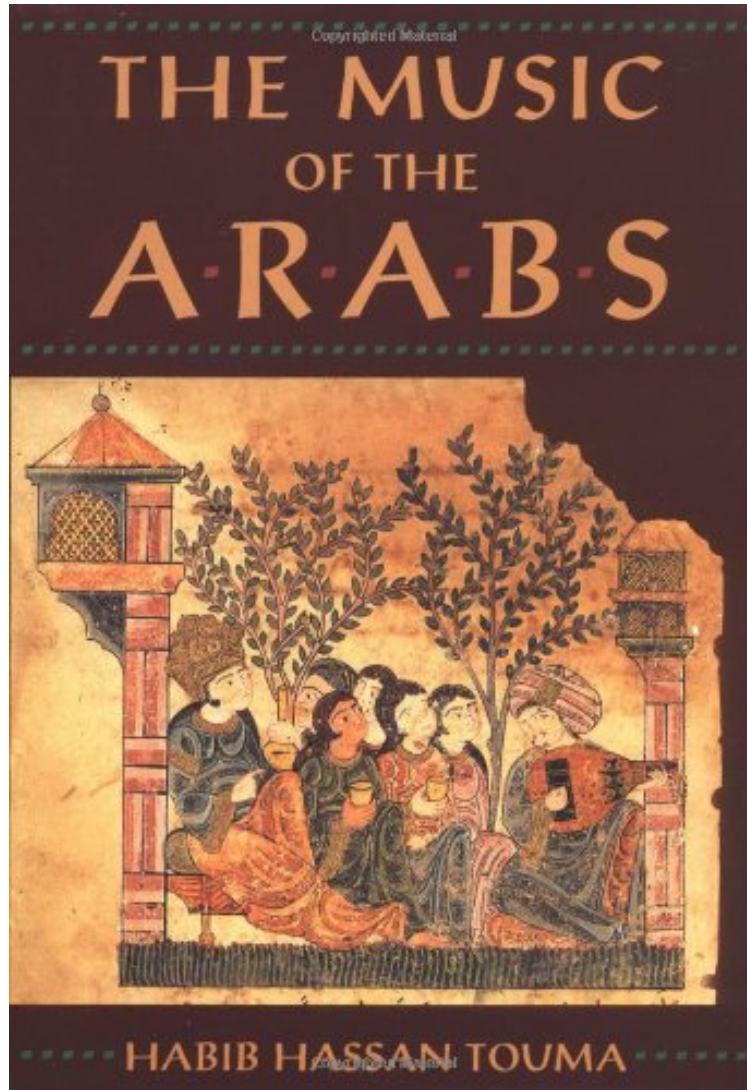


[Download ebook] The Music of the Arabs

The Music of the Arabs

Habib Hassan Touma

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Habib Hassan Touma : The Music of the Arabs before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Music of the Arabs:

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful. IndispensableBy Fernand RayAs you can see, this is a complex and contentious topic. If you want to get your bearings, there is simply no better introduction to the subject in English, and that's not all good news. It would be silly to expect a small book like this to cover all aspects, let alone all personalities, be they "authentic" or not. This is certainly in the spirit of the great musicologists like D'Erlanger, who wanted to save Arabic music from itself, and in opposition to the inferiority complex that created the bizarre "arabic orchestra", in which legions of musicians play a single melodic line on as many western instruments as could be

