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Middle Eastern Music and Dance since the Nightclub Era

Anne K. Rasmussen

William and Mary, akrasm@wm.edu

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Orientalism
Transnationalism
& Harem Fantasy

Edited By
Anthony Shay & Barbara Sellers- Young

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CHAPTER 6

“An Evening in the Orient”: The Middle Eastern Nightclub in America*

Anne Rasmussen

The spirit of the Oriental *harem*, romanticized especially by nineteenth-century European travelers as the consummate “den of iniquity,” was reconstructed in the United States within the context of the Middle Eastern nightclub. During the 1960s and 1970s, Arab-American musicians and those from other Eastern Mediterranean communities cleverly adapted the emblems and symbols of the Orient and popularized a new musical style rooted in their own indigenous traditions. Although the trademarks of Orientalism helped these musicians to achieve unprecedented success, the racist bias of this European belief system served to enhance the foreignness of these Arab and other Middle Eastern immigrants and their families, placing them in an imaginary world that was exotic—even to themselves.¹

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In this article I study the virtual absence of Orientalism in the musical lives of Arab immigrants who first established communities in the United States and the subsequent appropriation, by certain members in this community, of Orientalist notions in tandem with the rise, in America of the Middle Eastern nightclub. My intent is to provide insight into the way in which this historical framework was adapted and restructured both within the context of the Middle Eastern nightclub and within the sound of the music played therein. This historical anecdote also exemplifies the ways in which both contexts for music making and concepts about music making are inseparable from the music itself.

Orientalism is a belief system originally created in European academic, artistic, and military circles in order to differentiate Western European civilization from that of the Eastern world. In his seminal work on the topic, Edward Said (1979) carefully outlined the characteristics of Orientalism (see also Kabbani 1986). Orientalism served as a rationale for British and French political and intellectual imperialism. One of its trademarks was that it lumped Asians, Near Easterners and North Africans, along with people from the Eastern Mediterranean, into an homogeneous and invariable populace. Second, Orientalism characterized the so-called Oriental races as uncivilized, disorganized, and untrustworthy. This supported the European doctrine of biological determinism, so important to their expansionist endeavors. Third, the Orientalist framework included a family of ideas and images which played upon tantalizing and fantastical accounts of the exotic, the sensual, and the mysterious aspects of this antiquated, faraway land. From the 1950s and through the 1970s, although political and evolutionary incentives for Orientalist thought were, for the most part, obsolete, many of the images and emblems of Orientalism were exhumed and incorporated into a new American musical and cultural phenomenon, namely, the Middle Eastern nightclub.

The emblems of this European belief-system were manifested in the context of the Middle Eastern nightclub, specifically in music style and repertoire, in song texts and titles, in the decor and costumes of the nightclub, and through the medium of the L.P. recording.² The cognitive implications of Orientalism appeared in both the overt and the implicit attitudes and concepts held by musicians and audiences. Professional musicians of the

nightclub took advantage of the racist stereotypes of Orientalism because of their vague familiarity to audiences and their entertainment value. I suggest, furthermore, that the symbols and images of the Orientalist fantasy were also meaningful to the musicians themselves in the exploration and expression of their own ethnicity and identity.

The Musical Life of Arab Immigrants in the United States

During the early twentieth century a steady stream of primarily Christian immigrants from the Levantine Arab world³ (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine) established the foundation of the Arab-American community. Their departure was broadly concurrent with the replacement of the Ottoman regime by French and British colonialists. Orientalist notions were *not* predominant in the cultural ideology of these early immigrants whose departure predated the European intellectual and social renovation that occurred in the post-Ottoman Middle East. The vibrant music culture they established in the eastern United States was similarly lacking in Orientalist notions, despite their having absorbed the most modern musical trends from the records and films imported from the Middle East

Beginning in the late 1920s several distinct contexts for music making evolved and became institutionalized in the Arab-American community. The most important of these—the *haflah* (pl. *haflāt*), a formal music party, and the *mahrajān* (pl. *mahrajānāt*), a communal festival lasting up to three days were events centered around live Arabic music. These events were organized by church groups or other social organizations and were held for philanthropic and charitable causes.⁴ Under the rubric of the church and community groups, a network of influential and popular Arab-American musicians, now sometimes referred to as “old timers,” along with their audiences, acted as an extended family, sharing “old world” musical and cultural traditions in “new world” contexts.⁵

The dynamic musical life of the Arab immigrant community was gradually overshadowed by a polyethnic nightclub culture that established alternate canons of musical taste and style, as well as new contexts and reasons for music making. Instigated during the 1950s, the nightclub phenomenon was concurrent with frequent community-oriented music events. By the mid-

1960s and into the 1970s, however, the nightclub had become the primary institution for Arab music, redefining musical and social values for both new audiences of Americans from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, as well as for people of Arab heritage.

The *haflah* and the *mahrajān* of the Arab-American community were music events that articulated social organization and shared values. Under the rubric of the church and social organizations, musicians were hired to perform among friends, family, and the broader Arab-American community. In contrast, the people, music, dancing, and refreshments of the nightclub were a polyethnic amalgamation representative of the American “melting pot” in the post—World War II years. Many musical and social precedents for the nightclub environment were introduced and established at festive community *haflāt* and *mahrajānāt*, but the Middle Eastern nightclub became a distinct music context with a unique structure and overt Orientalist ideology shared by the participants in this cultural institution.

The Origins of the Middle Eastern Nightclub

According to Arab-American musicians, patrons, and audiences, the first Middle Eastern nightclub, “Club Zahra,” opened in Boston in 1952. The Lebanese-American couple who assumed ownership of the club organized a Middle Eastern floor show with continuous musical entertainment provided by a “house band” that included musicians of Lebanese, Turkish, Armenian, and Greek heritage. Sometimes musicians visiting from overseas entertained at the club. Following a few years of success with Club Zahra the same couple opened “Club Morocco,” named after Morocco, a co-owner and professional, dancer and singer from Lebanon. Morocco sang Arabic, Turkish, and Greek songs and danced Oriental style. Accompanying her were several, primarily American, female dancers whom she trained informally. These Boston night spots, “Club Zahra,” “Club Morocco,” and later “Club Kayam” became very popular.⁶ While some Middle Eastern families enjoyed this new nightclub scene, the clubs were patronized, notably, by an international clientele and cosmopolitan-minded Americans. According to co-owner and performer Morocco:

We were famous all over. From coast to coast the club Zahra was known. Whenever you came to town, you

came in. People were lined up and down the street, you had to make a reservation, like a week before. And we had all high-class people, lots of Americans. We had lawyers and doctors and senators. In fact John Kennedy used to come in (Morocco, personal communication, September 9, 1988.)

