

Moroccan music

Wael Kakish

speaking or writing about music in *Al-Maghreb Al-Arabi* (Morocco) is an exciting, serious and interesting subject due to its variety and consistency of several musical and vocal genres ranging from local patterns and other several patterns inherited orally a long time ago in addition to other influences by neighboring countries or immigrations from and to Al-Maghreb. The most important of these influences are the African, Amazigh, Oriental Arab (Egypt and Greater Syria) in addition to European's effects. Locally, there are various styles and forms of music in Morocco, religious and secular; classic and folkloric, mountain, sea and desert, in addition to commercialized traditional music whether it's romantic or light dancing music (pop). All these differences and variations types and forms are stemming, in terms of their nature, identity and artistic message, from one core soul; the soul of Al-Maghreb. They are distinguished by the peculiar dialect of Maghreb, either Arabic, colloquial or Amazigh. The concentration in this briefing will be on the most important musical and vocal works based on historical and artistic perspectives. We will include a number of the most popular and famous works in Maghreb as well as some of the instruments used.

In the past, only a few of Al-Maghreb music and vocal heritage reached other Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Gulf countries, thanks to the 'Arabic Music Conference' that took place in Cairo in 1932, where few participants from some countries in Al-Maghrab Al-Arabi presented music that covered part of the classical and traditional repertoire. This conference focused on the different styles, scales, rhythms and genres that Moroccan music offers. In the 70s, the most popular songs that passed the Moroccan borders were the ones somehow related to political, social and economic circumstances in Maghreb specifically and in Arab world as a whole. Groups such as *Jil Jilala* (جيل جلالة), *Nass Al-Ghiwan* (ناس الغيوان) and *Al-Mashaheb* (المشاهب) were among the most famous; they called in their songs for equality, justice, peace and brotherhood; their music was introduced in a high artistic level, full of rich meanings and vocabulary; strong rhythms and sweet rapturing melodies expressing the beating sound of the heart of the Arab world as a

whole and feelings of Moroccan people and their specific life. These groups were similar in size and popularity as to some of the Western bands that were popular in Europe and America such as the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Rolling Stones and Doors. The message was compared to music from early 20th century in Egypt led by nationalistic singer and composer Sayed Darwish or Sheikh Imam Issa in the late sixties and early seventies and 'Firqat Al-Mayadeen' in the 80s led by Merceel Khalifa. The second type that reached the Levant is the romantic style in traditional forms with its peculiar Moroccan dialect. This represented in orchestral music ensemble like the ones we see in Egypt, Syria and Iraq during that period of time (1960s-70s) with the addition of some western instruments sometimes, such as a keyboard, electric guitar or a mandolin. Among the most famous artists at that time was Abdulwahab Al-Dukaly, Abdulhady Belkhatat and Hameed Zaher, the latter's music was based on Oud only accompanied with a percussion section that played traditional rhythms that are complex in their form. Some of these artists such as singer Warda and Samira Saeed arrived to Cairo looking for extra exposure and fame. Therefore, these songs were presented in two styles; one was in a folkloric style and had a patriotic, nationalistic nature that expressed a state of instability and unrest that people undergo from time to time. The other was passionate, romantic, full of sorrow and pain, yearning to the beloved, themes which were common that shared similar expressional emotional themes that we might see and hear in other music of the Arabs and the Western world.

As for traditional classical Moroccan singing, it is a rich legacy in the deep meaning of richness. Historically and artistically, it is linked closely to local Moroccan environment. It is also in convergence with neighboring environment that contains other influences as far as the *Al-Mashreq Al-Arabi* (Eastern Arab countries) and the Gulf Arab countries. In *Mashreq*, the word '**Maghreb**' (literally means the West) does not only mean Morocco; it also means few other countries in north and west of Africa, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania. On the other hand, people of Maghreb call Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine 'the Levant' or 'Al-Mashreq Al-Arabi'. Like our Mashreq legacy and its vast differences and similarities, Maghreb legacy is variable and has some similarities. For example, when we say 'Maghrebi classical music', we most probably mean a famous style called 'Andalucian Tarab' (rapture) or 'Andalucia Nawba'. It is the combined instrumental and vocal composition inherited from the peak of Arabic singing dated back to Arab-Spain

