ARABIC MUSIC

BY LAURA WILLIAMS

IN man's consideration of human affairs, his chief questions are, "What of the future?" and "What of the past?" History helps him to answer both. Dissatisfied with history the searching mind asks again, "And before that, what?"

The records of the careful digging of archeologists reveal, that many of the customs and habits of the ancients are not so different in their essence from ours of today. We know that in man's rise from complete savagery, in his first fumblings toward civilization there was an impulse toward beauty and toward an expression of it. We know too, that his earliest expression was to dance to his own instinctive rhythms. Later he sang. Still later he made instruments to accompany his dancing and his singing. At first he made pictures of his dancing and his instruments. Later he wrote about the dancing and his instruments. Later he wrote about the dancing and singing and the music. Men have uncovered many of his pictures and his writings. From the pictures we can see what the instruments were like. We can, perhaps, reconstruct them or similar ones and hear the quality of sound which they supplied. But no deciphering of the writings has yet disclosed to us what combinations or sequences of sounds were used, nor what accents marked his rhythms. While one man is digging in the earth to turn up what records he may find of man's life "before that," another is studying those races who today are living in similar primitive circumstances.

Western civilization proceeds from a place and time which we have chosen to call "The Cradle of the Race." We can trace our own culture back through history via Rome, Greece, and Egypt into that small territory near the two great rivers.

Though history carries us ever further and further back in our knowledge of man's habits and ways, our knowledge of music goes back only a short way. However, the study of primitive races gives us a key. We cannot know the music of the ancient world, but we find in that same territory where we are now searching for the earliest records of our race, a people whose culture has, in many respects, stopped at the Middle Ages.

The Semitic people, Arabs and Jews, descendants of those more

ancient people who lived in what we call the Near East, are more closely related to us racially and culturally, than the other oriental peoples. If the Jews, those wandering folk with their easy adjustment to new environments, are still using musical idioms brought over from Egypt (see page 82) why is it not possible that the Arabs of today are using the idioms of their distant past? Is it not extremely likely that they may provide the missing link in the musical succession?

Some years ago, I found, in a musical magazine a short article on Arabic music. It began something like this: "The Arabs are very fond of music." I read no further. What the writer could say after that could not interest me. Only an Occidental tourist, and probably an Anglo-Saxon tourist, could make such a statement. It is as if she had written, "The Arabs are very fond of breathing." In this country music is unfortunately an extra, a special, expensive, cultural luxury—the frosting on the cake—to be enjoyed after the main business of life has been disposed of. With the Arab, as with most other peoples, with the possible exception of the Anglo-Saxon, music is as vital a part of existence as eating and sleeping, in fact, as breathing. Perhaps because the Arab is closer to the fundamental principles of life, is less artificial than the occidental, his music partakes of that same vital quality as breathing. It is life and in its inflowing and outflowing it takes its own great rhythm. It nourishes him and flows out to nourish others.

But what exactly do we mean by Arabic music? We speak of Chinese music, Japanese music, Hindu, Javanese, Siamese music, and an idea is called up, clear and definite, based on something racial, national, something detached and separate, which belongs to a distinct homogeneous group. When we say "Arabic Music," the words call up no such clear idea. In fact, the majority of writers on Musical History say that there is no such thing; that what is called Arabic music is nothing but Islamic or Mohammedan music and that it has no significance because it is not old, but a cheap modern distortion of other and varied forms.

I shall hope to show in this article:

First:—That Arabic music is a clearly defined and old form and that, as such, it should receive more serious consideration than it has in the past.

Second:—That it has exerted a tremendous influence on western

music at several periods in the past and is therefore historically important.

Third:—That it can exert a great influence in the future, since, as a hitherto untouched source it has great value for the modern composer in that a natural and spontaneous employment of unusual rhythms and microtones might well be of assistance to the student and composer interested in such forms.

Let us take up, then, the first point, that there is a definite Arabic music and that it is old. The term here applies to the music of the Arabic speaking people of Egypt, Syria, Arabia, and North Africa. Persian music and Turkish music show marked resemblances as does much of the music of Moslem India. This lends some authority to the claim that it is Islamic music. There are, however, a large group of Arabic speaking people who are not Moslems, such as the Christian Syrians and they have been largely responsible for the preservation of the purity of the language and the finer aspects of the Arabic culture. There are also historical facts and internal evidences in the music itself to point to an antiquity which greatly antedates Mohammed and the Arab ascendancy.

In the first place Arabic music must be considered folk music in the broadest sense of the term, in that it is that "body of song" which "embraces all vocal compositions which have come to be so fondly liked, loved, admired by the people that they have become a native and naive popular utterance." "Folksongs are the echoes of the heart-beats of the vast folk, and in them are preserved feelings, beliefs, and habits of vast antiquity." "Music cannot lie, for the reason that the things which are at its base, the things without which it could not be, are unconscious, unvolitional human products." "....it follows that the music of the folksong reflects the inner life of the people that gave it birth, and that its characteristics, like the people's physical and mental habits, occupations, methods, and feelings are the product of environment...."[1]

It seems reasonable to suppose that where the "physical and mental habits, occupations and methods" have changed so little in several thousand years, the music, that "reflection of the inner life of the people" has probably changed as little. People who live in the same kind of dwellings, using the same tools, wearing the same kind of clothes that they did at the beginning of our era, are doubtless singing the same kind of songs. In fact the adoption by the Arabs of

[1]H. E. Krehbiel. *Afro-American Folksongs.*

western ways does not have an effect on their music immediately and then in ways which I shall take up later on.