In Eastern seaboard cities, the Middle Eastern nightclub became an emblem of a polyethnic America. In the 1960s, approximately twelve nightclubs were in operation in "Greek Town," a neighborhood in New York City near 8th Avenue and 20th street. The shift from restaurant to cabaret seems to have been a gradual one, according to New Yorkers. The Greek restaurants would hire a couple of musicians, then a dancer; soon these places became known for their Oriental entertainment, Lebanese-American dancer, choreographer, and writer, Ibrahim Farrah, a veteran of the New York nightclubs, remembers the late 1960s and early 1970s as an "age of expansion." Many Americans had had the opportunity to travel to "exotic" places in Greece, Turkey, or the Arab world. They had acquired "Oriental tastes," decorating their homes with Islamic art, Persian rugs, and brass trays. Just as middle- and upper- class white New Yorkers ventured into the black clubs of Harlem, to "slum it" for an evening of bebop Jazz, so they frequented the Middle Eastern nightclub.

They don't really understand what they're hearing or really relate to it, its like a night on the Mediterranean for them. It was not unusual to go to 8th avenue and see women going into the nightclubs with big [fur] coats. They find it an exotic evening. (I. Farrah, personal communication, August 1, 1987.)

Nightclub culture of the 1960s clearly represents an amalgamation taking place among various ethnic groups and between immigrants and American society at large. Complementary to this sociological impetus for ethnic fusion was a shared ideological complex pertaining to the "Oriental world." Consistent with Orientalist notions, the nightclub presented the Middle East in a general fashion, blurring racial, cultural, and religious distinctions in musical and social ways. Although music and dance styles were modern innovations, they were portrayed as primitive and raw, as a glimpse of the past. Most conspicuously, the

nightclub capitalized on the sensual images of Orientalism: dark lighting, pulsating rhythms, enticing aromas, exotic women, and erotic dancing.

The Belly Dancer: An American Reinterpretation of the Orient

When the urban nightclub emerged, belly dancing was the featured attraction on the marquee and became the vehicle through which Americans and other ethnic groups came to know about Arab culture, including food, music, and a romanticized version of history. The misnomer "belly dancing" is a direct translation of the descriptive French characterization *danse du ventre*. Referred to more correctly as "oriental dance" from the Arabic *ar-raqs ash-sharqi*, it is traditionally performed by a woman alone and is characterized by curvaceous movements of the hips, torso, and hands which are held at shoulder level or higher. It is an improvisatory dance which, depending on the dancer, can be delicate and subtle, bouncy and rambunctious, or erotic, voluptuous, and licentious.⁷

In its most romantic and fantastic characterization, public Oriental-style dancing, or belly dancing, evoked images of dangerous unmarried women, of the romanticized Middle Eastern *harem*, and consequently, by association, of prostitution. The exotic, erotic, and licentious nature of belly dancing was originally promoted by European-influenced Orientalists, as is reflected in this account of the United States premier performance of the so-called *danse du ventre* which occurred at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, in Chicago, Illinois.

The young woman...is about to render the celebrated *danse du ventre* and it will be seen that practice in the movement of her body rather than her feet has greatly developed her abdominal region. We are to understand that this development has increased the beauty in the Oriental imagination, as it has certainly lessened it according to Western canons of taste. No ordinary Western woman looked upon these performances with anything but horror and...it was a matter of serious debate. . . whether the customs of Cairo should be faithfully reproduced... (Racy 1983, 176.)

During the nightclub era, Orientalist conceptions of the dance, not unlike the description of the Chicago Exposition, were used to entice audiences and prospective dancers. On the back cover of "Port Said," the immensely popular inaugural record album of nightclub music featuring the Egyptian immigrant performer Muhammad al-Bakkar, the record notes read:

...Egyptian music is always dance music, Some of it harks back to the ancient slave market, when maidens performed sensuous and provocative dances to the accompaniment of native bands of musicians. It is untamed and raw, but orthodox. In [Port Said] there are dancing girls who will perform their ancient ritual for a few modest coins and for a little more will take you into their tent or hut for more enjoyable entertainment. ("Port Said," 1957.)

These so-called dancing maidens, using their beauty and their style, brought the Oriental world to the United States. Ibrahim Farrah explained that there was a mystique and an aura about the women who performed in this "funky artistic atmosphere."

Now these girls were also accepted by the American populace because a lot of them (Americans) liked that illusion or that fantasy that they're looking at someone who just got off the boat. You know, this dark haired girl with the crooked nose and (who's) got a little bit more weight on her than is commonly seen and (who does) this voluptuous dance. (Farrah personal communication, August 1, 1987)

American women took these images home with them. In fact the great majority of professional dancers were American women who took Oriental stage names such as "Jamila," "Sareena," or "Najla." Belly dancing for amateurs was taught in dance studios, private homes and YMCAs. One belly dance album advertises: "Housewives Secretaries, Professional Dancers, Instructors—Belly dance your way to health!"¹⁸ Belly dancing was promoted on professional and amateur levels. It appealed to women of all shapes, sizes, and races. Although professional dancing by Arab-American women met with public disapproval, this dance genre was perceived by American women in a positive light as an art, a

form of physical conditioning, and as an ultra-feminine way to move.

Musical Strategies for the Nightclub

The ideas and images of Orientalism served to promote and enhance the nightclub scene. Sinuous Middle Eastern sounds accompanied by sensuous visual images provided by the belly dancer, now an indispensable component of music performances, was placed in opposition to the old-fashioned indigenous musical traditions established by the original Arab Americans. Complete with images of camels, harems, hashish, and sexy women, Orientalism became a sort of ideological blueprint for a polyethnic, Middle Eastern music.

Musicians of varying Middle Eastern heritage were creative in combining their indigenous techniques and styles: Turkish *qanun* players, Arab violinists, Greek *bouzoukee* players, and Armenian *'udists* shared the stage.⁹ Some American-born musicians began their professional careers in this eclectic musical idiom that combined Arab, Greek, Turkish, and Armenian styles and aesthetics. Although they may have been brought up with what they refer to as "authentic Arabic music," they were very careful to present only a selection of the indigenous characteristics of musical sound for their uninitiated audiences.

Eddie "the sheik" Kochak and Freddy Elias were among many nightclub musicians of Arab heritage who were especially sensitive to the limited aural capabilities of the American listener. Elias, born into a New England Lebanese community, began his "ethnic" music career with Greek musicians, expanding later into Arab and other Middle Eastern musical repertoires. Owing in part to his conservatory training, Elias was a capable arranger who bridged the gap between American audiences and Arab traditions. Describing the music he prepared for an extended 21-month engagement in a Las Vegas nightclub, Elias explained that he arranged the music with simple harmonies and "the necessary guitar chords, so it wouldn't be too indigestive for Western audiences" (Elias: personal communication, July 2, 1987). Eddie the sheik" Kochak, American-born of Syrian heritage, and his partner, Iraqi-American composer, performer and music professor Hakki Obadia, describe their music as "Amer-

aba: music with that Oriental flavor, geared to the American ear" Kochak 1986).

