

9. PERSPECTIVES AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS BETWEEN OCCIDENT AND ORIENT

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Abstract: *Impact of occidental culture on oriental music is recent, and so is the discovery of oriental music by occidental composers. Between modal and tonal systems, from occidental rhythmic span to oriental rhythmical diversity, from the instrumentation of the modern symphony orchestra to the oriental small group of Takht, from the various and ample genres of Occidental music to the accompanied monody specific to oriental music, composers of the twentieth century (both Occidental and Oriental) have searched for the ideal formula to understand, and then to introduce in their creations the atmosphere of another culture. If expressive meaning may be the same (sadness, joy, melancholy, etc.), the expression and, above all, the esthetic capabilities of each cultural public differ significantly. Therefore, the two musical cultures can meet tangentially, they can share certain typical elements, but without "their voices ever to be mistaken, or to lose their own tone and register" (J. Dering).*

Key words: *Occidental culture and Oriental culture, elements of musical language, repertoire, professionalism, musical communication and perception in two cultures*

When we speak of the Orient, our virtual memory evokes wide open spaces, where the time element loses its real meaning, all taking place as within eternity. On the contrary, the Occident, as a semantic concept means spatial and temporal limits, the quadrate, moral, intellectual and social constraints. But the spiritual typology of these two civilizations contradicts existing clichés, perhaps because of the inevitable truth that the mind has acquired out of contrasting marks as compared to where it was developed. As the balance, the fundamental law that should be ruling the world requires the existence of counterweights, so that reality may not be pleonastic, fact that would inevitably lead it to its extinction.

First, we must determine what East is referred to, because geographically it implies Asia (Middle East and Far East), but culturally it also includes the Turkic and Arabic speaking countries, countries of Islamic culture, not necessarily in the sense of religion, but mainly in the sense of cultural tradition.

Although in both civilizations the lode of music was religion, its role being to emphasize the expressiveness of the verb, the later development had different manifestations, in form and content, and even during shifted periods. Almost from the beginning Occidentals felt the need to free their mind and soul of the narrow space that overwhelmed them, as being the only way out of spatiotemporal constraints. Meanwhile, the Easterners reflected on themselves, while conserving the idea that "the world is the mirror of God" that leads to the focus on the theme of the individual tragic condition, as a consequence of the same dominant theme in antiquity. In fact, Occidental music quickly released itself from the burden of the word, and harmony, polyphony and counterpoint (choir at first, indeed) demanded the appearance of polyphonic instruments, of

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which the organ was the example of magnitude and complexity. The timbre spectrum was structured in the instrumental diversity so that the symbiosis between the full orchestra and the choir is fully accomplished in the early nineteenth century in Europe (the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven). The increasingly accentuated dynamic and formal timbre diversity reveals musicians' research and efforts to nuance the expressiveness of the fight between feeling and intelligence (their favorite theme). It is because of these efforts that they introduce, especially after 1830 (the year of impact with the Arab culture, due to the inclusion of Algiers), oriental items that they call *exotic*, meaning *otherness*, of what is neither ordinary nor known.

However, Islamic music (as music belonging to Arabic, Turkic cultures, and not in the sense of religious music) carefully kept vocal characteristics, with strict laws of composition, expression and behavior, being traditional music, transmitted orally and not in written form, as in the Occident. According to During "any tradition is created in the *objective world*, meaning that it adheres to a meaning, to truths (or dogmas), it complies to standards and laws, is full of symbols that bring up a lack of transcendence without which it deteriorates in practice"³². In Islamic cultures, tradition, especially oral (because here music is eminently vocal, dependent of poetry), has not allowed musicians to go beyond Sufism³³, since one cannot speak of music aesthetics (as an art independent of the verb) before the twentieth century. Music *beauty* laws take shape once with the loosening of music from poetry, namely, when the music starts to have an intrinsic expressive value. But, since until the twentieth century we talk about the perfect symbiosis between poem and melody, the influence of music on the audience can (and it surely should!) amplify the expressive value of the verb, while maintaining its high value aesthetics. For example, Al Fārābī speaks of the existence of blank and full notes in Islamic music, and this in relation to the words of the poem. Thus, when we speak of a blank note, we refer to a note lying between two accents (two stressed syllables or two words). On the blank note, the musician can develop the ornaments of the performance, regardless of the rhythmic factor. Then the melody is even more beautiful, but the meaning of the words may be lost, being difficult to understand. Full notes are well synchronized with the syllables of the words, articulated even by letters. This is a more rhythmic music, less beautiful certainly, but it offers more clarity to the verb. Thus one finds in blank notes the essence of vocalization and improvisation, while in full notes, the structure of recitatives³⁴.

