when the major-like mode is constructed on *b*-flat, rather than on *B*-flat, an octave lower (Ibid.: 52).

The above exposé sheds light upon a number of key issues regarding intonation and the ecstatic experience. Reflecting the sensibilities of a performing theorist, al-Ṣabbāgh's ideas may not be universally accepted or applied. However, they illustrate the direct relationship between emotional gratification and intervallic "fine tuning." Furthermore, his empirical observations are consistent with the experiences and intonational preferences of a vast number of musicians. For example, widely recognized is the profound ecstatic character of the Gharīb modal structure, which apart from al-Ṣabbāgh's allusions, is seldom conceptualized or analyzed as such in the more formal theoretical sources. One specific maqām that musical

⁴⁹ Al-Ṣabbāgh 1950: 51. In this context, the description offered is very terse and does not tell us exactly how the modal pattern specified above, which he calls *Sikāh Gharīb*, might compare with Hijāz Gharīb on the *g* step. See also Note 50 below.

⁵⁰ The suffix *gharīb* literally means "foreign," or "strange," or "estranged." As indicated by the current practice, both Hijāz Gharīb and Sikāh Gharīb (also called *Sikāh Baladī*, literally "local," "country," or "folk" Sikāh) share a certain "compressed" augmented-second between the second and third degrees. The "folkish" quality of the former mode is sometimes noted. Khālīd Khalīfah, who comes from Aleppo and plays Arab music on the cello, recalls that this mode has been referred to locally as *Hijāz Nawarī*, or "Gypsy Hijāz," an appellation reminiscent of the Syrian Gypsies, particularly the manner in which they play the Bedouin *rabābah*, a single-string fiddle (from a 1998 conversation in Los Angeles). Musicians often confuse the two mode names or use them interchangeably, probably for a good reason since excessive narrowing of the augmented second of Hijāz can lead to a certain "Sikāh-ish"

practitioners refer to as "Sikāh Gharīb," and that appears in the songs of such major artists as Umm Kulthūm, 'Abd al-Wahhāb and Wadī' al-Ṣāfī (usually as an inner modulation), is known to produce an overwhelming sense of *ṣaltānah*.⁵⁰ Similarly, the accidental lowering of the fifth note in Hījāz usually toward the end of a phrase or during the final stage of the performance is a widely occurring practice, one that verges on being an ecstatic cliché. A further illustration is the slight shifting of such seemingly stable intervals as the major third or perfect fourth and fifth for example by moving them toward the tonic note, which has a tendency to pull other notes toward it as long as it is used as the referential center of the melodic activity.⁵¹ Such subtle and temporary readjusting, which belongs to an intuitively learned and applied intonational grammar is intended to grant the performance "sweetness" and to make it emotionally effective.

Conversely, bad intonation, in other words, the creation of *nashāz*, results either from a poor sense of relative pitch or from an instrument's lack of intonational versatility. In recent decades, the Arab *qānūn* has been one of the most serious offenders. This is somewhat ironic since historically the instrument has been cherished as a prime tool of *ṭarab*. In the early twentieth century, the *qānūn*, which lacked tuning levers altogether, enjoyed a basic level of tonal correctness since its strings were separately tuned to individual *maqām* notes as sensed by the discriminating ear of the performer. Such tonal fixation, a temperament of sorts, did not prevent the *qānūn* player from introducing accidental notes through the careful and aesthetically pleasing practice of stopping the strings with the thumb or middle finger of the left hand. Such stopping happened only sporadically, given the relative modal consistency that pervaded each of the self-contained *waṣlah* performances. Thus, the *qānūn* was ideally suited for: 1) having the entire gamut of modal pitches individually, albeit somewhat immutably, preadjusted; and 2) providing the ensemble, especially the *muṭrib*, with a referential set of modal steps that are tonally stable, as well as sonorously prominent. Such attributes may have rendered the instrument worthy of its name, *qānūn*, which means "law" or "rule," from the Greek word "canon." In fact, highly ecstatic

feeling. However, in the *Sikāh-Gharīb* mode, strong emphasis is placed on the third note (as would happen in *Sikāh*, rather than on the fourth as the case would be in *Hījāz*). Furthermore, in this particular mode the full step below the tonic is raised by slightly less than a full semitone. For example, if *Sikāh Gharīb* occurs on *g*, the note affected would be the *f* below, which in its raised form (low *f*-sharp) would function as a leading tone. And similarly, the note further below would be a slightly raised *e*-flat. Among the well-known works that incorporate prominent *Sikāh Gharīb* modulations are 'Abd al-Wahhāb's song *al-Karnak*, and Umm Kulthūm's song *Shams al-Aṣīl*.

⁵¹ The same tendency applies to the less stable notes. For example the half-flat seventh note in *Rāst*, as well as the half-flat sixth note in *Bayyātī* and *Hījāz*, is usually pulled down into a regular flat when the melodic activity is strongly referenced by or directed toward the tonic. Conversely, this note is typically raised to its neutral, or half-flat position when it serves as a leading note or part of a leading-note cluster below the tonic or the upper tonic.

performances have been recorded on this instrument by pre-World-War-I artists, the senior Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād and others.

The modern instrument most often lacks the number of tuning levers (*ʿurab*) needed for producing effective modal renditions. A few skilled and tarab-conscious qānūn players utilize instruments that are equipped with elaborate lever-systems that enable them to raise or lower each course of strings by increments smaller than a quarter-tone each and to obtain some of the smaller microtonal inflections needed for affective tarab making.⁵² Yet, the vast majority of Arab qānūn players today employ minimal tuning systems, quite often four working levers per string course, that change the pitch roughly by quarter-tone increments. Although on such instruments some of the levers are set in places that may suit certain common modes, the format as a whole continues to reflect the popular paradigm of equal temperament and to render certain intervals blatantly out of tune.⁵³ The same applies to the buzuq, which as generally played in the Arab world, uses a minimal system of basically stationary frets arranged in terms of half steps with a few neutral steps on certain typical degrees.⁵⁴ Obviously, such intonational inadequacies are becoming more striking with the recent proliferation and increasing prominence of keyboard instruments.⁵⁵

Finally, the traditional intonational practice is eloquently exhibited in the vocal performance. Through its exceptionally pliable nature the voice is

⁵² Some musicians recognize two types of elaborate lever-systems. The *mākinah kāmīlah*, or "full machine," incorporates between nine and eleven metal levers per string and is capable of producing various comma inflections. The other, namely *niṣf mākinah*, or "half machine," being intervallically less detailed, usually has five or six levers and provides the approximate quarter-tone steps in addition to one or two in-between (plus-one-comma and minus-one-comma) types of intervals. Applicable mostly to Aleppo musicians, this information was provided by Dr. George Sawa, an Egyptian-born scholar and an accomplished qānūn player himself.

⁵³ In fact, al-Ṣabbāgh expresses extreme unhappiness about the typical microtonal shortcomings of the modern qānūn as he accuses the musicians of always opting for what is facile or superficial (1950: 171). Furthermore, he makes reference to the abandonment of the original left-hand stopping, which was more difficult but extremely pleasing if done well, and also to the sliding pyramid-like wood bridges that were introduced at one time. In reality, many modern qānūn players justify their adoption of minimal lever systems through such statements as "it makes it easier to insert accidental notes and to modulate rapidly," or "it makes the instrument more in tune with the accordion or electric keyboard instruments." Incidentally, the intervals that appear to suffer most are the "narrowed" augmented-seconds, for example those occurring naturally in Hījāz, or between the fourth and fifth notes in Huzām, or between the fourth and fifth in Ṣabā, or even more prominently, in the Gharīb modal structures.

⁵⁴ On my own buzuq, I have over the years developed an extremely elaborate fretting system. For example, I have found it necessary to include several microtonal gradations on most of the main pitch degrees.

⁵⁵ Although instantaneous microtonal readjustments are possible on certain electronic keyboard instruments, the performers quite often choose to play the various intervals, including the microtones, conveniently in the fixed equal-tempered tuning, usually to the detriment of proper intonation.

capable of producing the finer *ʿurab* that evoke ecstasy. Rendered most effectively by the trained vocalist, such microtonal inflections are particularly observable within the purely vocal genres, for instance Sufi hymns that are performed without any instruments. Embracing a similar level of intonational finesse is the unaccompanied vocal solo, the supreme example of which is Qurʾanic chanting, particularly the more elaborate *mujawwad* style as rendered by the masterful reciters. The primacy of the voice as an intonational model is stressed by Aḥmad al-Jundī, a practice-conscious Syrian biographer who defends the use of neutral microtones on artistic grounds and admonishes those who advocate abolishing such microtones on the grounds that they are not well-suited for Western instruments or do not fit certain arbitrary laws of physics. In his words: "Why don't we use as reference the human larynx, which is the first and eternal sound medium . . .?; Should we adjust our larynx to the inanimate instruments or should not the reverse be the proper thing to do?; Do we make clothes to fit the body or do we compress the body to fit the clothes?" (1984: 16).⁵⁶ In the same vein, it can be stressed that an affective *ṭarab* practitioner is someone who "plays out" the music's implicit intonational system beyond the confines of formal theoretical constructs.

Meter and motion

Meter, or the system of rhythmic modes known as *īqāʿāt* (singular, *īqāʿ*), or *ḍurūb* (singular, *ḍarb*), or *awzān* (singular, *wazn*), adds to the music a special ecstatic dimension. As *ṭarab* related writings indicate, meter appears to generate ecstasy in a variety of ways. As repeated self-contained structures, rhythmic patterns generate an orderly temporal flow. Furthermore, through their distinctive internal designs, they evoke certain affects. In the *īqāʿ* orientation, which is typical of Syria's *muwashshah* tradition and to a large extent shared by Ottoman classical music, we encounter a wide array of cyclical patterns, each containing a specific number of *dumm* (or deep sounding, emphatic) beats, *takk* (or light, crisp) beats, and rests (or silent) beats.⁵⁷ Creatively embellished and fleshed out by the percussionist, each pattern resembles a unique architectonic design whose individual aesthetic quality permeates the entire performance. Al-Khulafī, who extolled the artistic value

⁵⁶ In performance, the singers tend to maintain certain intonational correctness even when the accompaniment is intonationally problematic. However, I have heard numerous artists, including established singers, compromise their own intonation in order to avoid sounding "out of tune" with their intonationally faulty instrumental accompaniment.

⁵⁷ In some Syrian sources, the rest is also referred to as *saktah* (literally, "silence") and especially in Egypt the word *iss* is used to indicate a rest. Meanwhile, in some earlier theories specific beat-combinations are recognized and syllabically represented.

of the Turko-Syrian rhythmic modes while lamenting the prevalent ignorance about this legacy among his compatriots, pointed clearly to the tarab effect this category of meters is capable of evoking.⁵⁸

It is also known that the length and tempo of the pattern determine the quality of its affect. Accordingly, *īqā'āt* that are more elaborate or move at a slower pace, for example those upon which many bashraf compositions are based, tend to evoke a stately presence, or in emotional terms, a profound "intoxicating" effect. In this regard, al-Khula'i mentioned that some musicians slowed down certain meters, for example playing the thirteen-beat *Zurāfāt* mode twice as slow "in order to augment the tarab feeling" (ca. 1904: 72). By comparison, short and fast meters are generally known to create an exhilarating sense of movement or to intensify an already existing tarab state and to carry it gradually toward an emotional climax.