The Music of the Nightclub

For the true connoisseurs of Arab music, those who performed and enjoyed music at community *haflat*, the music of the nightclub violated every boundary of authenticity. The nightclub sound was a musical hybrid generated by the creative invention and innovation of second-generation and post-World War II immigrants who were inspired by modernization and Orientalism. Reflecting the influence of American popular music and the modern trends of Cairo, Egypt, musical innovators Muhammad al-Bakkar, Eddie "the sheik" Kochak, and Freddy Elias incorporated Western instruments and modern emergent styles into their performances during which a kind of musical caricature of the Orient was created.

The Middle Eastern rhythms of nightclub music were perhaps its most important attribute. In many recordings the rhythm sections are expanded and rhythmic elements exaggerated. Usually two, three, or more percussion instruments are heard on recordings of the nightclub era. The *darabukkah* or *dumbek* might be assisted by a larger bass drum and finger cymbals, or *zils*, the belly dancer's idiophone. Performances in free rhythm became, for the most part *passé* and nonmetric improvisations were usually done as *taqāsim 'ala al-wahdah*, improvisation over a rhythmic/melodic *çiftetelli* pattern (see Figure 1).

Middle Eastern rhythms provided some of the most pleasant and intriguing aspects of nightclub music, with American and South American rhythms and drumming styles further contributing to the driving nightclub beat. American trap drums, complete with crashing cymbals, tight high-hat accents, and fast snare-drum patterns, are heard in many of the recordings. Latin rhythms, the syncopation of jazz music, the dotted rhythms of early rock and roll, and the straight-ahead march style of military music enriched the texture of nightclub rhythm. Although the particularly eclectic ventures in rhythmic combinations—heard especially when these drummers took solos—veered away from the traditional sounds of Arab drumming, they represent some of the creative risks taken by the new generation of nightclub artists.

1 2

i v i I V7 I
 tonic dom. tonic tonic dom. tonic
 minor minor major 7th major

3 4

flat vii i flat vii I flat vii I iv i
 dom. tonic flat vii I flat vii I sub-
 substitution minor dom.

Figure 1: Four variations on the eight-beat rhythmic/melodic ostinato *çiftetelli* pattern.

The most obvious adaptation of American music to indigenous repertoires was the domination of Western instruments in nightclub ensembles. Electric guitars, bass guitars, and organs became almost a prerequisite for music groups. Sinuous Oriental melodies were played by oboes, saxophones, and clarinets and flutes. Violins remained unchallenged but were electrified, and the *'ud* and *qanun* were used more selectively. The incorporation of new techniques accompanied the use of new instruments. For example, the harmonization of a traditionally monophonic idiom became immediately possible when there was an electric guitar and an organ or synthesizer in the band. The harmonization was generally simple, using tonic, subdominant and dominant chords. The idiom of the American bass guitar also found its way into the nightclub style. While at times the bass followed the principle melody line, often a complimentary bass line was played in the style of American popular music. This style of bass playing implied a harmonic progression even if there were no instruments playing chords (see Figure 2).

The bulk of nightclub repertoire is drawn from traditional and popular music of the Middle East. Like the musical suite (*waslah*), characteristic of the authentic musical repertoires of the Ottoman and Arab world and performed during community events in the United States, a variety of musical numbers are presented as a medley at nightclub performances.¹⁰ Most of the songs are metric and strophic, and distinct pieces in contrasting tempos are often linked with instrumental improvisation or *taqāsim*.

In traditional contexts for Arab music, nonmetric improvisations, either instrumental or vocal, are some of the most highly charged aesthetic moments of a performance. Solo, nonmetric improvisation, or *taqsim*, is both a test of technical and stylistic ability, as well as a medium for modal exposition and manipulation. Unlike the style of *taqāsim* in free rhythm performed by the "old timers," nightclub musicians' improvisations are usually more concise and almost always set to the recurring *çiftetelli* pattern. In the nightclub, this type of improvisation: *taqasim 'ala al-wahdah* (improvisation to the beat) or *çiftetelli*, (improvisation on a *çiftetelli* pattern) accompanies the "floor work" or the "veil work" of the belly dancer, the part of the show where the dancers



$\frac{1}{2}$ indicates 1/2 flat; the \flat is usually full flat (b) in surrounding notes

zils (finger cymbals)

Percussion
Lutu.
dumbek

Ensemble,
qanun, ud,
violin, flute

Sax guitar

Figure 2: Traditional Syrian song, "Qaduka al-mayyas" in *Maqam Hijaz*. The bass line implies an underlying harmonic progression. Transcription from the recording "Strictly Belly Dancing, Volume I" by Eddie "the sheik" Kochak and Hakki Obadia, Ameraba AM 2498.

movements are perhaps the most curvaceous, graceful, sensual, and provocative.

With the addition to the nightclub ensemble of electric guitars, organs, and synthesizers, the melodic component of the *çiftetelli* pattern was often harmonized, sometimes imparting a false sense of harmonic progression to an essentially monophonic idiom. Figure 3 is a transcription from a recording by the Freddy Elias Ensemble of an improvisation played on the 'ud in free meter over the *çiftetelli* pattern played by the drum (called *dumbek*) and harmonized by the electric organ. For each repetition of the eight-beat *çiftetelli* pattern, the organ moves regularly between tonic and dominant harmonies. When the 'ud emphasizes the fifth-scale degree of the mode *Maqam Kurd* (the note A, see system 5 of Figure 3), the organ also shifts the chord pattern to the fifth-scale degree, thus implying a dominant harmony that subsequently resolves to the tonic. This brief excerpt clearly exemplifies the adaptation of Western performance techniques, namely the tertian, chordal harmonies supplied by guitar and keyboard players. Furthermore, the shift between tonic and dominant harmonies, both within the eight-beat pattern, and in tandem with various notes emphasized by the soloist, indicates the selective use of Western functional harmony on the part of nightclub musicians.

Although musicians were incorporating Western instruments into the nightclub ensemble, they exploited the timbral qualities of these instruments to present "music with that Oriental flavor." The sound of the oboe, for example, was thin, reedy, and reminiscent of, but more refined than, the Arab folk reed instruments, the *mijwiz* and the *mizmar*. The oboe could perform lyrical melodies that were evocative of the mystical harem, snake charmers and the like. In contrast, the sax, with a hard-driving bluesy, wailing quality, was used to evoke the boisterous atmosphere of the *dabkah* folk dance, as may be heard in the tune "Village Feast" on Eddie Kochak's album "Ya Habibi" (Decca: DL 74501). The silver transverse flute sometimes took the place of the Arab reed flute, the *nay*. With the exception of a few recordings by Eddie Kochak (see Figure 7), brass instruments were never used. Although a Western instrument, the clarinet had long been an important ingredient of Armenian and Turkish music,

The image displays a musical score for improvisation in free meter. It consists of five systems of staves, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked with a tempo of $J = 104$ and includes the lyrics: "cristalline", "vapore", "d'acqua", "through with", "repose", "d'acqua", "d'acqua", "l'acqua". The piano accompaniment features a repeated rhythmic and harmonized melodic pattern, with measures numbered (1) through (5). The score is written in a style that suggests a contemporary or experimental setting, with various note values and rests used to create a complex, layered texture. The piano part includes chords and single notes that support the vocal line's improvisation.

