

## ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: ARAB MUSICIANS IN WASHINGTON, D.C. AREA:  
ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

Christina Campo-Abdoun, Master of Arts, 2011

Thesis directed by: Professor J. Lawrence Witzleben

Musicians living in the Arab Diaspora around the Washington, D.C. metro area are a small group of multi-faceted individuals with significant contributions and intentions to propagate and disseminate their music. Various levels of identity are discussed and analyzed, including self-identity, group/ collective identity, and Arab ethnic identity. The performance and negotiation of Arab ethnic identity is apparent in selected repertoire, instrumentation, musical style, technique and expression, shared conversations about music, and worldview on Arabic music and its future. For some musicians, further evidence of self-construction of one's ethnic identity entails choice of name, costume, and venue. Research completed is based on fieldwork, observations, participant-observations, interviews, and communications by phone and email. This thesis introduces concepts of Arabic music, discusses recent literature, reveals findings from case studies on individual Arab musicians and venues, and analyzes Arab identity and ethnicity in relation to particular definitions of identity found in anthropological and ethnomusicological writings. Musical lyrics, translations, transcriptions, quotes, discussions, analyses, as well as charts and diagrams of self-identity analyses are provided as evidence of the performance and negotiation of Arab identity.

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ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

By

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Seifed-Din Abdoun, for his love and support, and to my children, Savana, Ramses, and Baby Abdoun.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lawrence Witzleben for his support and investment of time and effort. Thanks to Dr. Jonathan Dueck and Dr. Carolina Robertson for their encouragement. I also would thank the community of Arab musicians in the Washington, D.C. area for allowing me the opportunity to enter their world and learn about their music and much more.

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## **A. Introduction**

The topic of this thesis is ethnicity and the negotiation of Arab identity in Arabic music by musicians in the Arab diaspora living and performing regularly in and around the Washington, D.C. metro area. Throughout the process of researching Arab musicians and their performances, I observed my informants' multi-faceted identities and how they conveyed them through music. During interviews and observations, each musician expressed his own unique interweaving of personal, family, ethnic, national, political, artistic and other various identities. What is fascinating about each Arab musician is how he unfolds and displays layers of identity, negotiating and subtly expressing them according to the context of a situation. The context and performance of identity is variable according to the location and the company each musician keeps.

Through performance events . . . participants may express or learn a sense of self that is related to their ethnicity, their nationality, and their Arab-American community.<sup>1</sup>

## **B. Background of this Study**

This thesis will apply some explanations of a few theories of identity that I have found to make sense in analyzing Arab individual and collective identity and how musicians of the Arab diaspora in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area express qualities that make them uniquely Arab. Moreover, I will discuss the performance and negotiation of Arab identity, what makes Arab musicians' performances significant and how Arab musicians address Arab authenticity, tradition, adaptability, and the future of Arabic music.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen, "Individuality and Social Change in the Music of Arab Americans," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, LA, 1991), 401.

Because of the diverse population of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and the number of transient people moving in and out of the area often for job-related reasons, it is not surprising that there are not whole neighborhoods of Arabs living side-by-side. Researching the Arab diaspora in this area requires a bit of travel and frequenting places where Arabs will gather. Several known scholars have offered insights into what the Arab diaspora signifies in the U.S. and in general.

According to ethnomusicologist Anne Rasmussen, the Arab diaspora is:

A vast collection of twenty-two countries, where Arabic is the official spoken and written language, the Arab world is home to a surprising diversity of peoples, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Furthermore, the people of the Arab world have been "on the move" both historically and in the present time. So, the music and the culture of the Arab world spreads out in a diaspora: rather than being confined to a single geographic location, its people and their traditions are dispersed beyond the boundaries of the region.<sup>2</sup>

It seems suiting that Rasmussen mentions that the Arab world has been "on the move," as even in the U.S. there is a degree of movement for the purposes of improving education, home, and work life. For example, Arab musicians must be able to travel around to perform at various functions to appeal to their audiences.

Another view of the Arab diaspora is:

"... The Arab Diaspora ... encapsulates all Arabs living permanently in countries other than their country of origin."<sup>3</sup> Zahia Smail Salhi also refers to the Arab diaspora, as "a space where both home and host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture, which situates itself in a third space which

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<sup>2</sup> Anne K. Rasmussen, "The Arab World," in *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples*, 5th Edition, edited by Jeff Todd Titon, (Belmont, CA: Schirmer Cengage Learning, 2009), 473-532.

<sup>3</sup> Zahia Smail Salhi, "Introduction," in *Voices of an Anguished Scream*, ed. Zahia Smail Salhi and Ian Richard Netton, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

is that of the [Arab] Diaspora.”<sup>4</sup> This reference to convergence and adaptation of cultures in the diaspora opens questions such as: how does an Arab musician demonstrate ethnic, personal and group identity? How do Arab musicians determine authenticity in Arabic music even as they are adapting to the host culture? How does the Arab collective identity get reinforced through musical performance?

For purposes of understanding the make-up of the Arab population in the diaspora, some of demographic information on Arabs in the United States is provided below.

At least 3.5 million Americans are of Arab descent.<sup>5</sup> Arab Americans live in all 50 states, but two thirds are concentrated in 10 states; one third of the total live in California, New York, and Michigan. About 94% of Arab Americans live in metropolitan areas. Los Angeles, Detroit, New York/NJ, Chicago and Washington, D.C., are the top five metropolitan areas of Arab American concentration. Lebanese Americans constitute a greater part of the total number of Arab Americans residing in most states, although in New Jersey, Egyptian Americans are the largest Arab group.”<sup>6</sup>

Due to the fact that the Census does not include a separate category for Arabs (they are counted mistakenly as Caucasian), there is no exact number of Arabs in the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 3 – 4.

<sup>5</sup> The number of 3.5 million is estimated and provided by the Zogby international polling institute in opposition to the 2000 Census bureau estimation of 1.26 million, based on a variety of facts: “The Census Bureau identifies only a portion of the Arab population through a question on “ancestry” on the census long form, causing an undercount by a factor of about 3. Reasons for the undercount include the placement of and limits of the ancestry question (as distinct from race and ethnicity); the effect of the sample methodology on small, unevenly distributed ethnic groups; high levels of out-marriage among the third and fourth generations; distrust/misunderstanding of government surveys among more recent immigrants, resulting in non-response by some; and the exclusion of certain sub groups from Arabic speaking countries, such as the Somali and Sudanese, from the Arab category.” Last modified 5 January 2011, accessed on 20 February 2011, <[http://aai.3cdn.net/63c6ecf052bdccc48f\\_afm6ii3a7.pdf](http://aai.3cdn.net/63c6ecf052bdccc48f_afm6ii3a7.pdf)>

<sup>6</sup> Provided by the Arab American Institute, last modified 10 January 2011, accessed on 5 March 2011, <http://www.aaiusa.org/pages/demographics/>

U.S., let alone for specific regions such as the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.<sup>7</sup>  
The estimates are in the tens of thousands total.<sup>8</sup>

Through my interactions with various Arab musicians since 2003, I began interviews and fieldwork with specific Arab musicians in the D.C. area. All but one of the fifteen musicians interviewed were male. Five of them were Moroccan, three Lebanese, two Palestinian, two Jordanian, two Egyptian (one was the only female), and one Syrian-American.

Within this thesis, my intentions are to attempt to answer questions on how Arab identity is performed and negotiated. In the introductory chapter, I will give a background on Arabic music, including a brief review of the instrumentation, ensembles, repertoire, variety of styles and genres, elements of Arabic music, Arab music/ musician exemplars, and places of performance.

I will discuss recent research and literature on music of Arab diasporas and the negotiation and performance of Arab identity in the United States, including work by Anne K. Rasmussen,<sup>9</sup> Kay Kaufman Shelemay,<sup>10</sup> and Ted Swedenburg<sup>11</sup> among other scholars. In Chapter I., I will address two contrasting, descriptive case studies of Arabic music performance to illustrate intricate details such as interactions,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Leila Holsinger, *Residential Patterns of Arab Americans: Race, Ethnicity and Spatial Assimilation*, (El Paso, TX: LFB Scholarly Publishing, LLC, 2009), 117.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Rasmussen, "Individuality and Social Change in the Music of Arab Americans," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, LA, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Ted Swedenburg, "Arab 'World Music' in the US," *Middle East Report* 219, (Summer 2003), 34 – 40.

musical choices, discussion of performance, and transcription of Arabic music and rhythms. This will set the stage for Chapter II., which contains five portraits of uniquely different Arab musicians living in the Washington, D.C. area.<sup>12</sup> These portraits will discuss basic background information on each musician, their instrument(s), how they perform, and how they see themselves as Arabs and as musicians, and what their goals are in relation to music's purpose and meaning in their own lives and others'. The discussion will consider each musician's "portrait" in terms of gender, ethnicity, and national and regional identities, drawing connections to recent research and writings on how identity is performed. Chapter III outlines various definitions and dynamics of identity, including the social construction of personal and group identity. I will also give an analysis of the musicians' identities, with an investigation into their individual musical identities and collective Arab identities. I will refer to Table No. 3: The Rubric of Characteristics of Five Featured Arab Musicians as a springboard to apply pertinent theories of identity to the musicians' negotiation of personal and group identity. In Chapter IV, I will summarize meanings and values of music in order to explain why the musicians perform and the significance of Arabic music to the featured musicians. I will also provide an analysis of themes such as tradition, adaptation, and dissemination of music. Chapter V. will conclude the thesis by offering suggestions and direction for further research and posing additional questions about performance of identity in the Arab diaspora.

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<sup>12</sup> I chose five Arab musicians to feature from the fifteen as they represent a variety of ages, experience, and background, yet still carried unifying threads of performing and negotiating their Arab identity through music.

The research process encompasses a variety of methods. As a participant-observer, I performed with an Arabic music ensemble under the direction of an Arab master musician. Playing my flute (concert flute) alongside Arab *oud*-players in practice and jam sessions provided me with unique insight. In addition, I attended many Arabic music performances in various venues, including restaurants, nightclubs, concert halls, and private settings. I found the process of writing ethnographies on Arabic music performance experiences encouraged reflection upon the complexities of what was happening. It was important at times to photograph, videorecord, and take notes in order to illustrate detailed information on the multiple layers of interactions as well as to witness how Arab identity was being expressed. Many interviews and follow-up interviews were held in person, by phone, and by email. Additionally, small group conversations about Arabic music, what musicians listened to, and further musical communications were rich and vitally important to understanding Arab identity as performed through Arabic music.

This thesis serves as an investigation into how different Arab musicians perform their multiple identities through performance of music, conversation about music, and self-narratives. The music is specifically Arabic music, including Arabic classical and popular music, as well as particular folk musics of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Palestine, Egypt, and Morocco. My research also explores how musicians choose their music from set repertoires, and what perspectives they have on the future of Arabic music.

I have applied certain theories of identity to explain how Arab identity and ethnicity is expressed through Arabic music. Music has been described as

symbolizing social boundaries.<sup>13</sup> John Baily discusses, “The function of music ... is to give people a sense of identity, and so to promote the successful continuation of the social groups concerned.”<sup>14</sup> After providing case studies on particular performances charts on the roles of musicians, commentary on specific Arab musicians and ‘portraits’ of each, as well as, I hope to provide some insight into how this can be applied to the study of Arab musicians performing Arabic music in the D.C. area. Please refer to Chapter III. Identity and Ethnicity for definitions, applications, and further discussions of Arab identity.

Because of my travel experiences in Tunisia in 1999,<sup>15</sup> I was attracted to the creative soundscapes of Arab music. Upon returning from abroad, I began taking *raqs sharqi* classes<sup>16</sup> which have been widely available for more than 35 years in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area;<sup>17</sup> this eventually led me to meeting and

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Stokes, “Introduction,” in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes, (NY: Berg Publishers, 1997), 20.

<sup>14</sup> John Baily, “The Role of Music in the Creation of an Afghan National Identity, 1923-73” in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes. (NY: Berg Publishers, 1997), 47.

<sup>15</sup> In 1998 I found myself teaching English at the American Academy of English in Sosnowiec, Poland, throughout a mostly gray, sun-hidden year. It was my first time living and teaching abroad, especially in such coal-soot-laden environs. I had a colleague once speak of Poland as needing a “300-year nap.” In the winter of ’98-’99, one of my American colleagues convinced me to join her and a few others on a two-week excursion to Tunisia. I had no idea what the country was like, expect from palm-tree-and-sunshine glossy covers of travel brochures. Remarkably, upon waking up to blinding sunshine on the Mediterranean sea every day, the land of Tunisia, with its colors, people, language, food, and music proved to be a welcome and life-changing contrast to the grayness of Poland’s lengthy winter.

<sup>16</sup> *Raqs Sharqi* in the United States is more commonly known as American Bellydance, as it is effected by American and Arab cultural influences. “Welcome to... Belly Dance, A Raqs Sharqi Magazine!” last modified on 20 December 2007, accessed on 15 March 2011, <http://www.bellydancemag.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> Adrianna, Interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 15 November 2010.



interacting with musicians, some of whom were Arab musicians performing Arabic music in this area.

I have lived in the Washington, D.C. area since before September 11, 2001 and experienced varying degrees of subsequent events. At the time, my experience as a witness to the alienating treatment of Arabs and Muslims was minimal, heard through a few personal stories. Nonetheless, considering consequent publicity of Arab and Muslim peoples, and media attention to negative stereotypes, I was curious about how Arabs living in this region were able to reconcile such treatment in their own lives and communities. Many Arabs and those resembling Arabs were profiled due to the negative examples set by those who committed the acts of that day, who appeared of a similar ethnic and religious background. According to the Arab American Institute's American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and my own observations,<sup>18</sup> media stereotypes portrayed Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, religious zealots, backwards, and dirty. How have Arabs managed to cope with perceptions of their collective identity?

Because of my connection with the local world of American bellydancers and as a musician myself, I willingly came into contact with a few Arab musicians who were circulating through bellydancer networks. These musicians primarily performed on the *oud*,<sup>19</sup> *tableh*, or Arabic keyboard. Meeting one particular friendly and accomplished *oud*-player afforded me the opportunity to stretch my own musical skills in a completely different genre of music, learning by listening and playing, and experimenting with new sounds and techniques.

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<sup>18</sup> "Notes on Anti-Arab Racism," Arab American Institute, accessed 3 March 2011, [http://www.aaiusa.org/page/file/a5773324892438c0e7\\_la7bmvqgt.pdf/NotesonAntiArabRacism.pdf](http://www.aaiusa.org/page/file/a5773324892438c0e7_la7bmvqgt.pdf/NotesonAntiArabRacism.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Please see section D.1 for more information on Arabic instruments.

As a female musician (flutist) who is not a fluent Arabic speaker yet, there were times when I found approaching some Arab musicians a little daunting, with a few challenges to participating in meaningful conversation about their music performance. After becoming a regular at the famous Alexandria, Virginia-based Casablanca restaurant, bringing lots of guests, and participating in dance events there and throughout the area, I began to gain some degree of access. Of course, my three most valuable keys to accessing more personal levels of communiqué with Arab musicians were my role as a musician who was becoming more versed in Arabic music, my openness and positivity with learning about and sharing Arabic culture, and my performing with and eventually marrying an Arab musician. These factors compensated for my limited ability to communicate in Arabic. Strangely enough, several people approached me and spoke in Arabic, mistakenly thinking that I could understand the language, based on the likeness of my facial features to some Arab women they had seen before. Nonetheless, many of the musicians with whom I ultimately made contact could speak and express themselves in English fluently.

A series of belly dance performances and connections brought me to the Middle Eastern Cuisine restaurant in Takoma Park, MD where the accomplished Shawkat Sayyad was performing on *oud*. We had connected through a belly dancer named Mina with whom I had been taking lessons. I brought my flute<sup>20</sup> and sat in with Shawkat for a few short sets, joining him on melodies, and adding trills and other ornamentation to the Arabic traditional music he played. Afterward, another Arab musician in attendance (Seifed-Din Abdoun) kindly approached me and invited

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<sup>20</sup> I am referring to a Western Classical/ Concert C-flute. I had not yet become familiar with the Arabic bamboo flute called the *nāy*.

me to join an Arabic music ensemble that he planned to form. With a little knowledge of Arab culture and a great appreciation for its musical soundscapes, I agreed to co-found the Tāqāsīm Ensemble with him. I looked forward to practicing and performing with the Tāqāsīm ensemble under Seif's direction.<sup>21</sup> The layering of complex rhythms, expressive melodies written in modal (*māqāmat*) form,<sup>22</sup> unique instrumentation, and intricate ornamentation all proved to be a stimulating mix that opened a new world to me. Performance, practice, and studying the music theory of classical Arabic music compositions offered challenging moments, and an insight into Arab history, as well as opportunities to meet Arab musicians and experience their music in the living culture of the local Arab diaspora. These experiences raised numerous questions in my mind about how they came to be here in the Washington, D.C. area to perform Arabic music for diverse audiences.

The inquiry I sustain through this thesis is multifold. I raise questions such as: why would these musicians come to this area to perform their music? How were these musicians performing Arabic music in a post-9-11 world? How was their music received by others – Arabs and non-Arabs? What made the music significant and authentic to their communities and to themselves? How did they perceive themselves in their own unique identities?

With the Tāqāsīm Ensemble I had the opportunity to regularly listen and practice Arabic music on my flute. I worked at playing the traditional bamboo flute

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<sup>21</sup> The Tāqāsīm Ensemble consisted of about seven musicians on vocals, *oud*, violin, Western flute, Arabic *nāy*, *tablā*, *riqq*, *dāff*, and cello.

<sup>22</sup> *Maqamat* is the plural form of *maqam*. *Maqam* (singular) in Arabic refers to particular modes that were played at certain times of the day or during certain seasons, each with a different color or flavor based on variations on pitch intervals and execution of notes. Habib Hassan Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996), 22.

called the *nāy*, but could more readily perform the microtones and bending pitches through rolling the C-flute's head joint at appropriate moments, as well as by lifting my fingers from the keyholes with a certain visual consciousness, like pulling air from the holes to stretch it in order to bend the pitches, working to match the microtones in the corresponding *māqām* of the piece played. After listening to “*Laylet Hob*” and “*Fog el Naghal*” numerous times,<sup>23</sup> I was able to play their renditions by ear, to the surprise and encouragement of my respected friend Shawkat Sayyad. Shawkat encouraged me to keep listening and playing to see what could be done with my own flute. I wanted to be able to play the *nāy* well, but did not commit myself to it until after a month of training my lips to a vastly different, oblique embouchure.<sup>24</sup> Although I found great satisfaction in listening, practicing, and performing, I did not accomplish anything close to *tārāb*, the Arabic term for the elevation to an embodiment of transcendent ecstasy.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, the value of the music was deepening in me, while I wondered what it meant to the Arab musicians with whom I had connected.

### **C. Purpose of Research**

There are three main reasons for my decision to research Arab musicians in the D.C. area. First of all, as a musician married to an Arab musician himself, my interest has led me to investigate the unique characteristics and creation process of Arabic music. A great many discussions about Arabic culture and music have been

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<sup>23</sup> These are two very famous Arabic classical songs originally played by a full Arabic orchestra, but now typically played on *oud* in small Arabic music ensembles.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on how the *nāy* is played, see this website, last modified 1 February 2011, accessed on 14 February 2011, <<http://arabicmusicband.com/instruments/arabic-nay>>

<sup>25</sup> Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*, (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 152.

encompassed by music-making and observing opportunities. I pose the question: what is unique and significant about Arabic music and its creation process? Having grown up with primarily Western music, the qualities of Arabic sound creation seem naturally stimulating and full of variety. Secondly, I have noticed that Arab musicians are typically able to appeal to the listening tastes of a plethora of Arab listeners from across the Arab world. The implications of producing Arabic music, with repertoires that sample Arabic classical, Arabpop, and regional musics from throughout the Arab world, indicate a performance of a pan-Arab identity that surfaces in the whole landscape of Arabic music-making. Immigrants from over twenty Arab countries live in the D.C. area,<sup>26</sup> and musicians that I've interviewed are from at least seven different Arab countries. In my research, I pose several questions. How have musicians in the Arab diaspora of the Washington, D.C. area negotiated and performed their complex layers of identity to musically satisfy themselves and their Arab listeners? How do Arab musicians connect and provide commonly known and appreciated music to vastly different subcultures beneath the umbrella of the pan-Arab cultural identity? Finally, considering some of our society's perceptions of the Arabs based on outcomes of historical events, do Arab musicians hope to reconcile negative misconceptions through music performance? If that is the case, then how?

