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 *ṭunbūr*, 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).

(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 Almaḍḥ 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.

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 Fatḥī, 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 Tawfīq 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 Muʾtamar al-Mūsīqá al-ʿArabiyyah* 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.

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'thīr*, 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 iḥsās*, 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 ʿAbbāsid 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 *ʿūd* (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 distanciation" (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 *sanṭūr* (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 discreetness. 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.