dragged onto the stage. It also sheds some light on why attempts to create pieces like symphonic "oud concertos" might sound silly and contrived. At the same time, there is a touch of madness and bias to such polemics. Imagine a little book called "Music of the Europeans", and you get a taste of the problems. Touma also forgets that Western Art Music is in crisis. The old orderly image of "classical music" is failing because we are finding that there is no viable "contemporary classical music". Mozart and Beethoven were products of their economic/social context, and those norms no longer work. If you want to talk about the music we listen to, you have to include John Lennon, Andrew Lloyd Webber ... AND Farid El Altrash. Having relied on rote oral transmission from master to student, especially defenseless against distortions for having no system of notation of its own, Arabic music has been constantly evolving (or decaying) over the centuries, and changing under the influence of foreigners. At one point Touma makes the following tragic admission: "Most Arabs today, however, whatever their level of education might be, no longer know true Arabic music." The sad thing is that the author of this book is no exception. It's as good as it gets, yet it is full of errors that reveal more than a translation (from German) problem. The reference to "Early Persian Magicians" to denote Zoroastrians in the first chapter is symptomatic. Touma then incomprehensibly uses the term "Maqam", which is a mode, a scale or tone row, to denote a Taqsim, which is an improvisation form that USES a Maqam. The material covered is wide, and nobody will spot all the errors, but it happens that I can also see that the very important Ajam Maqam is notated incorrectly. The criticism that some reviewers level, that it arbitrarily ignores some important figures in 20th century Arabic music, is also not without basis. Farid El Altrash was not just a crooner, he did more to restore interest in the classical Taqsim and the essential Oud (lute) than anyone "modern" before him. The fact that all the Arabic TV stations now regularly broadcast high quality Taqsim music is Farid's legacy. Ignoring him completely was NOT a wise editorial decision on Touma's part. You can be sure all the other material in this book is likewise a bit stilted and peppered with little mistakes. Still, books such as this, that aim to return to historical foundations, are invaluable. The controversy (and the errors?) make the field all the more interesting. The exposition of the Maqam phenomenon, the specific Arabic mode/scale system with ties to the "modes" of ancient Greece, is cursory but tries to be complete. You should be acquainted with this stuff if you have any interest in music as a general human phenomenon. It's wonderful that the current interest in "world music" can support efforts such as this. The technical level of the analysis gets quite deep, and the layman may wish to skip some passages. The interested reader can start here, then listen to a wealth of examples on youtube under Oud and Taqsim, and the professional can further study a detailed presentation of the Maqam system on sites like maqamworldDOTcom. Armed with the not inconsiderable body of knowledge in this volume as a start, you can be better prepared to join the fray and meaningfully argue whether Farid El Altrash was a tacky movie musical actor with a fast wrist, or a genius imbued with the tradition of centuries, and whether other Oud players like Nasseer Shamma are brave innovators, or if they should stop equivocating and just play the guitar. You can also ponder whether Munir Bashir, who left Iraq to practice a more authentic Arabic music, was right on track, or just spinning a self-serving tale. The CD is of course arbitrary in its selections, but a very welcome bonus, especially for readers new to the subject, and for whom no amount of reading can substitute for hearing "what it sounds like". The long Bashir selection is a great illustration of the aforementioned Taqsim genre that is central to traditional Arabic Art Music. The book-CD package is a fine value, printed on thick paper that is rarely found in paperbacks, and if you have any interest in Arabic music, this is the one to start with. You will keep coming back to it for reference, and, as your knowledge deepens, to quibble and rage ;-)

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great reference material for the maqamat - but there are notational ambiguities...By Boradicus

Being a music theorist, I was primarily interested in this book for its discussion of microtonal theory and practice in Arabian music. For this reason, the book is a wonderful resource, and it also has some helpful descriptions of musical form and practice for how the maqamat should be performed. Being a survey of traditional Arabian music, the book includes examples that might be of cultural interest to the music appreciation aficionado, but places more of an emphasis, in my opinion, on musical culture and history than on analysis of style (although this is included as well). I was a little disappointed with the sound files (which I was able to download from the publisher's website) that only partly coincided with the musical transcriptions in the book. I would have liked to have had access to more recordings representing the material covered in the book. Overall, I enjoyed 2 of the seven tracks of music, and found another informative, but the other tracks I would not have purchased for any musical merit. My favorite track by far was the layali, which showed some of the wonderful virtuosity available to this type of music. Overall, this is a great introduction for the theorist and non-theorist alike. It does exactly what an introduction should do, which is to whet your appetite while providing enough tools to make further experience in the subject more enjoyable.

UPDATE (6-12-14): I have noticed some ambiguities in the scalar material provided on pages 29-36 that it would be useful for the author to update in either a future revision or the publication of errata on either the publisher's or the author's website. There are times when a note preceded by an accidental is followed later by the same note also preceded by the same accidental; however, in some cases, no accidental of any kind appears on the note subsequent, and therefore, no consistent scheme may be determined from the notation from which the correct application of an accidental may be inferred. Here are the ambiguities that it would be helpful to have corrected or clarified:

1. On page 29, in maqam rahaawii, under the rast genre, although the first ascending F has a quarter sharp in parentheses, it is unclear as to