#### **D. Background on Arabic Music**

Before I provide a background on Arabic music, I do want to address the usage of the terms, "traditional" and "authentic" through this thesis. Each term has similarities but is not necessarily interchangeable, although often the musicians

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<sup>26</sup> League of Arab Nations, Last modified April 2007, accessed 15 February 2011, <<http://arableague.org>>

interviewed use them interchangeably. When the Arab musician informants employed the word “traditional,” they were mainly referring to the context of traditional music, traditional music technique, and traditional poetry/ lyrics. This implies knowledge passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition, in other, ancient information in history. When the word ‘authentic’ is used, it also is used in the context of how the Arab musician informants perceived Arabic music.<sup>27</sup> Please take notice of the usage of the words ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ in Chapter II. “Five Portraits of Arab Musicians” and a discussion of authenticity in terms of Arabic music and identity in Chapter IV. “Meanings and Values for Arab Musicians.”

Clearly, traditional music is respected by Arabs themselves as having generations of existence. However, Habib Hassan Touma refers to traditional music as “secular and sacred Arabian art music,” that excludes “folk music .... and contemporary popular music – so-called new music .... For these fall outside of the scope and aim of [his book which] present[s] the modal and rhythmic principles of traditional art music.”<sup>28</sup> Along those lines, the discussion of modes and rhythms would exclude a great deal of Arabic folk music as it is often characterized by extremely simple, repetitive melodies consisting of very few notes, and simple meanings. However, for the sake of this thesis, and its emphasis on how Arab musicians express their identity through Arabic musical performance, I have included folk music and Arabpop (Touma’s reference to the “so-called new music”)<sup>29</sup> as

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<sup>27</sup> Please refer to Arab musician/ informant Souheil’s quotes in Chapter IV.

<sup>28</sup> Habib Hassan Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, transl. by Laurie Schwartz, ed. Reinhard G. Pauly, (Cambridge, Amadeus Press, 2003), xv.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

displaying Arab collective and musical identity. Nonetheless, Arabpop is not considered traditional music, but may contain some traditional elements such as instrumentation, usage of a *maqam*, etc.

In the discussion of what makes Arabic music, what it is as an authentic macro-genre of music, so to speak, and also to make this discussion specific to my research, I will outline the traditional instrumentation, performance practices, elements of Arabic music, various Arabic musical sub-genre, and typical sites of performance. Certainly, there are numerous sources for further reading on Arabic music (in English) including articles in the *Garland Encyclopedia of Music*, and the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. There are books by the nineteenth-century composer and author Francesco Salvador-Daniel,<sup>30</sup> early twentieth-century author and scholar Henry George Farmer,<sup>31</sup> and recent books by Habib Hassan Touma,<sup>32</sup> Amnon Shiloah,<sup>33</sup> Ali Jihad Racy,<sup>34</sup> and Scott Marcus.<sup>35</sup> Arab scholars who have written on Arabic music include the ninth-century Al-Kindi and tenth-century Al-Farabi.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Salvador-Daniel Francesco, *The Music and Musical Instruments of the Arab*, (London: William Reeves, 1914).

<sup>31</sup> Henry George Farmer, *Music of Islam*, (London: New Oxford History of Music, vol. 1, 1957).

<sup>32</sup> Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*.

<sup>33</sup> Amnon Siloah, *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900 – 1900)*. (Tutzing: G. Henle Verlag, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> Racy, *Making Music*.

<sup>35</sup> Scott Marcus, “Modulation in Arabic Music: Documenting Oral Concepts, Performance Rules, and Strategies,” in *Ethnomusicology Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring - Summer 1992): 171 – 92.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Farabi, Abu-Nasr, *Kitab al-musiqi al-kabir*, in Turathuna series, ed. Ghattas-Abdel Malek Khashaba, (Cairo: al-Kateb al-Arabi, 1967).

## D.1. Instruments

One traditional instrument is the *nāy*, a simple aerophone, which is a flute made of a stalk of bamboo. It is played by blowing across a hole at one end with an oblique embouchure. It traditionally comes in a set of seven to ten *nāys* of various lengths in order to play corresponding keys to a variety of modes or *māqāmat*.<sup>37</sup> Two of the subjects featured herein are *nāy* players.<sup>38</sup> It is known for its lilting, airy timbre, mysterious color tones and melodies, and a kind of metaphysical transcendence for player and listener alike. Talented *nāy* players are greatly respected primarily for the expressive artistry required. Secondarily, *nāy* players are respected for the skill it takes to maintain the embouchure, and the technique of bending pitches by pulling blown air with the fingers, slightly lifting and shifting so that air and sound is manipulated to form microtones.

The traditional musical instrument most revered by Arab musicians is the *oud*,<sup>39</sup> a plucked chordophone made of at least three different types of wood. To learn more about the mystical folklore and anthropomorphic symbolism of the *oud*, one can reference reading by al-Kindi.

Another highly esteemed stringed instrument is the *qanoʿn*. It is a trapezoidal-box-shaped zither that is traditional finger-plucked. None of the musicians featured played *qanoʿn*.

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<sup>37</sup> Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> Mohamed Amir and Farid Miller, Arabic musicians featured in the “Portraits” chapters, are both *nāy* players.

<sup>39</sup> Five of the fifteen Arab musicians I interviewed were *oud* players (and vocalists), and three of the five featured musicians in the “Portraits” chapters.



In the Arabic percussive world of idiophones, many different drums and tambourines exist, including the *tablā*, also known as the *darabukah*, *riqq*, and the *dāff* to name a few.

Other Arabic instruments include the violin (especially tuned to Arab music), which works well in ensembles and orchestras. The Arabic keyboard has taken on a massive role in Arabic popular music by containing the sounds of traditional and newer instruments from *oud*, *qanoun*, and *nāy* to saxophone and electric organ. At least two of the fifteen musicians I interviewed were skilled keyboardists, creating soundscapes of an orchestra of instruments, some of which are less commonly played in public, especially in the U.S.

## **D.2. Elements of Arabic Music**

Touma states that “the art music of every culture native to the Near East and North Africa is characterized by musical structures based on modal improvisation and developed within the framework of the *maqam* phenomenon.”<sup>40</sup>

Since Arabic music is primarily transmitted by oral tradition, the usage of Western notation is a relatively recent phenomenon. Forms of notation in Arabic music were written as early as the tenth century.<sup>41</sup> Notations illustrated finger positions as dots on the strings of the *oud*, similar to guitar tablature. However, each note in the Arabic scale or *māqām* has a different name. For example, middle ‘C’ on the piano is the ‘*rast*.’<sup>42</sup> ‘C one’ on the piano is not ‘*rast* one’ in Arabic music, but is

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<sup>40</sup> Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, xvii.

<sup>41</sup> Henry George Farmer, *Music of Islam*, (London: New Oxford History of Music, vol. 1, 1957), 465.

<sup>42</sup> Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, 21.

called the *kurdan*.<sup>43</sup> In the case of the transcription in figure no. 3, *nāwā* means ‘G.’ Therefore *māqām bayāti nāwā* means the *māqām bayāti* starting on ‘G.’ Although such notation was originally written down in a tablature-type form, it was never widely used.<sup>44</sup>

The *māqām* phenomenon is most closely compared with modes in Western music. Within a *māqām* is a scale that is begun on a particular degree or note depending on the *māqām*. For example, if it begins on the first note (or degree) of the scale, it is called a *māqām rāst*, which means first. If the *māqām* begins on the second degree, it is called *māqām bayāti*, which means second.<sup>45</sup> In contrast with a chromatic scale in Western music that consists of twelve tones, an *māqām* is made of seventeen tones with the addition of quartertones.<sup>46</sup> Over fifty *māqāmat* are known to exist in Arabic music.<sup>47</sup>

How does a musician modulate from one *māqām* to another? In modulations between two modes which have dissimilar tetrachords based on the same note, the pivot note is often one of the two notes which define the boundaries of the dissimilar tetrachords.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>45</sup> Please refer to Figure 1.

<sup>46</sup> Quartertones are tones between half pitches; for example, ‘A’ quartertone represents a microtone between ‘A’ flat and ‘A’ natural on the scale.

<sup>47</sup> Touma, *Music of the Arabs*, 25, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Scott Marcus, “Modulation in Arabic Music: Documenting Oral Concepts, Performance Rules, and Strategies,” in *Ethnomusicology* vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring - Summer 1992): 190.



Phases and Tone Levels in Taqasim



Figure 2: Phase and tone levels in *Tāqasim* on *Māqām Bayāti Nāwā*.<sup>54</sup>

Taqsim on Maqam Bayati Nawa

Munir Bashir



Figure 3: Transcription of Munir Bashir’s *Tāqsim* on Bayāti Nāwā by Christina K. Campo using the Sibelius music composition program.

One musical phenomenon in Arabic music is the concept of the *tāqsim*, generally meaning ‘improvisation.’ Ethnomusicologist Ali Jihad Racy refers to

<sup>54</sup> Scott Marcus, “Modulation in Arabic Music,” 192.

improvisation as “an intuitive art.”<sup>55</sup> ‘*Tāqasim*’ in Arabic literally means ‘division,’ and is uniquely performed by a musician using a predetermined *māqām* to express *tārāb*, roughly translated to mean ‘enchantment’ or ‘ecstasy.’<sup>56</sup> Some of the essential elements of the *tāqasim* are the creative process, imagination, a sense of risk, quick decision-making skills, high level of musical proficiency, use of *māqām* and modulation, a strong relationship with the audience, and a true sense of *tārāb*.

*Tāqasim* serves as a vehicle for emotional exploration of improvised melodic sequences based on a particular mode. In addition, *tāqasim* is performed by a solo instrument, such as an *oud*, *qanoūn*, *nāy*, or violin, with no accompaniment. It can be spontaneous, but “modal-bound,” as at its foundation is the Arabic *māqām*. The length of time for performing a *tāqasim* varies from one performer to another, and may even last twenty minutes or more depending on audience response and the performer’s mood, as he or she progresses through stages of sculpting a memorable and moving work of art.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the musician plays a *tāqasim* just before the singer performs the *mawāl*, the vocal form of improvisation. One function of the *tāqasim* is to set the mood and lay the musical groundwork for the singer to enter. Since most singers are also musicians, a musician may flow easily from instrumental to vocal improvisation (*tāqāsīm* to *mawāl*).<sup>58</sup> For instance, the Egyptian singer, composer, and virtuoso *oud*-player Farid Al-Atrache was known to perform

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<sup>55</sup> Ali Jihad Racy, “The Many Faces of Improvisation: The Arab Tāqāsīm as A Musical Symbol,” in *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2000): 304.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Samha El-Kholy, *The Tradition of Improvisation in Arab Music*, (Giza, Egypt: Imprimerie Rizk, 1978), 5.

<sup>58</sup> Racy, “The Many Faces of Improvisation,” 306.

extensively long *tāqāsim* at the beginning of his compositions, leading into lengthy *mawāl*, which pleased his listeners tremendously.<sup>59</sup>

During times in which the *oud* accompanies the voice, a contrast in timbre between them occurs. As the human voice habitually makes connected legato sounds, (*oud*) notes are disconnected and heighten the contrast between singer and instrument. (The *oud*) often helped in maintaining the pitch and in suggesting the approach toward modulations.<sup>60</sup>

Another function of the *tāqasim* is to lead listeners on an auditory journey through the subtleties and colors of the *māqām* with the destination of *tārāb*, described as a state of enchantment, or ecstasy. Because there is a great capacity inside the human soul to communicate emotions to others and to experience one's own emotions, *tāqsim* functions deeply in musical and social consciousness.<sup>61</sup>

In *tāqasim*, it is important to consider the relationship between melody and *māqām*. The *māqām* has multiple functions, but most simply serve as a foundation from which to build the *tāqsim*.<sup>62</sup> It is believed that each *māqām* has a special energy, like a spark or essence that needs to be explored and revealed throughout a *tāqsim*.

In addition to *māqām* and modulation, other tools are available for the construction of emotionally charged *tāqasim*. Arabic art is generally characterized by

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<sup>59</sup> Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*, (Colorado: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 2005), 141.

<sup>60</sup> El-Kholy, "The Tradition of Improvisation," 7.

<sup>61</sup> Racy, "The Many Faces of Improvisation," 305.

<sup>62</sup> Bruno Nettl, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach," in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Jan. 1974): 11.

curling, richly ornamental arabesques, calligraphic lines, geometric repetition of shape and form. This principal of aesthetic crosses over, of course, when considering the richly embellished music of the *tāqāsim*. The usage of appoggiaturas, trills, and mordents combined with tremolos, glissandos, and slides serve to create variety in a *tāqāsim*. The performer's tools are like a painter's brushes and colors, available for personal expression. Other techniques of ornamentation are glissandos and articulations. The performer uses these at free will to embellish the notes and to add variety to the sound. When an *oud*-player plays glissandos, he or she bends the string after it has been plucked to give the sound a wavering tone.

What makes *tāqāsim* aesthetically pleasing? The experienced listener would expect to hear certain elements emphasized. These elements are mood and usage of *māqām*, technical dexterity, musical skill, originality, personal style and expression. For example, Racy claims that “an improviser may be cherished because of his virtuosic playing and the exceptional skill he is capable of displaying.”<sup>63</sup> Because aesthetic enjoyment in improvisation is often a shared experience, it serves as a collectively social and creatively expressive activity. Not only does this operate on a communal level, but it also is necessary for the performer to experience a sense of emotional harmony inside him or herself. This harmony allows the performer to create freely.

“The Arab culture correlates the improvisatory process with transformative experiences, or altered states of consciousness, as well as with momentarily

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<sup>63</sup> Ali Jihad Racy, “The Many Faces of Improvisation: The Arab Tāqāsim as A Musical Symbol,” in *Ethnomusicology Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2, (Spring/Summer 2000): 304.

heightened aesthetic ability.”<sup>64</sup> Although scholars find *tārāb* hard to define, it has numerous meanings amongst those who seek to experience it, that is, audiences of Arabic art music. For example, one scholar offers this definition:

*(Tārāb)* refers linguistically to a state of heightened emotionality, often translated as “rapture,” “ecstasy,” or “enchantment” but can also indicate sadness as well as joy.<sup>65</sup>

A connection between the audience and the performer must be made during the performance. Music lovers and performers of what has come to be called the “classical” Arab musical repertoire associate aesthetic quality and authenticity with the ability of artists and their audiences to achieve *tārāb*. *Tārāb* constitutes the most important term in musical aesthetics (in Arab music-culture).<sup>66</sup>

When famous Egyptian chanteuse Oum Kulthoum would sing, “the musical experience imparted to the listeners (by her and her ensemble) is called *tārāb*.” The intensity of *tārāb* depends primarily on the voice and performance style of the singer, as exemplified by Oum Kulthoum.<sup>67</sup> Just as in instrumental *tāqāsim*, her vocal improvisations (*mawāl*) displayed the tonal-spatial relationship; she “only approximately followed the fixed rhythmic-temporal organization of melody.” After about four and a half minutes of setting mood and suspenseful build-up of phrases, the soloist on *qanoūn* vamps basic *tāqsim* to open the floor for the diva.

A good Arab singer never sings ... a poem in the way the

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<sup>64</sup> Jonathan Shannon, “Emotion, Performance, and Temporality in Arab Music: Reflections on Tarab.” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 18, iss. 1, (Feb. 2003): 75.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>66</sup> Racy, “The Many Faces of Improvisation,” 304.

<sup>67</sup> Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).



composer has written it. He is expected to vary the melody and even to paraphrase it. He is a creative singer who has a large share in the shaping of the song itself.<sup>68</sup>

In Al-Atlal, a forty-minute performance with Oum Khulthoum and an Arabic classical orchestra, this effect of delay is very noticeable especially around the beginnings and ends of her phrases.<sup>69</sup> Although she sings pre-composed melodies and lyrics, her creative freedoms in extemporizing deal with the tempo of her melodies, as well as prolonged and heavily enriched ornamentations, along with some creative liberty with articulation.<sup>70</sup>

Her presentation hovered between that which she performed (composed melodies) and that which she created herself. The music contrast between the familiar and fixed on the one side and the new, freely structured though related on the other creates ... a tension whose up and down evokes *tārāb* in the listener.

This is apparent when one hears the applause around time 6'45" and for at least a full minute around thirteen minutes, and quite poignantly around 25 – 27 minutes into the performance, including many shouts and calls. Although it is difficult to discern what is being shouted, typically when an audience is pleased with the music, they would shout things like of "Ya salaam!" "Allah!" "Yaeini!" to express their collective feelings of *tārāb*. The audience can provide a musical

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<sup>68</sup> Habib Hassan Touma, "Relations between Aesthetics and Improvisation in Arab Music," *The World of Music*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1976: 36.

<sup>69</sup> Based on my observations.

<sup>70</sup> Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*, 98.

ambiance for, and also shape the content of, the performance through what can be described as “creative listening.”<sup>71</sup>

It is natural that the singer would also be expected to reach a state of *tārāb*, if not *saltana* (higher level of enchantment). According to Syrian virtuoso singer Sabah Fakhri, “The performer has ... to be in a state of ecstasy (*matrub*) in order perform in the most inspired fashion.” On relations between the audience and the performer,

First and foremost, a listener has to love music because the more he loves it, if he is also able to understand the words and the tunes, the more his presence delights me. Such listeners know the value of the music, as the jeweler tells diamond from glass. Of course, I sense people’s reactions from their movements and by observing their inner emotional tribulations and their responses and their responses to what I am singing.<sup>72</sup>

Arabic *tāqāsim* is based on culturally devised rules, expectations, and aesthetic principles that the community at large agrees upon. This community consists of educated listeners and highly skilled musicians and singers. The relationships shared amongst this community are open and obvious, as can be heard on the Oum Khulthoum recording or at most Arabic music concerts. It is expected and understood that the ultimate goal is to experience *tārāb*, a sense of enchantment and ecstasy, particularly because of the artistry, skill, and passion with which an excellent musician or singer performs. The rules of technique, ornamentation, *māqām*, and modulation within the *tāqāsim* have existed for centuries as the music has evolved. In the past century, Arabic classical music and *tāqāsim* have been

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<sup>71</sup> Shannon, “Emotion, Performance, and Temporality,” 77.

<sup>72</sup> Ali Jihad Racy, “Improvisation, Ecstasy, and Performance Dynamics in Arabic Music.” *The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, eds. Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 95 – 96.

appreciated by larger audiences, as media and recording industries have helped spread exposure.

As can be heard in Munir Bashir and Oum Khulthoum's performances, *tāqasim* serves as an essential aesthetic component of Arabic "classical" music. Although there are more studies being done on Arabic music, there is a great deal that has not yet been explored. *Tāqāsīm* present many exciting opportunities for study, analysis, and appreciation.

#### **D.4 Arabic Music Genres**

Numerous Arabic musical genres exist, but many are similar and may fall under one of three categories that make sense. The three broad categories are: Arabic traditional classical, traditional/ folkloric, and modern Arabpop. Arabic classical includes secular art music<sup>73</sup> and music that is usually played by an Arabic orchestra including Arabic traditional instruments,<sup>74</sup> and at times Western classical instruments with adjusted tunings, such as violins. Types of songs are usually written to provoke *tārāb*; these include songs by Abdel Wahab and Oum Khoulthoum.

Traditional/ folkloric music includes regional musics in the Arab world that are performed in group settings. These include the typical Egyptian folkloric music called *khaleeji*, the highly controversial North African music *Rai* which literally means "opinion,"<sup>75</sup> *sha'abi* music, which encompasses very simple melodies about 8 – 12 measures long, including old folk songs in local dialects from throughout the

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<sup>73</sup> Habib Hassan Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, transl. by Laurie Schwartz, ed. Reinhard g. Pauly. Cambridge, Amadeus Press, 2003, 55 – 108.

<sup>74</sup> Racy, "Making Music," 50.

<sup>75</sup> Swedenburg, "Arab 'World Music' in the U.S.," 35.

Arab world in local dialects, as well as street music for the people, sung in huge gatherings in unison, subject of songs depends on occasion: wedding : love, nation: heroism, *maqam rast*, *bayati*, no complex rhythmic patterns, only one *maqam*, no modulation to other *maqam* and other regional musics. For more information, please refer to the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: Volume VI, The Middle East*.<sup>76</sup>

The third major Arabic music genre is modern popular Arabic music, or Arabpop. It is characterized by synthesizers, background tracks, and typically more synthetic sounds that are often meant to replicate the traditional instrumentation, but offer a hybridization of various regional musics. For example, Amr Diab's famous song "Habibi El Nour" combines traditional frame drums, percussion, and singing style, with westernized harmonies, accordion-played melodies, guitar, and other sounds influenced by commercialization and globalization, mainly from the West. Currently famous Arabpop artists include Nancy Ajram and Hakim, whose music and music videos are meant mainly to entertain and appeal to the interests of Arab youth. For more information on various artists and genres of modernized Arabic musics especially Arabpop, please see Andrew Hammond's *Pop Culture Arab World*.<sup>77</sup>

Please refer to the table no. 3 to get a broad perspective of a repertoire of an evening's worth of Arabic music, how it might generally be planned to provoke responses and to arrive at its ultimate destination of *tarab*. An evening of Arabic musical performance usually starts with slower music that gradually catches people's attention. After a few songs, the tempo of the songs becomes somewhat faster.