We can, at any rate, feel fairly certain that the Arab of today is singing and hearing the same music that he knew in the Middle Ages. We have, to guide us, the theoretical writings of the Arab scholars, those scholars of the Golden Age of Arabic culture which reached its peak in Spain in the tenth and eleventh centuries, which began in the eighth in the court of the Abbasides in Baghdad. These writers based their theory of music on the theories of Aristotle and Aristoxenus, rejecting that of Pythagoras, but they chose the system prohibited by the Greeks, the enharmonic.[2]

Unlike western music, Arabic music has never been what we might call composed music. The performer made his own, knowing little of the theories propounded by the scholars, unable to write down what he sang, teaching it by ear to his pupils, and so, with all the chances of error in such a method of transmission, the songs were handed down. Since, however, the songs now sung are modally in conformity with the theoretic writings of Al-Farabi, Ibnu Ghaibi, Ibn Sina, Al-Kindi, and the others of that time, and since the form of composition is that prescribed by the singers of earlier days, it is fair to think that the microtonic modes were those in use in those days and liked by the musicians and the people.

It might be well at this point to note that there has been brought out recently some question as to whether Arabic music was truly enharmonic. The very beautiful translation by Eleanor Haig of Julian Ribera's *Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain* is a truly great contribution to the literature on this subject. Ribera, however, mentions the fact that all the modern scholars who have already published the results of their research on Arabic music have been in agreement on one point, that it is essentially diatonic, not enharmonic and that there is no proof that the Arabs sing quarter tones. I contend that they do. In that connection let me call attention first to the following statement by Herbert Hughes in the introduction to his collection of *Irish Country Songs*: "....it has recently been demonstrated that the Irish possessed, and still employ, a series of scales or modes that are only quite distantly related to the Greek modes, and with a much greater variety of intervals. The obvious comment of the academy-nurtured musician is that they are 'only

[2]"Enharmonic—noting or pertaining to a style of music or a scale or instrument employing intervals smaller than a semitone."—*Century Dictionary.*

singing out of tune' but experience has proved that they have a scale system as delicately and elaborately constructed as the most fastidious modern artist could wish. So-called 'quarter tones' are deliberately sung by the unlearned and despised peasant."

When the occidental musician hears any oriental singer and makes the hasty statement that he is singing "out of tune," the answer can usually be, "If you will listen more carefully, you will note that he sings 'out of tune' only on certain notes in each song; that the note or notes on which he sings 'out of tune' come at the same place in the scale each time, which leads one to the conclusion that it is intentional and not the unfortunate faulty intonation too often heard on the concert and operatic stage." To hear Mr. Christos Vrionides, expert on Byzantine music sing an ascending chromatic quarter-tone scale taking in twenty-three clean, clear steps in the octave, is certainly proof of the possibility of such a performance. Mr. Vrionides tells me that it requires constant practice to be able to keep his ear sufficiently keen when hearing much occidental music, which may explain why the eminent theorists are unable to hear anything smaller than the half tone except as faulty intonation.

The western ear has been so long accustomed to clean intonation on the diatonic scale, that it takes a great deal of unlearning and resensitization to be able to discern the fine shades of difference between the Arabic modes. Probably the best way to attain to the kind of hearing necessary to discriminate between the fine intervals would be to learn to do it oneself. It can be done. But for those who are not singers there is an interesting Arabic instrument called the Qanoun on which the modern musicians have introduced a system of tuning by means of small shift keys or frets which can be lifted or dropped to change certain notes a quarter tone. Thus, the musician can set his instrument exactly for the mode to be played and need not pause to stop the string.

Any Arab musician of today can hear a new song and name the mode instantly and can recognize the exact moment when it modulates, even though the usual modulation is a dropping of two consecutive notes, each a quarter tone, making for the measure or two in which they are used, a different mode, just as in occidental music the use of accidentals may turn the composition for a few measures into the minor or the Dorian or Phrygian.

The fact is that there have been very few performers of Arabic music who were at the same time scholars, understanding scientific

theory. The western scholars who have investigated it have all shown by their statements that they were merely listening and undoubtedly drawing their deductions from a background of occidental training and habit.

One occidental scholar only seems to have transcended this limitation. After twenty years of research in Tunis, Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger prepared his findings for publication under the title of *La Musique Arabe*. The first volume of this work appeared in 1930.[3] The second volume is now in the press. The remaining seven volumes will come out in time. Baron d'Erlanger's death in October, 1932, put an untimely end to his consecrated service to musicology, but he had been recognized as the greatest authority in the world on the subject.

What does Baron d'Erlanger say of the antiquity of Arabic music? Can we go further back than the Middle Ages? He thinks we can go back to the seventh century B.C. and find the origin of this music in Persia. Let me quote from an Arab scholar who worked with the Baron in his research, Manoubi es-Senoussi.

> There exist in the world two very ancient musical scales known by primitive races. The first of these scales, the most widely known, with which the common people of all countries are acquainted, even the civilized countries of our epoch, is composed of five intervals—the pentatonic. One encounters a music based on this scale throughout the world. It was well known in the period when man overran the earth in search for pasturage for his flocks. When men became agricultural, they ceased to roam and formed what we call nations. Those which established themselves far from the lines of travel, escaped all exterior influence and conserved their primitive music based on the pentatonic scale. The others saw their music transformed following each political change, or each introduction into their country of a strange people.
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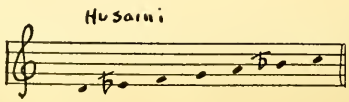
> The priests of ancient Egypt, on the other hand, invented an entirely new musical system based on their observation of the stars. We know the probable way in which they constructed it. Depending on an ancient Arabic book, the Baron has been able to reëstablish this scale. It is still used by the Jews of the countries of Barbary in reading the Bible. It is composed thus:



[3] *Librairie Orientaliste*, Paul Geuthner, Paris.

