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0521316855 - Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab - A. J. Racy

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Making Music in the Arab World The Culture and Artistry of *Ṭarab*

A. J. Racy is well known as a scholar of ethnomusicology and as a distinguished performer and composer. In this pioneering study on music in the Arab world, he provides an intimate portrayal of the Arab musical experience and offers insights into how music generally affects us all. The focus is *ṭarab*, a multifaceted concept that has no exact equivalent in English and refers to both the indigenous music and the ecstatic feeling associated with it. Richly documented, the book examines various aspects of the musical craft, including the basic learning processes, how musicians become inspired, the love lyrics as tools of ecstasy, the relationship between performers and listeners, and the influence of technological mediation and globalization. Racy also probes a variety of world musical and ecstatic contexts and analyses theoretical paradigms from other related disciplines. Written in a lucid style, *Making Music in the Arab World* will engage the general reader as well as the specialist.

A. J. Racy is Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and one of the leading experts on music in the Arab world. He is a performer and composer in his own right.

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Celebrated Egyptian singer Umm Kulthūm (ca. 1904–1975) performing.
Photo courtesy of Dār al-Şayyād.

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Making Music in the Arab World

The Culture and Artistry of *Ṭarab*

A. J. Racy

University of California, Los Angeles



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To my family,
And all the *sammī'ah*

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Preface

Why does music move us so profoundly? What makes it special as a human expression? How does it really affect us? Music is said to inspire and elate the listeners and to transform them mentally, physically, and emotionally. And similarly, musicians are thought to possess an extraordinary ability to impress and engage through an aural medium that on the surface seems rather innocuous and beyond obvious utility. These and other related questions have preoccupied philosophers, religious leaders, politicians, scientists, music critics, and musicians throughout human history. This book represents the persistent and seemingly universal quest for understanding music and its unmistakable appeal. More directly, however, it is about a specific musical tradition, one that establishes strong links between music and emotional transformation. I write as a native performer in that tradition, but one whose perspectives are those of a historically minded ethnomusicologist. Although the overall orientation is cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary, the core component is an in-depth study of Arab music and its emotional dimension. My work does not aim at advancing a single “grand theory,” one that explains musical affect globally, nor does it make exclusive allegiance to one such theory. Rather, it offers numerous theoretical constructs and conclusions whose implications extend beyond the immediate subject matter. It is my hope that by developing better theoretical comprehension of how the Arab musical experience is culturally sustained, contextually produced, and personally processed, this research will provide insights into comparable experiences in other world contexts. This and similar endeavors can make us more cognizant, as well as more appreciative of how as humans we think, behave, and feel musically.

This research could not have been done without the assistance of many individuals and institutions. I am particularly grateful to the late Professor Albert Hourani of Oxford University for encouraging me to write this book and for offering his characteristically gracious and enthusiastic support over the years. I also extend my gratitude to Dr. George Sawa, ethnomusicologist, medievalist, and fellow musician, who read the original manuscript and inserted his own remarks, which were extremely helpful and at times delightfully humorous. My appreciation also goes to Dr. Dwight F. Reynolds, Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of

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California at Santa Barbara for his most useful input into various literary and historical matters. I am also indebted to those who provided assistance during the various stages of my research, including Dr. Deanna McMahon, Dr. Virginia Danielson at Harvard University, and Dr. Robert Moser at Brown University. Similarly, I wish to thank the Lebanese music scholar Dr. Victor Saḥḥāb for his valuable help, especially in facilitating my contacts with Dār al-Şayyād in Lebanon in 1997–1998. I am deeply touched by Dār al-Şayyād's staff, especially Dr. Antoine Buṭrus, director of the research division and Sharbal Farḥāt, the supervising archivist, for giving me access to their archival material and granting me permission to include some of their archival photos in this book.

I also express my gratitude to the numerous singers, instrumentalists, composers, music thinkers, and listening connoisseurs with whom I have conversed and in many cases performed music both in the United States and in the Arab world. Although many are individually recognized through the ensuing discussions, I am particularly thankful to the late Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād, Şabaḥ Fakhri, Wadīʿ al-Şāfi, the late Sayyid Makkāwī, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Tannārī, Simon Shaheen, the late Mūnir Bashīr, Dr. Ḥasan al-Bazzāz, Maḥmūd Kāmil, Buthaynah Farīd, Maʿmūn al-Shinnāwī (Jr.), and the late ʿAlī Reda. These and many others have shared with me their artistic knowledge, and in some cases helped me establish key contacts in the field.