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<sup>76</sup> *Garland Encyclopedia of World Musics, Vol. VI The Middle East* eds. Virginia Danielson, Scott Marcus, and Dwight Reynolds. (NY: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Hammond, *Pop Culture Arab World: Media, Arts, and Lifestyle*, (Colorado: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 2005), 141 – 172.

People start to responding with movement or singing along. Eventually, a singer and his band will start playing faster music as the people begin dancing. During the conclusion of the party, the norm is to revert to Oum Khoultoum songs towards the end as people are satisfied with the danceable/excited phase. People are now are ready for heavier, more intense listening that speaks to the soul as Arabic classical music is played for the purpose of evoking *tarab*.

Table 1A: Program of an Evening's Performance of Arabic Music (First Half)<sup>78</sup>

Program of an Evening's Performance of Arabic Music (First Half)								
Song Name	Name Meaning	Theme	Singer	Country of Origin/ Influence	Decade / year	Genre/ Type	Preferred Setting	Tempo/ style
Asmar Yasmarani	My Tan Darling	Love	Abdel Halim Hafez	Egypt	1940s and 1950s	Folksong	Start of Hafila/ Evening with Friends	Lento, Easy
Ala Add El Sho'o	As Much as My Longing					Arabic Classic		
El Helw hayati	The Beautiful One is My Life and My Soul							
Ya Bent E I Sultan	Daughter of the Sultan	Love	Egyptian Folklore	Egypt	Trad.	Egyptian Folksong	Dancing/ Evening with Friends	un poco allegro
Meen Habibi Ana	Who is My Beloved?		Wael Kfoury, Nawal El Zoghbi	Lebanon	1960s	Slower Pop		
Wanni Mareg	As I Passed the House		Assi El Hellani		1994			
Jinni Jinni	Go Mad (In Anger)	Love	Ragheb Alameh	Lebanon	2010's	Arab Pop	Dancing/ Evening with Friends	Molto Allegro
Al Aah	Ah (Arabic expression indicating pain)				1990			
Ma wa'adtek Ben Njoom El Layl	Didn't Promise You the Stars of the Night		Wael Kfoury		1994			
Enti Alamteeni	The One that Taught Me To love				Early 1990's			
El Bent Beda	The Lady in White		N/A		Egyptian Folklore			

<sup>78</sup> The sequence of songs, translation, meaning, theme, singer, year, genre, setting, and tempo were generally provided by Hilal Khouri, Arab musician and informant, featured in portrait No. 1. Some editing of the translations was provided by Seifed-Din Abdoun. The original directions, formatting, arrangement, and final edits were provided by Christina K. Campo-Abdoun.

Table 1b: Program of an Evening's Performance of Arabic Music (Second Half)<sup>79</sup>

Program of an Evening's Performance of Arabic Music (Second Half)								
Shlonak Enei	How are my (Eyes?)	Love	Salah Abeel Ghafour	Iraq	1990's	Iraqi Dabkeh (Joobi)	Dancing/ Evening with Friends	Allegro
Al Ein Molayetaim	On My Eye Are Two Tears	Love Sadness	Gypsy, Samira Topik	Levantine Region	Folk/ trad. songs	Levantine Dabkeh		
Sari Saralleil	Traveler in the Night	Love, love & life	Faris Awad, originated in Gulf region			Lebanon		
Howwara	Not translatable		Traditional Folksongs	Levantine Region				
Al hawa	On the Breeze					Jordan		
Yabu Agaal Oo Kafeyyeh	Man with the Head Dress	Coffee, Hospitality						
Balla Tsobbo Hal Gahwa	By God, Pour the Coffee		Hospitality Pride					
Ya Hala Bel Deif	Welcome is Our Guest							
Hathehi Laylati	This is My Night and the Dream of My Life	Love	Oum K.	Egypt		1968	Arabic Classic	Late night listening, end of hafila: O. Khoulthoum music
Hayyarti Albi	You Confused My Heart	Love, Confusion			1961			
Ansak?	Forget You?	Love			1961			
Enta Omri	You Are My Life	Love, Nostalgia			1964			
Alf Leila O Leila	Thousand and One Nights	Love			1969			
Lessa Faker	Do You Still Remember?				1960			
Hob Eh	What Love?				1960			

<sup>79</sup> This is a continuation of Table 1a on the previous page.

## **E. Review of Literature**

### **E.1. Arabic Music in the Diaspora**

At this point, I offer a brief discussion of various ethnomusicological literature on Arabic musics in the Diaspora of the United States. Anne K. Rasmussen is the primary contributor to this subject area; her writings include her 1991 dissertation “Individuality and Social Change in the Music of Arab Americans,” as well as several articles in the journals *Asian Music* and *Ethnomusicology*. Her dissertation covers the history of Arab-American music in the diaspora in Dearborn, Michigan and various cities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts 1930s – 1970s. While Rasmussen outlines time periods and their themes, she suggests that the Arab-American musicians were quite innovative and successful at entertaining large groups of Arab peoples in social settings. She discusses various performance contexts such as parties, nightclubs, and other social events, along with characteristics of Arabic music, and particular Arab musicians who became famous as kind of culture guardians for other immigrants in the Diaspora, who felt nostalgic for their homelands. This work is seminal in its depth and breadth of study, and particularly exemplary for the personal investment in the ethnographies. Rasmussen often filled the role of participant-observer and gained deeper access as an *oud*-player and aficionado of Arabic music.<sup>80</sup>

Rasmussen’s article “An Evening in the Orient: The Middle Eastern Nightclub in America”<sup>81</sup> discusses how “Orientalism helped these musicians to achieve

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<sup>80</sup> Anne Rasmussen, “ ‘An Evening in the Orient’: The Middle Eastern Nightclub in America,” in *Asian Music*, vol. 23, no. 2, (Spring – Summer, 1992), 63 – 88.

<sup>81</sup> Anne Rasmussen, “The Middle Eastern Nightclub: Resurrecting Orientalism for America,” in *Ars Musica Denver*, Spring 1990, 28 – 38.



unprecedented success.”<sup>82</sup> Rasmussen identifies ways in which Arab musicians and nightclubs exploited the American and international desire for an escape by presenting Arabic music in a fantastic constructed environment of Middle Eastern décor, food, bellydance, and culture in the nightclub space.<sup>83</sup> Rasmussen’s “Theory and Practice at the Arabic Org: Digital Technology in Contemporary Arab Music Performance.”<sup>84</sup>

Another ethnomusicologist who has written on music in a similar diaspora is Kay Kaufman Shelemay in the book, *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews*.<sup>85</sup> This is a cross-cultural study of the music and culture of Syrian Jews living in New York. Because of their roots in an Arab country as well as their Jewish religion,<sup>86</sup> their music borrows a great deal from traditional Arabic music, with Hebrew lyrics applied to form what is called *pizmonim*.<sup>87</sup> Shelemay

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<sup>82</sup> Anne Rasmussen. “An Evening in the Orient”: The Middle Eastern Nightclub in America, *Asian Music*, vol. 23, no.2, (Spring/ Summer 1992):70.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Anne Rasmussen, “Theory and Practice at the ‘Arabic Org’: Digital Technology in Contemporary Arab Music Performance,” in *Popular Music*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Middle East Issue (Oct., 1996): 345-365.

<sup>85</sup> Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>86</sup> Upon investigation of how Syrian Jews might possibly define themselves, I did some anonymous interviews with Syrians who considered themselves Arab-American. They were not Jewish, and happened to be Christian or Muslim. However, there seemed to be a consensus among those interviewed that Syrian Jews would admit that they are Arab amongst Arab-only circles (i.e. in Syria), but otherwise would admit they were Jewish to the rest of the population (here in the U.S.), especially other Jewish people. The explanation put forth was based on fear of discrimination for being Arab, and fear of forsaking their Jewish identity due to the perceived low status of Arabs to the Jewish population at large.

<sup>87</sup> The Hebrew word *pizmonim* is plural for *pizmon*, which refers to songs sung in Hebrew, with often-borrowed secular melodies (especially Arab secular melodies in this book), that carry great religious meaning by embellishing Jewish religious prayers and ceremonies. Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain*, 1, 154.

makes at least seven references to the parallels between Syrian Jewish music and Arabic music,<sup>88</sup> from discussion of *layali* to *maqam*.<sup>89</sup>

Shelemay invested a great deal of time, at least eight years, into her fieldwork. Within *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews*, she shares many primary-source interviews with Syrian Jewish people with whom she interacted in New York and Mexico. Her writing is filled with personal experience, due to the multitudes of discussions full of emotion, memories, and testimonies. She spent years not only recording, interviewing, and observing these people, but also participating in their community. Attending services at the synagogue and presumably building a trust relationship with the Syrian Jewish community furthered her involvement in numerous other social affairs, allowing more opportunities for fieldwork. The aforementioned variety of research methodologies employed by Shelemay helped to shape her book as an evocative means of using music to construct an intertextual space, linking the Syrian Jewish population in New York to its homeland and its community. Shelemay's personal identity as a Jewish woman, teacher, musician, and ethnomusicologist, allowed her to gain access and membership to the community she chose to study. It is significant to note that the amount of personal interview material, along with the discussions, transcriptions, and recordings of music provided, essentially illustrate that a similarly high degree of value is placed on the memory and personal expression of the Syrian Jewish people as much as the

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<sup>88</sup> Shelemay handles this potentially controversial connection with a great deal of care, referring to the Syrian Jews as appreciators of Arabic music, as opposed to potential appropriators of Arabic music. Shelemay, *Let Jasmine Rain*, 3, 5, 152.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 124.

music they perform and talk about. The value that the people placed upon carrying on traditions, keeping history alive by passing it down through oral tradition and music, upholding strong moral and religious values, and a life-long sense of enrichment regarding music, religion, poetry, and positive communal experiences is further perpetuated by Shelemay's contributions. Specifically, she worked at passing on tradition by recording a portion of the New York Syrian Jews' musical and social history in New York in the 20th century. This serves as an historical contribution to a culture and group identity as she expressed throughout *Let Jasmine Rain Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews*.

## **E.2. Ethnicity and Identity**

I will refer to the ethnomusicological writings on ethnicity and identity by ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice and Martin Stokes in Chapter three, as well as some discussions of identity by anthropologists Anthony Cohen, Frederick Barth, Fon and Chuang. To address Arab identity, Rice discusses self-identity as being defined by self-understanding and self-worth; this seems relevant in some of the less musically developed Arab musicians, and also to all the Arab musicians in their early stages of musical development. With frequent practice and connection to the technical and social contexts and traditions in Arabic music, Arab musicians continue to reinforce their self-worth and therefore, cultivate not only their self-identity, but also the identity of the group with whom they acquire membership.

Stokes writing on music defining social boundaries as an anthropological phenomenon builds upon theories similar to Cohen, Barth, and Nagel who express the fact that individuals and culture groups work to create self and collective identity

based on their as a construction of boundaries, including music and musical contexts and spaces. Sharing some common characteristics, but defining a group against a host culture by highlighting its uniqueness and differences, provides ethnic groups such as Arabs the opportunity to cultivate group identity. At the same time, Nagel would argue that ethnic identity, as well as other forms of identity is “situational and changeable.”

I have attempted to illustrate this situational and changeable quality in the three identity maps included in Chapter II. Portraits of Arab Musicians. What is significant about these maps is that they were designed for the purpose of organizing Arab musicians’ individual identities by laying out an array of identity categories (such as ethnic, national, musical, etc.) that would be connected to some extent and expressed in a circular, unified relationship. One was designed for informant Hilal, one for Farid, and one for Souheil. Each of these informants had the opportunity to peruse them and then edit, add, or subtract information to create a more accurate picture of their overall identity. It’s surprising that they each only made minor changes, but that religion was the one element that they chose to de-emphasize.

In Chapter IV., The Rubric of Characteristics of Five Arab Musicians gives further information on their individual identities, but also gives further clues into their collective identities, especially into their worldviews on the future of Arabic music and roles as traditionalists or modernists.

In Chapter III. the table of Cross-Analysis is a reference and graphic organizer that outlines the roles of musicians (in social identity), the functions of

music, and the song themes, all to give a sense of what is important to Arab musicians in musical performance.

### **I. B. Concern for Authenticity**

While investigating the Arab musician's individual identity and the Arab musicians' collective identity, a genuine concern for authenticity arises amongst musicians and those surrounding Arabic music. I want to address the concept and definitions of authenticity here in the introduction for the purpose of clarifying its use in this thesis, as well as highlighting two principal domains of authenticity. Later in this thesis, I will attempt to illuminate the importance of cultural and musical authenticity to the Arab musicians, particularly in Chapter IV. "Meanings and Values for Arab Musicians."

Throughout this thesis, the words authentic and authenticity arise. They usually appear in quotes by the Arab musician informants, as well as by Arabic music experts writing on music. Several definitions of authenticity exist. One definition of the word authentic is: "authentic . . . means credible and convincing . . . believable to the public. This usually refers to an "authentic copy" of something such as a historic location, historic document. In reference to an Arabic music setting, the restaurant/nightclub owners who attempt to recreate a specific place in Morocco or Egypt may import décor such as brass tables, Islamic tile, and golden teapots, as mentioned in the Casablanca case study. The environment of Casablanca nightclub is convincing enough to have made the Iraqi patron "feel like home." The second meaning

What is unique or significant about Arabic music is: it is sung in Arabic and it expresses moods through the system of *māqāmat*; it utilizes complex rhythms; the

instrumentation is specific to the Arab world (percussion such as the *tableh*, *riqq* and *dāff*, *nāy*, keyboard with multiple Arab instrument functions, the *oud*, and the Arabic singing voice); the singing style is rich, full of movement, and similar in ornamentation to the way the *oud* and *nāy* rise, fall, and bend notes. Other things significant about the music include the fact that there is no harmony, and there is a kind of density of ornamentation and accentuation of certain syllables and notes, along with dramatic dynamics, that provide great variation within rather singular melodies/ monophony.

## **Chapter I: Case studies: Two Experiences in Arabic music performance**

### **I.A. Casablanca**

As Seif and I drove through the rain-slicked streets of downtown Alexandria, we gently debated about what side of the street the club was located. Upon spotting the familiar night-lit green awning with “Casablanca” written on it, we pulled into a metered parking spot. A giant poster in the window pictured Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in the 1940’s Hollywood movie of the same name. The sunlight had weathered the poster’s colors and lines, dulling its worth to those who might have noticed it.

#### **I. A. 1. Our Arrival**

As we entered the long lobby leading up to the hostess’ stand, four dark-haired gentlemen standing in the corner nodded; one, who was the owner, politely came over and shook Seif’s hand. After we paid our \$10 cover charge, we followed the hostess to one of the round, low-standing brass tables etched with radial geometric designs, adjacent to the dance floor. Reclining into the velveteen pillows, I glanced around, observing the club more keenly than ever before, especially from this new vantage point.<sup>90</sup> Red and blue painted Islamic star designs tiled the ceiling, encompassing the tops of the two mirror-walled block columns on either side of the club. The ceiling beams, encrusted with wooden appliquéd half-fan designs, skirted the ceiling, echoing the shape of the dance floor. The stage was a raised platform surrounded on two sides by a wooden railing. Behind the stage was curtain with

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<sup>90</sup> I had visited Casablanca a few times before, but every experience was uniquely different.

curving valances framing a wall mural of a desertscape. A woman in the foreground, swathed in draping clothes, standing in an arch-pointed doorway of a distant Sahara.

Here was a romantic view of the Arabia,<sup>91</sup> this time, not a Hollywood poster of movie stars with palm trees and an airplane in the desert. I have seen the desert before, with palm trees whose upper reaches were pregnant with dates; and I have seen leather-skinned old women dressed in long robes, tiny golden pins<sup>92</sup> shaped like fish fastened to their garments.

### I. A. 2. *Al-Mūsīqā al-Arabiyyā*

As the Casablanca band began warming up, the sounds of an orchestra of strings, accordions, and organs streamed across the dance floor, wafting amid the spotlight beams. Countless functions of the double-decked keyboard filled sonic space around the two live *tablā* players and electrified violinist. At certain moments the violinist crafted a call and response with the richly ornamental *qanoûn*<sup>93</sup> function executed by the keyboardist. The synthesized sound of the accordion lilted and wavered, inviting the violinist to perform a *tāqsim*.<sup>94</sup> Then, the lead *tablā* player came in with a *baladi*<sup>95</sup> rhythm:



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<sup>91</sup> This region of North Africa is known as *al-Magreb al-arabbi*. Unless otherwise noted, all Arabic terms were defined by Arabic music expert, Seifed-Din Abdoun, interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 5 September, 2004 – 29 April 2011.

<sup>92</sup> These pins are called *bezima*, and are meant to hold the robes and cloth together. Wendy Buonaventura, *Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World*, (NY: Interlink Publishing Group, 1998), 7

<sup>93</sup> The *qanoûn* is the predecessor of the harp and piano, a horizontal stringed instrument in the zither family.

<sup>94</sup> *Tāqsim* (*singular*) is an instrumental improvisation.

<sup>95</sup> *Baladi* means folk.



accompanied by the second drummer performing on *riqq*. The keyboardist switched instruments from *qanoûn*, to string orchestra, to accordion, and piano through each *quesn*.<sup>96</sup> Between each section, the *tablā* prepared the other musicians for what was coming next, speeding the tempo in anticipation of the next piece. The quick tak-takking of the *tablā* players' hands successively spiraled toward a vortex, ending with syncopated kla-Klak!

The Arabic *takhts* would have used authentic, traditional instruments with live musicians.<sup>97</sup> Here a whole Arabic classical orchestra was downsized and condensed onto the keyboard, accompanied by a skillful violinist and two expert *tablā* players. Still, this music was characteristically Arab, using the lilting and bending quartertones, the mysterious modulations of *māqām*, unique timbres and textures of instruments, all combined in heterophony.

The two *tablā* players, the violinist, and the keyboardist all were dressed in nice dress shirts and slacks, and appeared to be between their late twenties to early forties. They were seated in a staggered arc from stage left to stage right: keyboardist, violinist, *riqq*/*tablā* player, and lead *tablā* player. Later, two different male singers, one from Iraq and one from Algeria, stood in the middle of the arc singing songs in colloquial Arabic. All four of the band members were Arab men, as evidenced by the keyboardist's announcements of the songs in Arabic. Because we

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<sup>96</sup> *Quesn* in Arabic means section, similar to a movement in Western Classical music..

<sup>97</sup> A *takht* is a small instrumental ensemble.

had met him a couple times before, at one point during the show, he even called out “Yallah, Seif!”<sup>98</sup>

### II.A.3 The Appearance of Zahra

As the band began the next piece, the *raqqasa sharqiyya*,<sup>99</sup> *Zahra*, suddenly appeared with a sinewy, sheer cobalt blue chiffon veil, sweeping it up around her, spinning, as it framed the cheerful curls on her head. Her bare feet stepped with quiet speed, toes gripping the wooden floor, hips responding to each strong off-beat, punctuated by hip drops and bounces, shoulder and hip shimmies. The *tablā* spiked a

KLAK!  
klak-klak  
klak-klak  
klak-klak

while *Zahra* rib-slid front, back, side, front, further accentuating the beat with a hip-drop-drop-hip-drop.

*Zahra*, looking at the camera, stepped and swayed closer to us and smiled more vibrantly. When the beat changed to that of the *zar* rhythm, she performed a kind of mixture of a gulf dance and *zar* dance,<sup>100</sup> using vertical hand punches, alternating body movements, left and right. Doum-ba Doum BAH Doum-ba Doum BAH!

Then, the keyboardist tickled out simulated *oud* riffs, bejeweled in complex ornamentation, jumping between octaves, as he accompanied *Zahra*'s performance. Gold sequin-fringe pulsed and shook across her tummy, through the piston shimmies

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<sup>98</sup> “Come on, Seif!”

<sup>99</sup> *Raqqasa sharqiyya* literally means ‘oriental dancer’ or ‘belly dancer’.

<sup>100</sup> The *Zar* is a type of rhythm for a mystical therapeutic women’s dance.

and tiny belly rolls of her interpretations. Her smiling face reflected the sparkles of her dress.

[*Raqs sharqi*] is the most eloquent of female dances, with its haunting lyricism, its fire, and its endlessly shifting kaleidoscope of sensual movement.”<sup>101</sup>

Suddenly, the keyboardist called out “Yaaallaaahhh!” signaling the drummers to change the tempo. As the *tablā* and *riqq* players struck up a very quick-spiked drum solo,<sup>102</sup> *Zahra* entered the audience space and began dancing for the patrons nestled in the side alcove booths. She pulled a young woman up to dance with her, creating a corporeal dialogue, responding to each other’s forward shoulder shimmies. The dancer encouraged her momentary partner by clapping a rhythm.

“Many dances of the *Magreb* are performed in a group, with women successively stepping forward to perform a solo or duet while the rest of the group maintains a chanting, hand-clapping accompaniment.”<sup>103</sup>

Then, lithely, *Zahra* whizzed passed and pulled another audience member up who showed genuine oriental dance skill, spinning and camel rolling. As the band slowed the tempo, they prepared for another super speeding rush to the vortex. With an impressive drum solo, the *tablā* player aggressively multi-flicked his wrists as *Zahra* quickly tip-toed, facing the audience in three directions, simultaneously quivering her abdominal muscles in unison with the *tablā*.