The Arabs call it Husaini.[4] In the time of ancient Egypt, then, there were to be found two scales throughout the world—the pentatonic and that which the Arabs now call Husaini.

After that Pythagoras invented, in Greece, the diatonic scale from which spring the Occidental scales of our day.

During this time, however, another and different music flourished in Persia. It is based on the tetrachord. The modes are numerous; each of them is composed, either of one tetrachord, of a tetrachord plus a whole tone, of two tetrachords plus a whole tone, or of three tetrachords plus a whole tone. In each of these it is the tetrachord which plays the important role. It gives to the mode its special character, by the size and placing of the intervals which go to make it up. The tetrachord contains, most often, one interval which is larger than the other two, sometimes than the sum of the other two. Such a tetrachord has a character inevitably sad, enervating, mystic. Persian music thus resembles all the Persian arts; it expresses something which dissolves the soul.

Each time, through the ages, that the Persians have invaded a country, they have introduced into it their music. They introduced it in Greece; thus we have found in each treatise on Greek music a separate chapter, having no relation to the musical theory of the different Greek scales, where is discussed the combination of fantastic tetrachords made up of strange intervals, of which the author makes no mention in showing the laws of consonances. The Greek Philosophers were united against this Asiatic music, considering it unhealthy, immoral, because voluptuous; and in order to discredit it in the eyes of the Greeks they called it enharmonic.

The Persians had, again, invaded Egypt in the fifth century B.C. They introduced their music there in spite of the efforts of the priests to prevent them. Plato, who visited Egypt, tells us in his *Republic*, of his admiration for the Egyptian music and expresses his disgust for that introduced in that land by the Persians, judging it enervating and "too rich and voluptuous."

If the Greeks were unfriendly to this music, the Arabs were certainly not. The great poets of the pre-Islamic era used it in reciting their poems. Some of the Persian instruments had already reached Arabia. The Persian influence was strong.

[4]The notation used here and throughout the article, employs the flat and sharp as usual. To indicate a tone only a quarter tone flat—as in this scale—meaning a tone between the natural and the flat, a flat sign with a line drawn through the stem is employed; likewise for the demi-sharp, the sharp sign with the lower crossbar omitted. One might say the flat plus and the sharp minus.

Then in the seventh century of our era came Mohammed, who coördinated and centralized the scattered Arab tribes, established the Islamic era of the Hejrah and began the conquests which carried his name and religion and the language of the Quran into Persia and India, north to the Caspian and Black seas and west to the Atlantic Ocean and into Spain.

When in the eighth century, the Abbasides established their great dynasty and set up their court in Baghdad, the great, almost fabulous, splendor of that court was fed from Persia. All the ministers were Persian and, what is chiefly interesting to us, the entertainers were Persian. They sang Persian songs in the numerous modes of that system which the Greeks had termed "enharmonic."

Arab ears had long been accustomed to this sensuous music. What they heard now that was new, was a more refined form, with greater elaboration and more complicated rhythms. The Arabs liked this music. They welcomed the new melodies and the longer rhythms. The Arab musicians adopted these forms and adapted them for their audiences. Because they did not understand the Persian words, they set their own words to the melodies and thus they have come down to the present time. The Arabian musician of today is still singing the old classical songs of an earlier day. We still find songs where the rhythmic cycle and the melodic phrase are longer than the poetic phrase, or where the accents of the melodic line do not fall with the strokes of the rhythm. To be sure this last characteristic is often found in the shorter North African rhythms, but there it is an indication of the Berber influence and the resultant syncopation. Where it occurs in the older, eastern songs, it might seem, at first hearing, to be a sign of compound rhythms, until we remember that the meters of the Arabic poetry are shorter than even the Persian.

What then is this music like which has so long a heritage, and what theoretical rules can we set down? How closely has it followed the original system and how has it altered? Manoubi es-Senoussi can help us again here.

> To attempt to fix the number of oriental modes and rhythms is a useless pretention; they are innumerable. They multiply, change their form and often their names, with almost every generation. One finds the cause of this instability of name first, in the fact that the musician never thought to write down his music, and second, in the fact that the development of musical art among the Arabs is solely the endowment of those who practice it. It is they alone who, through rivalry

and in the quest for fame, constantly change the rules of their music. Their schools are numerous and live only as long as the reigns of the princes about whom they gather. Systems add themselves to systems, classification to classification and the list of names lengthens.

In spite of all this the soul of the Oriental remains the same. The color of the milieu changes but its essence is unaltered. The musician reflects that essence. The imagination of the improviser, far from being compelled to follow one single obligatory road, finds, on the contrary, many, and can, according to his fancy, open up for himself others, which approximate so much those already laid out that his innovations are unnoticed by the ear of the crowd.