civilization in Andalucía from about ninth century to the fourteenth century A.D. This type of singing prevailed for more than 400 years started from singing of simple rhythmic '*qasida*' poems brought by poets and musicians from Iraq, Egypt and the Levant to North of Africa during the Arab-Islamic expansion in the eighth century and later and later reached some of parts Europe such as Spain and Southern France. There was also an integrated full vocal repertoire with various rhymes and compound long and heavy rhythm cycles. This form was called '*Muwashshahat*' (موشحات). The word is derived from scarf (وشاح) worn by women at that time. Form and artistic order of Muwashshahs were like a scarf embroidered with all types of jewellery and made of bright beautiful colors. Ziryab, a famous musician who came from Iraq in the Abbasid dynasty, had the biggest role in the development of this type of Andalusian Muwashshahat, Nawbas or Tarab Andalusian singing. In Andalusia, Ziryab created a developed modern school of Arab singing. It consisted to some extent of the music found in that part of the world (Arab Spanish and North African environment) at that time. This distinguished musician could brilliantly create the classical Arab foundation of Andalusian singing, ranging from *qasida* (traditional poetic singing) based on a simple and light rhythms to a new advanced and complicated form using long cycles of rhythmic patterns such as *al-owais* 11/4, *al-muddanwar* 12/4, *al-murabba'* 13/4, *al-mukhammas* 16/4, *al-anfar* 19/4 and other accurately composed **even** and **odd** compound rhythms which enriched the aesthetic of Andalusian's singing. Since the start of the Andalusian classic school, '*nawbat*' were collected in a book called 'Diwan'; it contained 24 *nawbat* that represented the 24 hours of the day. This means that each *nawba* was especially composed for an hour of the day by using a selected *maqam* (or mood as called in Maghreb) and a rhythm suitable for this hour. For example, *Ushshaq nawba* is played at morning, *Maya nawba* is played on the evening and *Hijaz* and *Rast nawbat* are played at night. *Nawbas* vary according to time and artistic mood. Unfortunately, after the fall of the Andalusian dynasty at the end of the 15th century, many of the art forms were lost, especially the orally inherited musical works, only a few were documented and preserved. Only 11 out of 24 *nawbat* remained. The remaining *nawbas* are: Nawbat al-Rasd, Rasd al-Dhail, al-Maya, Raml al-Maya, al-Hijaz Kabir, al-Hijaz al-Sharqi, Iraq al-Ajam, Asbahan, Ushahaq, Siga and Gharibat al-Hussein. The word '*Nawba*' means 'turn' in which musicians play respectively melodies, improvisations, performance and others are repeated. The term '*nawba*' or '*Sana'a*' (craft) is more popular and used in Algeria

than other areas of Al-Maghreb. It is called '*Musiqā al-ʿAaleb*' (instrumental) music or '*Tarab Ghirmati*' (Granada rapture) in Morocco and 'Ma'luf' in Tunisia and Libya. All these names, however, refer to one thing, 'Andalucian music'. The 'Diwan', in which, *nawbat* were the biggest part, contained the biggest number of poems that were sometimes divided to subsections called Mayazene (ميزان) as in the '*gushel*' system in the Iranian modes called '*dastagab*' and '*amaz*' and its parts in or in comparison also to the 'Raga' system in classical Indian music which is also divided to 24 *ragas*. 'Mayazene' is derived from the word scale (ميزان) or rhythm, as Andalucian music is based on five basic rhythms: Al-Baseet, Al-Batayhi, Al-Qa'em, Al-Qaddam and Al-Darj.