Figure 3: Improvisation in free meter over a repeated rhythmic and harmonized melodic pattern from an *'ud taqasim* (solo) by Richard Bayrouy, recorded on "Artistic Moods for Dance: Fred Elias Ensemble with John Tatassopoulos" (Instrasonic IS 2002)

and its incorporation into eclectic polyethnic nightclub ensembles was a natural transition.

Nightclub musicians used Western instruments in new ways to play a music that was fresh and exciting to polyethnic audiences of American urban areas. Coupled with the wish of musicians to be modern and their natural inclination as Americans to learn to play American instruments such as the guitar or electric organ, Western instruments fulfilled at least two musical functions. First, Western instruments in an ensemble or on a recording provided musical qualities, especially in areas of harmony and intonation, that were familiar to general American audiences and American-born Middle Easterners. Second, while 'ud, violin, and percussion instruments and players were plentiful in the United States, the availability of *nay*, *mijwiz*, *mizmar*, and *qanun* was limited, as was the availability of competent musicians to play them. Whereas the "old timers" of the early community *haflat* simply did without a *nay* or *qanun* player, younger musicians chose to expand and adapt the ensemble to play their version of Middle Eastern music.

Belly Dance Records: The Promotion of Orientalism Through Music Media

Nightclub musicians were part of a complex which included not only their style of music but also the contexts in which they performed, their audiences, the recordings they produced, and the dancers and club owners who became their most important patrons. To complement their live performances, the sounds and symbols of their version of Orientalism were also transmitted over the airwaves of polyethnic America through the medium of belly dance records. In reciprocal fashion, these records were the perfect vehicle for carrying visual images, intriguing descriptions, and the unfamiliar caricatures of musicians and dancers who comprised the cast of this eclectic and exotic subculture.

The music of the nightclub received the enthusiastic support of a large and diversified audience, both in the context of live performance and through record sales, which became an important financial and artistic incentive for musicians and dancers. Visual symbols of Orientalism were a prerequisite for Middle Eastern music packaging. Scantly clad, opaquely veiled dancers, musicians wearing the Turkish *fez*, and pyramids, camels and

other emblems of Orientalism necessarily appeared on record jackets (see Figures 4, 5, and 6). To further enhance and exoticize the musical contents of these recordings, concise versions of or allusions to Oriental history and culture appeared on the backs of the covers. In order to introduce a naive audience to the exciting Middle East, one record jacket from 1957 offers the following description.

Here exotic and mysterious men of every sort intermingle. Here peddlers, dancers, wandering musicians, beggars, soldiers of fortune, merchants, thieves, prostitutes, bakers, candlestick makers and drug addicts rub elbows. Here, for western consumption, is embodied all the strange and titillating allure of the exotic Middle East ("Port Said" 1957.)

Aside from salutations by lead artists, there is often little information about the other musicians or the recorded music. Titles, if given at all, are often anglicized and romanticized as in "Ripples of the Nile," or "Mecca Interlude."¹¹ Musical instruments are mentioned peripherally and are often described as ancient or primitive. Although vocal music was important to the early nightclub scene, instrumental versions of songs, with new English titles, predominated during its maturity. By the 1970s the inevitable loss of indigenous languages, whether Arabic, Turkish, or Armenian, and the predominance of second- and third-generation offspring of immigrant families accounted for the decline of the vocal music that was so prevalent at community events of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s.¹² Figure 7, below, is the text of a mixed-language song recorded by Eddie Kochak. The Orientalist spirit is invoked by the English lyrics, which speak of the ancient backward "land of the Pharos," set to the familiar Russian tune "Song of the Volga Boatmen." A big band-style arrangement—featuring modal improvisations and the Arab *darbukkah*—is laced with just enough musical Orientalism to make it curiously exotic for mainstream audiences.

These Oriental images couldn't have been farther away from the experience of first-generation immigrants or their American-born children. As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of Arab immigrants to the United States were Christians from the Levant.



Figure 4: Freddy Elias and his ensemble from a photograph of the back cover of his album, "Artistic Moods for Dance," (circa late-1960s, early-1970s). From left to right: Richard Beyrouty (*'ud*); George Kokoras (accordion, organ); Nick Kokoras (guitar, bass); Arthur Chingris (*dumbek* and percussion). The album also features Greek-American singer and *bouzoukee* player, John Tatassopolous.

—HAKKI OBDIA—
STRICTLY BELLY DANCING
THE 5th VOLUME



Figure 5: The album cover from “Strictly Belly Dancing, The Fifth Volume” by Eddie “the sheik” Kochak with Hakki Obadia. Note the Orientalist background and the *Ameraba* record label.



Figure 6: The album cover of the popular inaugural recording by Muhammad Bakkar and his Oriental Ensemble “Port Said.”

Thus Mecca, the holy pilgrimage site of Muslims, located in Saudi Arabia, and the Nile River in Egypt were merely an abstract and imagined part of a collection of general ideas about Arab culture.

Conclusion

During the 1960s America was at the threshold of an era of ethnic reassertion and diversification. The Civil Rights movement powerfully challenged the ideology of homogeneity characteristic of the so-called "melting pot." The struggle for African-American civil rights legitimized also the civil rights and the unique identities of other ethnic communities in the United States. Instead of blending in with the American majority—however it was defined—immigrants were encouraged to be proud of their heritage and to preserve and share their indigenous customs. Ethnic symbols and practices, such as food, music, and dance, became popular commodities appealing to a new adventurous and cosmopolitan American public.

It is interesting and perhaps ironic that the public proclamation of Arab identity as it was encoded in symbols of music and dance was not all a portrayal of the indigenous or community life of well-established Arab-American groups. In their effort to explain the East to the West,¹³ the musicians, dancers, and owners of the nightclub adapted and capitalized upon a set of symbols they came to know in the Western world. As they presented a caricature of themselves that was entertaining and even familiar to American audiences, they also promoted and magnified the most salient and discriminatory features of Orientalism. First, consistent with the thought that the "Oriental races," be they Chinese, Turkish, or Moroccan, were indistinguishable from one another, the nightclub era encouraged the blurring of ethnic boundaries. The haphazard fusion of Turkish, Greek, Armenian and Arab musical styles, languages, and cultural customs was characteristic of the nightclub. Second, although nightclub music was a completely new sound, and nightclub musicians were a group of energetic and daring innovators, their music and instruments were often described as primitive and ancestral, harking back to the ancient slave market, untamed, and raw, but orthodox" ("Port Said" 1957). With such descriptions of antiquity, musicians affirmed that theirs was a music from the cradle of

Vocal improvisation free rhythm: "Ya layli ya layli ya ayn"

4 measures of the rhythmic pattern *maqsum*

Ali Baba had a wife ready willing and able
till one day he heard her snore, now she's in the stable

Chorus

A thousand years ago,
A thousand years ago,
Ah Ah Ah Ah a thousand years ago.