I leaned over to Seif and remarked on the *tablā* player’s skill. He told me that *tablā* players get paid less than other musicians in the Middle East.

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<sup>101</sup> Wendy Buonaventura. *Serpent of the Nile: Women and Dance in the Arab World*. (NY: Interlink Publishing Group, 1998), 10.

<sup>102</sup> The *riqq* is a drum with cymbals, like a tambourine.

<sup>103</sup> Buonaventura, *Serpent of the Nile*, 94.

“But why?” I asked. “This guy is no less skilled than other musicians at what he does.”

“Because anyone can play the *tablā*, but it takes special skill to play any other instrument. That’s just the way it is,” said Seif.

#### **I. A. 4 The *Moūtreb* Sings**

As the lights changed to deep purple hues, the *moūtreb*<sup>104</sup> came out and crooned an Arabic love song. “Do you see how? Do you see how much love I have?” Casablanca patrons began to enter the dance floor and danced with each other, disco ball spinning, blue and red lights glowing across the musicians’ faces. He sang, “look and see, “*bos e bos e bos.*” Everyone in the audience seemed to enjoy this song, as they began singing along.

The singer crooned up the scale, as the violinist completed each of the phrases. The Arabpop sound of Amr Diab<sup>105</sup> poured forth from the keyboards, as many instrument sounds unfolded heterophonic melody. He sang in Arabic with an Iraqi accent:<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Moutreb* literally means male singer.

<sup>105</sup> Amr Diab is a very famous Egyptian Arabpop singer and musician.

<sup>106</sup> Although I am not fluent in Arabic, I noticed a difference in the accent, and referred to Seif to explain from where the accent.

<p>How sweet is the moon? Everyone fell in love with it.</p> <p>I'm going to meet my uncle. And he might give me his blessing</p> <p>To marry his daughter. I'm going to release her from her prison And build her a palace</p> <p>And no soul will come close to her Not even a good horse-rider</p>	<p>“Ta Bil Gamar Wudraithe”</p> <p><i>Ta bil gamar wudraithe Kul min gam wimraithe Wanna lay gabil ammii Wanna lay gabil ammii Yim kin ya tinee bnaithe Yim kin ya tinee bnaithe</i></p> <p><i>Wallah lexe siggenha Wubni bidi hasanha La ruh ti grub minha Hayah lun lou kanat aiya</i></p>
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**Figure 4: “How Sweet is the Moon?” Lyric Transcription** <sup>107</sup>

It was a simple Iraqi folk tune with a repetitive melody that some of the audience members seemed to recognize as they sang along. Such music was “embedded in a web of kinship and collective memory, located within a cognitive map defined by (Arab/ Middle Eastern) ethnicity and religion.”<sup>108</sup> Many Arabic songs are based on old poetry with the themes of love and life. The words expressed were hidden in these artforms because saying them outwardly was not considered polite.

#### **I. A. 5 The Audience Performs**

The audience danced vibrantly, shaking shoulders, dropping and twisting hips to further express the music of the Casablanca band. A crowd began to form, some in couples, many in groups interacting with each other – having conversations and

<sup>107</sup> Arabic and English translation by Seifed-Din Abdoun.

<sup>108</sup> Carole Pegg, Review of *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music*, British Journal of Ethnomusicology, vol. 3, (1994): 126.

dialogue – alternating between shoulder shimmies and interpretative hand gestures, with knee-lifts and hip swings. Waiters constantly shifted around the crowded dance floor, still serving customers drinks, *argile*,<sup>109</sup> and platters of *hummus*, *falafel* and grape leaf dishes. Many of the patrons made quick bouncy hip movements to keep up with the fast beats of the *tableh* and rich ornamentation of the string orchestra sound of the keyboard. Other people moved with fewer movements, choosing to interpret the melody in an expressive manner.

The audience clapped happily and cleared the floor at the end of each song, which lasted ten to fifteen minutes. For each *wāslā*,<sup>110</sup> the singer continued singing in the same *māqām* as he transitioned from one song to the next, allowing the people to continue dancing.

Two young men who appeared to be in their late 20s sat near us, jean-clad legs crossed, reclining back against the cushions. I turned to one of them and asked where he was from. He said, “Iraq.” I asked him how he felt to be there at Casablanca, and he responded, “It feels like home.” The look in his eyes further conveyed wistful sentiment and meaning.

Most of the people, including musicians and audience members, were of Arab descent as many spoke in Arabic and danced in characteristic ways. They also were quite comfortable in the environment, as if they had been there numerous times. A group of non-Arabs, most likely Americans, enjoyed the remains of dinner and drinks as they had celebrated someone’s birthday. Many began leaving before the open

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<sup>109</sup> *Argile* is the same as a *houka* or smoking device.

<sup>110</sup> A *wāslā* is a musical form or collection of songs.

dance time was in full swing. It was a novelty to them, they were not regulars as many of the others seemed to be.

As the *moûtreb* began crooning a *mawāl*,<sup>111</sup> a couple of audience members, including one of the Iraqi gentlemen next to us, came up and began showering dollar bills in front of him, shooting them off in a quick flood. I watched as they helicoptered to the floor and stayed there, to be collected at the end of the night. The violinist soloed between the vocalist's verses, steel-and-molasses tones searing the air. The *moutreb* continued to proclaim as the melody line rose, and the *tablā* began its *shargi*<sup>112</sup> rhythm.

1	2	3	4
Dum Dum	Dum Dum	Dum ta-ka	Ta-ka ta-ka

The heavy beats suddenly spurred a dozen young men to rush onto the dance floor holding hands, some with cigarettes stilled pursed between their lips. They began dancing the *debke*, a famous men's folkdance performed in Arab countries. The men kicked and slid-stepped in circles, while the *tablā* doom-doom-doom-doomed, strongly pulsing between the cycle-like melodies of the singer soloist. The men, dressed in jeans and nice shirts, enthusiastically stepped and hopped, some breaking off in trios and quartets of brotherhood, while one man stayed in the middle dancing a bit. Although the *debke* is usually for men, women sometimes join in too.<sup>113</sup> It is similar to Greek Zorba dance, but the arms are held down at the sides.

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<sup>111</sup> *Mawāl* is a vocal solo.

<sup>112</sup> Traditional rhythm of Iraqi style *debke*.

<sup>113</sup> In Jordan and Palestine, it is quite common for men and women to join together in the dance, holding each others' shoulders, but maintaining the *debke* footwork. Instead of being called the *debke*, it is called the *Habel Mowade* meaning 'Love Thread.' Information provided by Seifed-Din Abdoun.

### **I. A. 6 We Dance**

After some time of watching the other restaurant patrons grooving with the Arabic rhythms, I pulled Seif with me to the dance floor, joining the charismatic crowd of revelers. The black fringe of the lace scarf tied at my hip swished and swayed as I spoke the language of shimmies, figure-eights, hip-bumps and hip-drops. Reflecting on the Casablanca dancer *Zahra*, how she seemed a little restrained for this style of dance, I let go and envisioned myself as the dancer of the desert night.

“(The dance) often became a trope for the Orient’s abandon, for it seemed to be a dramatically different mode of dancing from its Western counterpart.”<sup>114</sup> I, too, was releasing my spirit, stepping into the fantastic world of Arab dance experience, shared with Seif and my fellow patrons shifting, shimmying and hip-dropping all around us.

Glancing around, I noticed the constant show of creativity and cultural attitude so commonly displayed by Arab dancers; the slight angled position of the head as a middle-aged woman would lift and drop her hip almost too-quickly-to-taunt. A mocha-skinned man lifted his arms and shoulders with minute hip movements, as his date shoulder-shimmed toward and away from him. A collective group of snake arms and fingers painted and molded the smoky air, at times liltily falling like feathers, exchanging dialogues.

### **I. A. 7 Casablanca**

The Casablanca restaurant serves as a social and cultural center. Cultural values and customs are transmitted here, from the older generations to the younger, from immigrants to first-generation Arab-Americans. A few children between the

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<sup>114</sup> Buonaventura, *Serpent of the Nile*, 90.



ages of seven and ten were dancing near adults; a woman in her late thirties dressed chicly in a pink satin top and black pants, led a little girl in dance, turning her and demonstrating hip moves. The little girl emulated her mother as her frilly white dress shook around her.

Casablanca, with its own house band, its dancer(s), had a character that was “constructed in terms of place and local images, traditions, and heritage.”<sup>115</sup> Here, exists the celebration of an ethnic group, with “organized interaction between people.”<sup>116</sup> This is evidenced in the way people were seated around the dance floor, around low-standing, small round tables, along cushioned couches. Each party would easily make conversation with the next, as the rules of personal space were more flexible in this environment than in many American restaurants. While dancing, the space around people was such that if a person bumped into or brushed against someone else, there was almost no notice.

It was getting too crowded where we were standing, so we repositioned ourselves on the other side of the dance floor, close to our table. Instantly, the music changed from Egyptian-style rhythms to a saucy Latin and Arab mix. More patrons jumped up to join in the revelry of the moment.

### **I. A. 8 Madam Casablanca**

As we were about to leave, I recognized one of the owners, whom I have heard referred to as the ‘Madam,’ as she sat near the entrance, directly in front of the dance floor, facing the band, where she could oversee the entire club and easily socialize with patrons. She and those around her were well-dressed in their late 50s,

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<sup>115</sup> Pegg, Review of Martin Stokes’ *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music*, 127.

<sup>116</sup> Barth, “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,” in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music*, 75.

early 60s perhaps, with thickly kohl-lined eyes and long-fringed hip-scarves encircling the almost-youthful waistlines. They often joined in the dancing, with the suave, but playful attitude of years of womanly dance experience. I spoke with one of the women, who mentioned she was half Bedouin (mother from Jordan), half Lebanese (father). She spoke of her grandmother and her family wistfully, almost as if she could go back to that time and that place.

The enthusiastic participation of the audience members by clapping with the musicians, dancing to the music, joining in with *Zahra*, shouting praises of “*Yaallah!*” and showering dollar bills in front of the band, all served to reinforce and evaluate fellow Arabs and support Arab cultural values.<sup>117</sup> By participating and self-evaluating, they continue membership in the larger ethnic group, not just in the Diaspora of the United States, but in the community of Arabs throughout the world.

The music having been shared, praised, remembered, and celebrated from far away, in the past, to here and now, supports Stokes’ explanation of authenticity and identity in music, that is, “this is what is really significant about this music.” What is significant? The instruments, the lilting melodies about love, the rhythms, the dance, and so much more. “This is the music that makes (Arabs) different from other people.”<sup>118</sup>

How fascinating that Casablanca restaurant, with its décor, food, music, and dancer seemed to celebrate its own Arab identity. The actions and behavior, the language (various Arabic dialects), the social customs, the popular Arab music (Iraqi,

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<sup>117</sup> Edward Brass, “Ethnic Identities,” In *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 89.

<sup>118</sup> Stokes, “*Ethnicity, Identity, and Music*,” 6.

Algerian, Egyptian), the dances (Egyptian cabaret, Arabian Gulf, Northeast African Zar), the cuisine (North African style chicken and couscous and ‘Middle Eastern’ style *falafel* and *tabouleh*), were pulled from various regions of West Asia and North Africa (encompassing the region known as Arabia). Nonetheless, the celebration of these many influences unified the Arabs living and visiting this area, enabling them to maintain a sense of their regional and ethnic identities.

### **I. B. Marcel Khalife at the Lincoln Theatre**

Perched high up in the balcony of Lincoln Theatre on something like the sixty-seventh row, my husband and I sat awaiting the arrival of Marcel Khalife, famous *oud* player from Lebanon. I sat quietly excited while watching the myriads of people climb into the old plush-covered wooden-backed seats. Most of the people I saw looked Mediterranean or Arab, and I enjoyed watching as many exchanged friendly greetings of a handshake and two kisses. The theatre was packed with over 1200 people.

I had never seen Marcel Khalife before or even heard his music that I knew of; I had only heard of him from Seif, that he was an excellent player and that everybody loved him. As he strode across the stage, I squinted to see him from the lofty balcony, his red scarf catching my eye. Accompanying him was two young men, both his sons – one a pianist and the other a percussionist, and last was an old man who played bass.

The audience applauded for his presence, as part of the Arab diaspora in D.C. greeting one of their brethren from home thousands of miles away. They warmed up with some contemporary eclectic eastern-influenced jazz music just to set the mood,

but I couldn't wait to hear the real stuff. Eventually, his warm male voice spoke Arabic to the audience. Laughter and chuckles greeted him as he made jokes with them while strumming the *oud*. It was as if he was talking to old friends, and the audience felt it too. After the first few modern pieces, he played some of his older compositions, what the Arab-speaking members of the audience knew immediately. Many of the men sang along with him. Later a female vocalist sang, and the women sang along with her. At one point, people were so excited by the music, they stood up and held hands and sang.

What I found most intriguing was when Khalife sang solo with the instruments quiet around him, the audience also was quiet, following every note. I was able to understand a few words, like “*oumi*” for mother, and “*salaam*” meaning peace. Khalife bent over his *oud* as if to cradle an old friend; his hand barely seemed to move as he plucked and strummed up and down.

As written in the program,

Interpreter of music and *oud* performer, Khalife is also a composer who is deeply attached to the text on which he relies. In his association with great contemporary Arab poets, particularly, Mahmoud Darwish, he seeks to renew the character of the Arabic song.<sup>119</sup>

Marcel expressed the feelings of the people, but once he sang a line of the Q'uran in one of his songs. This song was called “I Am Yusef Oh Father,” about the plight of the Palestinians. ” about the prophet Joseph, the poetry was composed by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. In his poetry he took a quote from the Q'uran. Khalife sang the song and recorded it. This was a controversial move that did not go unnoticed. Because the words of the Q'uran are sacred, Muslims feel that they should

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<sup>119</sup> Program notes, Marcel Khalife in concert, 2005.

not be put to instrumental music, as this disgraces the Q'uran. The head cleric, a Shia Muslim, tried to take Khalife to court, and asked for a severe punishment. Luckily, the case was dropped, because they thought it was not fair to stereotypes, and to advance the culture of the society that surrounds it.

On his opinion in taking the case of singer Marcel Khaleifa to the court, Sheikh Shamseddine said, "I do not expect the case to go to court. Our task, being a religious reference, is to teach the Islamic jurisprudence in this respect."<sup>120</sup>

Khalife's songs are about love and nationalism only. He expressed the love for the land and for the cause of the Palestinian people's suffering. At the beginning of one song in Marcel's performance, he requested that the spotlights be put on the people, and the stage lights be darkened, as he wanted to hear the people sing, "Passport." As soon as he started to play, people began singing, "leini ya el founi..." meaning "they do not recognize me."<sup>121</sup>

One of Marcel Khalife's songs was a form of call and response. It was an enjoyable experience, as he led the audience in an original melody that was not well-known. Everyone in the crowd followed his lead and sing in response. The melody was rather complex, using the vocal ornamentation called *orab*, which is a form of vibrato in Arabic singing. The melody is firmly implanted in my mind even days after the concert, and the enjoyment of sharing that experience with 1200 other people also lives in me.

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<sup>120</sup> Marcel Khalife, interview October 1999 with Holy Cleric Sheikh Shamseddine (Accessed [4 December 2004])  
<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/991012/1999101216.html>

<sup>121</sup> Please see lyrics below.

This entire experience was memorable for several reasons. Not only because Marcel Khalife is an excellent singer or that the music beautiful and stimulating, but also because the meaning behind his music was poignant to the crowd of people, immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Middle East.<sup>122</sup>

### **Passport**

By Mahmoud Darwish

They did not recognize me in the shadows  
That sucks away my color in this Passport  
And to them my wound was an exhibit  
For a tourist who loves to collect photographs  
They did not recognize me,  
Ah . . . Don't leave  
The palm of my hand without the sun  
Because the trees recognize me  
All the songs of the rain recognize me  
Don't leave me pale like the moon!

All the birds that followed my palm  
To the door of the distant airport  
All the wheat fields  
All the prisons  
All the white tombstones  
All the barbed boundaries  
All the waving handkerchiefs  
All the eyes  
Were with me,  
But they dropped them from my passport

Stripped of my name and identity?  
On a soil I nourished with my own hands?  
Today Job cried out  
Filling the sky:  
Don't make an example of me again!  
Oh, gentlemen, Prophets,  
Don't ask the trees for their names  
Don't ask the valleys who their mother is  
From my forehead bursts the sword of light  
And from my hand springs the water of the river  
All the hearts of the people are my identity  
So take away my passport!<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Seif also shared with me that he had the pleasure of performing with Khalife in a concert in Libya in 1989.

<sup>123</sup> This is one example of a song text that Marcel Khalife sings, written by the award-winning Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.

## **Chapter II: Five Portraits of Arab Musicians**

This chapter contains the portraits of five of the fifteen Arab musician informants. My intention is to provide a “snapshot” or brief portrait of five of the thirteen Arab musicians involved in my research. Each is uniquely different, but with a few common characteristics. After each portrait, a favorite Arabic song is listed with Arabic lyrics and English translations. After three of the five featured Arab musician/ informants are “Identity Maps” that show a divergent visual diagram of various facets of their identity. These facets of identity include name, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, regional identity, etc. The function of these identity maps is to provide a quick-reference to the featured musician. However, in no way are the identity maps meant to be comprehensive or complete, as identities are far more complex.

The stories and experiences they shared, as well as personal perspectives on their own identities is quite complex. Additionally, how those identities seem to manifest themselves in musical expression further illuminates how the interplay of Arab identity, ethnicity, and music is performed and negotiated in the Arab diaspora of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

### **II.A. Hilāl Khoūri:**

Hilāl Khoūri was originally born in Jordan, but spent most of his early years growing up in the Arabian Gulf. He has lived here in the U.S. since he was 17 years old, more than 16 years. Originally trained on the *tablā* in a musical family, he was exposed to numerous rhythms and songs, including the characteristic driving, syncopated beats of the local *khālijī* music. “Folk music ... in Saudi Arabia and its

neighboring Gulf states [is] characterized by monophonic musical structures, the predominance of the voice in music and sung poetry, highly syncopated rhythms, strongly emotional lyrical content . . . . ."<sup>124</sup>

While performing at Mosaic Café, he played songs that he remembered from the gulf. Hilāl describes Arab culture, language, and music interchangeably; for him, they are masculine, strong, having endured tough living in the desert, surviving the elements. The music reflects and embodies this sense of survival and lifestyle. People get up and dance and clap to deeply moving rhythms symbolic of the motion of life and human expression. Hilal taught himself to play *oud* and has immersed himself in researching the folklore, the history and the repertoire of the *oud*.

Having described a complex set of self-identities, Hilāl leans toward one particular identity rather than another depending on the context of the situation in which he finds himself. He describes himself to be an Arab man, a Jordanian, an Arabian Gulf Arab, a Levantine Arab, and to some degree an Arab-American. He lived in Allentown, Pennsylvania for at least seven years in his twenties, and still has family there. Hilāl chose an English name to be referred to by many of his peers.

Hilal says that his family left the Middle East in search of financial stability and the freedom to live with their chosen religion of Christianity. He said that most Arab Muslims don't understand how difficult it is to live under Arab Muslim rule and feel unsafe of celebrating Christianity. Since his family came to the US when he was 17, he felt his family was seeking these goals that made complete sense to the good of the family and to so many other Arab families. His is a musical family that had no

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<sup>124</sup> Kay Hardy Campbell, "Folk Music and Dance in the Arabian Gulf and Saudi Arabia," in *Images of Enchantment*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur, (Cairo: American University of Cairo, 1997), 57.



problem performing music publicly, while Hilal struggled as a young boy when he learned that in Islam, many Muslims interpreted that music was *harām*, as it was associated with sex, alcoholism, and other undignified acts. After a year-long sacrifice, he ultimately embraced his love of music and continued to build his skills at playing Arabic *tablā*, while continuing to learn through oral tradition: watching, mimicking other family musicians, and performing in small and large groups.

In the context of spending time with other Arab-Americans who were actually born in the U.S., he has said that he feels more than different from them. He perceives that they see him as being backwards, the way that they generalize about Arab culture in general. Many of them don't speak Arabic and do not stay educated in Arabic politics. He feels they are less educated, but tend to chide him for his personal perspectives. He tends to look at things globally, living with a sort of double consciousness in regards to how Arabs live in the U.S. and how Arabs live in the home countries, throughout the Arab world. He and most other Arabs I have contact with on social networking sites openly share links to the latest news and video clips, as well as articles about current politics and human rights topics.