The Arab scholars set forth several quite rational theories, which had little to do with this practice of the musicians, but which have had, nevertheless, an influence on the modern theorists. One theory which is held in high favor by Arab scholars of today is that which limits the number of the modes to seventy-two. All the modes reach the octave and are composed each of a tetrachord and a pentachord. There are six kinds of tetrachords, as follows:

1. Whole tone — whole tone — half tone.
2. Half tone — whole tone — half tone.
3. Whole tone — half tone — whole tone.
3. Three-quarter tone — three-quarter tone — whole tone.
5. Whole tone — three-quarter tone — three-quarter tone.
6. Three-quarter tone — whole tone — whole tone.

There are twelve kinds of pentachords, obtained by joining to each kind of tetrachord, either a whole tone below or a whole tone above. In adding each kind of tetrachord to each kind of pentachord, we get six times twelve, which equals seventy-two, octaves or modes.

There are in actual practice, however, many more. Es-Senoussi says,

> One can count actually in each Mussulman country from forty to fifty names of modes, but the modes used can be counted by the hundreds. They differ in their length, the nature of their intervals, the tonic, the leading tone and even in the melodic design which fits each of them. There is not in the Orient, the idea of a scale. A single scale with us, gives birth to several modes.
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> Taking the fact that the octave of the classical oriental Arabian music admits of eighteen fundamental notes, there are at least ten modes based on each of these notes; that means

that the oriental Arabic modes having a personality, *definite* and *known to all* are, at the smallest reckoning, one hundred and eighty in number.

On the other hand, there is the primitive music of the tribes, which employs the modes contained in a fourth or a fifth, which differ one from the other, sometimes by only an eighth of a tone.

With regard to rhythm, Baron d'Erlanger had recorded over 360 different ones, while a man in Cairo, I am told has counted 200 rhythms based on the quarter note, 100 on the half note and over 300 on the whole note.

Such a statement sounds utterly fantastic to the western mind accustomed to the few short rhythms of occidental music. It is difficult for us to think of rhythm except in terms of measure and that in a count of two, three or four, with six, nine, and twelve merely combinations of those. Where in Russian music we find five, seven or nine, the tendency is to see in them merely alternating rhythms.

With the Arabs, rhythm is neither tempo nor meter. Any attempt to say what it is usually wanders into philosophical abstractions, for which there is neither time nor place in this article. It is necessary, however, to know the place which the element of rhythm occupies in art, in order to understand the Arabic idea.

Gevaert in his *Histoire et Theorie de la Musique de l'Antiquité* puts the arts into two classes, "Plastiques" and "Pratiques." The first class includes Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, those arts which "present themselves directly to the spectator in a finished state," and the second, Music, Dancing, and Poetry, those which need the "intervention of a skilled performer, which necessitate an act separate from that of the creative artist." The first class has for its domain, Space, and demands an order and regular arrangement in the space occupied—Symmetry. The second class has Time for its domain and requires an order and regular arrangement in the time occupied—Rhythm.

Havelock Ellis, in *The Dance of Life,* gives us the following:

> Dancing and building are the two primary and essential arts. The art of dancing stands at the source of all arts that express themselves first in the human person. The art of building, or architecture, is the beginning of all the arts that lie outside the person; and in the end they unite. Music, acting, poetry proceed in the one mighty stream; sculpture, painting, all the arts of design, in the other. .

When we consider that the chief plastic art—or art which lies "outside the person" of the Arabic people is Architecture (since all pictorial art was forbidden by Islam) we find an interesting parallel between their architecture and their music. The symmetry following rigidly definite mathematical laws, finds its counterpart in the rhythm of the music. The Arab's love of ornament finds outlet in the elaboration of the arabesque and in the intricacies of the melody. In architecture his structural form is simple. In the courts of his palaces we may find rows of columns, all shaped and spaced alike, upholding arches of the same size and form, and no two of the columns may be carved alike, and the arabesque decoration on each arch may be different. In music he chooses a rhythmic form, and within the limits of that rigid form, he decorates with motifs selected, according to his taste, from a mode. Provided he holds to the limits of the form, he can do what he wishes with his modal material.

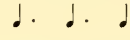
Someone has said, "In Arabic music, the rhythm is the piece of cloth on which one embroiders; the melody is the embroidery. Just as one does not count the thread in putting in the needle, so the accent of the melodic line does not always fall with the accent of the rhythm." But the rhythm, unlike occidental rhythm, is exact, absolute, unchangeable, never quickening, never retarding, with never a hold. Once established, it proceeds as to a metronome. "In the sense that Arabic music is rhythmic," says Baron d'Erlanger, "western music has no rhythm at all."

Undoubtedly all musical rhythm, though much of it springs from the poetic rhythm, traces its descent from the dance. In Arabic countries, the song, wherever it is based on a rhythmic pattern and is not a free improvisation, is danced. Rhythm with its accompaniment of melody is used by all sects of the Dervishes to induce ecstasy.

Each Arabic rhythm has a name. Each has a definite pattern of beats—so many heavy strokes, so many light strokes, so many silences. Just why, or what they mean, no one can say. Like the modes their meanings are lost. There is a tradition among the Arabs that points also to ancient sources, that each mode and each rhythm had an occult significance. There was a mode for each hour of the day, each season, each element; modes corresponding to the planets and the signs of the Zodiac, the constellations. There were male and female modes and rhythms, and others denoting different emotions. In some cases the record has been kept; in most cases it is lost. "Such

information as we have is full of contradictions and holds mostly to legend," es-Senoussi says, "Religion has effaced all the ancient pagan traditions, often beautiful, and there is no chance to revive them or make them known."

