

AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ARAB MUSIC AND WESTERN MUSIC?

**New ideas, new programs, a glance at the B.Ed. course of the
Lewinsky College of Education, Music Department**

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Is an encounter such as this possible? Are we working towards it at all, when planning a new course in the framework of B.Ed. studies in music education – when actually, the very idea behind it speaks of openness to our everyday musical environment?

Students who are well-versed in western art music literature are already familiar with Debussy, Cage, Jean-Claude Eloy, Isang Yun, Varèse – composers who have integrated well with western music and who have much insight into attitudes of the musical and extra-musical world of the Far East, each composer in his own way, in his own environment and in his own time.

But what about here, where we are situated, at the Middle Eastern seam where West meets the Arab world? – A veritable desert.

We have before us the choice of creating the musical connection ourselves. We have increased our insight into both cultures, by listening to music with a maximal level of concentration, by analyses, by lessons in musical performance given by master-artists of the Arab sector and by writing exercises in composition. Three areas in which we worked were intonation, rhythm, and communication between artist and audience.

Western intonation is very rich from a macro point of view (extended texture: harmony, polyphony) whereas in Arab music the emphasis is on the micro area (minimized texture: the division of the tone itself into quarters, halves and three-quarters); the world of rhythm in the best of western tradition is extremely symmetrical while in the Arab work asymmetry rules; in western concert halls, artist and audience are two completely different categories – there is the “active” side (the artist) and the “passive” side (the audience), or even better, the one able to give (the artist) and the one able to receive (the audience), whereas in the oriental world, artist and audience are one and the same and their encounters on various occasions give meaning to the daily round of living as a whole.

Students were required to attend musical events which were defined as concerts for this purpose – an Arab “khafla” (happening), Shlomo Bar, Shalom Hanoach, a routine concert

of classical and contemporary art music – and were later asked to complete a questionnaire. We saw ourselves as detectives, trying to discover what occurs between artist and audience during “concerts”. In the area of rhythm, students supplied the “pyramid” of western rhythm which they usually present to their pupils; and they also took turns in teaching the class an Arab melody chosen from a compilation of melodies which I had made available. The aim was to search after methodical ways for facility in teaching complicated rhythms and meters (complicated, that is, for western-oriented musicians like ourselves). We experienced the deliberate synthesis between Arab and western music in compositional exercises. The analysis of scales of Arab music (in itself a western act) led us to the discovery of small units in the scale; the students were then required to mix them together and to form new qualities of sound. The results are fascinating. The questionnaires presented after the events may well serve as the first steps in a field research, the likes of which have never been undertaken before.

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