At the end of this portrait, there is an identity map designed for Hilal. Its purpose is to clearly organize a set list of identities to see relationships amongst them, and to quickly get a big picture of Hilal's overall personal identity. By no means is it 100% thorough, since it was shared and discussed with him, he had the opportunity to add, subtract, and edit data in the identity map. Because of his concern for having multiple facets of Arab identity itself, the arrangement of the facets worked well as a unifying whole, with an understanding that any of the identities could be advanced or

negotiated depending upon the context in which Hilal found himself. For example, in various musical settings such as a private hafla with mainly Arabs or a public performance with mainly non-Arabs, Hilal would advance part of his traditional Arabness in the first context, and emphasize his Arab-Americanness more in the second.

Hilal has an American name that he uses at work and in some social situations. This is one way he shows a sense of adaptability to American culture.

“Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau caution that bicultural people who occupy two worlds, such as Arab Americans, switch and alter identity as they move back and forth between social worlds. This alternation of identity may lead to displacement or fragmented identity. There is a strong connection between identity and social interaction. Identity is shaped and formed through social interaction. The fluid nature of identity is an important element in understanding immigrants’ experience, because their identities are continuously renegotiated in their attempt to adapt to and integrate with their host culture.”<sup>125</sup>

In performance at Mosaic Café, Hilāl tends to enjoy sitting in with other musicians, and seems somewhat uncomfortable to play solo. His experience singing and playing *oud* came later than playing the *tablā*, but he loves and reveres the *oud* for its beauty and status within Arabic music. Hilal taught himself to play *oud* and has immersed himself in researching the folklore, the history and the repertoire of the *oud*.

Hilal characterizes himself as someone who has an ear for traditional music. His appreciation for the *oud* and all other traditional instruments, folkloric music of the Arab world, classical Arabic music such as songs by Abdel Wahab, Oum Khoulthoum, and Abdel Halim Hafez, all reinforce the idea of what he and some of

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<sup>125</sup> Hecht, M.L., Collier, M.J., and Ribeau, S., *African American communication: Ethnic Identity and Cultural Interpretations*, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 53.

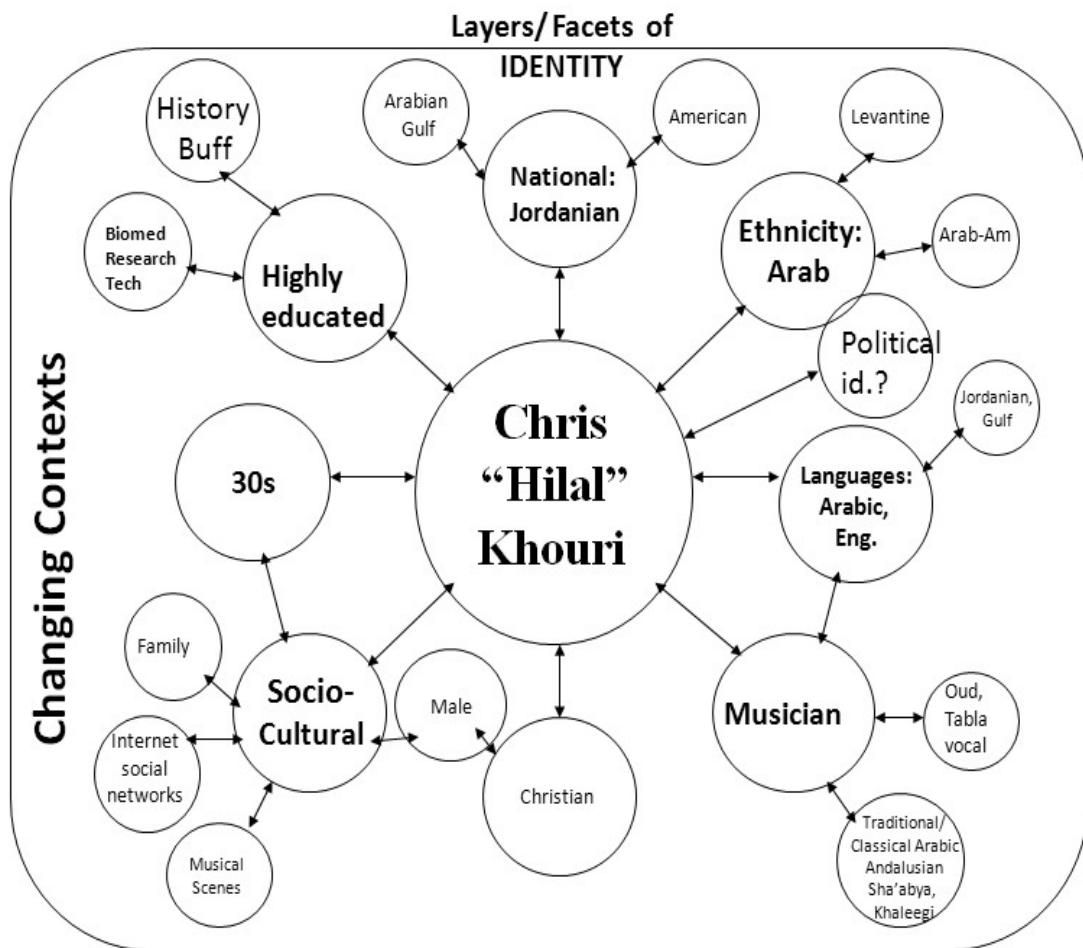
the other musicians frequently refer to as “what is authentic,” in regards to Arabic music of the past that carries on traditional elements including taqasim, tarab, instrumentation, etc.. When asked about the future of Arabic music, Hilal expressed his concern that, “Traditional Arabic music is fading away, being replaced by the faster,[technologically driven rhythms, tracks, and sound manipulations of] pop music in the West.”<sup>126</sup> Although he respects and reveres traditional Arabic music, he sees the necessity for Arabic music to meet the changing tastes of the youth and rising generations of Arabs. As young Arabs desire more danceable, faster rhythms and look to the music of the West as forward-moving, technologically advanced, and possibly even superior to the seemingly antiquated traditions of classical and folkloric Arabic music, Hilal suggests that Arabic music will change and serve their needs in such a way that will sound more Western, losing the attention to *māqāmat*, *tārāb*, poetry, and traditional live instrumentation. He sees the point at which globalization of Arab pop music is necessary and valuable to rising Arab youth. He says he doesn’t believe it’s possible that those traditionalists trying to bring keep traditional Arabic music alive in their various means (workshops, performance, YouTube videos, etc.) will be successful at perpetuating its life.

This discussion leads me to question how the change in Arabic music might affect change in Arab identity. Considering that Arab youth in countries such as Egypt and Jordan constitute at least 1/3 of the population, in this global village, it is not surprising to imagine that Arab identity is already changing. From political revolts to widespread access to the information superhighway, Arab identity is making changes in itself in this current moment.

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<sup>126</sup> Hilal Khouri, interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, November 2010.

Hilal admits that performing folk and classical Arabic music is more “authentic” to him; he appreciations the goal of *tārāb* and how the *oud* is the most revered instrument, with its long history and lasting legacy. Knowledge of and skillful, artistic performance of the *oud* represent for Hilal and some of the other Arab musicians I interviewed: an authenticity in all of the following: Arab masculinity, Arab musicianship, and Arabic music.



**Figure 5 Identity Map of Chris “Hilal” Khouri**

Wādī al- Ṣafī  
*Al-Laylū Yā Lailā* (The Night, oh Laila)  
الليل يا ليلي يعاتبني

Lyrics: Mūstafā Mahmoud  
Music: Halim el -Roomi

الليل يا ليلي يعاتبني ويقول لي سلم على ليلي	The night, oh Laila, is blaming me And is telling me to send you its regards
الحب لا تحلو نسائمه إلا إذا غنى الهوى ليلي اه الا اذا غنى الهوى ليلي	The love's winds/breezes is not sweet Unless love sings (for) Laila unless love sings (for) Laila
دروب الحي تسألني تري هل سافرت ليلي وطيب الشوق يحملني إلى عينيك يا ليلي	The neighborhood's roads are asking me Did Laila leave? And the goodness of longing is taking carrying me Towards your eyes oh Laila
لأجلك يطلع القمر خجولا كله خفر وكم يحلو له السفر مدى عينيك يا ليلي	For you, the moon comes Shy full of shyness And how sweet travelling is to it For you eyes oh Laila
لنا الأيام تببتسم ولا همس ولا نغم وماذا ينفع الندم نديم الروح يا ليلي	For us, days smile Without whisper or tune And what good is it to regret You're the companion of the soul oh Laila
رجعت ألم أحلامي وأحيا بين أنغامي وغاب ربيع أيامي وليلي لم تزل ليلي	I'm back to gather up my dreams And live between my tunes And the spring of my days is gone And Laila is still Laila

**Figure 6 Wadi al-Safi Lyric Transcription Arabic, English<sup>127</sup>**

<sup>127</sup> Arabic and English translation by Seifed-Din Abdoun.

Al-Laylu Ya Laila (The Night, oh Laila)

Lyrics: Mustafa Mahmoud  
Music: Halim el -Roomi

Music Moderato



6  
9  
13  
17  
21  
25  
29  
33  
38  
42  
47

al  
laylu ya Laila ya laila ya'atiboni wa ya golo li sa-  
lim ala lila al- hobo la tahlo  
nasa'emoho .... illa itha gana el-hawa laila...  
al laylu ya Laila ya'atiboni wa ya  
golo li sa lim al liala al- hobo la tahlo  
nas'emoho illa itha gana el- hawa laila...  
illa itha gana el- hawa laila... droop el-hay ta'saloni .....  
tara hal saf- art laila watib al- shawqi yahmiloni  
illa aynaki ya laila illa aynaki ya laila.....

Figure 7: Musical Transcription of Al Laylu Ya Laila (The Night, Oh Laila)<sup>128</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Musical Transcription provided by Seifed-Din Abdoun.

## II. B. Farid Miller

“The prominence of our identity rises and falls relationally, depending on the context. Our identity is dependent upon the relationships we have with other people.”<sup>129</sup>

I was fortunate to have connected with Farid online via Mike’s *Ouds* website forum. As an Arab, Farid’s carries the hyphenated identity Syrian-American; his mother is Syrian and his father is American. To further add to the mix, Farid was born in Syria, originally given an American name and was raised and educated in Lebanon, completing his schooling at the American University of Beirut. He feels comfortable in both Arab and American circles and speaks both languages fluently.<sup>130</sup>

During the interview, I posed such questions to him as “do you see yourself as Syrian-American? Does you refer to yourself as Arab? He replied affirmatively to both questions, although he made clear that he is also American. While he mixes in Arab circles, he feels his Arab identity is further pronounced. During the interview Farid expressed an almost equal degree of a need to connect to the community through music as much as to connect to his Arab roots.

His desire to share his *nāy* playing was quite impressive. Farid originally started playing recorder and not an Arabic instrument as many of the other musicians had. He felt his life was equally balanced as American and Arab because of his parents and his schooling.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Joane Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture,” in *Social Problems*, Vol. 41, No. 1. (1994), 152-176.

<sup>130</sup> Farid Miller, interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 11 October 2010.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Farid's wife played an important role in his acquisition of a set of *nays* and his development as a *nay* player. She shared the story quite eloquently of her purchase of a set of *nāys* for her husband, and her personal wishes behind that gift. An entire list of reasons came pouring forth about why she wanted her husband to play the *nāy*. First of all, she wanted her husband to learn to play the instrument that was so loved and appreciated in Arab culture. She wanted to help her husband share something with her fellow Arabs, especially her family here in the U.S. to help them feel a piece of home through his performance on the *nāy*. She also wanted him to share something positive with Arabs and non-Arabs around them that were faced with daily negative images in the media.

Farid as an Arab-American musician had, to some degree, work at constructing his ethnic identity for others to see his identity as an Arab. For example, to prepare for musical performance, he made deliberate choices for dress, instrument, and name in order to be more "authentic." He chooses to wear a tarbouche and a chanicle for some performances. He chose the name Farid, even though he had no Arabic name, only an English name from his father. He also chose to play the *nāys*, with encouragement by his Lebanese wife.<sup>132</sup> Farid admits has tried to trace all his family roots. He thinks about his identity and seeks a feeling of connection with his own "Arabness." This represents his need to be more 'authentic' in self-consciously shaping his own identity, and how he wishes to be perceived by others, both in the Arab and non-Arab communities.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

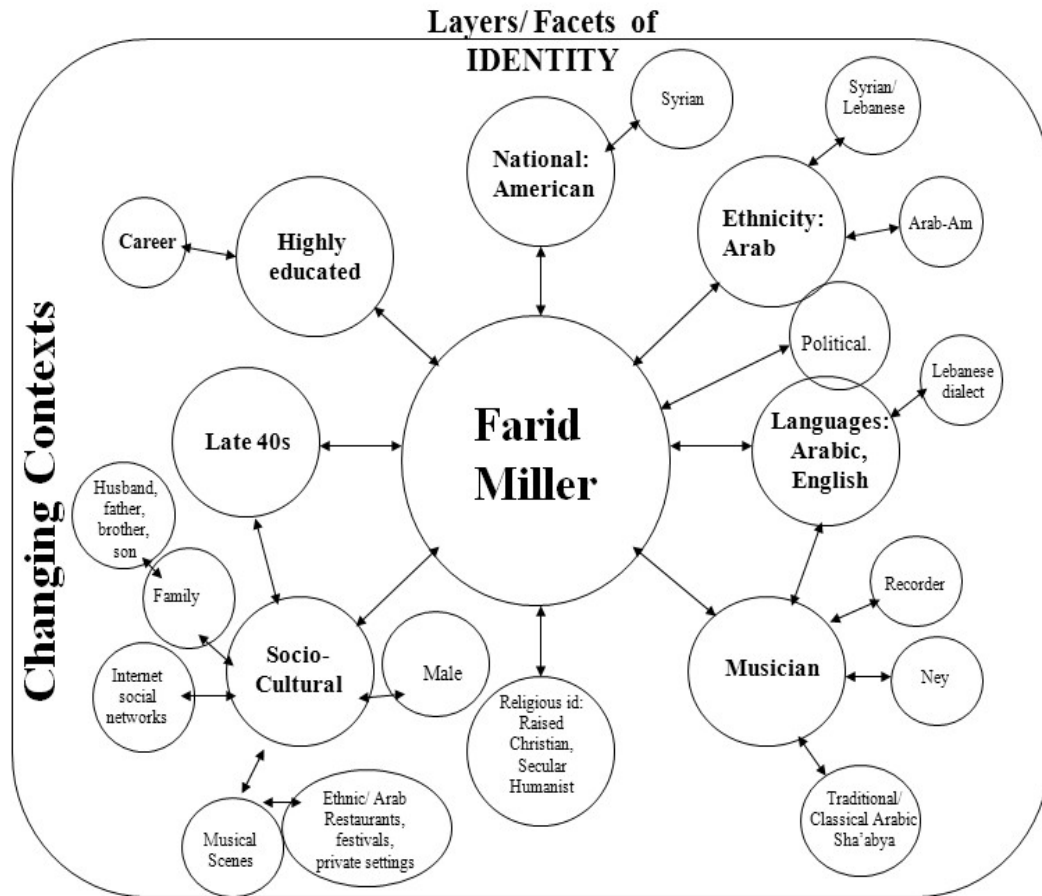
<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



Farid said, “Why relive our history (Lebanese/ Arab wars and struggles)? You have to shape your identity; if you are shaped by your history, you have to create your own individuality in our survival mode...”

The notion of constructed ethnic identity finds itself displayed in Farid’s choice to be called Farid rather than his original birth name. Farid chose this name because it sounds more authentic to be a *nāy* player named Farid than John, for example. ‘Farid’ itself means ‘unique,’ which speaks to his choice of shaping his own individual identity.

The following is an identity map for Farid which shows a basic summary of descriptors that classify aspects of his overall multi-faceted identity. This is by no means a complete look into who he is; it is simply a quick visual summary. Please also refer to Table 3: Rubric of Characteristics of Five Featured Arab Musicians in Chapter IV. which provides further insight on Farid’s individual identity as an Arab musician (in the context of a comparative view with four other featured Arab musicians), and his worldviews on Arabic music and its future.



**Figure 8: Identity Map of Farid Miller<sup>134</sup>**

## II. C. Dr. Souheil Younes

Touring in a Lebanese choral group with famous singer Majida Rumi, Dr. Souheil Younes came to Montreal, Canada in the mid-1980's. He joined his musician brother in Montreal and decided to study medicine. Dr. Younes maintained his musical connection by practicing and performing with his elder brother, the two interchanging between *buzuq* and *oud*. Together, they regularly performed at restaurants and nightclubs, making a living while attending graduate school.

Dr. Younes' work in medicine brought him to Bethesda, MD six years ago to work at NIH (National Institutes for Health). Having connected through an online

<sup>134</sup> Designed by Christina Campo-Abdoun with input by Farid Miller.

forum for *oud* players, I invited him to Mosaic Café for an interview. Naturally, he brought his *oud* and a fellow *oud* player where the conversation turned from talking about music and his life to a spontaneous musical performance.

Dr. Younes mentioned that his family supported his musical pursuits to a certain degree, allowing him to sing in the church choir, travel with the Lebanese choral group. His brother encouraged and taught him to play *oud* and *buzuq*. However, there was no encouragement to pursue music as a job or career. It was expected that all members of the Younes family would pursue higher education for more esteemed positions such as doctor.

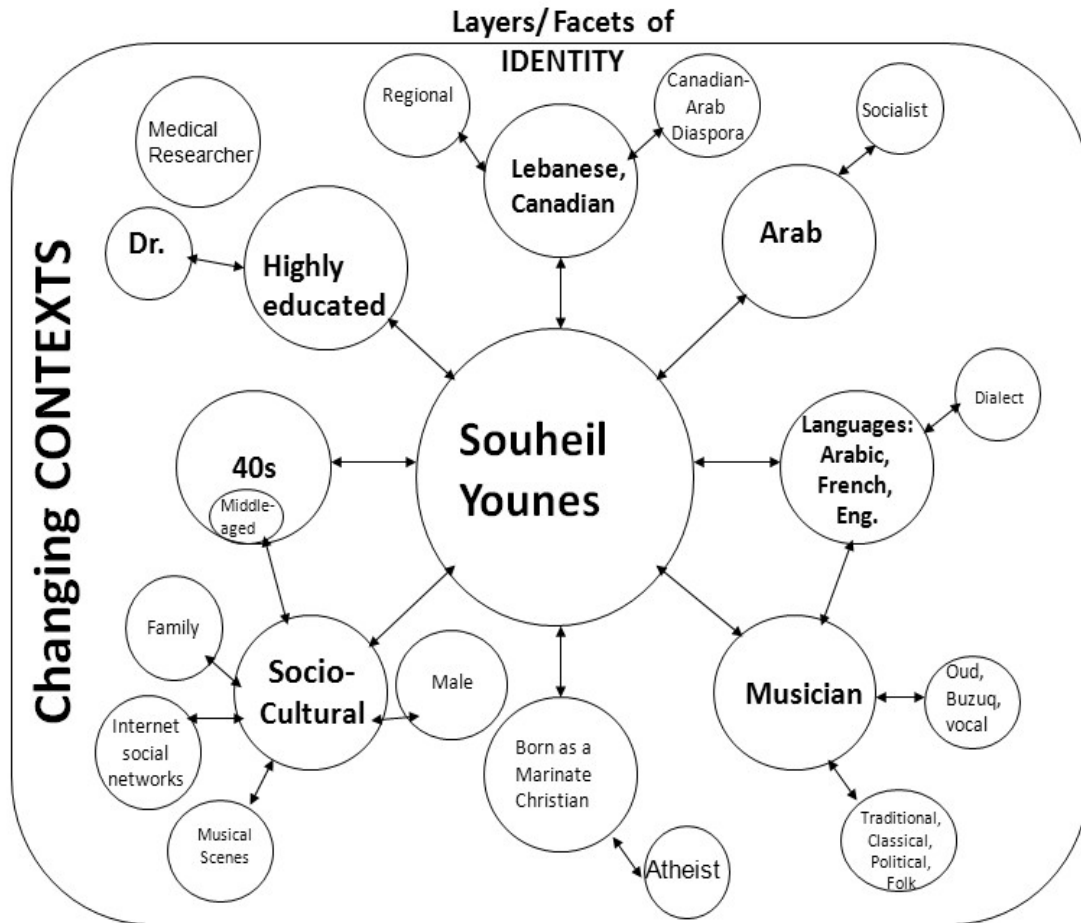
As a Arab Lebanese musician with years of life experience in Canada and the U.S., Souheil's interests and concerns in music encompass the traditional/ classical music of Egypt and Lebanon, various art musics from around

Reference to a viewpoint:

Sadly, the music in question, Arabic music, will be lost to most of these young people as it is sufficiently difficult to learn, and for most, neither a lucrative nor a stable profession. ... they have not learned to appreciate the older music or the *māqām* tradition as listeners, for their 'period ear' a term Rasmussen uses ... is attuned to cross-over Western electronic music with Arabic lyrics and percussion."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Sherifa Zuhur, "Introduction," in *Images of Enchantment.*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur, (Cairo: American University of Cairo, 1997),10.