Meanwhile, musical structures may gain special efficacy through the use of differing metric patterns. Despite the general emphasis on metric consistency, as typically illustrated by the *muwashshaḥ* and the *bashraf*, metric variety in the span of a full performance, or even a single musical work, is seen as an antidote to excessive repetitiveness, a phenomenon detrimental to the evocation and sustenance of tarab feeling. Metrically, the general pattern of statement-digression-restatement found in the *samā'i* form, is a case in point. Here, the ten-beat *Samā'i* *Thaqil* meter is maintained throughout the *samā'i* composition except for the fourth, or last *khānah*, which typically uses a triple or a six-beat pattern, before the final repeat of the refrain returns to the original ten-beat meter.

Furthermore, ecstatic buildup may result from metric intensification, specifically the gradual or progressively phased shifting from long and stately patterns to shorter and livelier ones. This procedure usually appears in the Syrian *fāsil*, which consists of a medley of traditional genres in a certain *maqām* and incorporates a collection of *muwashshaḥ* compositions of various beat patterns. The same can be observed in the performance "sets" of some Sufi orders, or for that matter in the overall structure of many *ḥaflah* performance. In these and other contexts, this general pattern, although by no means always predictable or orderly, creates a sense of gradual intensification, an ascent that usually leads to a climactic conclusion.

Ecstatic stimulation may also stem from accentual reiteration, a phenomenon best exemplified by a fundamental metric principle referred to as *waḥdah* (or *wāḥidah*), which literally means "unit," "one," or "metric accent." Strongly associated with Egyptian music, the *waḥdah* can be described as a reoccurring accentual effect. Unlike the Syrian-Turkish cyclical patterns, which display a wide variety of essentially predetermined and succinctly structured beat designs, the *waḥdah* in its most elemental form

⁵⁸ al-Khula'i ca. 1904: 85.

is a unit of time marked by one downbeat, or *dumm*. Sometimes treated as a primal theoretical design, the *waḥdah* pattern exists in a variety of lengths or *tempi* and is given such descriptive epithets as large, medium, and small.⁵⁹

Historically and aesthetically, the *waḥdah* principle is rooted in the local religious practice, specifically the Sufi *dhikr*. It is associated with the reiterative beat pattern, or *waḥdat al-dhikr* that permeates the typical Egyptian dervish performance, at one time a prime training arena for *ṭarab* singers. Typically, the *dhikr* performance embraces an encompassing accentual drive that combines repetitive swaying of the upper torso, rhythmically controlled breathing, reiteration of a religious verbal formula, and metric clapping by the *shaykh*, or religious leader. In some cases, percussion instruments may also be involved. This underlying metric, and sometimes melodic, activity usually provides an accompanimental *ostinato* (or *arḍiyyah*, literally, ground or foundation) for the leading religious vocalist. Similarly, the performance tends to engender a series of ecstatic high points that in some cases are carefully controlled. As Michael Gilsenan explains: "the *shaykh*, by clapping his hands in increasing tempo, builds up each of the series of climaxes to a high pitch, but stops abruptly before the danger of mass frenzy can be realized" (1973: 173).

In the secular practice, particularly in Egypt, the *waḥdah* has developed as a *ṭarab* meter *par excellence*. As various early recordings demonstrate, the relatively slow rendition, or *Waḥdah Kabirah*, is characteristically heard in the metric *qaṣīdah*. It also appears in the *dawr*, particularly in the middle and highly flexible segment, which in turn is preceded and followed by sections that are compositionally more fixed and use the somewhat stately eight-beat pattern, *Maṣmūdī Kabīr*.⁶⁰ The *waḥdah* is also used in a variety of

⁵⁹ Modern theoretical treatises usually discuss the *waḥdah* as an accentually marked unit of time, as well as an *iqāʿ*, or metric-mode proper. Al-Khulafī presented four variants, namely: the *kabīrah* (large), that amounts to four counts (a whole note) and that twenty-five of which occur per minute; the *mutawassīṭah* (medium) that equals two counts and that fifty of which occur per minute; the *saghīrah* (small) that receives one count and that a hundred of which occur per minute; and *niṣf saghīrah* (half small) that equals a half count and that two hundred of which occur per minute. He added that in his time, the first one was used in the Egyptian *dawr* (ca. 1904: 64).

⁶⁰ Maḥmūd ʿAjjān's book (1990), one of the most detailed and reliable modern studies on *ṭarab* genres, discusses the *dawr* in its various historical stages and outlines the stylistic innovations that were introduced by major *dawr* composers, especially the highly esteemed Egyptian composer and singer Muḥammad ʿUṭīmān (1845–1900). As he describes it in its more standardized format, which prevailed since the late nineteenth century, the *dawr* began with an opening section (*madhhab*), which usually used the *Maṣmūdī Kabīr* meter and ended with a conclusive *qaflah*. Then came an elaborate section (*ghuṣn*), which commonly used the *Waḥdah Kabīrah*. It began with the opening melody of the previous section, but proceeded into a development-like segment that introduced new melodies, and allowed for considerable interpretive flexibility. Leading into *āh* and *hank* segments, this part finally closed with a brief section that typically repeated the concluding phrase of the opening section. See ʿAjjān 1990: 11–29.

instrumental and vocal works from different periods and in different genres, including Umm Kulthūm's classics of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Like other metric designs, the waḥdah generates an enticing sense of motion. Whether in the form of tapping one's fist on the knee or rendering a rhythmic pattern on a percussion instrument, the mere flow of accents is capable of engaging the ṭarab musician's rhythmic sense, thus inspiring him or her to perform or compose. The Lebanese-born poet Khalīl Miṭrān (1872–1949) described how during a trip on a steamliner from Alexandria to Marseilles, at a time when he felt quite lonely, the beat of the ship engine kept him company as it served as a waḥdah against which he sang to himself a favorite dawr he had just heard from 'Abduh al-Hāmūlī. He added that more than forty-five years later he continued to remember the dawr (*Matti' Ḥayātak bil-Aḥbāb*) very well and, despite not having a good voice, to sing it occasionally to himself and to experience its profound ecstatic effect.⁶¹

Ultimately, the full impact of the waḥdah is brought forth by the artistry of the performer. When interpreted on a percussion instrument, most characteristically the riqq, the accentual pattern becomes generously embellished. In other words, it is furnished with a rich filigree of timbral and accentual nuances. The ability to "fill out the beat" as such is usually cited when praising the artistry of outstanding riqq players, the late Ibrāhīm 'Afīfī of Egypt, the late 'Abd al-Karīm Qazmūz of Lebanon, and others. The almost boundless variations, made possible through an elaborate vocabulary of sonorities and dynamic effects, render the waḥdah more attractive and safeguard it against oversimplification or tedious repetition. In an attempt to produce variety, percussionists may even briefly introduce, or gradually "modulate" to, iqā' patterns that fit the waḥdah cycle in length and overall accentual design. When musically appropriate, a longer waḥdah may be transformed into the so-called *Bamb* pattern or into another more familiar configuration (sometimes also referred to as *Wahdah*) which, like *Bamb* is heard typically as an ostinato motif accompanying a taqāsīm performance.⁶² The performers may also introduce some rhythmic mutations through substituting a short waḥdah for one that is twice as long, or vice versa, at a musically suitable moment. A riqq player may even skip the dumm beat momentarily in order to create tension or anticipation or may insert brief syncopations, for example creating dumm-takk reversals so as to generate suspense, as well as to display virtuosity and even musical wit. Moreover, if the musician being accompanied were to go off the beat (*yīlla' barra* literally, to go out) say for lack of competence, a dexterous percussionist may

⁶¹ Miṭrān ca. 1938: 135.

⁶² The *Bamb* metric ostinato, usually combined with a melodic ostinato, is frequently heard on early twentieth-century 78-rpm recordings. The similarly applied *Wahdah* variant mentioned above resembles the Turkish Çifte Telli pattern.

cleverly cover up by subtly repositioning the beat so as to match the accompanied musician's metric track, a technique that drummers refer to as *talbīs*, literally "dressing up something" or "custom fitting."

Conversely, excessive liberties can interfere with the ecstatic efficacy of the waḥdah pattern. For example, shortening the duration of the cycle itself by converting a larger waḥdah into another one half its length may create a livelier temporal track but may also detract from the elative feeling associated with longer waḥdah cycles. Furthermore, frequent excursions into dance related or popular meters, for example the ubiquitous Maqṣūm and Maḥfūf, may add certain energy to the performance, but may also replace the "intoxicating" or "spiritual" effect of the waḥdah with an atmosphere that purists may deem too "pedestrian" to suit serious listening. Accordingly, such alterations may project a mood of *tarqīs*, literally "making people dance" or *tahyīs*, "generating or displaying vulgar musical excitation."⁶³

Indeed, the percussionist must strike a balance between variety and consistency. A good riqq accompanist must produce exciting fillers, variations, and mutations without losing control of the tempo or compromising the reiterative clarity of the accentual beat or beat pattern. Although, as indicated earlier, good accompaniment may at times call for extreme subtlety in the rendering of the metric accents, the basic beat pattern remains the prime pillar that supports the overall musical structure.

Playing around the beat

As an accentual pattern, the waḥdah grants the music rhythmic regularity without seriously encumbering its temporal fluidity. Unlike the Arab-Turkish metric mode, which furnishes the underlying rhythmic design for a musical work, the waḥdah beat tends to serve as an accentual grid that guides the overall performance. Thus, the waḥdah fits well within a musical tradition that encourages elastic, as well as metrically conscious melodic creations. More specifically, its overall referential role favors thematic deliveries that flow in a piecemeal fashion, as typically happens in modal improvisations. If treated as an *iqāʿ* proper, the waḥdah can inspire tightly worked out metric compositions, but when approached as an accentual

⁶³ In fact, serious listeners and fans of ṭarab music have complained that the commercially successful tunes that Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Waḥḥāb had composed for Umm Kulthūm later in her career, basically in the 1960s and early 1970s at the instigation of President Nasser of Egypt, veered toward the popular *tarqīs*, primarily through the frequent use of short dance meters. Also criticized have been the composer's dense orchestration and his allowing the singer very little room for individual interpretation. See Fuʾād 1976: 330–331 and 464–465, and Danielson 1997: 173–177.

device it can grant the performer, or ideally the improviser, a certain flexibility in determining the timing and the length of each melodic phrase. By the same token, the *waḥdah* makes it easier to slightly anticipate or delay a *qafḥah*, as long as the execution maintains a certain degree of synchrony with the beat pattern. Differently stated, *waḥdah* accompaniment is perfectly suited for the process of *taṭrīb*, as it provides the creative performer basic temporal order, but also allows him or her a considerable margin of flexibility and compositional discretion.