Here, we will list the main *nawba* movements, they are numerous and diverse and are based on the mode of the composition itself, most famous in cities like Tanja, Fez, and Titwan.:

1. Baghiyeh or Tushiyeh: tuning-up or setting the strings as a prelude to the selected *nawba* to be played, also to prepare up the audience's ears for the melodic theme and it is usually done without rhythmic accompaniment.
2. Istihlal or Istiftah (prologue/prelude): a musical introduction accompanied with rhythm.
3. Al-Musaddar: a musical intro that resembles the 'Bashraf' in Turkish music and it usually consists of two or three sections and a refrain. The rhythm of the Al-Musaddar is usually 6/4 or 3/8 called the 'Sama'i Ta'er', or a fast 6/8.
4. Batayih (verses): the group singing using classical Arabic poetry which sometimes includes 'Istekhbar', (a form of a vocal) improvisation.
5. Brul: A rhythm that is similar to the 'Malfoof' rhythm in Eastern music.
6. Derj: singing 'zajal' type of verses (lines in colloquial dialect).
7. Khafeef (light): a prelude to the conclusion which is a leading rhythm and melody towards the finale, sometimes using a rhythm such as the Nawakht 8/7.
8. Qafla or Khatam (conclusion): A quick closing musical turn done to the 6/8 or 3/4 rhythms that leads to the end of role.

Musical Instruments used in classical Moroccan music are many and diverse such as the Arabian or Andalucian lute or al-qwaitrah, mandolin, nay flute, violin (family of violin), the Andalucian rabab (looks similar to the Indian Serangi) and in addition to rhythmic instruments such as the tar, riqq, naqarat and the darabukka.

Other important musical genres performed in Maghreb are: **Malhoun**: folkloric praise poetry that is considered a sort of Andalusia's singing performed in the common or colloquial dialect. Malhoun is a word that refers to '**composed music**' and it is Moroccan music inspired by Andalusia music. Malhoun is exclusively focused on the sort of poetry that depicts the working stratum. It is originally a poetic art that is still called 'Poem' or 'Praise' and it is usually accompanied by instruments.

Ganawa, called sometimes 'healing or trance music' originates from 'Ghinawa' or 'غُناوة' of immigrants to Maghreb from West Africa in the golden age of Al-Maghreb Empire (towards the end of 16th century A.D.), which was then called Western Sudan or Ghana Empire (Guinea) which is today's state of Mali. Rhythmic instrument of 'Qaraqeb' and instrument of 'Haghoug' or 'Senteer', and sometimes 'Tabl' or large drum, are used in Ganawa performance.

Eita: Eita art used to exist in extension of middle plains of Atlantic coast (mainly Shaweya, Abdu and Dukala) through some neighboring areas. Eita art, in its original and ancient concept, means the 'call'. It is the call from the tribe and asking the ancestors for help in order to motivate men to exert more effort. This art is distinguished by wonderful, yet difficult, rhythms. It is based on praise, ghazal and enthusiasm. It is the term that refers to a set of lyrical phrases and musical rhythmic separators in a discipline that differs in its items according as per the different types and patterns of Eita. Experts and enthusiasts classified this art into three forms: Mersawy, Hawzy, Malaly.

Amazigh music: it is a *taqtoqa* or folkloric type of music from the Atlas Mountains. Made famous by some distinguished artists such as Mohamed Rouicha performing on an old instrument called 'Lutar' with female voices accompanied by rhythmic section. It's tends to be 'bluesy' in its feature, sad and deep.

Finally, it is difficult to mention all Arab musical and singing legacy of Al-Maghreb in an essay. There treasure of music tradition of 'Andalusía tarab' and 'Amazigh' music in the rural north and Atlas middle and Susi south. Rai and Kada music is another types of music found in east of Al-Maghreb and Taqtuqa in Northern Atlas. We hope that tonight's performance as we are celebrating a unique and ancient style of music, will be an educational, cultural enrichment and memorable time to you.