**Figure 9: Identity Map of Souheil Younes<sup>136</sup>**

The following musical transcriptions were chosen from Souheil’s list of favorite songs to play. This one is particularly meaningful coming from Lebanese composer Marcel Khalife, due to his controversial but popular sense of nationalist identity and metaphorical references to homeland and his people’s sacrifices.

*Wa Anā Amshi* (وانا امشي): As I Walk  
 Poem: Samih al-Qassim  
 Music & Singing: Marcel Khalifā  
*Māqām*: Rāst

<sup>136</sup> Designed by Christina Campo-Abdoun with input by Souheil Younes.

<p>منتصبَ القامةِ أمشي مرفوع الهامة أمشي  منتصبَ القامةِ أمشي مرفوع الهامة أمشي  في كفي قصفة زيتون وعلى كتفي نعشي  وانا امشي وأنا أمشي وانا امشي وانا وانا وانا  امشي</p>	<p>I walk with my back held straight, I walk with my head held high  I walk with my back held straight, I walk with my head held high  I hold an olive branch in my palm, and on my shoulders I carry my  coffin  As I walk, as I walk, as I walk, as I- as I- as I walk</p>
<p>قلبي قمرٌ أحمر قلبي بستان  فيه فيه العوسج فيه الريحان  قلبي قمرٌ أحمر قلبي بستان  فيه فيه العوسج فيه الريحان</p>	<p>My heart is a red moon, my heart is a garden  It is filled with boxthorn, it is filled with basil  My heart is a red moon, my heart is a garden  It is filled with boxthorn, it is filled with basil</p>
<p>شفتاي سماءً تمطر  نارًا حينًا حبًا أحيان  شفتاي سماءً تمطر  نارًا حينًا حبًا أحيان  في كفي قصفة زيتون ، وعلى كتفي نعشي  وانا امشي وأنا أمشي وانا امشي وانا وانا وانا  امشي</p>	<p>My lips are like a stormy sky  Raining fire one moment and love the other  My lips are like a stormy sky  Raining fire one moment and love the other  I hold an olive branch in my palm, and on my shoulders I carry my  coffin  As I walk, as I walk, as I walk, as I- as I- as I walk</p>
<p>منتصبَ القامةِ أمشي مرفوع الهامة أمشي  منتصبَ القامةِ أمشي مرفوع الهامة أمشي  في كفي قصفة زيتون وعلى كتفي نعشي  وانا امشي وأنا أمشي وانا امشي وانا وانا وانا  امشي</p>	<p>I walk with my back held straight, I walk with my head held high  I walk with my back held straight, I walk with my head held high  I hold an olive branch in my palm, and on my shoulders I carry my  coffin  As I walk, as I walk, as I walk, as I- as I- as I walk</p>

**Figure 10: Lyric Transcription of Wa Ana Amshi (As I Walk)<sup>137</sup>**

<sup>137</sup> Song selected by Souheil Younes. Transcription provided by Seifed-Din Abdoun.

**Ana Amshi**  
maqam rast

Poem: Samih al-Qasim  
Music: Marcile Khalifa

Moderato  
Music-Introduction

8  
muntasiba el qamati amshi marfua el - rayati amshi

14  
muntasiba el qamati amshi marfua el - rayati amshi fi kafi qasfato zaytonen wa'ala

20  
katifi na'ashi wa ana amshi wa ana amshi wa ana amshi wa ana wa ana amshi Fin

27

33  
qalbi qamaron ahmar qalbi bustan

39  
fihi fihi el awsaj fihi el - rayhan shafataya sama'on

45  
tomter naran hinan hoban ahyan fi kafi qasfato zaytonen wa'ala

53  
katifi na'ashi wa ana amshi wa ana amshi wa

58  
ana amshi wa ana wa ana wa ana wa ana wa ana wa ana amshi

**Figure 11: Musical Transcription of [Wa] Ana Amshi (As I Walk)<sup>138</sup>**

<sup>138</sup> Music selected by the Souheil Younes. Music transcription by Seifed-Din Abdoun.

## II. D. Mohamed Amir

Mohamed Amir is a Moroccan musician and restaurant owner who has spent the last 14 years since arriving to the United States performing throughout the Washington, D.C. metro area. He came to this region because of his desire to improve the quality of his life and because he had Moroccan musician friends already established in the area.<sup>139</sup>

As a child he was drawn to music, but because of deeply embedded cultural beliefs, his father dismissed his wishes to become a musician as misguided. Mohamed picked up the *nāy*, a bamboo flute for one dinar (about a \$1.00 at the time). He explains that he loved the music of that instrument so much that he would commute by bus and on foot to another town to study the *nāy* with an excellent *nāy* player who was recommended to him. He was encouraged and supported by an uncle in spite of his father's wishes, which ultimately convinced his father to allow Mohamed to attend music at the conservatory. Beyond that point, he experienced a great deal of success at the time, appearing with groups on television, being personally requested by royalty to perform at important functions.<sup>140</sup>

Later, Mohamed chose to learn the Arabic synthesizer so that he would be an indispensable asset to the community of Arabs and Arabic music aficionados who would hire him for private haflas and other events.

...in the unsupervised, real-time world of Arab-American music, synthesizers reign as the *loudest*, largest, most versatile, most expensive, and most powerful instruments."<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Mohamed Amir, interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 16 April 2008.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Anne Rasmussen, "Theory and Practice at the 'Arabic Org': Digital Technology in

With his skill at the keyboard, he sees himself as a one-man-band.

While the façade and body of the synthesizer consist of neutral, slick, black plastic and metal technology, the soul of the instrument, when played by Arab-American musicians, is capable of a completely indigenous, if synthetic, musical idiom.”<sup>142</sup>

In the past several years, he has owned and managed a Moroccan restaurant in downtown Silver Spring, MD, currently runs a restaurant in Fairfax, Virginia called Fez Bistro and will soon be opening another one of the same name in Silver Spring. He maintains his identity as an Arab musician by performing regularly in his restaurants and in other venues that know him as a skilled musician of Arabpop music. In addition, he continues to perform for private events, and even makes time to compose new music, using a variety of technological sound recording equipment such as his Arabic keyboard synthesizer, as well as laying down his own vocal and *ney* tracks.<sup>143</sup>

Mohamed spoke sensitively about the meaning of Arabic music for him. He described how he wants to make people happy, but also to remind them of the beauty of Arabic music and culture and the positive memories about their homeland.<sup>144</sup>

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Contemporary Arab Music Performance,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Middle East Issue (Oct., 1996): 345.

<sup>142</sup> Rasmussen, “Theory and Practice at the ‘Arabic Org,’” 345.

<sup>143</sup> Mohamed Amir, interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 16 April 2008.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



## II. E. Shawkat Sayyad

The most experienced musician I worked with was Shawkat Sayyad. A Palestinian *oud* player and singer for at least 55 years, he is one of the few remaining “old timers” still living and performing in this area. His career began in Israel in the 1950s and continued on to his arrival in the U.S. in the 1970s until now. Performance venues encompass everything from private parties and restaurants to embassies, colleges, and concert halls, with guests ranging from the average party attendee to students, to royalty of Arab nations.<sup>145</sup>

Shawkat has been playing *oud* about 55 years and is one of the few remaining “old timers” still living in the Washington, D.C. metro area. He has been actively performing in the US since the 1970s, from private parties and restaurants to embassies, colleges, and concert halls.<sup>146</sup>

Shawkat studied the *oud* and violin mainly through oral tradition. Specifically, he watched, practiced, listened, performed, and followed master musicians in whose practice he had the privilege of being. He did have some vocal lessons as well, but mainly learned Arabic music performance through observation, listening to recordings of great Egyptian and Lebanese masters, and practice with others that he knew had more skill than he.<sup>147</sup>

When he reflected upon his musical life and what he considered unique and authentic, he provided plentiful evidence to support the meaning of authenticity in his music performance. Not only did he learn to play music through oral tradition, he

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<sup>145</sup> Sayyad, Shawkat. Personal interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 10 November 2010.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

had to memorize all the music he learned. He did not admit to having been able to read or write music, and *proudly* boasted that he had access to no recording devices for at least the first 30 years of playing the *oud*.

Shawkat's words often set himself apart from other younger Arab musicians. For example, he discussed how they had no idea how to name or explain Arabic music theory and systems, such as the *māqāmat* (modal system). Shawkat learned to play the *oud* and sing by listening to other musicians.

As a young man, Shawkat studied the *oud* and violin through the means of oral tradition. He practiced singing in the mountains and valleys to hear his voice travel and resound. He took some sporadic vocal lessons as well, but mainly learned Arabic music performance through live observation, listening to other musicians' practice and performance, listening to the radio and recordings of great Egyptian and Lebanese masters, and practicing with others that had more skill than he. Because he did not rely on technology, he had to memorize the tone, song, words, and music in constant practice. Over time, his listening skills combined with his strong memory abilities made him a keen musician and living repository of Arabic songs of diverse themes and styles.

I excel in my culture, my art. .... Middle Eastern people are emotional, very sensitive .... They have a close culture with their family. The music represents lots of emotion... death in the family, played with emotion, like I was singing for them (the family who felt the loss).” I’m *proud*, I love what I do... to pass it to people, to make them happy. I like to sing for all occasions. Sadness made me a better musician out of me. Happiness – what is it? To please God, to forgive me.... we live, we sing, life is a cycle, a circle.... To accept my destiny.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

I first was introduced to Shawkat by a local bellydancer named Mina with whom I was studying American bellydance. She described him as an amazing musician that made dancers work hard, but who really knew his craft. He knew how to work the dancer and the crowd, so to speak. At a bellydance *hafla* one night at the Mediterranean Café (no longer in existence), I decided to bring my flute and sit with Shawkat. As a friendly and open person, he was more than willing to play music with me and explain techniques like an old master teacher. He would sing and play a line from a song on his *oud* three or four times, periodically providing an explanation of meaning or pitch, and then wait for me to play it back. I sang it to myself, worked it out, and playing it back on flute. With my first introduction to understanding and learning to play the quartertones, it was thrilling to remember a jazz flutist I'd studied many years prior who was known for the "slide flute," that is, rolling the flute lip plate inward and outward to change the pitch in subtler tones than  $\frac{1}{2}$  intervals, in other words, in microtones. Hearing Shawkat bend pitches with *oud* and voice lent visions of this exotic Arabic music, and even more, challenged my ear, memory, and playing skill. When I played back a line from the famous *Laylet Hob*, Shawkat encouraged me to continue further by demonstrating another line. We continued on until he found my playing satisfactory enough to invite me to sit in with him at a restaurant in Takoma Park.

The Middle Eastern Cuisine restaurant on Carroll Avenue had Shawkat as regular performer every Friday evening from 6 – 11pm. It was a simple place owned and managed by a Palestinian family, serving traditional Arabic foods like *falafel*, *hummus*, and *shawarma*, with a simple beige décor, replete with Arab cultural

icons including *nargile*, *fez*, a map of Palestine, and a peeling mural of an exotic desert scene.

When he reflected upon his musical life and what he considered unique and authentic, he provided plentiful evidence to support the meaning of authenticity in his music performance. Not only did he learn to play music through oral tradition, he had to memorize all the music he learned. He did not admit to having been able to read or write music, and demonstratively and proudly declared that he had had no access to recording devices for at least the first 30 years of his musical career.

Shawkat's words often set himself apart from other younger Arab musicians. For example, he discussed how they had no idea how to name or explain Arabic music theory and systems, such as the *māqāmat* (modal system).

Because Shawkat learned to play the *oud* and sing by listening to other musicians, he felt he had learned music in the most traditional and authentic way. This was a complete musical immersion, an embodiment of Arab music tradition, mingling and performing with other musicians; listening, playing, sharing conversation, with almost no awareness of time. The way that he worked with me, was very much the same, with a completely dedicated, enthusiastic passion for the music and an unparalleled commitment to spreading his knowledge. Stories of his past performance experiences and social encounters were interwoven throughout the private music lessons to the degree that the overall experience was entertaining, stimulating, and inspiring.

Shawkat sees himself as a simple man among the human race, having faced extreme challenges in life, including the wars, poverty, and challenges of growing up

in Palestine, onto all that life provides. In the US, he has faced many great hardships as a musician financially and personally with his health. However, through all the trials of life, his music was what he used to cope with it all. Shawkat has such great joy and appreciation for his “Gift from God” that his mission was to make people happy. He would sing songs of heartbreak, love for one’s mother/ family/ homeland/ child, celebration, marriage, and more to fill hearts of those around him. He played particular attention to the needs and identity of his audience in order to fulfill the function of the music at hand.

It was common for Shawkat to alternate between drumming and strumming on his *oud*, while *loudly* singing and calling his audience members names out. His identity as entertainer, storyteller, and ultimately culture guardian sets him apart amongst many groups, from fellow Arab musicians to bellydancers, to arts organizations and Arab organizations who seek his services to educate and entertain.

The following musical transcription from Shawkat’s list of favorite songs to play provides insight into his self-described identity as a heartsick nomad.

‘Abdel Hālim Hāfez  
*Sāwwah* (Wanderer)  
عبد الحلیم حافظ – سواح

Lyrics: Mūhāmmād Hāmzh  
Music: Baligh Hamdi  
*Māqām: Nahawānd/Hūzām/Rāst*

سواح وماشي في البلاد سواح والخطوة بيني وبين حبيبي براح مشوار بعيد وأنا فيه غريب والليل يقرب والنهار رواح	A wanderer... walking in the countryside And the step between my beloved and me is vast In a faraway land where I am a stranger The night approaches as the day leaves
وان لقاكم حبيبي سلموا لي عليه طمنوني الأسمراني عامله إيه الغربية فيه	And if you find my love say hi to her from me Reassure me about how she is doing so far away
سواح وأنا ماشي ليالي سواح ولا داري بحالي سواح من الفرقة يا غالي سواح إيه اللي جرى لي سواح	A wanderer... walking in the nights Not knowing what I'm doing What has this separation from my love done to me?
وسنين وأنا دايب شوق وحنين عايز أعرف بس طريقه منين	For years I've been melting with desire and longing I just want to know where is the way to her
يا عيوني.. آه يا عيوني إيه جرى لك فين إنت وتعمل إيه	My eyes, ah, my eyes Where are you, what's happened to you and what are you doing?
يا ظنوني.. آه يا ظنوني ما تسيبوني مش ناقص أنا حيرة عليه لا أنا عارف أرتاح وأنا تابه سواح	My worries, ah my worries Get away from me, I don't need this I'm confused about her as it is... and I can't rest I'm lost, a wanderer
يا قمر يا ناسيني رسيني عالي غايب نور لي .. وريني سكة الحبايب	Oh moon, oh you who forgets me Take me to the one who is absent
وصيتك وصية يا شاهد عليا تحكي له عالي بيه واللي قاسيته في لياليا	Give me light and show me the trail of my darling I've enjoined you with my last will and you are my witness Tell her what's going on with me and what I've suffered in the nights
سواح وأنا ماشي ليالي سواح ولا داري بحالي سواح من الفرقة يا غالي سواح إيه اللي جرى لي سواح	A wanderer... walking in the nights Not knowing what I'm doing What has this separation from my love done to me?

Figure 12: Lyric Transcription of Sawwah (Wanderer)<sup>149</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Lyric transcription by Seifed-Din Abdoun. Music selected by the Shawkat Sayyad.

## Chapter III: Identity and Ethnicity

### III. A. 1. Definitions of identity

The main idea of my thesis is based on the theory of identity as socially constructed by individuals and the collective group, as well as the theory of identity as being defined against boundaries such as other people or groups. Explanations of such relevant identity theories are provided by ethnomusicologists Timothy Rice and Martin Stokes, and anthropologists Frederick Barth, Anthony Cohen, Thomas Turino, Joane Nagel, and sociology professors Mary Fong and Rueyling Chang.

Identity is the representation of selected habits foregrounded in given contexts to define self to oneself and to others by oneself and by others. Individual identity involves the selection, emphasis, and representation of certain constellations of habit over others in given contexts by oneself and others.<sup>150</sup>

I have combined a variety of definitions of identity into what I hope is a cohesive explanation. What is identity? According to a constructivist perspective, it is the shaping and reshaping of the definition of one's multi-dimensional self-perception or self-image, through the process of looking at various aspects of oneself and expressing, performing, and cultivating those for multiple functions. Specifically, these functions include seeking self-satisfaction, making human connections and relations with similar peoples, setting oneself apart as a unique individual, expressing power in an ethnic or collective group identity, advancing and competing with other groups or individuals, presenting the purpose of the value of what's real(ity), and performing what's respected as authenticity (based on history, longevity, propagation

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<sup>150</sup> Turino, Thomas, ed. "Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities." *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*. (Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2004), 3 – 19.

and perpetuation of tradition). Overall, what is valued in identity is the sense of the authentic, that is, the concept of historical, traditional, and innovative elements surviving in the long-term.

How can identity be expressed? This depends on how the collective group perceives its history and the results of surviving hardships such as war, occupation, economic and political challenges to name a few. When certain elements endure such as language, music, and traditions, an ethnic group may be able to take inventory, consider its successes, and look to the future for positive change, growth, and sustainment. This allows the culture of the group to expand and grow, building upon past traditions, and passing on new ones.

According to Timothy Rice,<sup>151</sup> very few ethnomusicological writings about identity have discussed actual definitions of identity, let alone cited or added on to previous sources on identity from the anthropological, sociological and psychological perspectives. One way to define identity according to Rice's restatement of theoretical contributions by psychologist Erik Erikson is "... Identity is fundamentally about individual self-identity... [Identity] is a concern for self-definition or self-understanding that implies questions like who am I and what is my true nature."<sup>152</sup> In the world of psychology this is referred to as personal identity, further defined is, "all the idiosyncratic things that make a person unique."<sup>153</sup> This

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<sup>151</sup> Timothy Rice, "Disciplining Ethnomusicology: Reflections on Music and Identity," in *Ethnomusicology* 54 (2), Spring/ Summer 2010, 21, citing Erik Erikson in *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York: International Universities Press, 1959.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, New York: International Universities Press, 1959.



self-identity can easily be connected to the Arab musicians' individual constructions of their own identity; in other words, how they choose to shape, express, and perform their identities in music, appealing to the audience and context in which they find themselves.

Consider musical performance and identity shaping: "... music can be used ... as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities..."<sup>154</sup>

Please refer to the application of theories on self-identity to the discussion of Arab musicians' individual self-identities in the second half of this chapter.

Another way to define identity according to Frederick Barth is in terms of boundaries. One must consider "boundary construction and maintenance" and consider opposites of what one's group identity entails. Barth states, "We can use 'boundaries' as a metaphor for how abstract categories, natural classes and kinds, are separated and marked off from each other." In the next chapter I apply this boundary-marking to examples of how my informants marked their own identity boundaries, as well as boundaries of the group of Arab musicians living in the Arab Diaspora of the D.C. metro area.

Martin Stokes states "Music symbolizes social boundaries...." In other words, how a group defines its own identity is explained by what it's not. Joane Nagel emphasizes the concept that identity, whether it's personal or collective is mutable, adaptable, and socially constructed by both the individual and by those with whom the individual interacts.

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<sup>154</sup> Raymond Macdonald, David Hargreaves, and Dorothy Miell, eds. *Musical Identities*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Music is a fundamental channel of communication: it provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions, and meanings even though their spoken languages may be mutually incomprehensible.<sup>155</sup>

With regards to the negotiation of identity, “The prominence of our identity rises and falls relationally, depending on the context. Our identity is dependent upon the relationships we have with other people.”<sup>156</sup>

### **III. A. 2. Social and collective identity as Ethnic Identity**

Because of the many levels of identity that are extracted and defined from myriads of psychological and sociological writings, I’ve decided to expand on the obvious relationship between social/ collective identity and ethnic identity. In resolving [the challenges of a cultural identity] individuals undergo self and cultural identity transformation in order to achieve understanding, harmony, and balance within themselves, their environment, and their connection with others.”<sup>157</sup>

Erik Erikson provides the definition of social or cultural identity to be a collection of social roles a person might play.

Rice restates that according Stuart Hall, there “...is a concern for the psychology of belonging to, identification with, and “suturing” to social groups.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell, *Musical Identities*, 1.

<sup>156</sup> Fong, Mary and Keturah D. McEwen. *Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity*. Ed. By Mary Fong and Rueyling Chuang. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Lanham, Boulder, NY, Toronto, Oxford, 2004. 166.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Timothy Rice, “Disciplining Ethnomusicology: Reflections on Music and Identity,” in *Ethnomusicology* 54 (2), Spring/ Summer 2010, 21, citing Stuart Hall, Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage Publications, 1996): 11.

“Social identities are based on recognized similarities within groups, and differences from others, which in turn serve as the basis of collective feeling and action.” Group identities are the foundation of all social and political life.<sup>159</sup>

### **III. A. 3. Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity is dynamic and created in communication and symbolic interaction. ... a person has multiple identities, and one of the identities will tend to be most salient in a given situation.”<sup>160</sup>

The social constructionist theory of identity attempts to explain how individuals’ and group’s identity(ies) are defined. Various factors influence the individual and group’s negotiation of identity. These factors include: what the group identity means to the individual, how the individual perceives oneself in the context of the group, how the group perceives the individual, and how society (including other groups) perceives the individual and the group. In other words, the individual will shape or reshape his identity to suit his needs in the context of the particular group.