These features are deeply rooted in the local religious expression, specifically the *dhikr* practice as generally encountered among Egyptian Sufi groups. Here, metric structure and rhythmic flexibility are carefully integrated. On the one hand, a certain order is sought: "As section of the *dhikr* succeeds section, all the action of the members should be in consort so that there is unity of performance in every aspect" (Gilsenan 1973: 175). On the other hand, the narrowly structured accent, or verbal-melodic ostinato, is used as a framework against which the leading vocalist may sing freely and make well-calculated rhythmic departures and returns. The *waḥdah* serves as "the lattice over which the *munshid's* music flows" (Waugh 1989: 171-172). This combination of metric definition and relative temporal freedom is viewed as a symbol of the mystical experience, in particular, the tension between realizing one's own transcendental visions and adhering to the norms of the Sufi order as set forth by the founding saint. In the case of the Ḥāmidīyyah Shādhīyyah order, Gilsenan writes:

Their ritual therefore contains a high degree of internal polar tension: between freedom and control, between unrestrained emotional ecstasy and formal regulation, between the individual and the group experience which must be one, though the first always threatens the second. In a sense this tension reflects a wider motif in *tasawwuf* as a whole. (1973: 174)

In the secular music, a comparable dynamic exists. *Ṭarab* artists demonstrate a striking proclivity toward moving loosely *with* the beat, as compared to performing strictly *on* the beat, for wandering about without losing track of the underlying temporal structure. They seek a desirable balance between metric orderliness and rhythmic freedom, a balance that Qūjamān describes as a test of the *ṭarab* performer's talent and skill:

A weak musician makes the listeners feel that he is tied up, or awkwardly obstructed, by the meter. He concentrates upon rendering the metric beats on his instrument as if he is playing the rhythmic pattern rather than a *taqṣīm*. In contrast, a good musician improvises without making the listeners feel that he is playing *taqṣīm* on the *waḥdah*, except when he brings the music to coincide with the meter, that is from time to time or from a musical phrase to another. He does not dwell on the metric strokes although he is truly bound by the meter and does not go off of it. (1978: 95-96)

The ability to feel the beat so strongly but also to "play around" it, a skill that some musicians refer to as *taṣḍir*, is occasionally cited when describing impressive ṭarab artists. Ṭarab connoisseurs for example have marveled at the metrically accompanied taqāsīm of the early twentieth century qānūn virtuoso, Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Sr.). In the realm of precomposed metric music, similarly noted have been the vocal renditions of the Egyptian composer Shaykh Zakariyyā Aḥmad and the various songs of Farīd al-Aṭraṣh and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. Described as a true *waḥdajī*, or someone with a superb sense of meter, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (1907–1980) combined melodic mastery with an almost declamatory style of delivery that became one of his distinguishing trademarks.⁶⁴

To close, performing loosely on the beat requires talent, experience, and a great deal of ensemble coordination. As percussionist Souhail Kaspar stresses, for this to work, the accompanist himself must be absolutely steady, or stated differently, dependably unwavering.⁶⁵ The resulting ecstatic impact stems from the leading performer's ability to combine the best of two worlds, an overall sense of motion provided by the metric drive and individual freedom that transcends strict metric conformity.

⁶⁴ The ecstatic effectiveness of performing loosely with the beat was alluded to in the preceding chapter when speaking of "hashish songs," although in such songs the looseness is probably more pronounced or even exaggerated.

⁶⁵ From a conversation with Mr. Kaspar in September, 1998.

The generation of musical ecstasy is associated with an inspirational state that musicians recognize by a variety of names. Frequently heard in musical conversations, these names have different semantic nuances and modes of application. However, the most common and most specific in its connotations is the term *saṭṭanah*.

Unlike the concept of *ṭarab*, which assumes a rather broad meaning as it describes the overall transformative experience connected with the music, *saṭṭanah* and other related concepts usually suggest a specific music-related condition. In a *saṭṭanah* state, the performer becomes musically self-absorbed (*mundamij*), and experiences well-focused and intense musical sensations. Furthermore, whereas the concept of *ṭarab* characterizes traditional Arab music in general and connotes a trait permanently present in *ṭarab* works whether recorded or played live, *saṭṭanah* is most often a temporary state generated before and during the performance proper. Also, unlike the feeling of *ṭarab*, which extends to all participants in the musical process, especially the audience members, *saṭṭanah* typically applies to the musicians, specifically in connection with performing. *Saṭṭanah* is the condition that inspires affective music making. Although musically and emotionally part of the overall *ṭarab* experience, it is the "magic" that momentarily lifts the artist to a higher ecstatic plateau and empowers him or her to engender *ṭarab* most effectively. In this sense, *saṭṭanah* is creative ecstasy.

Moreover, compared to the concept of *ṭarab*, which is applied to the ecstasy emanating from the various components of the performance (timbral, textural, metric, melodic, and others), the concept of *saṭṭanah* is usually linked to the *maqāmāt*. Accordingly, each mode has its own potential *saṭṭanah*, as musicians are said to be in a state of *saṭṭanah*, for example in *maqām Rāst*, or *maqām Bayyātī*, or *maqām Šabā*. While in such a state, the performer finds himself captivated by the mode, particularly the intervallic and tonal components. He feels haunted by the tonic pitch and the intervallic structure, but is also fully prepared to evoke the powerful *ṭarab* effect of the mode. Thus, the strongly felt presence of an established tonic and related intervals and notes of emphasis makes it possible to view

salṭānah as a form of modal, and by implication tonal and intervallic fixation, or essentially as modal ecstasy.

Finally, whereas the concept of ṭarab refers to the affect of all ṭarab music, whether precomposed or improvised, the condition of salṭānah displays strong affinities for the spontaneous creative process typical of the live performance. The state of salṭānah prepares the artist to improvise with feeling or to interpret or modify precomposed works in highly affective ways. In other words, salṭānah appears most valuable in the context of taṭrīb, described earlier.

Although part of the local musical jargon, the various concepts that refer to the momentary inspirational ecstasy of the artist appear to have parallels, and may have originated in, related mystical, literary, and artistic domains.¹ For example, the concept of *mazāj*, literally "mood," "disposition," or "temperament" reminds us of medieval cosmologies that establish interconnections among such diverse entities as the planets and zodiacs, times of the day, colors, sentiments, bodily organs and humors, lute strings, melodic modes, and metric modes.² In the musician's parlance, often heard are expressions such as *mā fish mazāj*, "there is no mood," to describe an artist's musically uncondusive state, and *bīqūl bi mazāj*, "he performs" or "sings when creatively inspired." Also closely related is the term *insijām*, which literally means "harmony" or "being in an emotionally agreeable state." It usually denotes both the artist's inspirational condition, and the conducive physical and artistic mood that surrounds his or her performance.

By comparison, the word *baṣṭ*, which describes the sense of elation generally acquired in musical as well as social events, has a specific mystical meaning. In Sufi writings, *baṣṭ* denotes a rapturous experience of "extension," or intensification of spiritual self-consciousness, as opposed to *qabḍ*, namely "constraint," or "compression" of the soul.³

Closely related is the concept of *tajallī*, which refers to "mystical revelation," or being in a state of transcendental preparedness.⁴ In the ṭarab culture, the concept of *tajallī* is used basically to refer to musicians' temporary sense of ecstatic empowerment and creative preparedness. Saying, for example, that a ṭarab musician is *mutajallī*, or "in a state of revelation," implies that he or she has become elated, has somewhat mysteriously acquired an elevated state of musical consciousness, and has been enabled to perform

¹ Among ṭarab musicians, the more formal Arabic words that mean "inspiration" are rather uncommon. For example the word *ilhām*, which is also used by Egyptian Sufis in reference to divine inspiration and the acquisition of extraordinary performance ability (see Waugh 1989: 86–89), is less frequently heard. The same can be said of the word *waḥī* ("revelation" or "inspiration") or the medieval concept of *shath*, which describes a certain category of divinely inspired mystical utterances. See Gibb and Kramers 1974: 533 and Ernst 1985: 133.

² See Farmer 1943: 3–26.

³ See Schimmel 1975: 128–129.

⁴ See Schimmel 1975: 281 and Nasr 1987: 167.

affectively. In addition, the concept of *tajalli* may refer to the dominant affect that a specific mode appears to exert at a certain time. Musicians may, for example, speak in terms of the "revelation" of maqām Rāst at a specific performance.⁵

Comparably, the concept of *saṭṭanah* appears to embrace certain magical and spiritual connotations. It is linguistically related to the Arabic word *sulṭān*, which having emerged in the eleventh century AD as the title of a powerful ruler, is believed to have derived from the Syriac *shultana*, which refers to power. The word "sulṭān" has appeared in several contexts, including the Qurʾān, basically in reference to "moral or magical authority supported by proofs or miracles which afford the right to make a statement of religious import" (Kramers 1987: 543).⁶ Today, the same word can be used to describe the irresistible power or absolute command of certain phenomena or urges, for example physical beauty, hunger, sleep, or for that matter, the intoxicating effect of ḥaṣhīsh.⁷

The overpowering–empowering complex

In the musicians' world, the acquisition of musical inspiration entails a certain oppositional duality. More specifically, the concept of *saṭṭanah* connotes a) dominating, overcoming, ruling over and b) granting efficacy or mastery. In other words, we can speak of modal ecstasy as being both overpowering and empowering, or somewhat paradoxically as the performer's attainment of artistic authority by succumbing to the ecstatic hegemony of the melodic mode. Such an apparent opposition is perhaps reminiscent of the Sufi notion of attaining a higher level of spirituality through *fanāʾ* or

⁵ Also sometimes encountered is the verb *injalā*, for example in the expression *injalā al-muḡrib*, which roughly means that the singer has entered into a musically conducive state, or more specifically, that after an appropriate period of musical warm ups his voice has become clear and supple and ready for creating tarab. See Mansi 1965: 64.

⁶ In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1987: 545), J.H. Kramers sheds further light upon the concept of "sulṭān." This title was applied to mystic shaykhs, a practice begun with the thirteenth century, particularly in Ottoman-dominated countries. We are told that among the early uses may have been such titles as, *Sulṭān al-Ulūmāʾ* (the "Sulṭān of Religious Scholars"), connected with Bahāʾ al-Dīn Walad, father of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and *Sulṭān al-ʿAshiqīn* (the "Sulṭān of Lovers"), given to the major Egyptian Sufi poet Ibn al-Fārīd, whose love poems have been set to music by Sufi-trained tarab singers. More recently the title has referred to the highly acclaimed artisans or artists, for example the female singer Munīrah al-Mahdiyyah, addressed as *Sulṭānat al-Tarab* and the nāy player Amīn al-Buzārī, acknowledged as *Sulṭān al-Nāy*.

⁷ In his description of the typical ḥaṣhīsh session in Egypt, Ahmad M. Khalifa refers to certain ritualized patterns of behavior and notes that there is a supervisor, usually called *sulṭān*, who has the honor and privilege of having his first "drag" from each new "load" (1975: 202–203).

"mystical annihilation." The ṭarab-related expression *salṭanat al-nagham* or "the domination of the melodic mode" indicates that the mode has imposed its ecstatic authority upon the performing artist, or that the artist has surrendered to the invincible power, or sultān, of the melodic mode. However, the equally prevalent expression *salṭanat al-mūtrib*, or "the singer's acquisition of salṭānah" means that such an artist has captured the innate ecstatic feeling of the mode and has been granted extraordinary ability to instill that feeling within the listeners.