whether the F an octave above is an F natural or an F quarter sharp (no natural sign precedes it), and it is also unclear as to whether the last F in the maqam is natural or quarter sharp (no natural sign precedes it).² On page 29, in maqam dilnishiin, under the rast genre, although the second ascending D is fully flatted, no natural sign precedes the descending D of the same octave that follows it, descending, nor is it clear as to the quality of the last descending D in the maqam.³ On page 32, in maqam buusaaliik, under the nahawand genre, the ascending middle C is sharpened, but it is unclear as to whether either of the Cs that follow are either natural or sharp due to the lack of an accidental preceding either.⁴ On page 32, in maqam raaHat fazaa, under the nahawand genre, while the F below middle C is sharpened, neither of the Fs that follow have accidentals, and therefore are not identified clearly.⁵ On page 32, in maqam dilkashiida, under the nahawand genre, the F below middle C is sharpened, but neither of the two Fs above middle C that follow it are preceded by any accidental, and are therefore unclearly notated.⁶ On page 33, in the first, unnamed maqam of the Hijaaz genre, while the E just above middle C is flatted, and the F just above middle C is sharpened, neither the two Es an octave above are indicated as either natural or flat, and neither the two Fs an octave above the sharpened F are either indicated as natural or sharp; however, the last E in the maqam is flatted, and the last F in the maqam is sharpened.⁷ On page 33, in maqam shaahnaaz, under the Hijaaz genre, while the ascending E above middle C is flatted and the ascending F above middle C is sharpened, neither the ascending E nor F immediately have their quality indicated; however, the descending two notes that immediately follow are sharpened and flatted respectively (perhaps indicating that the preceding notes in the same octave may be naturals - yet again, there is no clear indication).⁸ On page 33, in maqam shadd 'arabaan, under the Hijaaz genre, while the ascending F above middle C is sharpened, the descending F above middle C that follows is not indicated as being either a sharp or a natural.⁹ On page 34, in maqam Hayyaan, under the nakriiz genre, the B below middle C is half flatted, but the B above middle C is not indicated as either a natural or a flat; also, the ascending F just above middle C is sharpened, while the F an octave above that is not indicated as either sharp or natural. In addition to these ascending ambiguities, the descending A above middle C is not indicated as either flat or natural, yet the ascending A of the same octave is a flat; also, the lowest descending F is not indicated as either natural or sharp, although the ascending note within the same octave is sharpened, and the F above that is not marked either way.¹⁰ On page 34, in maqam HiSaar, under the nakriiz genre, while both the ascending and descending G notes just above middle C are both sharpened, the highest G in the maqam, between these two, is not indicated as either being a natural or a sharp.¹¹ On page 35, in maqam shawq afzaa, under the 'ajam genre, while the ascending E above middle C is half flatted, the E following, an octave above, is neither sharpened nor flatted; as well, the ascending G above middle C is flatted, however, the descending G within the same octave is not indicated as being either flat or natural.¹² On page 35, in maqam shawq awiir, under the 'ajam genre, while the ascending A above middle C is flatted, the descending A in the same octave that follows is not marked as either being flat or natural.¹³ On page 36, in maqam Tarznawin, under the kurd genre, while the ascending E just above middle C is flatted, the ascending E above that is not clearly marked; also, while the ascending G above middle C is flatted, the G an octave above that is not clearly marked; lastly, while the ascending A above middle C is flatted, the descending A in the same octave is not indicated as either being natural or flat.¹⁴ On page 36, in maqam Tarab, under the kurd genre, while the ascending E above middle C is half flatted, the E an octave above that is not indicated as being either half flat or natural; and lastly, while the ascending G above middle C is flatted, the descending G within the same octave is not indicated as being either flat or natural. While this book is quite helpful as an introduction to maqamat (the plural of maqam), it would greatly benefit from several corrections to the text. Additionally, while "five" examples of each maqam "genre" are provided to the reader, it is clear from the text that the examples of each genre are exhaustively representative of each maqam genre, as Touma refers to them. While the book does contain a sizable bibliography, as well as a selected discography, the majority of the titles listed are in Arabic, while a smaller number are in French, and a mere handful are in English. Additionally, there are no footnotes indicating which bibliographical references were used for the information presented, making the task of clarifying questions that might arise resulting from the text itself less easy to readily research and support using the references cited. However, the fact that there is a bibliography at all is a boon.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. From WAY Outside ...By Gio... from the point of view of a professional European-tradition musician who has listened to and appreciated Arab music in the broadest sense (that is, everyone from al Andalus to Iran), I have no qualms about praising this book as extremely useful. I've noted the angry one-star reviews of it; the bitterness expressed in them may or may not be justified, but it doesn't in any way diminish the value of the book to an outsider like me. What I wanted, and got, wasn't a paean for specific performers or traditions but an explication of the basics of Arab music theory, its tonal system, its rhythm practices, its forms of notation and parameters of improvisation, and some outline of its most persistent genres. The historical accounts and the sociological notes about the role of the musician/composer in cultural identity were interesting to me, but I'm in no position to evaluate either their accuracy or their inclusiveness. This is essentially a book for two sorts of readers: 1) people immersed in Arab culture to some degree or 2) people not at all immersed in Arab culture but basically literate in music and able to understand/compare music theories.

(Amadeus). Encompassing a history of more than 2000 years, the music of the Arabs is unique among the world's

various musical cultures. This book presents an overview of Arabic music throughout history and examines the artistic output of contemporary musicians, covering secular and sacred, instrumental and vocal, improvised and composed music. Typical musical structures are elucidated, and a detailed bibliography, a discography (mainly covering the last 50 years) and a guide to the Arabic alphabet for English speakers are also provided.