.... The association between sense of belonging and ethnic culture .... ethnic identity is related to how meaning is socially constructed. Who we are and our identity are dependent on our relationship with others and “the web of interdependencies.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Fong and Chuang, “*Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity*,” 175.

<sup>160</sup> Mary Fong and Keturah D. McEwen. *Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity*. ed. by Mary Fong and Ruyeling Chuang, (NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 166.

<sup>161</sup> K.J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 158.

The chart below Table 4 “Chart of Cross-Analyzed Relationships Among Arab musicians, Musical Performances, and Arabic Musical Themes,” the overall concept of social identity is displayed. In other words, the roles that these particular musicians play within their cultural groups are clearly listed. The roles appear in the first column, with related functions of Arabic Music Performance in the second column. Finally, the common song themes that pervade much of Arabic music are connected and listed in the third column. It is important to note that the featured Arab musicians fulfill several different roles at different times in varying contexts. For example, Shawkat and Souheil often serve as entertainer, memory-maker, educator, and archivist, but not always at the same time or place. Sometimes, the musician finds himself in the role of cultural guardian and hero, when large groups of Arabs, perhaps generations who have been away from their homeland for long, will look toward the musician and the musical performance as filling a void, and taking them back in time to a memory or place, a kind of construction of musical space as Martin Stokes seems to have put it, in which they could experience the past or the imagined and idealized past.

**Table 2: Chart of Cross-Analyzed Relationships  
Among Arab Musicians, Musical Performance, and Arabic Musical Themes**

<b>Roles of Arab Musicians</b>	<b>Functions of Arabic Musical Performance</b>	<b>Song themes</b>
1. Ambassador of peace	1. For Peace, joy, hope, inspiration, comfort	1. Love of mother, child, family, motherland, lover
2. Entertainer	2. To entertain/celebrate 3. For personal enjoyment	
3. Memory-Maker	4. For nostalgia, keep collective memories intact	2. Heartbreak/ loss 3. Birth/ Death 4. Baptism/ Wedding
4. Inspirational leader/ therapist	5. To move people; evoke <i>tārāb</i>	5. Traditional/Classical 6. Traditional/ folkloric songs of Arab heritage
7. Educator	6. To educate/ community outreach	
8. Storyteller/ Historian	7. To mark an important occasion	
9. Archivalist	8. To be recorded for future listening	
10. Culture Hero/Guardian	9. Maintain culture	
11. Working Professional/ Entrepreneur	10. To make a living	5. Military 6. Political 7. Brotherhood/ nation 8. Arabpop

Advancing one's personal ethnic identity, for any multi-faceted person, means downplaying certain attributes and advancing others. Ultimately, the individual would, with some degree of conscious control, negotiate his identity by shaping, participating, and performing certain roles and mannerisms. In the realm of the diaspora, this negotiation may be a more conscious thought process (as opposed to the process in one's own homeland) as can be evidenced later in this chapter on Arab musicians in the diaspora of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

How one belongs to a group often requires various elements. One of the elements that determine belonging to or associating with a group/ cultural identity includes the attributes that the individuals have in common. For example, shared language, traditions, history and experiences, customs, mannerisms and even costumes and appearance all contribute to unifying the individuals into a collective/ ethnic group. More specifically, cultural identity is defined as "identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/ rules for conduct."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> M.J. Collier and M. Thomas, "Cultural identity: An Interpretive Perspective," in *Theories in Intercultural Communication*, eds, Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988, 113.

### **III. B. Analysis of Musicians' identities**

#### **III. B. 1. Individual Musical identities**

“The artists of their communities in their musical and social prime... when their musical taste and artistic sensibilities became those of the community.”<sup>163</sup>

This chapter will serve several functions. I will provide an analysis of individual and collective musical identities and worldviews of the five featured Arab musicians', and I also will discuss how their views on Arabic music incline them toward a traditionalist or modernist perspective. My analysis will be framed by four over-arching themes including authenticity, tradition, adaptability, and outreach/dissemination of Arabic music. The ultimate goal in this entire analysis is to work toward an understanding of authenticity as it pertains to Arabic music. In other words, what is significant to Arab musicians about Arabic music? What are the intentions of each of the musicians? How do their intentions further reinforce and shape their individual and collective identities? Finally, I will discuss the future of Arabic music in terms of the musicians' perspective and my own.

Further in this chapter is Table No. 5 “The Rubric of Characteristics of Five Featured Arab Musicians, which displays about seventeen categories of characteristics of the Arab musician informants. Categories include age, instruments, repertoire, playing experience, worldviews on music, performance venues, technique, national identity, ethnic identity, and music as a livelihood. I designed this rubric as an analytical tool that would help show a wide range of characteristics among the musicians, but hoped to find commonalities and trends.

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<sup>163</sup> Rasmussen, “Individuality,” 85.

What I found was that based on the dependence on technology, the age, and experiences, some musicians were more likely to lean to a modernist perspective of Arabic music. In other words, Mohamed tended to lean the most toward being a modernist in the sense of his adaptability as a *ney* player who picked up the Arabic keyboard and could sing. His interdependence on musical technology as well as his ability to compose, produce, and record new music made him the most innovative of the group of informants. Ironically, although Souheil leans more toward traditionalist, based on his opinion on learning and practicing the *oud* with traditional techniques, playing and singing traditional repertoire, prefers not to perform in nightclubs or with bellydancers, and is very concerned about the preservation of Arabic traditional music. Because of this concern, he has chosen to utilize video recording of his own playing and uploading to YouTube and other web media, for the purposes of archiving and disseminating traditional Arabic music with a wide audience. Numerous other data discoveries can be found in this rubric which is meant to organize a variety of information to describe the five informants' musical and individual Arab identities. Nonetheless, information on collective/ ethnic/ group identity can still be extrapolated from the rubric based on commonalities in certain categories.

The quote referenced in the Introduction about “home and host cultures”<sup>164</sup> (Arab and American cultures) in forming a third culture (Arab-American culture) would naturally raise the question: how does an Arab musician demonstrate ethnic, personal and group identity?

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<sup>164</sup> Salhi and Netton, “Voices,” 2.



.... That is what I want to emphasize: through each one of my affiliations, taken separately, I possess a certain kinship with a large number of my fellow human beings but because of all these allegiances, taken together, I possess my own identity, completely different from any other.<sup>165</sup>

### III. B. 2. Collective Arab Identity through Musical Performance

..... bicultural people who occupy two worlds, such as Arab Americans, switch and alter identity as they move back and forth between social worlds. This alternation of identity may lead to displacement or fragmented identity. There is a strong connection between identity and social interaction. Identity is shaped and formed through social interaction. The fluid nature of identity is an important element in understanding immigrants' experience, because their identities are continuously renegotiated in their attempt to adapt to and integrate with their host culture.<sup>166</sup>

How does the Arab collective identity get reinforced through musical performance? Several of the musicians were originally musicians who learned music through oral tradition in their home country, providing a contradiction to the Muslim ideology that music is *haram*. Being men, their involvement in music was supported by their families but not expected to support a livelihood. Two of the musicians picked up an Arabic instrument later in life, which opens up other questions to the expression of their Arab ethnic identity in music.

Even though there is a small population of musicians living in the Washington, D.C. metro area, all the nightclub musicians seem to know each other and work together, but all the other Arab musicians do not necessarily know each other. In fact, several asked me to provide them with others' contact information. I believe this is due to two major reasons. Firstly, the *oud*-players often sing and play

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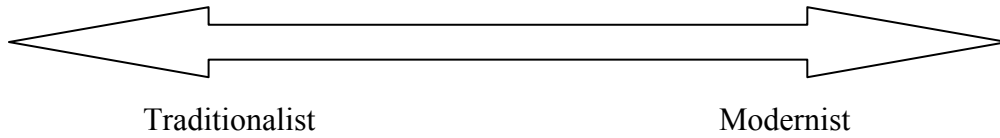
<sup>165</sup> Amin Maalouf, *On Identity*, translated from French by Barbara Bray, (London: The Harvill Press, 2000), 16-17.

<sup>166</sup> Fong and Chuang, "Constructing Ethnic Identity," 53.

solo or invite a table player that they already know to accompany. This is financially more feasible. Secondly, the types of venues vary from private haflas to embassies to colleges to cafes and restaurants, as well as bellydance workshops. All these different venues seek fewer musicians, whereas the nightclubs, whose objective is to entertain large groups, often seek to hire a full band of Arab musicians, who easily get to know each other from playing a few nights a week at different clubs. The nightclub musicians tend to range in age from 20s to 40s with a few exceptions, and a majority is Moroccan. However, other Arab groups are represented, as mentioned in the Casablanca case study, with the Iraqi singer named Majid, and at the Chantilly nightclub Al Flayla Wa Layla a Palestinian group regularly plays.

For the nightclub musicians, there generally seems to be a sense of a collective Arab identity. They play in each others' bands; they need each other for the varied functions they serve, they play in common venues; and they see each other often in these venues. For the non-nightclub musicians, they know there are more Arab musicians around, but they are not so easily in contact with each other. In addition, they tend to be older and range in age from 30s to 70s.

**Table 3: Rubric of Characteristics of Five Featured Arab Musicians**



<b>Musicians' Names:</b>	<b>Souheil</b>	<b>Shawkat</b>	<b>Hilal</b>	<b>Farid</b>	<b>Mohamed Amir</b>
<b>Categories:</b>					
<b>Age</b>	42	70	34	46	39
<b>Instrument(s)</b>	Buzuq, <i>Oud</i> , vocal	<i>Oud</i> , vocal, violin	<i>Tablā</i> , <i>oud</i> , vocal	<i>Nāy</i> , recorder	<i>Nāy</i> , keyboard, vocal, <i>tablā</i> , laptop background tracks
<b>Solo or ensemble</b>	Solo, Duo	Solo, duo, ensemble	Solo, Duo	Ensemble	Solo, Ensemble
<b>Repertoire* 167</b>	AR CL/TR FL	AR CL/TR FL	AR CL/TR FL AP	AR CL/TR FL	AR CL/TR FL AP
<b>Years of playing experience</b>	25+	55+	<i>Oud</i> : 10+, <i>Tablā</i> 20	5 – 10 years	25+

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Key for Arabic music genre terms:

1. AR CL/TR: Arabic classical/ traditional (Abdel Wahab, Abdel Halim Hafez, Oum Khoulthoum)
2. FL: Folkloric; Khaleeji, Sha'abi, etc.
3. AP: Arabpop (Nancy Ajram, Dianna Haddad, Alabina, Amr Diab, Hakim, etc.)

<b>Technique: Playing style</b>	Arabic classical <i>oud</i> , some other world influences	Club musician/entertainer, <i>loud</i> , drums on <i>oud</i>	Traditional <i>tablā</i> , eclectic <i>oud</i> ; world influences/guitar-like strumming style	Classical style <i>nāy</i>	Traditional style <i>nāy</i> , high tech Arabpop keyboard/bkgrd tracks
<b>Technique &amp; Training</b>	Musical family, oral traditional, studied with brother	Musical extended family, Oral tradition, self-taught, few private lessons	Musical family, oral tradition, self-taught	Somewhat Self-taught, Arabic retreat workshops	Self-taught + Arab Conservatory training
<b>Music Literate</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Performance Venues</b>	Restaurants/cafes, private events	Restaurants/cafes/nightclubs, embassies Concert halls, colleges, bellydance haflas, festivals, private events	Restaurants, Cafes, private events	Restaurants/cafes/nightclubs, festivals, bellydance haflas, private events	Restaurants/cafes/nightclubs, bellydance haflas, private events
<b>Willing to Perform with bellydancers</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Music as Main source of income</b>	N	Y	N	N	N

<b>World View on technology</b>	Digital immigrant; adept with current tech.	Uncomfortable with most current tech	Digital native; very adept with current tech.	Digital immigrant; adept with some current tech.	Digital native, very adept, greatly dependent upon current tech.
<b>Dissemination of Recordings</b>	Youtube Facebook PalTalk	Audio cassettes Cds Few youtube links	None	Ensemble's website Cds	Arab music websites Youtube Facebook Professional website
<b>National Identity</b>	Canadian, Lebanese	American, Israeli, Jordanian	American, Jordanian	American, Syrian	American, Moroccan
<b>Ethnic Identity</b>	Arab Lebanese Arab	Arab Palestinian	Arab Levantine Arab Gulf Arab	Arab-American, Syrian Arab	Arab Moroccan Arab (al-Magrebi)
<b>Other Significant identities</b>	Musician Masculine ID Research Dr.	Musician Masculine ID "Old-timer"	Masculine ID Musician	Father Musician Masculine ID	Musician Restaurant owner Father
<b>Worldview on future of Arabic music</b>	Concern for loss of traditional <i>oud</i> playing; seeks to leave a video archive of authentic music on Youtube	Concern for disintegration of Trad. Arabic instrumentation / music, seeks to perform/ teach large groups to leave lasting legacy; would like a memoir of his life recorded	Trad./ folkloric music endures within cultural contexts. Recognizes place of Arabpop in world music scene.	Trad. Arabic instrumentation/ music picked up by few of new generations but changing with the current times	Trad. Arab music will be appreciated but never replaced; Arabpop will continue to thrive

### III. B. 3. Arab Identity

The process of creating communities from ethnic groups involves the selection of particular dialects or religious practices or styles of dress or historical symbols from a variety of available alternatives.<sup>168</sup>

According to Baily, “a second and rather different approach to ethnicity regards ethnic identity as something that is invoked by individuals in particular circumstances when it suits their purposes and helps them attain their goals.” This can be easily applied in the cases of Farid, Adel, and Hilal who have stepped in across cultural boundaries from Arab to American or from a particular Arab subculture to another Arab subculture. What Farid has demonstrated as a recorder player is that he maintains a degree of American/ European classical culture in playing in a group setting, classical pieces. On the other hand, he fulfills his goals of keeping connected to the Arab community through carefree social activity in which music serves a major role to facilitate enjoyment and social interaction, particularly in regards to a shared cultural history.

Ethnomusicologist John Baily, “Music is itself a potent symbol of identity; like language.... it is one of those aspects of culture which can, when the need to assert ‘ethnic identity’ arises, most readily serve this purpose. Its effectiveness may be twofold; not only does it act as a ready means for the identification of different ethnic or social groups, but it has potent emotional connotations and can be used to assert and negotiate identity in a particularly powerful manner.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Edward Brass, “Ethnic Identities,” in *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 75 – 82.

<sup>169</sup> Baily, “The Role of Music,” 48.

Each of the musicians interviewed seek to express a variety of aspects of Arabic culture through their music, some more conscientiously than others. For example, Farid seeks to embody the inherent beauty of the *nāy*'s natural form through his practice and performance of this bamboo flute well-known in the Arab world. Having first heard the lilting ribbons of the *nāy*'s ethereal sound wafting from a lone Arab man's performance in the forest of Beirut decades ago, he was drawn to its haunting voice and whispering timbre.

## Chapter IV: Meanings and Values for Arab Musicians

In this chapter, I will attempt to reveal some common threads shared amongst most of the informants in regards to their insight about the significance of Arabic musical performance interwoven with their personal values. Four main themes will be used as a framework illustrating the negotiation of their Arab individual identity and Pan-Arabic collective identity.

“Identity and culture are fundamental to the central projects of ethnicity: the construction of boundaries and the production of meaning.”<sup>170</sup>

### IV. A. Authenticity

Of the four definitions that anthropologist Edward Bruner offers on authenticity, I will apply two important ones to the discussion of Arab musicians and the way they address authenticity in Arabic music. One definition of authenticity is that a copy or reproduction of an object or idea should be “credible and convincing,”<sup>171</sup> as close as if it were the original.

Another definition involves authority and credibility that is “duly authorized, certified or legally valid.”<sup>172</sup> Then, the question arises, “who has the authority to authenticate?”<sup>173</sup> I contend that based on questions posed to the Arab musicians involved with this study, the majority of the fifteen would consider themselves capable of identifying ‘authentic Arabic music.’

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<sup>170</sup> Joanne Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture,” in *Social Problems*, Vol. 41, No. 1. (1994), 153.

<sup>171</sup> Edward M. Bruner, “Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism,” in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 96, No. 2 (1994): 399.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*



Arab musicians, by nature of inference, imply that have the authority to identify what is authentic in Arabic music and performance. The four reasons why Arab musicians think they have the authority to determine what is authentic are as follows. Firstly, who is better suited to identify authentic Arabic music than someone born and raised in Arab culture? Secondly, most of the musician/ informants who participated in this study were quite experienced, that is, they regularly listened to the Arabic classes, practiced diligently and regularly, developed a high degree of skill and virtuosity, played traditional instruments, learned to play without written music and by oral tradition, and strived to maintain a typical Arabic performance style of constant interaction with one's audience.

Thirdly, some of the musicians mentioned that Arabic music embodies tradition, that is passed down from generation to generation, endured the test of time, and survived hardships, occupation, and political crises. The rationale here is that the music has demonstrated longevity and therefore has substance and power.

Fourthly, Arabic music has timeless messages, expressing emotion, history, and personal stories that all Arabs can relate to. Finally, other cultures and ethnic groups have borrowed from it, quoted it, appropriate it, appreciated it, modified it, and possibly re-invented it as their own, adapting its influences in their own culture.<sup>174</sup>

How do Arab musicians determine authenticity in Arabic music?<sup>175</sup> To have the authority to determine if Arabic music is authentic depends on one's abilities to recognize the valuable traits that make Arabic music characteristic and unique. Some

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<sup>174</sup> See Souheil's discussion in Chapter IV.

<sup>175</sup> Edward M. Bruner, "Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism," in *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 96 No.2, (June 1994): 397 – 415.

of the Arab musician/ informants such as Souheil, Shawkat, and Mohamed, no matter how much they leaned toward traditionalist or modernist perspectives, tended to aim toward common goals in Arabic music performance that they would deem as authentic music. For example, usage of *maqamat*, aiming for *tarab*, virtuosity, listening and discussion the great Arabic music masters, performing moving *taqasim*, demonstrating technical ability at performing quartertones and ornamentation are just a few of the elements of Arabic music that have tremendous value and significance to Arab musicians. Being able to successfully incorporate all those facets and move an audience would exemplify how an Arab musician could discern what is authentic in Arabic music and performance.

The repertoire of a seasoned Arab musician contains many pieces of music for myriads of functions and emotions. For example, there are Arabic classical and folk songs to express joy and to inspire; songs that express love of mother, family, country, nation; songs to celebrate weddings and birth; songs to entertain; songs to express heartbreak, sadness, despair, and loneliness; songs to prepare soldiers for war; songs for death. Typically, Arabs describe themselves as emotional, expressive, with close-knit family, and enduring through struggles. One musician I interviewed even went so far as to describe Arab culture as being male-dominated and tough, in regards to the characteristic deep-throated sounds of the Arabic language, as well as the aggressive, masculine manner when playing certain instruments such as the *tablā*.

Why is authenticity ultimately important to Arab musicians? It is all the important substance that they feel makes their music unique and meaningful, true and genuine to their culture and its identity.

#### **IV. B. Tradition**

According to Barth, a major part of what shapes a group's ethnic identity is the recognition and perpetuation of traditions. For musicians in the Arab diaspora of the D.C. area, coming from a myriad of Arab countries and cultures, the concept of tradition is complex, shaped by individual and collective memory and history. It is important specifically to address tradition within music and its surrounding phenomena. For example, practice and performance of traditional and classical Arabic music is recognized as decreasing in occurrence but still widely respected and appreciated. This decrease is due to the fact that fewer musicians are performing on traditional instruments such as the *oud*, *nāy*, *qanoīn*, *tablā* traditional violin, etc. within traditional ensembles or orchestras. Due to economics and global influences, some musicians rely on modern technology to produce classical and Arabpop sounds; specifically, the Arabic electric keyboard and the electric violin, constructing the entire Arabic orchestral soundscape. All of the musicians interviewed held an appreciation for the popularity and power of these instruments and for classical Arabic music. For Souheil and Shawkat, the element of nostalgia is prevalent in any discussions about good Arabic music – as if the way it was during the time of Abdel Wahab and Oum Khoulthoum was the ultimate in authentic music creation, provoking regularly experienced *tārāb*.

#### **IV. C. Adaptation**

I note three main areas that Arab musicians have demonstrated cultural adaptation. The first is by becoming adapted to the dominant or host culture, that is, American culture, and more specifically to the culture of the Washington, D.C.

metro area. Although it has its share of challenges, all immigrants experience this routine process cultural adaptation, usually resulting in some degree of balance in order to function in daily life. The Moroccan musicians that have built a network over the past fifteen years or more have had the benefit of having a personal contact here before arriving. There has been the presence of Moroccan musicians for more than 35 years, at least since before the opening of the Casablanca Restaurant in Alexandria, Virginia. Having such a network provides a support system of fellow ex-patriots that share the same ethnic identity, including language, food ways, customs, familial, political, religious, and cultural values, and similar goals for the future.