Rhythm seems to be the first element to be affected by the adoption of western ways. In Egypt and Syria, the countries most westernized, there are today, two different kinds of musical composition in high favor, that in which the instrumentalist or the singer improvises on a given mode in an entirely free cadenza or recitative, and that used for dancing in which the rhythm Masmoudi is used practically to the exclusion of all others. Masmoudi is a four beat rhythm but is always played with the essential strokes syncopated thus:—



The Arabs calls the heavy stroke, "Doum," from the sound as it is struck on the middle of the drum. The light strokes are called "Tak" and are struck sharply on the edge of the drum. Masmoudi is practically the Tango rhythm with the third beat omitted. As the Arab plays it, it is usually embellished with an elaboration of rapid, light strokes to fill in and make an intricate design. The Oriental musician generally contents himself with marking the accents with the tambourine while the western Arab of North Africa clings to the Durbekkeh or, as he calls it there, the Darbouka, and elaborates on the rhythm.

This Masmoudi rhythm has supplanted all the older rhythms in the East, where the older ones seem to have been lost practically in one generation. The young modern musician of Egypt or Syria does not use them and consequently has forgotten them or never learned them. In Tunis I listened to a concert of Egyptian music, played and sung by an excellent and highly accomplished group of performers who gave one group of songs, two of which they did in Masmoudi but which I knew in their older forms of *seven* and *ten*. In talking with Syrian musicians in America I have been told repeatedly, "Yes, my father knew those rhythms but I never learned them," or "I know those rhythms because my father taught them to me but I never play them." One exceedingly good drummer, who could embellish Masmoudi with delightful embroideries, was entirely incapable of learning *seven, ten* or *nine,* although I struggled with him for three days, spending altogether five hours trying

to get him to drop or add a beat. Even Masmoudi seems to be difficult for the occidental, and Alexander Maloof, the Syrian band leader, told me that in order to get his men to play it, he was obliged to have them count eight—three, three and two, that it was impossible with the four count.

In North Africa however, the longer rhythms have been preserved naturally so that Baron d'Erlanger was able to find musicians to work with him who could give him the exact patterns of the longer cycles. These longer rhythms give to the music a more fluid, flexible line. There would be extreme monotony, considering the exact tempo of Arabic music, were it not for the variety afforded by the longer cycles and the contrast between the heavy and light strokes and the silences. Later on I shall show some of these rhythms.

The other change now coming into Arabic music in Egypt is an attempt to harmonize. Most of the harmonizations, to date, are exceedingly elementary. But the necessity, when introducing harmony, to alter the modes to fit the diatonic scale and equal temperament, probably marks the beginning of the end so far as the enharmonic modes are concerned. However, with men such as Baron d'Erlanger and some of the musical scholars of Cairo who are studying to preserve the old music, and who are able to afford to keep permanently occupied musicians of the older traditions, there is hope that it may be possible to record the music of the past.

And now we come to the second point—that Arabic music has exerted a tremendous influence in the past and is therefore historically important.

What early influence on western music came from Persia is a matter for conjecture and some doubt since the diatonic system seems to have been adopted at an early date. It would appear, though, to be quite as reasonable to think that early Church music was as much affected by the East as by Greece, or perhaps that the popular Greek music of that day was more enharmonic than diatonic, since the Greeks also probably sang as they wished with little regard for theory. Certainly Byzantine music as preserved to this date in the Greek monasteries shows natural use of quarter tones. In referring to those Dark Ages with their dearth of record regarding music, Waldo Selden Pratt in his *History of Music* says, "These cataclysmic changes destroyed the continuity of civilized

life and thought, and interrupted the development of all the fine arts. The chief exceptions were in the Byzantine Empire and in regions under Moslem control, but in both cases culture was more oriental than occidental."

Leaving the Dark Ages, as we must, to their darkness, we take a long jump, which lands us in western Europe in the eighth century. The Moors are in Spain, have been defeated in their attempt to enter France. The Jongleur enters the scene with popular music, and under his arm and hanging to his shoulder "many Arabian instruments that were quite new, some of them constructed so as to give a more scientific scale than that which obtained in western Europe." Thus, Henry George Farmer refers to the Arabian influence in the Middle Ages.[5]

These Arabian instruments the Jongleurs adapted to western use. Among them was of course, the lute (from the Arabic *el-aoud*), the zither or European Conon from the *Qanoun,* the modern caisse from the Arabic *Qasa.* The trumpet, the cymbals, tambourine, and guitar came from the Arabs. The ancient rebec was derived from the Arabian *Rabeb,* still in use in North Africa.

The Jongleurs and the Trouveres and Troubadours during the years following and especially after the Crusades sang in the Arabian manner. Probably many types of songs were Arabic in their origin. In a little pamphlet published by the Cambridge University Press[6] entitled *The Interpretation and Probable Derivation of the Musical Notation in the 'Aucassin et Nicolette' MS.*, Mr. Clifton Joseph Furness describes two café entertainers that he heard in North Africa, giving a recital which seemed to him so obvious a survival of the type of performance known as the *Chantefable* that he felt it might be identical. His further investigation, following that conjecture, showed that the musical notation of the "Aucassin et Nicolette" MS. corresponded with one of the most popular Arabic modes.

To return to Farmer—he says that to this "political contact" we owe such musical innovations as discant, organum, and instrumental tablature. As to what he calls the literary and intellectual contact, Farmer says, "Between the eighth and eleventh cen-

[5]*The Arabian Influence on Musical Theory,* Harold Reeves, London, 1925.