The two notions of surrender and empowerment, or of being dominated and becoming dominant, are closely intertwined in statements made by musical critics, connoisseurs, and performers regarding artistic inspiration. In reference to the remarkable moral, personal, and musical attributes of 'Abduh al-Hāmūlī, one biographer writes that the artist:

... was distinguished from the rest of the singers of his time not only by his powerful, resonant voice and his highly enchanting musical creations, but also by the God-bestowed spirit that would take hold of him during his salṭānah in the various modes. Consequently, he would come up with the most amazing and marvelous vocal renditions, thus lifting up the thoughts of his listeners upon the wings of his magical visions so they would imagine that they have ascended to heavenly ranks and seen things they had not seen or dreamt of ... (Rizq ca. 1936: 45)

Comparable imagery of succumbing to power and becoming empowered appears in one narrative describing a vocal performance by Shaykh Muḥammad al-Maslūb (1793–1928).⁸ Presented somewhat poetically by the modern music critic Kamāl al-Najmī, this narrative is based on a first-hand report by an elder Egyptian connoisseur. When al-Maslūb acquired salṭānah during a festive musical evening, "his appetite for singing was stimulated" (1972: 151). When a specific dawr was requested of him, "he was filled with cheerfulness, and exuded munificence (*aryaḥiyyah*) and ecstasy (*ṭarab*), as he released his voice at a high tessitura, thus utterly dazzling the listeners" (Ibid.). In addition to describing the audience's verbal responses, al-Najmī provides a metaphoric image of the artist while in a salṭānah state. What comes to mind here are the two related Sufi notions of annihilation and transcendence, the inspired singer becoming nothing but a voice:

How beautiful, tender, and amazing Shaykh al-Maslūb was when haunted by salṭānah (*taṣṭānah*) and taken by ecstasy (*wajd*), thus departing away from being and existing only as a voice that was singing. Love, who can hide it? ... Love is the divulger of secrets. (Ibid: 152)

⁸ Although these dates may be approximate, this singer is said to have lived some 130 years and to have led a very long performing career. See Shafīq and Kāmīl n.d.: 8–9.

Sometimes, the domination-empowerment complex is represented through vivid imagery of royalty and political authority. In a book on Shaykh Zakariyyā Aḥmad, the late Amin Fahmī, himself a qānūn player, music theorist, and educator, offers a description of this late singer and composer on the basis of direct observation:

When I used to listen to the Shaykh as he sang and acquired *saṭṭanah* in his singing, I always imagined that he was an uncrowned king . . . when his body rose, his eyes glimmered, his face quivered, and his hands moved, he took control of his listeners and captured their senses, so they would be overcome by silence, elevated pride, and elation (*nashwah*). They would look up to him with exaltation and reverence, as if they were the subjects of a nation whose name is *ṭarab*, and this is their king addressing them through tunes from heaven. (Fahmī n.d.: 10)

As shown here, ecstatic surrender and empowerment are manifested in the artist's appearance as well as through his musical delivery. The ecstatically transformed performer gains artistic and physical powers that are mysterious and awe-inspiring. In turn, the listeners experience an elative sense of surrender, a feeling of *communitas* that, as Fahmī puts it, binds them together as citizens of the *ṭarab* nation.

The themes of dominating and being dominated are also common in music related conversations. Musicians and connoisseurs explain that without *saṭṭanah*, a performer becomes emotionally ineffective or powerless. In other words, his or her performance becomes devoid of spirit and feeling. Referring to early-twentieth-century musicians, the Egyptian qānūn player Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Jr.) explained that ecstatic transformation used to make the difference between excelling and failing to impress. As he put it, even Shaykh Yūsuf al-Manyalāwī, despite his exceptional vocal ability and magnificent talent, needed *saṭṭanah* to make any musical impact. "If he sang without *saṭṭanah* you would not even care to listen to him." According to al-ʿAqqād and others, *saṭṭanah* enables the artist to captivate the listeners, and to compel them to listen. It causes the audience members to shake their heads or to utter exclamations of enchantment. Summing up the notion of being overpowered and empowered is al-ʿAqqād's explanation: "when you have *saṭṭanah* you are captivated by it and you cannot help it, but having it also makes you invincible like a king."⁹

"Time split from time"

The overpowering-empowering complex also entails transformation of the physical and perceptual faculties of the artist, and by extension the

⁹ From the interview with Mr. al-ʿAqqād in Los Angeles in 1984.

participating listeners. Musicians who acquire salṭānah develop an altered sense of time, a condition associated with "losing oneself" and becoming totally engulfed by the musical process. This phenomenon has been noted in the performances of a renowned late nineteenth-century artist:

Muḥammad 'Uthmān was a people's artist in the full sense of the word, as his evening performances (*sahrāt*) used to bring together individuals of different classes and ages. When he was captivated by the ecstasy of ṭarab (*nashwat al-ṭarab*) he used to rise carrying his 'ūd with one hand and gesturing with another. He would continue to sing and play while standing among members of the audience, so the listeners would become very enthusiastic and would request him to deliver more and more. The dawn might have broken while he was still in this condition. (Shafiq and Kāmil n.d.: 20)

Implicit in this account is the development of transformed temporal awareness accompanied by added effortlessness and a higher threshold of physical endurance on the part of the performer. Losing sense of time is also mentioned in a modern poetic depiction of a performance by 'Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥilmī (1857–1912), during which this muṭrib was overtaken by salṭānah:

'The sammī'ah did not sense the passage of time . . . The night had set upon heaven and earth. The moon was a shining cup filled with the wine of the beautiful voice. The assembly of merriment was becoming more agreeable and cheerful from one hour to the next. Ṭarab was granting them an uplifting feeling of lightness (*yastakhif-fuhum*) so they would sing after 'Abd al-Ḥayy as if they were his chorus. Their ecstasy (*nashwatukum*) made them imagine that their night was split away from time and will never end up in a morning. (al-Najmī 1972: 158)

Here, salṭānah (and ṭarab in general) is portrayed as an altered sense of time, more specifically as "timelessness" or temporal transcendence. The notion of "time splitting from time" appears to imply the existence of two alternate modes of temporal awareness, one pertaining to ecstatic time and the other to nonecstatic time, or time proper.

This view of music making is consistent with the prevalent articulations of modern ṭarab artists. According to al-'Aqqād "If you have salṭānah, you could easily sing or play from nine o'clock in the evening to nine o'clock in the morning. Time passes and you don't feel it."¹⁰ At ṭarab events, often projected is the feeling that "ecstatic time" is somewhat open-ended, and largely exempt from the barriers that control "ordinary" time. Šabāḥ Fakhri's long performances, including those I have attended, are good illustrations. Similarly, it is customary for ṭarab artists to cheer up an eager crowd through such opening, often perfunctory, remarks as "God willing, we are here till morning." Usually met with highly enthusiastic gestures, such remarks seem

¹⁰ From the same interview as above.

to help initiate a mood of timelessness, and to provide assurance that this mood will be allowed to take its full course.

How *saṭṭanah* occurs

The manner in which *saṭṭanah* as an overall inspirational condition develops tends to be enigmatic. It is not always clear what causes it to happen, whether it is voluntary or involuntary, who can acquire it and under what circumstances, and whether its primary source lies within or outside the artist or the artistic event. As Sayyid Makkāwī explains, the idea of forcing inspiration to descend (*istinzāl*) upon the musician is truly absurd.¹¹ However, by and large, *ṭarab* performers recognize certain preconditions and procedures that pave the way for or induce the *saṭṭanah* state. These preconditions and procedures belong to a variety of domains: cultural, personal, contextual, physical, emotional, and musical (see Figure 5.1).¹²

Eastern soul

Musicians stress that for a person to experience *saṭṭanah*, or in a broader sense *ṭarab*, he or she must be fully attuned to a certain pervasive local disposition. In the mid-nineteenth century, al-Shidyāq presented *ṭarab* as part of the Eastern mental-emotional character.¹³ Today, artists identify *ṭarab* or *saṭṭanah* with a somewhat abstract but genuinely felt native ethos, or Geist, in Arabic, *rūḥ*, literally, "soul" or "spirit." Accordingly, the ability to truly fathom the music's emotive dimension presupposes having a deep-rooted sense of "Eastern-ness" or "Arab-ness." Regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds the performers and their audiences must be connected to the music's indigenous essence, its local feel. They must possess *rūḥ Sharqiyyah* (Eastern soul) or *nafas Sharqī* (Eastern breath). As the violinist 'Abbūd 'Abd al-'Āl explains, since every nation or people has its own *rūḥ*, a performer must absorb (*yataṣharrah*) a certain nation's *rūḥ* in order to feel its music and perform it properly.¹⁴

¹¹ From the 1994 conversation with Mr. Makkāwī.

¹² A modified version of Figure 5.1 appeared in Racy 1991b: 23.

¹³ Cachia 1973: 45.

¹⁴ From a conversation in Los Angeles in the early 1980s.

Genuine artistry

The ability to experience salṭanah also requires what musicians call *aṣālah*, or “genuineness.” In order to feel the music, a performer who may already have Eastern soul must be a *fannān aṣīl* literally “genuine” or “thoroughbred artist,” someone with authentic musical talent. More specifically, genuineness means innate ability to feel and express the musical idiom, particularly the melodic modes. A genuine artist is someone for whom the performance of ṭarab genres, for example instrumental or vocal improvisations, is “a second nature.” Such an artist must be able to extemporize melodic and rhythmic nuances and instrumental fillers, to have a good sense of intonation, to execute proper qafḷāt, and to interact heterophonically with other performers in the ensemble. In short, “genuineness” grants the artist special ability to experience salṭanah and ultimately to evoke genuine ṭarab within his or her listeners.

Feeling

Furthermore, a musician must be endowed with *ihsās*, or “feeling,” in other words, emotional responsiveness to the affect of ṭarab music. Having feeling also implies that the performer is capable of creating music that is emotionally expressive. To describe a musician who has feeling, listeners may say: *hīqūl bi-ihsās* “he performs with feeling,” or in the same vein, *ṣawāb’uh hīlwah*, “he has sweet fingers,” as opposed to *ṣawāb’uh mālḥah*, literally “he has salty fingers.” Arab musicians usually speak of feeling as an innate musical gift. Although it can momentarily surge or subside, depending, for example, upon the specific performance event and the musical work being performed, the basic ability to feel tends to exist permanently within the artist. As Ṣabāḥ Fakhri explains: “Feeling is born with musicians when they are born. Those who have musical feeling, those are the ones from whom genius (*‘ābqariyyah*) can come out. Those who have no feeling (*ḥiss*) are just ordinary.”¹⁵

Artists with *ihsās* are also known to feel their own performance intensely. For example, we read that when ‘Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī performed, “his ṭarab was no less than that of the person listening to him, and his ability to improvise tunes excelled beyond all levels” (Kāmil 1971: 29).¹⁶ Similarly, the early-twentieth-century composer and singer Shaykh Maḥmūd Ṣubḥ

¹⁵ From the 1990 interview with Mr. Fakhri.

¹⁶ In this case, Kāmil is quoting the late musical authority Ibrāhīm Shafīq (1896–1968).