Improvisation, either vocal or instrumental, takes place in small intervals, from one note to another in small values, without a definite rhythmic structure, the *ad libitum* kind. Occidental composers will predominantly use this half-cadential element to define the intention of Orientalism in their creations. We

³² Jean During, *Question de gout. L'enjeu de la modernité dans les arts et les musiques de l'Islam. La modernité en Orient*, in : Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles, 1994, p. 27

³³ See <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soufisme> - ontological and religious quest in Islam, inner way (Batin) appeared with the prophetic revelation of Islam. His speech is contemplative and his verbal aesthetic, poetic.

³⁴ Rodolphe d' Erlanger, *La musique arabe*, Volume II, Ed. Geuthner, Paris, 1935, p. 66-68

may mention here (except the famous example of Scheherazade, by Rimsky-Korsakov), the third movement of the Concerto for violin and orchestra, by Stravinsky, the Second movement of the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, by Khachaturian, "Afternoon of a Faun" or "Syrinx", by Debussy, Ravel's Habanera, etc. Moreover, small improvising spirals of oriental appearance can be both tonal and modal because the inclusion of modalism in Occidental music of the late nineteenth century is an often encountered phenomenon.

Modalism, the basic framework of Oriental music is so vast that in 1949, Mikhail Khalil Allahwirdi states that "it is necessary to draw up a complete inventory of the *Maqâmâts* and to specify, by means of an infinitesimal measuring unit, the atom (the *dharra* - of which Allahwirdi is the inventor), subtle differentiations in order to include by this multiplicity the complex nature of feelings"³⁵. So, Oriental modes are numerous and complex, and in addition, modulations from one mode to another must follow strict laws, we can say stricter than harmonic modulations in Occidental music. Most Oriental modes are sad or solemn, according to the melodic treatment. For example, in two modes with the same changes for the first tetraccord, the character may be different: sober and solemn if the intervals are gradually enchained consecutive seconds, or gay and lively if it contains leaping of thirds, quads or fifths. Similarly, if in a mode with a certain structure a note is excluded, it turns into another mode. Occidental composers have not deepened into these fine details, given the large dimensions and the specificity of the domain ethos. Instead they used the improvisational style to emphasize decreased or increased intervals, especially on the augmented second.

Even if they flirted with half alterations (as George Enesco and Eugène Ysaÿe in their violin sonatas, where they used half-flats and half-sharps), this was accidental, through chromatic passages, ornaments, shifts, without pretending to really get into the Oriental mode. And we should not forget that some Romanian modes contain micro-intervals and that George Enesco used them wherever he wanted to strengthen the Romanian folk character (for example, his third sonata for piano and violin, or its sequel *Impressions d'enfance*). Similarly, Ysaÿe's *Ballade* (his third sonata for *solo* violin) is dedicated to G. Enesco, and therefore he used them for the same reasons, namely to be more persuasive on the Romanian folk character. In addition, Maurice Ravel uses in his rhapsody for violin and orchestra, *Tzigane*, notes of the 2nd tetrachord of the *saba* Arabic mode (semitone, tone, semitone), corresponding to the first tetrachord of the *altéré*³⁶ mode (known as the decreased *superlocrien*, or, more rarely, as the *locrian 4*) widely used in jazz. If the ethos of *saba* mode in Arabic music is the bearer of a sense of the extreme, even of the tragic, sadness, and in jazz this sequence is used "on dominant chords to create melodic tensions compared to a slightly monotonous harmonic

³⁵ Christian Poché, *De l'homme parfait à l'expressivité musicale. Courants esthétiques arabes au XXe siècle*, in : Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie, 1994 : Esthétique, p. 17

³⁶ The melodic minor scale, sensitive for tonic.

progression"³⁷. Therefore, we cannot make a simple analogy between the notes of any type of mode and the *maqâm*³⁸, especially at the level of perception, which differs for Orientals and Occidentals³⁹.