Instrumental Interlude (oboe) and trumpet tag

Omar was a happy sheik, till he met Thelony
She took him for all he had, Thelony was Full a' baloney

Chorus

A thousand years ago, etc.

Instrumental interlude (flute) trumpet tag

Way back in Egyptian land they had no television
All they had were mummies, that stood in one position

Chorus

A thousand years ago, etc.

Instrumental Interlude (trumpet with mute) and trumpet tag

Sammiyah the dancing girl was called a captive lady Every
time she did her dance, she'd shake the Turkish Navy

Chorus two times - with Kochak imDrovisin2 on the words
"Ya leili, Ya. 'ayn." etc. in the background

Figure 7: "A Thousand Years Ago by Eddie Kochak Nilephon EK 102).

civilization.¹⁴ Finally, the Western European puritanical characterizations of Oriental culture were reproduced with enthusiasm and naiveté for public consumption. The allure, the titillating exoticism, and the carnal pleasures that accompanied a distant imagination of the Middle East were a brilliant advertising strategy for the music, the dance, and the environment of the nightclub.

The east-coast nightclub complex of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s was an outgrowth of the community music events of Arab Americans. As a commercial venture, those involved in the nightclub assumed the responsibility of presenting a captivating portrait of the self to the other. In contrast, the community events such as *haflat*, weddings, and picnics which continued during this period were lacking in Orientalist decor, rhetoric, and ambiance. In the nightclub, however, encouraged by the precedents set in such media as Orientalist literature and Hollywood films, American-born musicians of Middle Eastern heritage and post-World War II immigrants adapted the constructed fiction and fantasy of their homeland for their own musical purposes. Stereotypes of the so-called Oriental world served, in this case, to break down some of the barriers between immigrant groups and between these groups and mainstream America. Today, individuals who choose to affiliate themselves with the Middle East are acutely aware of the prejudice, segregation, and misrepresentation fostered by the once-popular Orientalist images and labels that were originally created among Europeans.

The 1960s witnessed the relaxation of immigration quotas and the subsequent and continuing immigration of thousands of families from the Arab world. In cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit the nightclubs are patronized almost exclusively by Arab Americans who come to dance and to hear Arab (not mixed) ensembles and the vocal music of Arab-born singers. In the strictly Arab-American context of the contemporary nightclub or community event, musical performance invokes a different yet equally romantic set of concepts based on rural images and a nostalgic longing for the homeland.¹⁵ A few bastions of Orientalism remain in certain nightclubs of, for example, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. which still cater primarily to tourists and mixed urban audiences. These nightclubs continue to explain culture through the sale of "exotic" music, dance, food,

and decor. The pioneers of these nightclubs created, through their musical style, not only a presentation of the self for the other; they also discovered a medium of expression that assisted in the negotiation of their own ethnicity and nationality. In this way they “explained” the East—both to the West and to themselves.

EPILOGUE

“Middle Eastern Music and Dance since the Nightclub Era”

“An Evening in the Orient’: The Middle Eastern Nightclub in America” describes a bygone era in the history of American music and dance. The article, originally published in 1992 in the journal *Asian Music* (23/2, 63-88), is based on both archival and ethnographic research conducted in the late 1980s and 1990s and was just part of a larger investigation of the musical lives of Arab Americans (See Rasmussen 1989, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002). Many of the musicians, dancers, patrons, and community members that I interviewed at that time are either quite elderly or have passed away. The American Middle Eastern music and dance scene is still, in some senses, rooted in “the Nightclub Era” but it has experienced significant change, enough so that this article merits an epilogue. While not meant to be a comprehensive overview of contemporary Middle Eastern music and musicians in America, I hope to at least outline some of the reasons that environmental and aesthetic forces have worked to significantly alter Middle Eastern-American and particularly Arab-American music culture as it relates to dance.

The Middle Eastern nightclub scene that began in the 1950s and experienced its heyday during the 1960s and 1970s waned considerably during the 1980s and 1990s. While live performances of Arab and Middle Eastern Music (with or without dance) certainly occurs in restaurants, cafés and clubs, these kind of venues cannot be said to constitute the major context for Middle Eastern music and dance at the dawn of the 21st century.

Several memories from veteran dancers, documented in a special 30th anniversary issue of *Habibi: A Journal of Middle Eastern Dance and Arts*, tell part of the story. For example, Dahlena, a veteran dancer from the Chicago area recalls:

In the late 1950s and early 1960s dancers worked in U.S. nightclubs six and seven nights a week. . . In the mid 1960s and 1970s, nightclubs featured star

singers and fewer dancers. . . (Today) Nightclubs are only open on the weekends and usually feature one or two singers and a dancer. The best venues for dancers have changed to corporate or private parties, school presentations and private concerts. (Dahlana in *Habibi* 2004, 17).

Today, when a dancer performs in the context of the nightclub or restaurant or at a private party, she is just as likely to be accompanied by recorded music as she is by live musicians.

Aisha Ali of Los Angeles, California remembers:

During the 60s most ethnic supper clubs had live music. With call (and) response between musicians and dancers, one's performance could vary between exhilarating or disastrous, and without it, the dance could be monotonous; but it was always personal . . . Now there are fewer nightclubs, and many professional dancers perform at restaurants without stages or lighting, and without live music. (Ali in *Habibi* 2004, 16).

Musicians experienced and participated in the decline of "the nightclub era" both voluntarily and involuntarily. While partaking of "the Orient" was "all the rage" among cosmopolitan America in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, numerous political and social processes have eroded this American love affair. The first Arab-Israeli war of 1948 was followed, much later, by the 6-day Arab Israeli of 1967. Civil war in Lebanon that began in 1975 and continuing conflict in Beirut and South Lebanon has placed that destination on the US state department's list of places "not to visit" year after year. The *Intifada*, a grass-roots uprising of the Palestinian people living in Israel began in 1988 and re-emerged with renewed energy in the summer of 2000 as negotiations for peaceful co-existence between the Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, and Palestinian peoples once again came to a halt. The first Persian Gulf war of 1991 was resurrected with a new Persian Gulf war that began in the spring of 2003 and is ongoing at this writing. Events like these, as well as, of course, the nightmare of September 11th, 2001, and the media machine that both informs and dis-informs the American "mainstream" have

helped to weave a shroud of insecurity and anxiety over the insatiable American curiosity about the Middle East.

A number of musicians have commented to me about the ways in which political events “kill” business. For example during the Iraq war of 1991, action in the clubs of Detroit and Cleveland, New York, and L.A. shifted into low gear, in part because of the apprehension of American audiences toward Arabs and their culture, but also because the Arab American community was in a state of social mourning. Who wants to go out and celebrate when your relatives are under fire? Who wants to sponsor a party (*haflah*) or a festival (*mahrajan*) if the community is grieving over their loved ones in the homeland—or waiting by the telephone and television for the next installment of bad news?