(1898–1941) is said to have become so enchanted by his own sung poems that he often chided his listeners for failing to respond with exclamations of approval.¹⁷ Performing with feeling seems particularly apparent when the singing is reinforced by mystical or religious overtones. Reportedly, a lesser-known Syrian singer by the name of Najīb Zayn al-Dīn (1881–1946), who specialized in Sufi songs but also mastered the art of ṭarab singing, often wept “when he was overtaken by ṭarab ecstasy”.¹⁸ The same high level of artistic sensitivity in combination with religious piety appears to affect the Lebanese singer Wadī‘ al-Ṣāfi, who explains that when he sings his own Christian songs expressing devotion to God he sometimes breaks into tears in the middle of singing because of the overwhelming nature of the experience.¹⁹

Umm Kulthūm, who began her career as a performer of religious songs and later became a ṭarab role model, is known to have felt her own music very deeply. Her biographer Ni‘māt Fu‘ād wrote that like any of her faithful sammī‘ah, Umm Kulthūm responded to her own songs intensely. When she viewed her film, *Widād* with a few friends and heard her own singing in the film, “she wept from ṭarab and joy.” We are also told that she often sat alone in her room and listened to her songs on records and tapes as she covered her face with her hands. Whenever she was moved by a certain passage or “musical move” (*ḥarakah*) “she exclaimed as any sammī‘ would: *Yā shaykhah mish kidhah!* roughly “Oh Shaykhah (literally, female of *Shaykh*), isn’t it like that!” *Dah gnān!* “That is amazing!” and *Ayh dah?* “What is that?” (Fu‘ād 1976: 233). In a similar vein, Aḥmad Rāmī, the renowned poet who wrote a vast number of Umm Kulthūm’s song-texts, is reported to have said:

Umm Kulthūm is enamored by her own voice and has the utmost love for her art to the extent that when she sings a tune and excels in it, her voice causes her to become ecstatic (*taṭrab min ṣawtiḥā*), and the utterance of “Āh!” emerges from her chest, but very softly so that the audience would not hear it. Shaykh Abū al-‘Ulā [Muḥammad] used to tell me: “This girl has singing in her blood (*biṭḥannī bi-dammahā*) . . . can you believe it, she says Āh! to herself?” (quoted in Fu‘ād 1976: 368)

To sum up, the innate ability to feel the music, or to interact with one’s own performance ecstatically, prepares the artist to attain high levels of *ṣalṭanah*. In some ways, such an ability elevates him or her from the mere role of ṭarab provider to the admirable status of a ṭarab “feeler,” or that of an accomplished amateur. Feeling grants the artist the same emotional prerogatives enjoyed by his or her sammī‘ as well as sharpens his or her ability to

¹⁷ Bin al-Khaṭīb 1980: 70–71.

¹⁸ al-Jundi 1984: 153.

¹⁹ From an interview with Mr. al-Ṣāfi in Los Angeles on August 7, 1984.

excel and impress. At the same time, the accomplished musician's own ecstatic sensations are expected to be circumspect. His or her feeling must be directed inwardly for the ultimate purpose of generating ecstasy within others. The ecstatic musician must seek a creative balance between feeling the music and performing it with feeling.

Body and spirit

The acquisition of salṭānah also calls for transient physical and emotional conditions that are directly linked to the performance event. Physically, the musician must be rested, comfortable, and in good health. Salṭānah is unlikely to occur if the artist is too exhausted, too sleepy, or has eaten too much or too little. The half-joking statement often voiced by hired musicians, "no food, no music!" may have real artistic implications after all. In addition to being rested before a performance, a singer may need to pay special attention to his or her diet, selecting the right foods and staying away from those known to hurt the voice. Şabāḥ Fakhri, for example, explains that there are foods that he avoids immediately before the performance and others that he never eats.

Salṭānah also demands being emotionally prepared, in other words being in a proper state of elation. Stressing that emotional comfort is a prerequisite for affective ṭarab making, Şabāḥ Fakhri explains that before a performance, musicians and musical connoisseurs often express such concerns as, "today the muṭrib is in a state of ecstatic preparedness (*mitjalli*); we beg that no one upset him (*yiz'iluh*), or agitate him (*yinarfizuh*)." If the singer is upset the connoisseurs do their utmost to lead him back into a conducive emotional condition, otherwise "the evening is ruined."²⁰

Ambiance

In context, the artist becomes inspired through interacting with a musically initiated audience that is eager to listen and to become emotionally involved in the ṭarab experience. The listeners must be endowed with the talent to feel the music and to express what they feel in effective and idiomatically correct ways. A similar role is played by the accompanying musicians, who can also inspire a featured artist and enhance the quality of the performance as a whole. The profound impact of the performance ambiance upon the

²⁰ From the 1990 interview with Fakhri.



Syrian singer Šabāḥ Fakhūrī (b. 1933) performing in Los Angeles in 1990. Photo by Barbara Racy.

performer's creative ability is eloquently described by Šabāḥ Fakhūrī, who speaks about his own experience:

In order for me to perform best, first I have to be sure that I am physically in good condition and that I am accompanied by good musicians, as well as equipped with a good sound system, one that I have tried out and adjusted in advance. Beyond that, it is the audience that plays the most significant role in bringing the performance to a higher plateau of creativity (*ibdāʿ*) . . . I like the light in the performance hall to remain on, so that I can see the listeners and interact with them. If they respond, I become inspired to give more. As such, we become reflections of one another. I consider the audience to be me and myself to be the audience.

Of course, the performer has also to be ecstatic (*maṭrūb*). Obviously, to be able to deliver something, you must have it yourself first and then reflect it, as the moon shines by reflecting the light it receives from the sun. In a large measure, the ecstasy emanates from the audience, particularly the *sammīʿah*, although the singer must also be endowed with *rūḥ* and *iḥsās*, in addition to being in a state of *baṣṭ* or *tajallī* at the time of performing. Indeed, elation causes the talented artist to shine.²¹

²¹ From the same 1990 interview with Fakhūrī. This quote was included in Racy 1991b: 8.

Biographers attest to the creative role played by audience members before and during the performance event. In several writings, the importance of coaxing the artist musically through verbal pleasantries is well-recognized. At one specific event hosting the early twentieth century Egyptian singer 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Bannā (1884–1969), "sweet talk" occurred as a prelude to the performance proper, thus coinciding with drinking, eating, and socializing. It consisted of such compliments as "Indeed, nothing will make us drunk except your voice, Oh! Si 'Abduh! [or Master 'Abduh]," thus complimenting this singer by comparing him to his famous predecessor 'Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī, and "We have not heard a great master of ṭarab like you, Oh! Si 'Abd al-Laṭīf!" (al-Najmī 1970: 146). According to the report, when this singer's companions noticed his ensuing state of *insijām*, one of them rushed to bring him an *'ūd* so he would accompany himself.

Creative listening

During the performance proper, *saltanah* within the artist is maintained and reinforced by the creative feedback between the performer and the audience. The organic relationship between the two is illustrated by Fakhrī's statement: "I consider the audience to be me and myself to be the audience." It is also expressed through various metaphors and analogies. One established violin player likens the audience to a sexual partner. In his analogy, sexual arousal (a metaphor for artistic inspiration) in one partner would induce a similar response in the other partner, thus leading to a perpetual cycle of sexual pleasure in both. The famous Lebanese singer Wadī' al-Ṣāfi (b. 1921) expresses the same idea but through visual analogy. In his view, the audience and the performer are like two mirrors facing each other. The image, which stands for inspiration, appearing in one mirror is reflected by the other mirror, and in turn the reflection is reflected again back and forth.²²

As implied by these explanations, the artist's ability to produce *ṭarab* is boosted by the audience's ecstatic responses. In context, the voiced exclamations, chosen creatively from a rather self-contained repertoire of verbal gestures, express the listeners' own sensations, as well as initiate and maintain the performer–listener feedback process.

The following are among the numerous exclamations that are heard in both live and recorded *ṭarab* performances. Very common is the expression *Āh!* which can reflect extreme sensations of pain, bewilderment, amazement, and pleasure. Heard on many early recordings, the expression is sometimes repeated as *Āh! Āh!* or combined with others such as *Āh yā rūḥī!* literally, "Oh

²² From the same 1984 interview with al-Ṣāfi.

my soul!" It can also be followed by the name of the performer, for example, *Āh yā Umm Kulthūm!* Another frequently heard expression is *Allāh!* literally, "God," a usage that appears to have a long history. During the first half of the nineteenth century Edward Lane wrote: "The natives of Egypt are generally enraptured with the performances of their vocal and instrumental musicians; they applaud with frequent exclamations of 'Allāh!' and 'God approve thee!' 'God preserve thy voice!' and similar expressions" (1860/1973: 354).²³ Very often this expression, which may connote wonderment, admiration, and being overwhelmed by an idea or a feeling, is uttered two or more times in succession, the result sounding like *Allāhallāh!* with emphasis on the long *ā* vowels. Also when deeply haunted by the *saṭṭanah* of the mode, the listeners may intone this or a comparable expression on the exact pitch that the singer had just ended his phrase on. Furthermore, the *sammī'ah* may utter the common expression *Allāhu akbar!* "God is great!" which opens the call to prayer and in common speech can express a state of being overwhelmed by profound sensations or spiritually moving experiences.

We encounter other gestures that express the listeners' wonderment, but whose religious or spiritual connotations, if existing at all, are less direct. These include *Yā salām!* literally, "Oh peace!" roughly meaning, "How marvelous!" *Yā ḥalawtak!* basically, "How sweet you are!" and *Yā rūḥ!* or "Oh my soul!" In common usage, the soul, which in Sufi tradition has distinct spiritual efficacies, symbolizes things that are extremely dear, such as one's life or one's child. Similarly, on some early recordings the expression *Yā waladī!* literally, "Oh my child!" is heard. Another related exclamation is *Yā 'ayn!* "Oh my eye!" an expression of endearment that in common parlance expresses the feeling of being impressed for example by a beautiful image.

A further category depicts the artist as an authoritative figure who captivates the listeners and controls their emotions. For example, *Yā sidi!* literally, "Oh my master!" or *Yā sīdnā!* "Oh our master!" may be addressed to the performer. Sometimes the idea of emotional submission to artistic authority is given further prominence through such expressions as *Aywah!* "Yes!" or *Aywah yā sidi!* "Yes master!"

Other exclamations beg the artists to continue to perform, or to repeat a certain phrase. Referred to earlier in this century by Kāmil al-Khulā'i was the prevalent expression *Kamān!* which means "Again!" and usually expresses the audience's interest in hearing a line of poetry or a musical phrase once more. Occasionally this request is followed by the performer's name, for example *Kamān yā Sitt Umm Kulthūm!* "Once more, oh Lady

²³ Interestingly, Edward Lane, whose book first appeared in 1836, noticed that in Egypt the exclamation "Allāh!" was "pronounced in an unusually broad manner, and the last syllable drawled out, thus - 'Allāuh!'" (1860/1973: 354). His observation continues to apply today.

Umm Kulthūm!" or voiced more emphatically as *win-Nabī kamān!* "Again for the Prophet's sake!"

The listeners may also utter titles of respect that address the performers individually and portray them as masters of their trade or as powerful evocateurs of ecstasy. The title *Sī*, short for *Sayyid*, which expresses respect for a person or artist, was commonly used in Egypt, as in the case of *Sī 'Abduh al-Himīlī*. Other social titles of respect such as *Afandī* were also addressed to the singer or the instrumentalist, especially in the early twentieth century. Similarly *Ānisah*, or "Miss," has been applied to young unmarried female singers. Nowadays, the title *Ustādh*, which is used profusely as a reference to a learned man, is also commonly applied.

Other expressions allude to the listeners' own transformed state, in other words to how the musicians are affecting them. Upon hearing a brilliant young 'ūd player at an informal gathering some twenty years ago, an elderly musician referred to the player as *Yā Shaqī!* or "You, Mischievous One!" When hearing a powerful qafḥah during an intimate performance in Cairo, one listener said to the late buzuq player 'Alī al-Dhuḥnī: *Ḥarām 'alayk!* "Be merciful!" or literally, "It is unlawful for you to do this [to us]." At a different point in the same performance one sammī' remarked: *Ḥatmawwītā l-yūm?* or, "Are you trying to make us die today?"²⁴ During a performance of *taqāsīm* that I gave on the buzuq, one highly established qānūn player from Baghdad said to me: *Nihnā shū 'āmlīn ma'ak?* literally, "What did we do to you?" or to paraphrase, "Have we done anything wrong to you that you are doing this to us?" Depicting music as a form of pleasurable "affliction," such exclamations are indeed complimentary, if not also clever variations on the theme of ecstatic transformation.