I consider the Occidental composer Maurice Jarre as the most faithful and the closest to the Oriental spirit in the music of the film *The Message*. He valued here the motif of the call to prayer in a way considered to be of religious spirit (the *Hijaz*). Through several types of variations (rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, timbral), Jarre creates an almost visual music. But to access and create this genre, we must understand and (if possible) feel the spirit of the mode, not only its melodic aspect, but also its rhythmic one (in fact, it aims to melodic-rhythmic structures).

Oriental rhythm, extremely rich, fitted out with strong and weak beats (the *dūm* and the *tek*), however, does not obey the Occidental metric symmetry that is usually organized in quadrats sentences (4 or 8 measures). The metric becomes non-symmetrical and irregular in Oriental music, a much more sensitive and expressive rhythm. In Occidental music, square sentences (4 or 8 measures) correspond to the poetry and drama verse, while for this kind of rhythm and asymmetric metrical structure Arnold Schönberg applies the term *musical prose*⁴⁰. In Oriental music, even if within the measure, the succession of strong and weak beats is not symmetrical, especially in counterpoint with the rhythm of the melody, the metric structure remains stable and consistent, without changing its texture for an entire melody, especially when it's a song accompanied by percussion. For its role in accompanying the song is to emphasize the beauty of the melody rhythm, and also to confer specific stability. In his *Ancient Epigraphs*, Claude Debussy applies a non-symmetrical suggestive and steady rhythm, to better express himself in the *Egyptian*. Moreover, those who surprise the most and enter the deepest the Oriental atmosphere are the Impressionists and the Moderns. Giving up the laws of tonality and rhythmic symmetry (as equivalent of pictorial perspective) they discover, through the Orient, the expressive power of color.

Apart from the melodic, modal and rhythmic clichés, they use a rich, extremely colorful orchestration, the great master being Maurice Ravel. However, instruments of soft velvety tone, such as the bass flute and bass clarinet, make their appearance, so that music may be more faithful to the

³⁷ See <http://sublevels.free.fr/gammes-modes>

³⁸ Beyond the sequence of intervals, often in a two-octave vocal range, the *maqâm* expresses the spirit of a fashion, its color, nature and feeling.

³⁹ Habib Hassan Touma tells, in his writing *The Music of the Arabs* (Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1996, Portland, p. 44), about an experiment performed on two equal groups of subjects, one Arab and the other one non-Arab who listened to saba mode. All were invited to record their emotions in concentric circles, with the lowest emotions outside. All Arab subjects expressed their feelings as "sad, tragic and painful". Among non-Arab subjects, almost half (48%) had the same feelings, but 28 % experienced feelings of "seriousness, desire and tension", while 6 % described their feelings as "happy, active or lively", and 10% did not identify any feelings.

⁴⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, *Composition with Twelve -Tones* (1) (1941), In: *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, Faber and Faber, London, 1975, p. 218: "This is what music prose should be - a direct and simple presentation of ideas, without any mosaic appearance, simple padding, nor empty repetitions" (referring to Brahms' music).

introspective and intimate atmosphere of a sacred and mysterious air, that of the Oriental atmosphere. As, if Occidental music reclaimed the existence of instruments with high and ample sonority, of extrovert character, in the sense of *expressiveness of strength* and width (concerning nuances), Oriental music created instruments of small, soft and velvety timber, of introverted character, subject to the *force of expressiveness*. *Nai*, *qanun*, *oud* and even the Oriental violin (with its tuning decreased as ambitus) remain to their maximum in the low or medium aria of intensity.

But the passage of Oriental music of the vocal to pure instrumental raised major disruptions and upheavals in the Arab musical thought. In 1956 the Egyptian philosopher Fouad Zakariyya (or Fuḳād Zakarīyā - 1927-2010), observes in his book *Musical Expressivity* that "the essentially vocal Arabic music is hampered by the burden of the word, its traditional role being to deliver a poetic message, commented and embellished by the sound"⁴¹. He thinks that, since expressiveness is thus in the text, and not in the pure source of the sound, the development of instrumental music is urgently needed, as the "only possible criterion to achieve the fullness of expression". Henceforth, instrumental tracks are open, without compromising in any way the vocal path. The principle of the new directory is instrumental valuation of vocal pieces. Thus one finds the coexistence of classicism (considered as traditional) with the Romanticism (considered as modern).