[6]Reprint from *The Modern Language Review,* Vol. XXIV, No. 2 April, 1929.

turies the Arabs had translated from the Greek many musical treatises hitherto unknown to western Europe....Besides these, numerous original treatises on music appeared from the pens of Arabian writers....When we compare the musical writings of Europe at this period with those of Arabian contemporaries, one feels abashed at western mediocrity." The scholars of Europe went to Spain and Andalusia and studied "both the Greek musical theorists *only to be found in Arabic* [the italics are mine] and the writings of the Arabian theorists themselves."

Farmer is convinced that "mensural music" which was "the outstanding musical innovation of the twelfth century" had its origin with the Arabs. It was known to the Arab theorists two centuries earlier and by the eleventh century the work of these theorists was widely accepted by the Andalusian Arabs and obviously studied and adopted by the European scholars. Farmer thinks further that the writings of the European scholars indicate that mensural notation also came from the Arabs and that Europe "owed its revision of the laws of consonances" to them.

There are possible influences also to be discerned in regard to form. Baron d'Erlanger believed the Sonata form to have originated in Arabic music. The so-called classical form consists of a group of several songs, usually four, in the same mode. The group opens with the *Doulab* or introduction, most often in Masmoudi rhythm, which is played by all the instruments of the orchestra in unison. Following the doulab, they go immediately into the first song, the players or one player singing. There is no pause until the group is finished. Because each mode has certain cadences and combinations of notes that belong to it the melodic material is similar in all songs in that mode; the only indication of the transition from one song to another is the change of rhythm. The last song of the group is frequently in a 6/8 rhythm. Each rhythm is performed in strict tempo until the very end of the last song, when there may be either a slight retard with an *ad lib.* measure to close or an accelerando, after which sometimes the instruments carry on alone for a few more measures and bring the group to a very rapid close.

In the construction of the songs themselves there is to be noted a definite rule of form which suggests further influence on our music.

Just here, I might pause for a moment to describe the modern

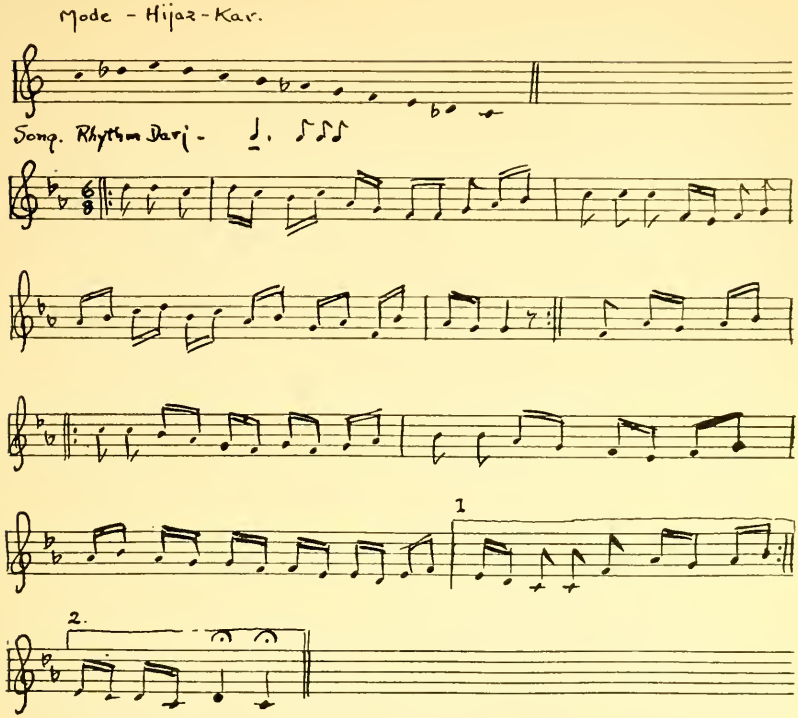
Arab orchestra for the information of those who may never have heard one. The orchestra consists of a qanoun, mentioned above, two aouds, a violin, the durbekkeh or hand drum and the tambourine. All play in unison with the voice. The only suggestion of harmony is the undertone of the drum and the octave coupling of the qanoun, which is played with both forefingers. The qanoun also contributes extra frills in the shape of rapid runs and trills, and in certain cases is used to establish the mode with an improvisation before the doulab. In more primitive communities, the flute is used instead of strings. Baron d'Erlanger spurned all modern or semi-modern instruments and used only the tambourine, the ancient naqara or tiny kettle drums, and the rebab—referred to above—which has only two strings. This is played with a bow and is extremely difficult to play inasmuch as the strings lie so high above the neck of the instrument that it is impossible to stop them by pressing down, and they must be stopped by a sideways pull.

Now we come to my third point—that Arabic music has a value for the musician of the present and the future. The Arabic modes show so spontaneous and natural a use of the small intervals, employing the small divisions of the octave not chromatically, but as we use the semitones in any occidental scale, that for the composer interested in working with quarter tones, a notation of some of them and a familiarizing of the ear to some of the themes should be of considerable value.