Finally, the verbal reactions of the sammī'ah, particularly in intimate musical gatherings, are usually subtle as well as combined with effectively timed and communicated moans, headshakes, and facial expressions. Also, in the large haflāt, individual expressions are often drowned out by loud cheers and whistles or at times yield to an atmosphere of distant formality or even apathy. Nonetheless, the various interactive gestures play a crucial role as salṭanah enhancers. As causes and effects of the transformative musical condition, they feed directly into the ecstatic flow of the performance.

Musical requisites

Under appropriate social, physical, and emotional conditions, the salṭanah state can be induced musically. Listening to or performing music in a given

²⁴ These gestures were heard on a cassette recording of a performance by al-Dhuḥnī for a handful of attentive listeners. The cassette was a courtesy of the late 'Alī Reda of Egypt.

maqām can generate *saḷṭanah* in the form of ecstatic fixation upon that maqām. The use of musical “starters” as such can be described as a sort of musical pollination or sympathetic magic that enables the artist to tune in to the ethos of the maqām being introduced.

Various types of musical preludes may serve as *saḷṭanah* initiators. The *dūlāb* and the *taqāsīm*, as well as the *bashraf* and the *samā’ī*, are among the primary examples. The ability of such genres to capture the true character of the maqām makes them ideally suited for modal stimulation. Whether metric or nonmetric, improvised or precomposed, such tools owe their inspirational effectiveness significantly to the dexterity of the interpreters. According to Muḥammad al-‘Aqqād (Jr.), one of the most valued skills of the early twentieth century accompanists was their extraordinary ability to invoke *saḷṭanah* through minimal musical means, for example, through short preludes or even introductions of just a few notes.²⁵ Such musical devices appeared frequently on early 78-rpm recordings, whose fixed short durations created a dire need for suitably short yet ecstatically potent musical openers.

Before World War I, the inducement of *saḷṭanah* musically often proceeded slowly and gradually. Citing an eyewitness report, one author described such a process at a performance by ‘Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī held at the court of Khedive Ismā‘īl. This artist’s *takht* ensemble, including the chorus, sat at one end of the courtyard, as the Khedival family sat at the opposite end. The ensemble began by performing *taqāsīm*, instrumental ensemble pieces, and *muwashshahāt* while the singer, as well as the royal family, sat and listened. This introductory phase continued:

... until *ṭarab* had been fully established and the mode had imposed its *saḷṭanah*. At that point, carrying his drink, ‘Abduh moved toward the musicians and as he came close to them, he started to sing. Then after joining them and sitting in the middle, the *ḥaflah* really began. (al-Jundī 1984: 42)

In another source, we read that ‘Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī often asked his *qānūn* player Muḥammad al-‘Aqqād (Sr.), who was also a singer of sorts, to begin the evening by singing “in order to establish a suitable atmosphere of *saḷṭanah*” for the celebrated singer (Kāmil 1971: 31).

Notably, the evocation of modal ecstasy through musical stimulation permeated the structure of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Egyptian *waṣlah*. In certain ways, the typical linear order of the generic components (as a rule all in the same mode) created and helped maintain a strong modal feeling within the individual accompanists and ultimately in the featured artist, thus enabling him to reach an ecstatic peak toward the end

²⁵ From the same 1984 interview with al-‘Aqqād.

of the performance. Usually an opening taqṣīm, most often on the ʿūd, established an initial phase of modal ecstasy for the ensemble members. In turn, the modally inspired instrumentalists performed a prelude, normally a dūlāb or a samāʿī with taqṣīm solos on such instruments as the nāy and the violin, either following the samāʿī composition or in between its inner sections.²⁶ This introductory instrumental segment, which gave added emphasis to the maqām of the waṣlah, initiated further salṭanah within the chorus and the muṭrib, as well as within the instrumentalists themselves. Then together, the singer and his chorus performed a short muwashshaḥ heterophonically, with the muṭrib singing intermittently, thus "warming up" for the rest of the performance and intensifying his own salṭanah further. After that came a short preparatory qānūn taqṣīm that in turn led to the qānūn-accompanied nonmetric improvisatory layālī-and-mawwāl by the featured vocalist. In turn, the layālī and mawwāl enabled the vocalist to create ṭarab and also to condition his voice even further, thus achieving the level of modal ecstasy required for executing the dawr, which constituted a climactic, and in certain ways, the most complex phase of the waṣlah. Sometimes a qaṣidah, which was typically improvised, appeared at the end of the third and last waṣlah of the evening, when the salṭanah of the muṭrib, the takht accompanists, and the listeners was at its highest level.²⁷

In later decades, salṭanah "starters" have included modern compositions, or fragments of compositions that musicians have considered ecstatically loaded. According to Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Jr.), musicians of his generation often used the opening theme from one instrumental composition by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb titled "*Shaghal*," as a salṭanah starter in Bayyāfī. They played it first and then repeated it in alternation with taqṣīm by different ensemble members.²⁸

Such musical triggers can also be incidental or unexpected. One might be walking down the street and faintly hear someone humming a tune in maqām Ḥijāz or a radio broadcasting a song in maqām Ṣabā, and almost unconsciously find oneself improvising or composing in those modes. Comparable

²⁶ The insertion of taqṣīm passages between the main sections of the samāʿī, which is an Ottoman-based genre, has been described as an Arab or Egyptian practice. Examples of such interpolations can be heard on some relatively late Egyptian recordings, for example those appearing after World War II and featuring the celebrated ṭarab singer Ṣalīḥ ʿAbd al-Ḥay. See Racy 1980.

²⁷ Apparently, the structure of the Egyptian waṣlah was flexible and had changed in time. The typical generic content described above is based on several historical accounts (for example Mansī 1965/1966: 62–64), as well as reports by elderly Cairo musicians and more recent recorded examples. Basically, no complete recordings of waṣlāt have come to us from the early recording era. It is also known that for early radio broadcasts, primarily after 1934, the waṣlah, which had already been declining, had to be more standardized and limited to half an hour in length. For more information on the history, structure, and ecstatic design of the waṣlah see Racy 1980 and 1983b.

²⁸ From the 1984 conversation with al-ʿAqqād.

suggestion may result from listening to someone tuning the qānūn to a specific mode or from listening to a drone on a musical instrument or even from unconsciously hearing the hum of a machine or a florescent light. Melodic ostinati can also be quite stimulating. Usually incorporating the tonic and a few lower notes of a specific mode, an accompanying melodic-metric pattern can both initiate a feeling of *saṭṭanah* in that mode and reinforce that feeling throughout the performance that may ensue.

Certain timbres and sonorities can be similarly conducive. For example, the sound of a good *ṭarab* instrument is known to have a tremendous inspirational impact upon the performer.²⁹ Also, reverberation, or "ambiance," created acoustically in a resonant performance-hall, or electronically at a recording studio, or through a public address sound-system, may produce magical sensations within *ṭarab* musicians. By prolonging the resonance of the notes, the resulting echo effect tends to inspire melodic phrases that are slow-paced and succinctly structured. Furthermore, in performance such phrases tend to overlap and perhaps blend harmonically with one another, thus creating an effect that is distinctly ecstatic.

Lower registers are also considered particularly suited for *saṭṭanah*. In one of al-Sunbāṭī's *ūd* recordings the shifting of the customary tessitura of the mode several notes lower is said to have boosted the music's level of *saṭṭanah*. Meanwhile, the late Egyptian *ūd* player and composer 'Alī Reda preferred to lower the tuning (*dūzān*) of his instrument because the resulting effect was ecstatically more evocative.³⁰ Within certain limits, such lowering seems to render the tone "sweeter" and the ornaments more expressive and easier to articulate. Furthermore, reduced string tension, which appears to enhance certain overtone effects, encourages performing at a leisurely and more ecstatic pace. Along similar lines, Muḥammad al-'Aqqād (Jr.) stressed that *saṭṭanah* is compatible with playing slowly, adding that it is almost impossible to achieve *saṭṭanah* through music that is extremely fast.³¹ Last but not least, good intonation, which in turn produces desirable resonance, is a prerequisite for ecstatic performing. As Simon Shaheen explains, in order to play with *saṭṭanah*, it is imperative that the instrument be tuned impeccably.

It is also noted that when such instruments as the *ūd* or violin are used, the modes tend to produce *saṭṭanah* more readily when played on certain

²⁹ For example, the resonance of *ūds* made by the famous (now deceased) Syrian craftsmen of the Naḥḥāt family is sometimes noted for its delectable effect. Similarly, the Egyptian composer and *ūd* player, Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, is said to have advised one of his students not to fix a subtle buzz on the student's *ūd*, because that particular effect added an enchanting dimension to the sound. This report about al-Sunbāṭī comes from a conversation with 'Alī Reda in the middle 1980s.

³⁰ The information comes from the conversation mentioned above.

³¹ From the 1984 conversation with al-'Aqqād.

tonal steps. It is felt that when a suitable "key" is chosen, the acquisition of saḷṭānah is facilitated by the elevated level of technical fluency and the added sympathetic resonance of certain strings. Conversely, less saḷṭānah might result if the mode were to be played on a tonic that leads to awkward fingering or to diminished sympathetic resonance. Also, the intensity of the ecstasy tends to vary from one maqām to another. As musicians explain, it is easier to create saḷṭānah in common maqāmāt such as Bayyātī, Rāst, Hījāz, and Ṣabā in part because these modes have progressions that are particularly familiar, expansive, and deeply ingrained in the minds of the listeners and performers. As indicated in the preceding chapter, also recognized is the domineering ecstatic qualities of Sīkāh-Huzām, Ṣabā, Hījāz and other modes that are closely related to them. Similarly, the ecstatically potent Sīkāh Gharīb often becomes so deeply entrenched that a subsequent departure to another maqām would seem extremely trying both technically and emotionally.

The feeling of creative ecstasy tends to be cumulative. After long performances, artists usually experience sharpened musical ability accompanied by an intensified inspirational surge. Such a cumulative effect may be felt even when a variety of modes or genres had already been presented. In the early twentieth century, Kāmil al-Khulāī bemoaned that during evening performances, distinguished guests and officials left early, before the third, and final, waṣlah, was presented. He therefore advised that musicians and their hosts begin the performances early in the evening so that the musicians reach their full inspirational peak when the eminent audience members were still present.³² In a similar vein, the notion of cumulative musical ecstasy is alluded to by a modern Egyptian music critic and biographer in a book on ṭarab singers and listeners, specifically in a chapter titled, "Indamā Yatasalṭan al-Mughannī" or "When the Singer Acquires Saḷṭānah." Particularly highlighted is a Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Ḥayy performance held at a tent during the 1930s, an event that featured a number of waṣlāt and illustrated the artist's progressive ecstatic transformation. Notwithstanding the satirical overtones and the hyperbolic language, the writing accounts for the manifestly displayed build up of saḷṭānah on the part of the singer and the audience members. For example, we read that when this artist sang the dawr at the end of a later waṣlah, "he used to end it as the tempest would end its work, forcefully plucking the listeners out of their seats, causing them to throw their fezes and turbans off their heads, to tear off their clothes, and to release their vocal chords, thus letting out a scream of ecstasy (*wajd*) and ṭarab as the artist reached his highest summit of saḷṭānah" (al-Najmī 1970: 140).³³

³² Al-Khulāī ca. 1904: 90.