One could argue that these devastating world events have effected a more negative brand of Orientalism in mainstream America but they have also contributed to an invaluable enrichment and renewal of Middle Eastern music and culture in the United States. This is because the same social and political crises of the last 50 years have resulted in significant new waves of immigration from the Middle East, particularly the Arab world, to North America; these new populations have had a phenomenal effect on music, dance, community and American culture. And, while turmoil in the homeland was forcing people to emigrate, U.S. immigration quotas, originally enacted in 1923, were finally lifted in 1965, making it easier than ever for students, business people, refugees, and family members to enter the United States. Not only is the post-1965 immigrant population larger, it is more diverse!

The Arab American population which, for the first half of the 20th century was made up of primarily Christians from greater Syria and their American-born offspring, is now augmented by significant groups of Palestinians, Lebanese, Iraqis, and Yemenis, and people from the Persian Gulf. In comparison to the first-wave immigrants these communities include a greater proportion of Muslims, villagers and unskilled laborers, as well as “white collar” students, artists, and professionals who are part of the phenomenon sometimes referred to as the “brain drain.”

Looking beyond events in the Arab World, the Iranian revolution of 1979 was a significant watershed for both political and

cultural international relations and effected a “big bang” of Iranian music, dance, film and mass media in the U.S. (see Rasmussen 2001). Furthermore, Arab world and Iranian emigration included numerous (Persian speaking and Arabic speaking) Armenians who augmented the community of mainly Turkish Armenians that had been in the United States since the first decades of the 20th century.

The arrival of new families from the “homeland” had a considerable impact on American musicians of Middle Eastern heritage. First, new musicians came into the country playing and singing different repertoires—both traditional music as well as the latest, pop-music hits. Second, both musicians and new immigrant audiences had a living connection to the languages of the homeland, languages that in the American context were being phased out by second and third generation musicians and audiences.

Third, musical ensembles became less eclectic and more homogenous. Arab musicians played together rather than with Turkish, Armenian, and Greek Americans as had been the case with the mixed-heritage ensembles common in the heyday of Eddie Kochak, Fred Elias, or George Abdo (Abdo 2002). Even within the Arab American community, distinctions were made between Lebanese, Yemeni, Egyptian, and Iraqi music and there were musicians and audiences for each of these communities and their regionally specific music (Rasmussen 1997). Fourth, this larger community with an immediate connection to homeland and folkways, required musicians to play for more life cycle and ritual events, like weddings and family celebrations. In some senses the context, at least for Arab American music, shifted back to focus on the community as it had in 1930s through the 1960s, when the in-group *haflah* and the *mahrajan* were the primary outlet for music making and dance. In the context of a family or community celebration, dance is generally social and participatory and in many cases a professional belly dancer is neither required nor appropriate.

Complementing music for social dance and family fun was the introduction (or, in some sense, the return) to more classical and traditional musical repertoires and performance practice.

The two uncontested proponents of traditional Arab music in the United States are Dr. Ali Jihad Racy, a Lebanese-born com-

poser, performer and professor of ethnomusicology at the University of California at Los Angeles and Simon Shaheen a Palestinian-born composer and performer who is based in New York City. Both arrived as professional musicians and students and became well-known performers and gifted teachers who have inspired countless disciples from both within the Middle Eastern American community and the American mainstream. For musicians like these, it is the art museum, the civic auditorium, or university concert hall, rather than the nightclub, that became venues for their concerts and it is in this context that they have introduced audiences to a vast repertoire of Turko-Arab classical instrumental music dating to the Ottoman age, as well as to the serious vocal repertoires of times and present.¹⁶

It is important to note that professional musicians, whether originally from the Arab world, Turkey, or Iran, find their most loyal and enthusiastic audiences not just from within their own "ethnic" communities but from within the American public at large. A new locus and source of patronage for Middle Eastern music activity is the college or university campus where musicians' workshops and concerts are sponsored and where academic and performances courses are taught by specialists in Middle Eastern music, usually within academic programs in Ethnomusicology, the study of music of the World's peoples (Rasmussen 2001, Solis 2004). These courses, ensembles, and programs not only introduce the music (and dance) to mainstream America, they also are a magnet for so-called "heritage learners" (people of Middle Eastern origin who may know little of their own history and culture), as well as for local community members of Middle Eastern origin who patronize concerts, lectures, and festivals. While there is a place for Oriental dance in the concerts held at universities, art museums, or civic arts centers it is certainly restricted in comparison to the description of the world of 8th Avenue, New York in the 1960s!

So, to summarize the socio-political and cultural phenomena that are at work in this American music and dance complex I recognize three related processes: world events that caused unprecedented numbers of new immigrants from the Arab world and Middle Eastern countries; diverse communities of Arab (Lebanese, Iraqi, Yemeni etc.), Turkish, Iranian, Armenian, who require their own music in their own language and dialect, not

the eclectic sound of a band made up of American-born musicians of Greek, Turkish-Armenian, Jewish, and Syrian musicians that used to make up the bands of yesteryear (to wit, Eddie Kochak and the Ameraba sound, or George Abdo and the Flames of Araby); a conscientious push by musicians and patrons for traditional forms of “art” music and away from party and pop music for entertainment .

Dance and Music since the Nightclub Era

In spite of changes in the Middle Eastern-American soundscape and dancescape, musicians and dancers continue to collaborate together and the publication of this volume is testimony that Oriental dance is alive and well in the 21st century. The community involved in belly dancing, or *raqs sharqi*, or oriental dance has been active, through performances, workshops, festivals, conferences and publications, such as the magazine *Habibi*, which began publication in 1974 and Bobby Farrah’s magazine, *Arabesque*, which was published from 1975-1992. Many of these events and activities incorporate the work of musicians. Dancers such as Aisha Ali have conducted ethnographic fieldwork, contributing to research about various forms of dance from throughout the Arab world and Middle East. Their scholarship, whether disseminated through academic papers, theses, and books, in dance magazines, in presentations, or in their choreographies is a welcome contribution for musicians as well as dancers.

Ethnographic research among “real dancers” *in situ* contributes positively to a quest for “authenticity” informing the American dancer and audience on such matters as choreography, costume, and contextualization. Yet, no matter how “authentic” a performance is, I suggest that Middle Eastern dance, once taken out of a community celebration, is always somewhat of a reconstruction and that this too, may have contributed to the demise of the popularity of Oriental cabaret (see Rasmussen 1997).¹⁷ ⁱ

Written accounts by and about American dancers reveal that “elevating” the dance to an art form, like ballet or modern dance, has been a goal for the American dancer/artiste. Egyptian dancer/ingénues that made the silver screen sparkle in the black and white films of the 50s, for example Tahia Carioca or Nadia Gamal, are often cited as heroines to be emulated. While these

Egyptian professionals may seem archetypal to the American dance community, it is crucial to understand that professionalism in a Middle Eastern or Arab context, no matter how glamorous, will always be viewed with skepticism. The professional entertainer, particularly the women whose "public body" may be enjoyed by the male masses, is paid for their service and this exchange, even in the cultural history of the Western world, is stained with dishonor.