I would also like to mention the encouragement of my students and colleagues at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where some of my classes and seminars have addressed topics related to this work. I am similarly appreciative of those who assisted in the preparation of the manuscript, especially Jay Keister, Heidi Feldman, Tonya Culley, Leigh Creighton, Kathleen Hood, Sami Asmar, and Antoine Harb. Also to be recognized are my friends and neighbors in a small coastal town in central Maine, where I did most of the writing. Many of these folks expressed genuine interest in my subject matter, and often spoke to me about their own ecstatic musical experiences.

Last but not least, my gratitude goes to my family, including my parents Salam and Emily Racy and my brothers Khaled and Ramzi, all of whom have shown tremendous enthusiasm about my work. I give my deepest appreciation to my wife Dr. Barbara Racy, for her boundless support. Barbara has made valuable editorial and photographic contributions to my research, and particularly through her specialty as a clinical psychologist and her expertise in dance ethnology and dance movement therapy, has offered truly insightful suggestions.

Technical Note

In this book, I provide my own English translations of the quotes from various Arabic sources. For the Arabic transliterations, I basically follow the conventional system used by the Library of Congress and the standard Near-Eastern studies journals. However, I represent one of the Arabic consonants differently, namely the one usually indicated by the symbol “ẓ”. As specifically applied in the above system, this symbol is inconsistent with the manner in which other dotted letters relate phonetically to the same letters without dots, for example, the “ṣ” and the “s”, and the “ṭ” and the “t”. Furthermore, the sound suggested by the symbol “ẓ” disagrees with the proper classical pronunciation of the Arabic consonant being represented. Therefore, to be consistent with both correct Arabic phonology and the transliteration system itself, I use the symbol “dh,” which is pronounced roughly as the “th” in the English words, “thus” and “brother,” and appears in such Arabic words as *dhālim*, *naḏhif*, and Maḥfūḏh.

For the various commonly used expressions, I tend to adhere to the standard classical transliteration, particularly since the colloquial patterns of pronunciation can differ considerably from one Arab country to another. In this case, the consonant I represent with the letter “j” whether in a classical or colloquial expression, would be pronounced as a “g” (as for example in “game” or “go”) by Egyptians. Also in the spoken idiom of Egypt, and the Levant region, the characteristic Arabic sound represented by the transliterated symbol “q” is usually changed into a glottal stop similar to the sound represented by the transliteration symbol “ʿ”. Deviations from the conventional system appear mostly in the spellings of some proper names and Arabized foreign words and in colloquial song lyrics and certain song titles. With respect to the plural constructions of Arabic nouns, I essentially follow the Arabic plural forms. For the sake of clarity I often list both the singular and the plural forms in the text.

Since two key terms in this study have a distinct tendency to be mispronounced by English speakers, a brief note on their proper pronunciation is presented here. In the word *tarab*, both vowelled syllables must be short, as in the English word “salad” (e.g., without artificially lengthening the second syllable) and furthermore, the accent must fall on the first syllable. In the word, *salṭanah*, all three vowels must maintain the “ah” sound, as in “salary”

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(e.g., without converting the first vowel into an “o” or a Latin “u”). Also, all three vowelised syllables must be short (e.g., without lengthening the second syllable), keeping in mind that the first syllable, “*sa*” is usually accentuated.

The dates, particularly of published works, include a few that originally follow the Islamic Hejira system and are listed in the text as such, with the symbol “AH” inserted before each date. Also, some key sources that are not explicitly or officially dated but incorporate clues to their approximate time of publication are listed accordingly (e.g., al-Khulaī ca. 1904). Sometimes two years appear side by side (e.g. 1929/1973) to indicate the dates of both the original publication and the reprinted version. Finally, the dates of birth and death for individual artists are elicited from a wide variety of biographical sources and oral reports. Thus, some may be tentative or approximate.