³³ In this chapter al-Najmī states that his description is based on the report of an eyewitness with whom he had spoken.

Contemporary musicians describe their own cumulative ecstasies in comparable terms. One 'ūd player who has worked in nightclubs for several years explains that quite often he experiences *saṭṭanah* in its most potent form after having played for several hours. "When I finish my job at the club I leave with thousands of tunes ringing in my head. When I pick up my 'ūd to play for a few friends after work I am able to readily achieve good *saṭṭanah* in the *maqāmāt* I choose to play in."³⁴ Incidentally, the *sammīrah* cherish the intimate, usually spontaneous, late-night performances that musicians are coaxed to give immediately after an evening public performance. In such gatherings musicians are said to play the "real stuff."

Finally, the time required for the full fruition of the *saṭṭanah* state tends to vary from one artist to another. Generally, *ṭarab* musicians are known to undergo extended periods of social, physical, emotional, and musical conditioning in order to become profoundly ecstatic. However, some appear to deliver ecstatically with little or no preparation. Exemplifying the latter category was 'Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥilmī, the celebrated pre-World War I vocalist and recording artist. As one biographer puts it:

All singers begin with preludes and proceed slowly and gradually in their delivery of *ṭarab* (*itrāb*) until their voices become smooth, the instrumental playing becomes more adjusted, and the listeners' feeling is established. Then the listeners would receive *ṭarab* bit by bit until its effect has come to a full culmination. All except 'Abd al-Ḥayy Ḥilmī, who was himself made of *ṭarab*. Every ounce in him makes you ecstatic and enchants you (*tuṭribuka*). Thus, when he starts with the first breath, he initiates in you a sense of enchantment and ecstasy without any introduction or prelude . . . (al-Jundī 1984: 62–63)

Among today's musicians some are similarly noted for their exceptional readiness to perform ecstatically. They seem to respond quickly to *saṭṭanah*-generating devices or even to require little or no musical preparation before performing. For example, the celebrated singer Wadī' al-Ṣāfi, known for his outstanding vocal improvisations, remarked that other artists, including the late Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahhāb of Egypt, have noted his uncommon readiness to deliver ecstatically, "without even a moment of hesitation."³⁵

Cosmological factors

Modal ecstasy may also elude, or occur independently of, the various conventional inducers. As 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Tannārī, an established violinist

³⁴ From a conversation with the musician in Seattle, Washington around 1979.

³⁵ From the 1984 interview with Mr. al-Ṣāfi.

from Aleppo observes, at times musicians try all night to instill the salṭanah of a certain mode in the muṭrib or within themselves to no avail, despite the existence of seeming ideal physical, human, and musical conditions. However, at other times, the salṭanah of a specific mode occurs quite readily and, furthermore, its dominion seems to preempt all attempts to create salṭanah in any other mode. The Syrian violinist even recalls that on certain days maqām Bayyātī, for example, has sounded extremely good and convincing "although the 'ūd we were using at the time was broken and hard to tune, so bad you wouldn't even want to touch it." On other days, an instrument that may have been of excellent quality seemed to defy all attempts to be tuned properly or to sound pleasing in a certain maqām.³⁶

Unpredictable as such, the development of salṭanah is sometimes attributed to forces that exist outside the control of the artists themselves. Occasionally brought up is the old connection between modal ecstasy and the domain of *falak*, or astral world. The particular configurations of such entities as the zodiacs or stars on certain days, or at different times of the day would determine the propriety of the maqām at the time of performing. As some reports indicate, the earlier astral-musical correlations remained current until a few generations ago.³⁷ Some elder musicians recall that early twentieth-century performers were cognizant and in some cases observant of the modal-temporal connections. According to one report, such renowned Aleppo musicians and composers as Shaykh 'Alī al-Darwīsh and 'Umar al-Baṭsh knew how to assign the maqāmāt to cosmologically appropriate performance times, and thus to tap into the salṭanah potentials of each of the maqāmāt.³⁸ In comparable ways, writers allude to the practice of performing the call-to-prayer to modes that fit certain days or times of the day. In one book on the Islamic call-to-prayer and its practitioners, we read that toward the beginning of the twentieth century, adhān performers at the Ḥusaynī Mosque in Cairo observed a special order:

The mode of Saturday was 'Ushshāq, that of Sunday was Hījāz. But the mode of Monday was Sīkāh if that day was the first Monday of the month, Bayyātī if it were the second Monday, Hījāz if it were the third Monday, and Shūrī on [or with] Jahārkāh if it were the fourth or fifth Monday. Furthermore, the mode of Tuesday was Sīkāh, that of Wednesday was Jahārkāh, that of Thursday was Rāst, and that of Friday was Bayyātī. (al-Sa'īd 1970a: 113)

The cosmological exigencies of music making are also described in practical musical terms, especially when speaking about "the old days." Referring

³⁶ From the 1990 conversation with Mr. al-Tannārī.

³⁷ For a survey of post-medieval Arabic treatises relating music to the astral world, see Shiloah 1979.

³⁸ This was indicated by al-Tannārī, who knew some of these musicians personally.

to cosmological manuals and treatises kept by some early-twentieth-century scholars and musical patrons such as the Syrian Fakhri al-Bārūdī, Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād (Jr.), explains that there are seven stars, each corresponding to one of the notes of the scale of Rāst. Al-Tannārī cites the belief that the planets correspond to seven primary maqāmāt, each of which is based on a different step along a fundamental seven-note scale namely that of the Rāst mode. We become prone to *saṭṭanah* in the maqām corresponding to the star influencing us at the time of performing, even without our direct consciousness of that star's influence. As al-Tannārī illustrates, "we often try to 'open a mode' (*niftah naghmah*), without much success, but there are times when our attempts succeed with little or no effort."³⁹ Of interest here is the concept of "opening," which is also used to describe the unveiling of the occult or the receiving or telling of a fortune. When musicians open a mode, or when a mode becomes accessible to them, a state of *tajallī*, or modal revelation, is known to set in. As explained by al-ʿAqqād, "If you happen to perform the mode of the star which is revealing itself at the time of performing you get *saṭṭanah* twenty times stronger."⁴⁰ Along similar lines, Ṣabāḥ Fakhri indicated that "the predecessors" (*al-aqdamīn*) believed that the "mother modes" were seven and that each day of the week was cosmologically suited for one specific mode, "for example today, Thursday must be for this mode, Saturday for that mode, and so on."⁴¹

Meanwhile, al-ʿAqqād, who maintained that the modal-temporal observance gave his grandfather and others who worked with famous singers such as ʿAbduh al-Ḥāmūlī better access to modal ecstasy, described a specific cosmologically based strategy that those early artists had followed. Thus, a certain form of "cosmic scanning," or modal trial and error was conducted. The singer began the performance event by listening to his accompanists perform for an extended period of time, as they wandered over various maqāmāt in order to find out which maqām seemed to "reveal itself," in other words which star was casting its influence at that time. Also, sometimes musicians would tune the qānūn initially to maqām Ḥijāz because the extended scale of this mode supposedly embraced the essences, or nuclei of all the basic modes.⁴² They played in a somewhat impromptu manner across the Ḥijāz scale until one modal configuration proved ecstatically operative at that moment. Such a configuration became the mode of the *waṣlah* that followed. Somewhat comparably, al-Tannārī of Aleppo recalls a

³⁹ From the same 1990 conversation.

⁴⁰ This quote is from the 1984 interview with al-ʿAqqād.

⁴¹ From the 1990 interview with Mr. Fakhri.

⁴² This is probably in reference to the various intervallic clusters that make up the scale. In maqām theory, such clusters, usually in the form of tetrachords that encapsulate certain modal essences, can serve as the foundations for other full-fledged modes. See for example al-Ḥilū 1961: 80–86. Also refer to Chapter 4, Note 47.

more recent practice of deliberately playing in different modes "until the right mode gets to stick" (*ḥatta al-naghmah ti'laq*).⁴³

In today's practice, the astral paradigm has clearly lost its appeal. For one thing, genres that emphasize modal consistency, improvisatory spontaneity, and the instantaneous initiation of ecstasy have become less central. Similarly noteworthy is the increased diversification in the listeners' tastes, not to mention also the waning of cosmological thinking altogether and the advent of Western musical values, compositional techniques, and educational approaches. Ṣabāḥ Fakhri states that his generation abandoned the cosmological rules of modal selection not out of artistic incompetence or inability to perform with modal consistency:

I can, for example, sing one whole night from early evening till morning of the following day, *adwār*, *qaṣā'id*, *mawāwīl*, and *qudūd*, all in *maqām Rāst*. However, I changed the [cosmological] practice because I am not an astronomer (*ʿālim falak*) to know about the hours and the heavenly courses (*madāriḥ*) and to watch for the hour of fortune, the hour of misfortune (*al-sā'ah al-naḥsah*), and so on in choosing the right mode.⁴⁴

Fakhri mentions that in order to decide on an initial *maqām* for the performance, the ensemble members sometimes try to find out what mode the *qānūn* player is tuned to and ask him to run a few themes in that mode. If that mode, for example *Rāst*, is found ecstatically compelling (*naghmah musaltīnah*), it would be taken up and the repertoire is selected accordingly. And sometimes after starting to sing in any given mode, Fakhri may conduct his own modal scanning as he visits various modes briefly in order to sense which one is truly domineering (*musayṭirah*) and therefore suitable for singing at the moment. However, the Syrian singer describes his approach as a compromise between accepting whatever mode appears to command *salṭanah*, for whatever reason, at the time of performing, and fulfilling the need to change modes throughout the performance in order to create variety and assure the continued attention of today's ḥaflah-goers:

I give the audience a bouquet of different flowers. In the garden, I take the listener from one flower to another in order for him not to become bored, because humans have a propensity toward boredom. God created for them the four seasons, the day and the night, the different colors and foods. Therefore, I bring to them a variety of musical styles.⁴⁵

⁴³ From the 1990 conversation with al-Tannārī.

⁴⁴ From the 1990 interview with Mr. Fakhri.

⁴⁵ In this statement, from the 1990 interview, the concept of "styles" is represented by the word *alwān*, the plural of *lawn*, which literally means "color," but also indicates a musical style or stylistic "flavor." For more information on this usage see Racy 1981: 14–15.