For women, modesty, particularly in the public sphere, is what brings honor to self and family, although, even a preliminary investigation into these concepts (modesty or honor) and their activation through action and real-life situation brings out complexities beyond the scope of this essay (see for example Abu Lughod et. al. 1998). Writing on "Contemporary Issues of Gender and Music" Miriam Roving Olsen explains: In public, women's expression is full off modesty and reserve when they are singing or dancing: their eyes are lowered, their body movements are discreet, and their words are difficult to follow and often barely audible. (2002, 302).¹⁸

The demeanor of modesty, Rosving Olsen further elucidates, may be contrasted to the behavior of women, who when among themselves, may be loud and boisterous, exchanging off-color jokes and dance (ibid).

In spite of the stigma, stereotypes, and suspicion that may surround American women, European-American cultural history tells those of us who are performers, whether musicians, dancers, mural painters or whatever, to see our work as "art;" however, in Arab or Middle Eastern culture and history, such artistic work may be seen, to cite the title of Karen van Nieuwkerk's excellent chronicle of Egyptian professional dancers and singers, as *A Trade Like Any Other* (1995).¹⁹

Nieuwkerk, in a more recent article on the professional performers of Muhammad 'Ali Street in Cairo, Egypt, the traditional neighborhood of entertainer guilds since the late 19th century, delineates three main contexts for the Entertainment "trade." She characterizes the nightclub in Cairo as a place "mainly for tourists."

First is the circuit of weddings and saint's day celebrations, the traditional context for the performers of Muhammad 'Ali Street. Second is the nightclub circuit, which exists mainly for

Arab and European tourists. Third is the performing arts circuit, which centers on the concert halls, theaters, radio and television. (Nieuwkerk 2002, 616)

So, here, I underscore three notions that may challenge the assumptions (or desires) of *the* American belly dancer (as if such a profile could be distilled from the many kinds of people involved in the dance): 1) that dance is art; 2) that dance on stage and in the context of the nightclub is at the heart of Middle Eastern authenticity; and 3) that dancing in public and for money is an appropriate, desirable activity for women. What Nieuwkerk and others seem to suggest, on the contrary, (and this has been reinforced by my own experience) is that in the “authentic setting:” 1) dance *is* work; 2) the nightclub *is* more for “visitors” than for “regular people; 3) and the public stage and the professional entertainer, especially women, *are* suspect.

Off stage, however, in both the “old world” and the “new,” and among amateurs and regular folk, dance thrives! In my experience at Arab weddings in Dearborn, Michigan, for example, I found dance to be almost an obligation for celebrants and guests (Rasmussen 1997).²⁰ At the beginning of a wedding, a couple is “danced” in to a public space with a quasi-choreographed, quasi-improvised *zaffah* procession (often involving a professional belly dancer). Toward the end of a wedding party following the formalities and the food it is common to find that just a few chairs are still occupied, and those, only by older people, hugely pregnant women, and little ones. The rest of the celebrants (sometimes numbering in the hundreds) are up on the dance floor, dancing either oriental style in groups and couples or doing line dances such as the *dabkah*. I interpret dance in this context as a social process whereby the newlyweds are honored through the physical display of dancing which can be accompanied by dramatic presentation of cash gifts.

Nevertheless, even in the context of a community wedding, even in the American Midwest, modesty may be operative for women when they dance in mixed company. When alone, however, in all women’s gatherings, or where only family members congregate, whether in formal celebration or casual community, women’s dance becomes a medium of personal expression and social interaction.

The act of women just “dancing for joy” came to life for me most vividly during the summer of 2000 in the city of Raffa on the border of the Egyptian desert in the Palestinian territory of the Gaza strip in Israel. I was in Israel and the Palestinian territories for a couple of weeks and decided to make a pilgrimage to visit my cousin’s mother-in-law, Khadijah Fayoumi. I had met the mother of my cousin’s husband, Nabil, on several occasions in the US when she arrived to help with the new babies in their family and for summer visits. In the bizarre context of suburban Chicago my cousin and I often danced to cassettes of Arabic music at the insistence of Khadijah, or as I call her, Um Nabil (mother of Nabil), a traditional, pre-literate, Palestinian, Muslim woman, who cheerfully admonished us for the obscene length of our cutoff shorts. Yet dancing in Raffa was a different experience altogether.

Although the distance was not particularly great, the journey from Bethlehem, a city in the West Bank of the Palestinian territories, to Raffa, the located at the far end of the Gaza Strip, was both long and intimidating. My companion, a female student from the College of William and Mary (which at that point in time had a summer teaching/internship program based in Bethlehem), and I were unsure of the route and the process at various Israeli checkpoints.

Finally, after meeting up with Nabil’s brother at the Eretz checkpoint and driving across the Gaza Strip, we arrived at Um Nabil’s humble abode. The extended family visited throughout the day but eventually the group consisted of an all-female collection of babies, young girls, teenagers, mother, aunts, and grandmothers. Um Nabil insisted early on in our visit that we get up and dance and she popped a cassette into a well-worn boom box. We danced for a while with Um Nabil, sat down again, ate, drank tea, looked at pictures and visited, as best we could, in Arabic. Each time a newcomer walked through the door, she was urged to dance and Um Nabil would get us all up and play the cassette again, and dance. The impromptu ritual seemed to be at once a celebrative recognition of our pilgrimage, our family connection, our status as honored guests, our beauty as women, and our, somewhat weird and wonderful sisterhood. Corny as it all sounds, this may hint at what so many American

dancers seek in their exploration of Oriental dance and the community of dancers with whom they interact.

Ironically, the functional, social, and socializing aspect of women's dance in a more natural setting, whether in Raffa, Palestine or Dearborn, Michigan rarely translates into the American context of the nightclub stage. I suspect that the disjuncture between Oriental dance as action and Oriental dance as public, professional, polished performance may have also contributed to the decline of "The Nightclub Era" as the time and place, *par excellence*, for Oriental dance.

As American audiences lost interest in the Orientalist fantasy of the Middle Eastern nightclub, Middle Eastern American communities found this venue somewhat contrived and inappropriate. Nightclub owners suffered. Musicians found new demands for more participatory styles and repertoires of music and dance within the community, and, at the same time, sought out cultural establishments, like the American theatres where there was a precedent for *listening* to music.

While it is possible to enjoy dance with "canned" (pre-recorded) music, it is impossible to enjoy music with "canned" dance. Given the opportunity, musicians relish the opportunity to perform with dancers because both Middle Eastern music and dance combine pre-composed music or choreographies with spontaneous and collective improvisation. Whatever changes may have taken place in the soundscape and dansescape of this American subculture there is no question that Middle Eastern music and dance, when experienced live, is as exciting to witness as it is to create.