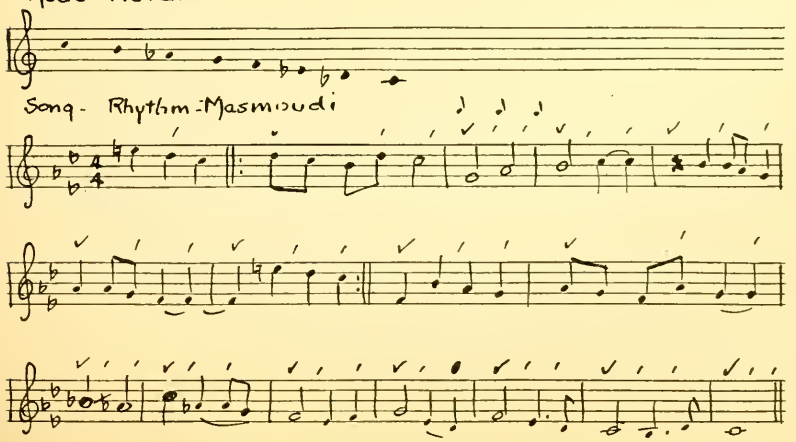
One oriental mode is already familiar to us and has been often used in the past for any expression of an oriental idea—the so-called chromatic scale—what Bourgault-du-Coudray calls *Chromatique Orientale*. The use that Russian composers have made of this scale is too well known to need mention. I should like to call attention, however, to two songs by Katherine Ruth Heyman, *The Blue Lotus*, 1. *Amina's Song* and 2. *Mystic Shadow*.[7]. In these songs the composer has handled the mode so consistently and with such insight into the oriental feeling and manner of expression, that they might be authentic oriental songs instead of remarkably fine occidental creations.

[7] Published in 1925 by The Composers' Music Corporation, Carl Fischer, agents.

In Arabic music this mode is called Hijaz Kar. Below is a melody as sung by the Arabs.



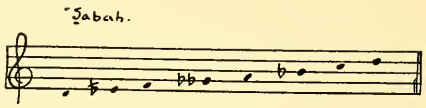
Another mode which could be used as easily, because it has no small intervals and is as logical a mode as our minor, is Kurdi:



Perhaps the most occidental sounding of all the Arabic modes is Rast, the first mode. It is similar to C major. But the third and seventh notes are dropped, each a quarter tone, giving us two tetrachords alike with a whole tone between as C major is two equal tetrachords joined by a whole tone. Here we have a mode formed in the manner described above, made of a tetrachord like No. 5 plus a pentachord made by joining a whole tone below to No. 5.

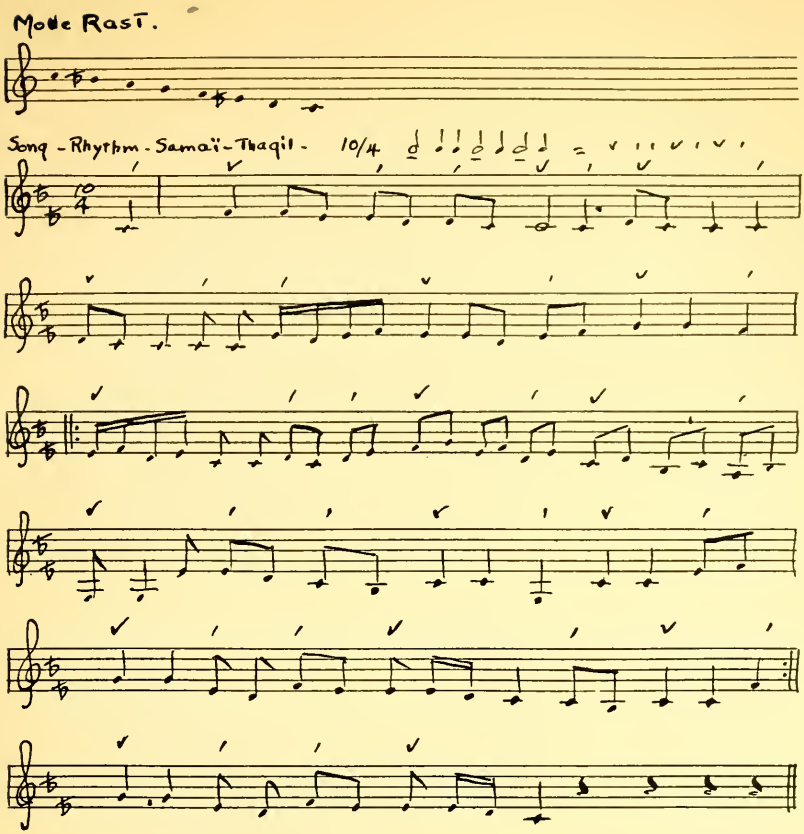
Then we have Hijaz, made of a chromatic tetrachord plus a No. 4 tetrachord.

When we look for an actual quarter-tone interval, we find one in such a mode as Sabah (Sheba). The Arabs say, "If you like Sabah, you really like Arab music." Listen to any of the phonograph records of the playing of Sami-Shaa, the great Egyptian violinist and see how a great improviser uses this mode.



It is possible that it may be some time before we can expect to hear much successful composition in quarter tones. It can be handled by strings with no frets, or by the several quarter-tone pianos already invented. Although I have not heard it, I am told that the most satisfactory instrument to date is that of Ivan Wischnegradsky in Paris. The Arabs are making some attempt to work out a kind of melodeon which will have stops to regulate the quarter tones. Such an instrument would be much better suited to the Arabic music than the piano, the tone of which can not possibly give the color for oriental music if it is to be used in its original form. As thematic material, however, for experiments in this new idiom, Arabic music can be of tremendous assistance.