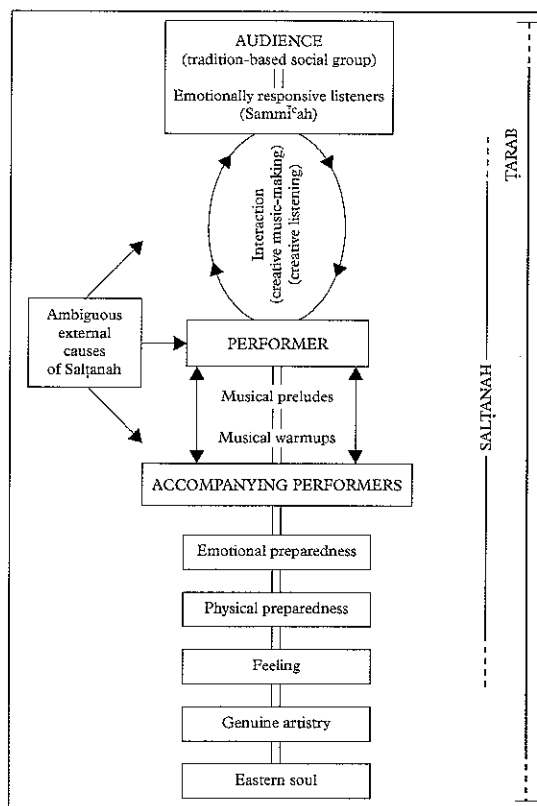


Figure 5.1 An Ecstasy Model

Music with *saltanah*

Although strongly felt, the musical manifestations of *saltanah* are difficult to pinpoint or articulate. In most cases, they are implicit in the performers' musical parlance. Often used is the term "*fihā saltanah*" or "it has *saltanah*" to describe an ecstatically imbued musical work or rendition. Furthermore, such manifestations are indirectly acknowledged when describing how such parameters as tonicity, phrasing, cadencing, and modulation are approached. Consequently, the study of *saltanah* as music seems to call for a comparative methodology, one that seeks to collate individual musical renditions that are known to vary in their levels of ecstatic efficacy. Yet even then, the approach requires selecting performances that diverge stylistically and emotionally from a shared aesthetic base. Furthermore, the chosen renditions must be contextualized, or more specifically, examined in light of their individual performance settings, as well as in terms of the relationship between the

music's emotive quality as felt by the performers or the listeners and the detailed musical structure as such. In essence, the analyst needs to probe inwardly into the realm of perception and outwardly into the musical syntax. Naturally, such an endeavor favors the use of actual musical performances, particularly those that can be closely examined and intimately felt.

With this in mind, I look at my own performances. Specifically, I provide my own critical assessment of three taqāsīm on the nāy all in the same maqām, namely Ṣabá, but performed during the last twenty years or so on three different occasions.⁴⁶ One performance was presented before a United States west-coast audience consisting largely of non-Arabs. At the time, the listeners seemed attentive but also predominantly formal and reserved. During the performance, I sensed slight intonational variances within the ensemble I was playing with. Furthermore, for accompaniment, the ensemble provided a drone which, rendered primarily on plucked instruments, seemed a bit too disjunct and obtrusive. For various reasons, my performance seemed to have little or no saṭṭanah. My rendition displayed correct intervals and an acceptable overall modal structure. However, with few intervening pauses, the melodic phrases were rather undifferentiated, and the overall compositional trajectory seemed highly amorphous. Moreover, there was only cursory emphasis upon the main tonal centers of maqām Ṣabá, and just as important, the qaflāt tended to be perfunctory or at times nonexistent.

The second of these performances appeared basically as a short, few-minute interlude within a much longer performance by an ensemble of about a half-dozen instrumentalists and a featured singer for a less attentive, largely Arab, audience in the United States. The heterogeneous ḥaflah attendants included a few sammī'ah whose ranks were overshadowed by a talking, socializing, eating, and drinking majority. The performance was marked by high levels of sound amplification. Here, I felt that my improvisation was of an average ecstatic quality. I remember performing with considerable agility and precision, in part due to the high levels of preparedness acquired through hours of performing prior to my solo. At the same time, the music displayed a rather ordinary quality. The melodic progression was typical and the qaflāt tended to be elaborate but also highly standardized. The music seemed to move by its own inertia rather than through the instantaneous emotional input of the listeners and fellow musicians. Although I presented a few staple accidental notes and modulatory hints all characteristic of Ṣabá, the taqāsīm appeared to unfold at an exceptionally fast pace as it quickly moved toward the higher pitches and finally rested upon the tonic.

⁴⁶ These analyses are guided by sound recordings selected from various cassette tapes of my own performances. The first performance took place around 1980, the second in the early 1980s and the third in the middle 1980s. A comparable analysis of these examples appeared in Racy 1991b: 19–21.

The third performance I deemed highly ecstatic, as well as technically excellent. This *nāy taqīm* in *Ṣabá* was performed in Beirut at a musical *jalsah* attended by a group of young *ṭarab* fans and some highly established artists who included conservatory teachers and instrumentalists employed by the Lebanese radio station. Preceded by polite but insistent cajoling on the part of the listeners, most of whom knew me personally, my solo occurred after about two hours of sporadic group performing, a period during which food and drinks were consumed and intimate socializing had already taken place. Reflecting the *muḥāsabah* of several well-seasoned artists and the lively input of young *ṭarab* aficionados, the *taqīm* demonstrated distinctive stylistic properties. Structurally, it consisted of discretely formed vignettes, modal or thematic units that were separated by carefully planned and timed pauses. Maintaining an overall moderate tempo and unhurried melodic movement, the performance established the mode *Ṣabá* both succinctly and emphatically. Accidental notes, although noticed and applauded by the listeners, were used sparingly so as to ensure the tonal and intervallic consistencies required for maintaining the *Ṣabá* feeling. The modulations, specifically to 'Ajam 'Ushayrān, which rests on the third step below, and then to Kurd on the original tonic, were typical occurrences in a *Ṣabá taqīm*, but their appearances seemed to come as positive surprises to the listeners. Meanwhile, the *qaflāt* were unequivocal, but often took the form of subtle hints and innuendoes. Finally, the individual thematic units, the musical micro-events, and the various digressions were all reflective of the emotional input of the ecstatically motivated, and in some cases analytically minded, listeners.

To close, the choices of the study examples and the modalities of analysis are unavoidably subjective. Similarly, the correlations we may establish between context, ecstasy, and musical structure are highly interpretive. Actually, *saṭṭanah* may come to fruition with or without the presence of an audience and furthermore, the relationship between the musical substance and the ecstatic content is far from simple or straightforward.

Saṭṭanah spoilers

The *saṭṭanah* state is essentially ephemeral and quite vulnerable. It can end gradually after having taken its natural course throughout a musical piece or an evening performance. At the same time, numerous adverse conditions – social, emotional, or musical – can either prevent *saṭṭanah* from developing or wash it away after it has already been established. Excessive fatigue, hunger, illness, or drunkenness are likely to block the path of *saṭṭanah*. Emotional stress can have a similar effect. Musicians cite the negative impact of such occurrences as a family dispute, a car accident, or tension

among musicians, for example just before performing at a nightclub. They may also blame the lack of saṭṭanah on a faulty sound system, the absence of *ṣimmi'ah*, or the existence of a few "unharmonious" persons at a small *jubbah*. Lack of audience participation or the display of gestures that are excessive, affectations, or musically out of place can cause the creative state to gradually die out or can simply make it impossible to establish. Similarly, nonidiomatically worded exclamations, which tend to betray lack of initiation on the part of the listener, may fail to inspire the performer. A featured artist may explain his or her failure to perform well through such statements as "there is no atmosphere" (*mā fīsh jaww*).

Music-related spoilers are numerous. Excessive tuning and retuning in the middle of a performance may disturb an already established feeling of modal ecstasy and may require the performing artist to develop the initial ecstatic energy of the mode all over again, an endeavor that does not always succeed. Similarly, as Simon Shaheen explains, a wrong note or a string going slightly out of tune during a *ūd* *taqīm* could wipe out an intense feeling of saṭṭanah. Inhospitable grounds for modal ecstasy include: exaggerated use of accidentals; inadequate emphasis on the basic notes of the *maqām*; abrupt shifts to other *maqāmāt*; extreme repetitiveness or sluggishness in the unfolding of the mode; bad intonation, for example resulting from not having a sufficient number of tuning levers on the *qānūn*; excessive percussiveness; and rigid adherence to the metric accents. Also, sudden tonal transposing is known to be extremely jarring. Sometimes, stemming from the need to find a comfortable tessitura for the vocalist, tonal shifting often means that saṭṭanah has to be re-established on the new pitch level. This process is particularly problematic when the shift is made from one tonic to another that is less compatible with it, as often happens to one that is adjacent to it.

Such adverse circumstances are frequently encountered at recording sessions. The technical demands of recording, the stark recording settings, the limited durations of the records, and the pressure to deliver music quickly to satisfy the industry's commercial objectives can all impede the development and maintenance of modal ecstasy. In response, early recording artists appear to have used various saṭṭanah inducing strategies. Muḥammad al-'Aqqād (Jr.), who recorded with major *ṭarab* artists, recalls the inhibiting atmosphere of the studio and the musicians' attempts to inspire the leading recording artists, particularly during the 1940s:

At the studio 'Abd al-Wahhāb or Šāliḥ 'Abd al-Ḥayy would tell us: "for the Prophet's sake start saying [performing] something in the *maqām* [of the performance]". So, you would hear us, me on the *qānūn*, the leading violinist, and the *nāy* player, all "noodling" on our instruments playing small snippets in the *maqām* until the singer has acquired saṭṭanah.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ From the 1984 interview with al-'Aqqād.

In some ways, the modern studio can generate a powerful sense of *saṭṭanah* within the recording artist through various instantaneously created effects and sonorities, including appropriate types of drones, echoes, and timbres. However, having to record a performance piecemeal, or to re-record a composition or parts of a composition several times in a row is likely to diminish or even obliterate a sense of modal ecstasy that had been developed through gradual physical, emotional, and musical conditioning. In a way, recording many "takes" of an improvisation and expecting such an improvisation to remain ecstatic is like telling a certain joke several times in succession and expecting that joke to sound funny each time. Al-ʿAqqād in fact recounted that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb re-recorded one small section of his song "*Yā Wabūr Qullī*" some 125 times, because during the original take, although he had been in a state of *saṭṭanah*, his voice had inadvertently produced an effect that he disliked. The singer finally settled with the first rendition because in the others he had become tired and had lost the fresh energy manifested in the first trial.⁴⁸ This and similar incidents continue to illustrate the tensions between feeling and technical perfection, the desire to record with *saṭṭanah* and the media's call for artistic expediency.

Finally, the role of *saṭṭanah* as a creative dynamic has been curtailed by recent musical developments, including the predominance of precomposed and fully rehearsed works, the increased use of notation, and the prevalence of such standard studio techniques as multi-track overdubbing and the recording of individual musical components separately. Similarly limiting has been the overriding tendency to think of the *maqāmāt* as mere scales and to treat them as such, rather than to recognize them as emotive-tonal-intervallic complexes. Meanwhile, the confluence of Eastern and Western orientations in today's musical pedagogy, as well as the common cynicism toward traditional performance mannerisms, may have contributed to the rise of a joke involving a student in a solfège class at a major Arab conservatory. At the time of examination, when the teacher asked the student to sight-read a melody in a specific *maqām*, the student replied "I am sorry, today I have no *saṭṭanah*."⁴⁹ Nonetheless, both as a concept and experiential state, *saṭṭanah* retains a central position in *ṭarab* artistry. Of primary concern to the musicians and the listening initiates, it provides the psychological and aesthetic base for affective *ṭarab* making.

⁴⁸ Conceivably the number of repeats is exaggerated, although the dilemma described here is very real.

⁴⁹ George Sawa points out that this is a real incident that took place at a conservatory in Alexandria. When the student told her that he had no *saṭṭanah*, the teacher replied, "Then sing without *saṭṭanah*!" (From a conversation with Dr. Sawa).