The second kind of adaptability is present in the creation and performance of Arabic music itself.

The musical life of Arab Americans is in fact a continuously evolving set of individuals, practices, and institutions that is a thriving part of the contemporary American multicultural soundscape as well as an important voice in Arab music as a diaspora phenomenon.<sup>176</sup>

How do the musicians make their music appealing to particular audiences? How do some musicians make their music more marketable and appealing to broader audiences? Shawkat states that he can easily identify the *Magrebi* Arabs from the Gulf Arabs from the Levantine Arabs, by several unique characteristics. These include dialect of Arabic, body language, and dress. Because of his keen observations, he makes decisions about his song choices, as well as how he executes his vocal improvisations, known in Arabic as *layāli*. For Gulf Arabs, he might

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<sup>176</sup> Rasmussen, "Individuality," 136.

change his dialect slightly and add particular words into his *layāli*, including the names of audience members and comments on how spirited and enthusiastic they are. For example, for Magrebi Arabs, he would choose a folk song from Egypt or an Oum Khoultoum or Abdel Wahhab song. Shawkat's choices demonstrate adaptability in music.

The informants often define themselves against how they see the American public perceiving them. They “labeled” and so were finding different ways of negotiating parts of their “Arabness.”<sup>177</sup> One interesting element that I noticed was the fact that none of the informants chose to advance a religious identity in their musical creation nor in personal discussion. In fact, Farid and one of the other fifteen informants demonstratively downplayed any importance of religion in his music (although he had described the sound of the *nāy* as “ethereal”). “I do not want to be pigeon-holed. I don't want to be accepted or rejected based on religion. Labels don't matter.....”<sup>178</sup> He was not alone in this conscious thought process. Souheil had shared the fact that what brought him to North America (Canada in particular) was that he sang with a (Maronite) church choir. However, importance of religion was removed in his identity map in the bubble he marked ‘atheist.’<sup>179</sup>

Although *tārāb* has the potential to be connected to a religious enchantment, all the musicians expressed it generally as a sensual, emotional uplifting state. For example, Souheil emphasized the importance of *tārāb* in music as a kind of

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<sup>177</sup> Anonymous Arab musician informant, personal interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 10 January 2011.

<sup>178</sup> Farid Miller, personal interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 14 November 2010.

<sup>179</sup> Please refer to Souheil Younes' Identity Map in Figure 8 in Chapter II.

collectively shared euphoria for the senses. The only musician who mentioned the word God in frequently conversation was Shawkat. He did not discuss any specific link between religion and his music, although he openly expressed thanks to God for the gift of music, as he has regularly stated:

I play to make people want to move and be happy. If they are sad, I play [Arabic] songs to comfort them. Everyone has to go through tough times in life. I want to help them the way music has helped me. God blessed me with such a gift.<sup>180</sup>

In slight contrast to Shawkat's mention of the value of his faith's involvement in his music,<sup>181</sup> another informant of the fifteen expressed these sentiments.

I make music for all people of the world to enjoy – regardless of race, religion, ethnic background and so on. My music makes people happy; they want more. I play for peace in the world.<sup>182</sup>

The conscious choice of the anonymous informant, several of the others (including Souheil and Farid) to extinguish or remove the influence of religion upon their music and therefore, any influences upon their musical identities is directly related to their need to adapt to American society. This need is due to the negative media image of Arabs, regardless of their religious background, as noted "... [The stereotypical image of Arabs and Muslims remains overtly negative and pervasive throughout society.]"<sup>183</sup> Likewise, "individuals from a minority group may internalize

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<sup>180</sup> Shawkat Sayyad, personal Interviews by Christina Campo-Abdoun, 5 September 2003 – 20 December 2010.

<sup>181</sup> Although faith and religion can be overlapping and perhaps interchangeable concepts, I do not assume that Shawkat's faith and religion are exactly the same.

<sup>182</sup> Anonymous Arab (Moroccan) musician/ informant. Interview by Christina Campo-Abdoun 10 January 2011.

<sup>183</sup> Nader Ayish, *Arabs in the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora*, ed. Darcy Zabel, Peter Lang, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2006, 61.

the negative views of the dominant society, ... developing a negative self-perception and identity....”<sup>184</sup>

One way that musicians negotiate their Arab identity with the public at large is through the performance of a hybridization of Arabic music genres with other Western genres. For example, in the early evening hours, the Moroccan musicians performing at Casablanca would play a few famous American popular tunes such as Frank Sinatra’s “Fly Me to the Moon” to capture the American audience’s attention. Such songs were typically played on the keyboard with typical Arabpop percussion, with some very minor variations to the melody to keep some Arabic stylizations present.

Projecting a sense of Pan-Arab identity and polyethnicity through musical performance, the band would later play Arabic music known to certain areas of the Arab World by particular Arab subgroups. For example, the Casablanca Nightclub, if Saudi or Yemeni or Omani Arabs were present, musicians would play the deep and danceable drum rhythms that originated in the Gulf region.<sup>185</sup> The musicians could determine who was in their audience based on a number of factors, including the sound of the Arabic dialect, style of dress, style of dance, and mannerisms/ body language particular to some Arab subcultures. For example, while dancing, Moroccan women tended to use the familiar hip movements, but also display a kind-of subtle two-fingered salute, carrying the right hand from mid-drift level in a circular motion, to gently touch the forehead. This was just one of the visual clues into which

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> These observations were based on my frequent visits to the Casablanca Nightclub in Alexandria, Virginia.

an Arab subgroup presented at the event, that could influence or determine the lead musician's or the band's song choice. Typically, the Casablanca band played regularly together and therefore would have a loose line-up of songs, influenced by personal requests, particular bellydancers of the evening, guest performers, and most especially the make-up of the audience.

The third kind of adaptability that Arab musicians seem to demonstrate is within their self-identity as unique individuals.

[The concept of] the “conductor” metaphor [is meant] to capture the orchestration of identity through coordinating cultural rules and cultural codes and communicative action. For example, to maintain the harmony of a Lebanese immigrant's cultural identity amid adaptation to American culture, he may choose to speak English and conform to American mainstream culture in public, while he speaks Arabic and eats traditional Lebanese cuisine at home. Code and rule switching become important actions in navigating one's self and social identity.<sup>186</sup>

One Arab musician with about six years of oud playing experience has placed himself in a group, primarily surrounded by non-Arabs who play Arabic music and instruments or who dance American bellydance to Arabic music. He is the leader because he plays oud and knows the most repertoire. He has to practice and really know the music well in order to teach it to the rest of the group, since it's not all written down. Because of this, his non-Arab musician colleagues perceive him as an authentic Arab musician playing authentic Arabic music. Therefore, he has gained status in this particular social network. However, amongst professional Arab musicians whether nightclub musicians or the café, *hafla*, private event, and festival circuit would consider him not as a virtuoso, although the amount of practice and improvement he may have garnered over the years has grown to a great extent.

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<sup>186</sup> Fong and Chuang,, “Communicating Ethnic and Cultural Identity,” 60.



#### **IV. D. Dissemination of music**

When considering the contributions these musicians make to the Arabic musical scene in the D.C. metro area, it's essential to keep in mind the importance of outreach, education, and dissemination of music. Each musician has a unique way of perpetuating Arabic music so that it has the opportunity to continue in some way.

For example, Farid regularly attends the Arabic Music Retreat in Boston, headed by world-renowned Arab musicians (also living in North America) Simon Shaheen and George Sawa, among other noted professionals. The Arabic Music Retreat is attended by numerous musicians from all levels and across ethnic boundaries who want to hone their skills and build their Arabic music performance community. Here at home, Farid further performs in private haflas and for public belly dance events where he collaborates with other musicians and is able to apply and share what he learns at the Arabic music Retreat. In addition, he and other musicians connect on the Arabic Music Retreat listserv and share links and important information about Arabic music, performances, instruments, meeting opportunities, as well as other items important to the group.

Mohamed Amir, professional musician and restaurant owner, has not only performed regularly in nightclubs, restaurants, and private events, but also has facilitated the development of Arabic musical scenes in several different restaurants in this area. Of particular interest is his own, "Arabi Band," performing live with fellow musicians to entertain dancing crowds. Mohamed Amir has cultivated a following and further nurtured appreciation of Arabic music through music videos and cds, posting his video recordings on YouTube, Facebook, his own website, and

other weblinks. He has invited guest belly dancers to perform nightly and at group *haflas*. His style of Arabic music performance leans toward a rich Arabpop sound, with numerous references to Arabic classical music, modern electronic sound effects (due to his frequent usage of the Arabic keyboard), and modern rhythms.

Today, synthesizers with their enormous resources and technical possibilities, have become a standard, if not indispensable, component of Arab music performance both in the Arab world and in Diaspora communities.<sup>187</sup>

Although traditionalists might reject this style of music as defiling the tradition of Arabic music, one well-known Moroccan *oud* player and composer with years of experience, has stated the importance of new innovations in Arabic music.

Furthermore, he recognized the value of modern Arabpop music as deviating from the old and creating new music based on Arab classics. He wondered, how can music grow and appeal to wider audiences if there is not some modern innovation? Through his perpetuation of live musical performance, recordings, links to his own videos and mp3s online, Mohamed has made a substantial contribution to the legacy of Arabic music in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

...in the unsupervised, real-time world of Arab-American music, synthesizers reign as the *loudest*, largest, most versatile, most expensive, and most powerful instruments.”<sup>188</sup>

Shawkat serves as a cultural guardian of sorts, in that his goal beyond making a living is to reach out and entertain and educate as many people (Arab and non-Arab audiences) as possible. He has noticed that many younger generations of Arabs do

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<sup>187</sup> Anne Rasmussen, “Theory and Practice at the ‘Arabic Org’: Digital Technology in Contemporary Arab Music Performance,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Middle East Issue (Oct., 1996), 344.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 345.

not know their history, let alone the meaning behind some of the authentic traditional music that represents Arab heritage. Some are not able to understand the dialect or the proper Arabic language used in the lyrics. Shawkat has willingly spent time explaining to his listeners the meaning of songs and interpreting the poetic lyrics. In addition, he has done many workshops for belly dancers, musicians, colleges, and organizations seeking to understand and appreciate the beauty of Arabic music. He regularly discusses musical elements such as *māqām*, rhythms, and *tāqāsim*, to name a few. He has noticed that young musicians don't know much about music theory and many Arab listeners and musicians aren't able to comprehend some styles of the older, formal Arabic poetry in the song lyrics. Therefore, Shawkat commits to outreach and education within numerous arenas as previously mentioned.

Most of the Arab musicians interviewed had significantly personal reasons for playing music and for performing it in public. Most were quite interested in sharing their thoughts and knowledge with me based on the hope that this information would be published, disseminated, read, and valued – in hopes that others – non-Arabs – would consider the positive contributions of Arabs. They want to have young Arab musicians educated about history and musical technique. Some made youtube videos to archive their performances for public viewing and appreciation. The elder musicians' had a personal mission to carry on the legacy of good Arabic music, based on tradition, virtuosity, and *tārāb*, in order to guide the youth, and help all Arabs remember the style, quality, and times of live, traditional instrumentation, expression that carried large and small Arab audiences to collective moments of *tārāb*. Finally,

the creation and preservation of Arabic music is meant to inspire and educate people in general, but especial Arab youth and future generations of Arabs.

What's fascinating about these shared missions is that all the musicians wanted to be remembered as human beings with good intentions. To not be associated with religion, war, terrorism; to be associated with peace, joy, and interconnectedness with other cultures was their preference. For example, one anonymous informant, an experienced Moroccan *oud* player, adamantly explained that his performances have nothing to do with religion, and have only to do with sharing with others – of all races and ethnicities, the opportunity to celebrate life through music.

When I posed inquiry to Souheil Younes, asking: why is preserving traditional Arabic music (specifically *oud* performance) so important to you? Do you feel there is a possibility it will be lost? He stated,

Arabic and Middle Eastern music, in general, is music that's been played in those regions for thousands of years. It's not a preservation issue rather than expressing yourself and being authentic toward the Middle Eastern musical heritage.<sup>189</sup>

Souheil was clearly adamant about the importance of history, longevity, and the enduring value of a music as related to the culture and heritage of its people. He even offered criticism of some non-traditionalist Arab musicians regarding their knowledge of Arabic music and treatment of it.

The big problem is that [many] musicians have no education in regards to their music. For example, take Nasser Shamma. He believes that if one plays (on *oud*) Western music or music influenced by the West, it will propagate the *oud* as an instrument and make the West more curious about the *oud* and the

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<sup>189</sup> Excerpted from e-mail interview with Souheil Younes, 24 November, 2010.

Arab culture. This way of thinking appears to be wrong since most Westerners go toward Turkish music rather than Arabic music. The Turks knew how to preserve their heritage when they emphasized the term “classical Turkish music” in which no Western influence can be found.<sup>190</sup>

Souheil’s concern for maintaining a kind of pure form of ancient Arabic music touches on his desire to keep it ‘authentic.’ He further states,

The Western listener seems to be attracted by foreign music rather than seeing someone play *oud* in a similar way to the guitar (like Shamma e.g). This problem is due to Western colonization that influenced Arabic music, but you don’t see this influence in the classical Turkish music. Since Arabic and Turkish music have the same roots, the Turks preserve their music but the Arabic music has always lived a crisis of identity. One should know both, Arabic and Turkish music, and emphasize the differences between them to promote Arabic music. Unfortunately, most of the Arab musicians (mainly *oud* players) do not know the difference.<sup>191</sup>

The crisis that Souheil refers to here is an ironic reference to identity. First of all, many of the Arabs I have interviewed would attest to the fact that Arabs in the Arab World managed to maintain some degree of their ancient culture during the 500 years of Ottoman Rule. Referring to the music as having similar roots could be a potentially sensitive topic to discuss with other Arab musicians, considering their need to advance the Arab identity as survivalist and enduring through hardships such as foreign occupation.<sup>192</sup> Secondly, his references to outside influences on music due to colonization allude to current concerns that globalization is prevalent in Arabic popular music, which Arab musical purists deem to be removing the significance of traditional Arabic music.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> According to interviews with Hilal, Souheil, and Shawkat.

## **Chapter V. Conclusion and Directions for Further Research**

One of my goals in this research process has been to facilitate opportunities for Arab musician informants to reflect upon their personal and cultural identities in conversation after a musical performance. My inquiries with each of them included such questions as how do Arab audiences respond to their performances? How do musicians select music to suit audience's tastes? Discussions with each of them have provided even more insight than might have been gathered during the observation of the performance. My intention was to re-present their music and personal stories in a body of work that would allow Arab musicians in the local diaspora to reflect on their personal identities, as well as on their collective ethnic identity as Arabs. Throughout the research process, I have tried to make sense of numerous facets of my informants' identities and how they conveyed them in musical performance and musical communication.

The opportunity to practice, make music, and communicate about what music means allowed even more significant information to be revealed on each of the musicians. For example, Shawkat's experiences and expertise highlighted the fact that he is quite a storyteller and repository of Arabic musical repertoire. Several musicians and dancers who know him have referred to him in conversation as a "living legend." Because Shawkat has had the personal experience that almost no other living Arab musician in the Washington, D.C. area has had, performing in this region in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this draws on a need for more research to be done on the history of Arabic music in this region. How did the music begin? Were the beginnings similar to those that Anne Rasmussen discusses in her dissertation

about Arab musicians in Dearborn, Michigan and Rhode Island from the 1940s to the 1970s? I think it is important to study more about the local Arab nightclub musicians to investigate the past 40 – 50 years when D.C. Arab nightclubs were in full swing and had frequent celebrity guests. Other than Kay Kaufman Shelemay's research on Syrian Jews in New York,<sup>193</sup> there is practically no other extensive ethnomusicological research on music in Arab American diasporas. This would certainly be an area containing vast discoveries.

Musicians and Arab audience members can connect with their culture, building on their sense of a cultural identity, when they participate in musical opportunities. Gathering more specific data, such as the variety of ways pan-Arab audiences participate and provoke music-making, their reactions, and their expectations could help shape a broader understanding of the directions in which Arabic music in the U.S. are headed and even compare them to what is happening in the Arab world. For example, one impression that many of the musicians commonly seemed to express was that the performance of traditional instruments and according

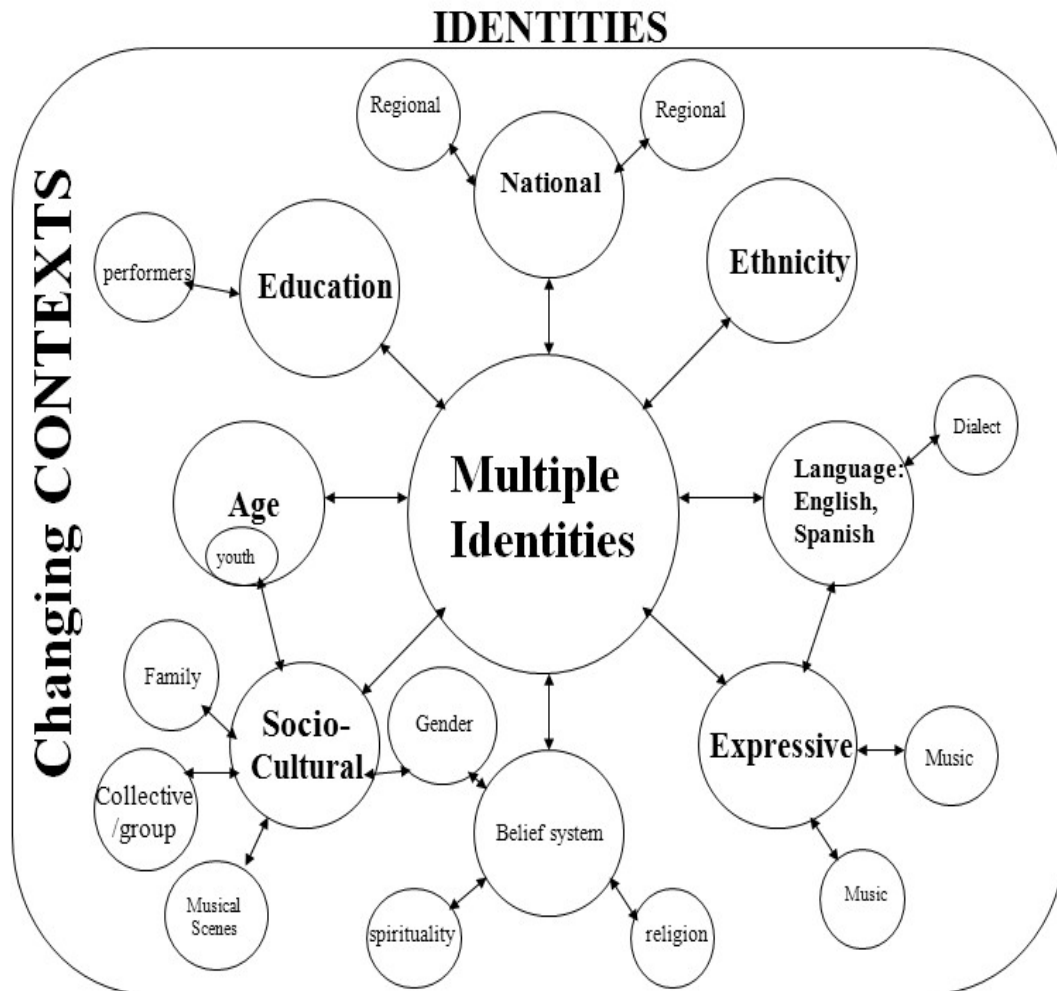
Other ideas for future research include providing analyses of the recent new compositions coming from Arab-American composers/ musicians; consider how they differ from new music from the Arab world. It would be valuable to consider the demands and influences of radio, internet, and recording industry demands. I would also suggest consider how current musicians are building upon past traditional/ classical music and to what degree might they be keeping it authentic? How can musicians preserve of certain rhythms, melodies, poetry, *māqāmat*, stylized *tāqāsim*

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<sup>193</sup> Mark Kligman also wrote his dissertation about Arabic *maqamat* used in the music of Syrian Jews in the diaspora in NY. He was a student of K.K. Shelemay.

and *mawāl*? There is further need for research on identity, influences, and contributions of Arab American musicians that travel up and down the East Coast from Rhode Island to Atlanta. How music is disseminated through performance, workshops, and the world of American bellydance? Compare and contrast American, Near Eastern, and Global political and economic influences on the production and performance of Arabic music in the Arab Diaspora of the United States.





**Appendix 1: Standard Identity Map<sup>194</sup>**

<sup>194</sup> This identity map is the standard one I designed and used as a basis for all the other. Then, after collecting enough data on each musician, I filled in the bubbles, and emailed the files to the musicians. They then looked at their own Identity Map, responded and revised as they wished and sent it back to me.

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