The rhythms, on the other hand, seem more adapted to our immediate use. While many modern composers are employing unusual rhythmic devices, such as free rhythm or broken rhythm, while there has been much use of compound rhythms, there has been very little consistent use of longer rhythmic cycles or rhythms of an uneven number of beats. The Russian composers have been the chief users of such measures as *five*, *seven*, and *nine* and the

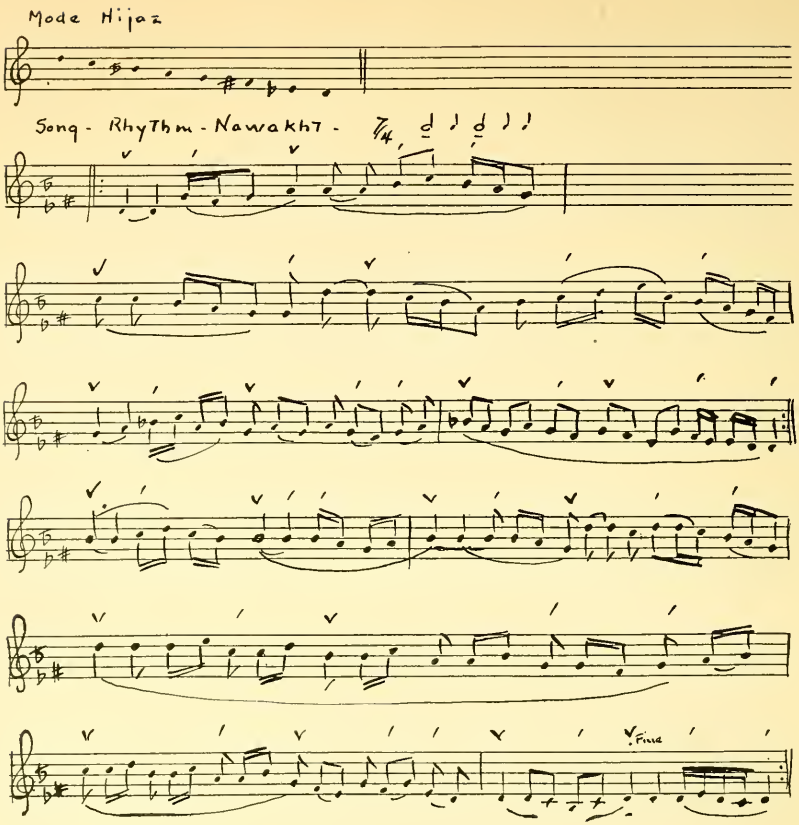


recent interest in folk music has disclosed, in many countries, examples of longer meters. Such experimenting as has been done, however, by modern composers, other than the Russian, shows a very restricted, artificial handling of the longer rhythms.

I make no attempt to discuss those composers who have employed broken or compound rhythms. There is a long list of those who have successfully broken away from the simpler forms. My contention is that regular rhythms of *seven, eight, nine, ten, thirteen,* and even longer provide a greater fluidity and grace.

Let us take *seven* for example:—

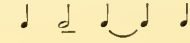
The Arab calls this rhythm *Nawakht.* The same rhythm can be found in Greek folk music, in Celtic, and in Russian. The He-



brides Milking Croon found in Marjory Kenneday Fraser's collection is the most perfect example of seven I have found. As the Arabs use it it has two accents, on the first beat and on the fourth,

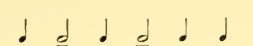
as the Arabs would write it,

It might seem to be alternating measures of three and four, just as the *eight* in the Arabic music can be thought alternating measures of three and five beats:



or the *nine,* four and five:

and the *ten,* three, three, and four.



However, the melodic phrase usually occupies one cycle of the rhythm and can not be considered to be made up of two or several unequal measures.

This inclination on our part to divide up a rhythm into short measures stands in the way of our feeling the uneven, the more fluid line. Only if we can think of *seven* as seven rather than as three and four, shall we be able to use it with any degree of success. Only when we can accustom our ears to the small intervals and to the accents of the melodic line, and our sense of rhythm to the longer cycles, can we employ these rich and beautiful forms intelligently.

Just here comes the interesting question as to which sense is our instrument in detecting musical rhythm. Close to it we hear it, or rather, we hear the instrument used to give the dynamic stress which marks it. At a distance, supposing that instrument to be one of percussion, we feel it before we hear it. Walk through an Arab village at night. There is silence, deep silence. Suddenly from somewhere far off, we are aware of a pulsation. We do not hear it. It is present like our heart beats, like breathing. We walk on. Gradually it becomes sound, muffled but unmistakable, then louder, until finally, quite close now, we hear over it, the shrill of flutes, the plunk of aoud or the singing of the violin. It is regular like the heart beat; it is regular like the cycles of life, like the revolutions of the earth around the sun, the precession of the equinoxes, the movement of the planets, the march of the stars. It is part of us like all those things. It is physical: we march to it; we run to it and dance to it. It is mental and spiritual; we think and feel to it; we aspire and work and create to it. We can no more escape rhythm than we can stop the vibration of electrons. But we can readjust our rhythmic sense to something longer than the short, choppy 2/4 of our usual round. Our music, that "reflection of the inner life of a people," can take to itself longer cycles and more flexible forms

and express something more profound than can be said in the short *two, four,* and *three* of our present-day music.

The world is turning to the East for inspiration. Things oriental have become welcome guests. Philosophy, art, literature are accepted as social equals. Oriental music is still regarded as more or less of a stranger and Arabic music, the newest arrival of all, is not even recognized. After all, this new visitor is more closely related to us than any of his eastern brothers. Can't we invite him in?