



Arabic Music

Arabic music sounds somewhat exotic to those of us raised in Western culture--it has some identifiable characteristics that distinguish it from the European-influenced music we have heard all our lives. People with musical training in Western music quickly become fascinated with Oriental music once they start becoming familiar with it. Modern Arabic music uses acoustic and electric instruments, but every instrument used should be able to play Arabic scales. These scales, referred as *maqam*, are not chromatic scales like the major and minor scales used in Occidental (Western) music. Arabic scales use quarter tones in addition to the semitones used in the chromatic scale. Some common *maqam* are named: *Bayate*, *Hijaz*, *Sica*, *Saba* etc. A song may often use more than one *maqam*. There are significant regional variants in the *maqam* system. There is not one *maqam* system. It is more accurate to say that *maqam* represents a way of conceiving of tuning and mode that creates a framework to understand a lot of different folk and classical music traditions. Modern Arabic songs tend to include both Western and *maqam* scales trying to approach new generations and audiences.

Pop music is a recent offshoot of modern music, written to appeal in particular to a younger generation. In Egypt, the true rise of pop music, which is called *al jeel* (generation music), began in the 1980's. Some well-known Arabic recording artists whose work could be considered pop music are **Amr Diab** (the vocalist who popularized *Habibi Ya Nour El Ain*), **Simon Shaheen**, **Hanan**, **Alabina**, and **Ehab Tawfeek**. Some of these songs demonstrate a definite Western influence, especially Spanish.

Amr Diab, whose music combines Arabic and Western sounds, was named the Best Singer in the Arab World throughout the nineties. He continually sets new Arabic sales records with successive album releases. His album "Nour El Ain" has become the best selling album ever released by an Arabic artist. *Rai* (pronounced "rye"), an old North African style of music dating back to the 16th century, has become an increasingly popular style of music among non-Arabs, with the success of North African singers such as **Khaled**, **Faudel**, and **Cheb Mami** who have given it a modern twist. Drawing on traditional Algerian and Arabic musical stylings, *Rai* is mixed with Western pop music, including Reggae, and is performed using both the Arabic and French languages. Modern Arabic music is reaching new borders. There are quite a few Arab performers today whose albums are popping up in US music stores' World Music sections, including your local *Borders*. Albums of all the artists mentioned can be bought from online music retailers. So expand your musical horizons and try some Arab music.

كلمات

Vocabulary

(Kal-eemaat)

Hot (Temperature)

Haar حار

Hot (Person) Attractive

Jatheb جاذب

Hot (Item) Great

'Azeem عظيم

Music

Musiqqa موسيقا

Film

Feelm فيلم

Beach

Bahr بحر

Note: Arabic is a very specific language therefore approximate correlating vocabulary has been given.

TOP TEN LIST

(Singers, Songs)

1. Ragheb Alameh (Lebanese)
 - a. Moughram Ya Leil
 - b. Albi Achikha
2. Amr Diab (Egyptian)
 - a. Habibi Ya Nour El Ain
 - b. Ma Tkhafich
3. Georges Wassouf (Lebanese)
 - a. Kalam El Nass
 - b. Leil Al Achkin
4. Najwa Karam (Lebanese)
 - a. Ana Ma Fiyi
 - b. Ya Helou
5. Aassi El Helani (Lebanese)
 - a. Ya Memah
 - b. Wani Marek Marreit
6. Wael Kfoury (Lebanese)
 - a. Maouli Tchatti
 - b. Ma Wadtek Bi Abb
7. Warda (Egyptian)
 - a. Btwaness Beek
 - b. Nar El Ghira
8. Adb Al Majid Abdullah (Khaligy)
 - a. Rahib
 - b. Ahebak Leh
9. Kazem El Saher (Iraq)
 - a. Zidini Ishkan
 - b. Salamtak Bedalah
10. Hani Shaker (Egyptian)
 - a. Tableh Ma Nehlamchi
 - b. Kida Bardou

Arabic Films

The major Arab film industry is centered in Egypt and consequently many films are made in the Egyptian dialect. However, the other Arab centers are Lebanon and Morocco, both of which add their own flavor to the mix. Many Arabic movies are satiric or ironic, as films with blatant political statements are often censored or not released. This is changing in many ways, especially as young Palestinians are becoming more active in the film industry and the ability to subvert meaning in symbolism is becoming more complex.

One such example of this is the 2001 film, *Divine Intervention*, by Elia Suleiman. This film examines the complexities of life in the area of Israel and the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza). This film is very symbolic and its political statements are often shrouded in symbolism.

Another example of political statement is the 1998 film *West Beirut*, directed by Ziad Doueiri, which examines life in 1975, at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. This war tore the city apart on religious lines and through the eyes of a few young boys, we are given a glimpse of daily life through irony, wit, humor and sadness. Again, this is in Arabic with English subtitles.

Ali Zaoua, Prince of the Streets, (2000) by Nabil Ayouch is an excellent example of modern Moroccan filmmaking. Centered around a rather morbid topic, the children in the movie are forced to find money to bury a friend who has died. The ironies in their lives, their delight in being children and their tribulations of being orphans are all highlighted in a very entertaining and enlightening way.

A wonderful example of Egyptian filmmaking is seen in the trio of films by the acclaimed director, Youssef Chahine. *Alexandria... Why?* (1978), *An Egyptian Story* (1982) and *Alexandria Again and Forever* (1990) follow a young boy, Yehia into adulthood. It is similar to the films in America that examine a person's life such as *American Beauty*. However, these films examine different aspects of the main character's life, allowing the viewer an inside glance into family life, the decision to immigrate to America and to follow one's dream, as well as reflection on one's self. These films are uplifting, yet sobering but very entertaining.

Finally, there are many films made in America about Arabs or with Arabs in them. Films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *True Lies* (1994), *Hidalgo* (2004), and even Disney's *Aladdin* (1993) all satirize and play on the stereotypes Americans have about Arabs and Arab topics. The Arabs in each of these films are caricatured as greedy, stupid, naïve or just plain "not civilized". Although for some people this may be the case, the majority of Arabs are not like this and the diversity of their films shows this.

If you are interested in Arab films, look in the Fall for the
Arab Film Festival!