Notes

¹ European ideas and attitudes have permeated almost every aspect of music in the Middle East from concert dress, to instrumentation, to intonation. In the name of progress and what is referred to in the Arabic language as *tajdid*, literally, "renovation," the cultural baggage of the imperial powers was liberally incorporated by leading artists and patrons into musical life. In addition to their adaptation of Western musical and cultural models, people of what is now called the "Arab world" also adopted certain aspects of the comprehensive, influential, and discriminatory framework of European Orientalism. See works by Racy

(1977) and Marcus (1989) for discussions of historical trends of musical modernization and westernization in the Arab world.

² Although there are still nightclubs today, the nightclub era to which I refer extends from the early 1950s through the 1960s and is concentrated largely on the east coast of the United States. Since the time of the nightclub era as I define it, a monumental second wave of Arab immigration (beginning in 1965) has effected yet another significant transformation in musical life not discussed in this article.

³ The "Arab world" is a sociopolitical term which came into usage within the past 30 years to indicate the areas where people are united by Arab culture and language—but not religion or ethnicity. Geographically the Arab world comprises countries spanning from Mauritania on the west coast of Africa, all of Northern Africa, Egypt, and the Sudan, the Levant (Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine [now Israel] as well as countries in the Persian Gulf. Terms such as the "Middle East" or "Near East" are geographic and military references. In this article I choose to use the term Middle East because of its widespread usage among immigrants.

⁴ The vast majority of Arab immigrants were Christians who established Maronite, Melkite and Syrian Orthodox church parishes in the communities they inhabited and developed. See Naff (1985) and Abraham and Abraham (1983) regarding Arab immigration.

⁵ See Rasmussen (1989, 1991) concerning contexts for musical performance among Arab Americans.

⁶ Like the titles of Hollywood movies "Ali Baba Goes to Town," "Thief of Baghdad," "Istanbul Express"—the names of nightclubs frequently reflect a sense of fantasy and Orientalism. Other popular Middle Eastern nightclubs in the United States have included, for example, "Shahrazade," "The Seventh Veil," and "The Fez" in Los Angeles, "Cleopatra" in Chicago, and "Darwish," "The Fez," and "The Seventh Veil," all in New York.

⁷ Another genre of dance popular among Arab Americans is the *dabkah*, a group line dance characterized by square shoulders, hands held tight with arms touching, and much percussive stamping, stepping, and vocal punctuation. There are several regional and national styles of *dabkah* dancing and even many different step patterns that can alternate. Most groups perform a very simple repetitive pattern of four to seven steps as established by the leader of the line.

⁸ The quote is on the album cover of "Mecca East: featuring Larry Mandirosian's Mecca East Quintet," Irana Productions Stereo CO 7802.

⁹ Traditional Arab instruments that were predominant among Arab Americans include: the 'ud, a pear-shaped, round-bellied, plucked lute, the *qanun*, a trapezoidal zither with strings in triple courses; the West-

ern violin which replaced the *kamanjah*, an upright bowed lute; the *riqq*, a heavy fish-skinned tambourine; and the clay *darabukkah* or Turkish metal *dumbek*, an hourglass, one-headed drum. Somewhat less popular, or less available in the United States, the *nay* or reed flute and the folk reed instrument, the *mijwiz*, are also important instruments in Arab musical ensembles. The 'ud, *qanun*, violin, and drum are played in most Middle Eastern cultures. The most noticeable non-Arab instruments included in nightclub ensembles were the Greek *bouzoukee* and the Western clarinet, played in the style of Greek, Armenian, or Turkish music.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of the *waslah*, see Racy (1983).

¹¹ "Ripples of the Nile" is from Eddie "the sheik" Kochak's album "Ya Habibi," Decca: DL 74501. "Mecca Interlude" is a composition for ensemble by Fred Elias from a recording in Elias' personal collection.

¹² During a recent visit with Freddy Elias, the American-born violinist told me of his recent efforts to learn the lyrics of Lebanese songs for audiences of newer immigrants from the Arab world. Although he is not fluent in Arabic, Elias sings from a notebook of Arabic song texts that he has transliterated from recordings. Elias, who was always careful to present a musical blend that would appeal to mixed audiences, expressed to me his surprise both about the resurgence of the Arabic language among Arab Americans and the popularity of his newly discovered singing talent.

¹³ See Shakir (1988) for an account of the efforts by Arab-American authors to "explain the East to the West." As Shakir notes, author Abraham Rihbany also presented an idealized view and capitalized especially on biblical stereotypes and pastoral images.

¹⁴ For European colonialists the interpretation of the Oriental world as a less-developed and transitional civilization filled a gap in cultural history (see Bohlman 1987:153). In parallel fashion, the study of "Oriental music" has been framed as a search for both the origin of music as well as the evolutionary path of musical expression. During the era of *Comparative Musikwissenschaft* (Comparative Musicology), the scholarly impetus was to compare foreign musics to the "highly developed" music of Europe. Much energy was devoted to discovering the origin of music, and Oriental music was considered to occupy a place somewhere in the unilinear path of musical evolution. Music scholars who have written in this vein include: Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music* (1893); Benjamin Oilman, "The Science of Exotic Music" (1909); Marius Schneider, "Primitive Music," in *Oxford History of Music* (1957); and Bruno Nettl, *Music in Primitive Culture* (1956).

¹⁵ Levantine folk genres such as the sung 'ataba and mijana and the *dabkah* line dance have become enormously popular among Arab

Americans, even those who are wealthy, of an elite class, and Americanized. These genres represent the rural homeland of, for example, Mount Lebanon, and not the fast-paced cosmopolitan cities of Cairo or Beirut.

¹⁶ The interest in and renewal of classical or traditional Turkish and Iranian music simultaneously took root and continues to flourish unabated to the present.

¹⁷ The presentation of carefully costumed and choreographed group dances based on regional folkloric practice is something that is also done to various degrees in Middle Eastern countries. The informed dance scholar might compare Egypt and Turkey for very different approaches to nationalizing and institutionalizing “native” dance. All of these factors can inform a discussion of the “authentic” presentation and staging of Middle Eastern Dance. Arzu Oztürkmen’s articles “I Dance Folklore” and “Dance and Identity in Turkey” serve as excellent introductions to the cultivation and disciplining of dance as a nationalizing project as well as the participation by boys and girls in folk dance clubs.

¹⁸ See also Sugarman or Cowan for similar descriptions of the expectations and actions of Mediterranean women.

¹⁹ See also Rasmussen 2000 for a discussion of the art/work dilemma among Arab American musicians).

²⁰ The largest community of ‘rabic speaking peoples outside the ‘rab World lives in Dearborn, Michigan, a city just next to Detroit. Dearborn is a geographic and historic microcosm of the ‘rab world that is both reflective of ‘rab cultural practices and at the same time completely unique. It includes sub-communities from all over the “rab world, families that immigrated at the turn of the 20th century and those who came last year, and people from the entire range of socio-economic class and education level.