Aesthetics, as science, defines Modernity as "a broad movement of individualizing the world", the objective World of Tradition, responsible for standard, laws and symbols. Shayegan characterizes modernity as forget of the symbolic dimension, "the shift in focus from top to bottom"⁴². The Islamic East followed a similar evolution of that in the Occident, going from the idea of the Beautiful subordinated to truth and intelligible towards Modernity, where the artist is invited to express his subjectivity. But this turn caused during the entire twentieth century, disputes concerning the most appropriated means to achieve it. For if the case of the expressiveness of instrumental music, independent of the verb, had already earned its place, instrumentation, orchestration, Occidental forms, harmony and polyphony (more than three voices) are still very controversial.

In the early twentieth century the Taqtuqa⁴³ could be heard in Egypt, a form of song accompanied by piano, instrument belonging entirely to Occidental music. Although proponents of classical Arab music qualify it as the "easy and enjoyable urban form", which "contaminates the musical field"⁴⁴, this form

⁴¹ See <http://ethnomusicologie.revues.org> - Christian Poché, *op. cit.*

⁴² Dariush Shayegan, *Le regard mutilé. Schizophrénie culturelle : pays traditionnels face à la modernité*, Ed. Albin Michel, Paris, 1989, p. 52

⁴³ See <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taqtuqa> - kind of slight voice Arabic music sung in an Arabic dialect. It is associated with singers of the early twentieth century and became popular thanks to the gramophone, cinema and singing cafés in Cairo.

⁴⁴ Alexander Chalfoun [Shalfūn Iskandar], "*al-caṣr al-ḥālī wa-maraḍ al-taqāṭīq (wa-sabab intishāruh)*" [*The current time and taqāṭīq disease (and the causes of this expansion)*] review *Rawdat al balābil* - 1924, 1/5, p. 7-11 in: <http://ethnomusicologie.revues.org/1345>, 7/1994: Aesthetics, Christian Poché, *op. cit.*

seduces the Cairo civilization and is rooted in modern genres, as premise of variety. Chalfoun, violently denouncing the taqtuqa in a virulent article entitled "The Present Age and the Taqtuqa Disease" receives a reply directly from a shaykh⁴⁵, namely the shaykh Muhammad Younis Al-Qadi. He takes the cause for taqtuqa, demonstrating that "its structure [...] requires an intrinsic knowledge of music"⁴⁶. In fact, through these completely opposed views, in this conflict between old and modern, we assist at dissonances on musical aesthetics, which demonstrates the autonomous existence of music in the context of all arts.

The twentieth century brought an invasion of Occidentalism in Arabic music. Harmonization, Occidental orchestration of Arabic music, coexistence of purely Occidental instruments with the *qanun*, the *oud* and the *darbuka*, in large orchestras are attempts to touch new paths in Oriental music. Tradition advocates oppose (surely, in a very relevant way) this contamination of Oriental character of the music, based on the primacy of feeling in the new romantic wave. Allahwirdi believes that "in order to express itself, the feeling does not need to make appeal to the Western technology of harmonization"⁴⁷. Similarly, Habib Hassan Touma (Palestinian musician of the late twentieth century) denies the usefulness of Occidental instruments in Arabic music, opining that they "affect the Arabic modal system", so that "the intimate atmosphere of small Arab orchestra is profoundly injured"⁴⁸. On the contrary, other musicologists put Arabic music in a state of inferiority as compared to the Occident, because of the lack of description, ideas and realistic images. Husayn Fawzi, a great defender of symphonic music, emphasizes the idea of universalism⁴⁹.

In fact, the rules of departure are not the same for Occidental music and Oriental music, because the first is based on the Greek tonal system, while the second is based on the Arabic modal system, which divides the musical range in 24 micro-intervals (having considered the quarter tones). Therefore, the two systems were developed on fairly different ways, together with all their accessories (compositional technique, quality of instruments, ethos and aesthetics). Therefore, how could the Occidental musician feel the spirit of a mode such as the *rast* or the *saba*, with all that it implies (in terms of melodic-rhythmic formulas of expression), in order to achieve composing within this *maqam*? Moreover, how will the Arab musician proceed to orchestrate (using temperate instruments of the symphony occidental orchestra, with complex harmony and polyphony) modal melodies, assuming quarter tones? Jean During gives a wonderful conclusion to this dilemma:

⁴⁵ See <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheikh> - master, old man, wise. Among Muslims, a man respected for his age and especially for his scientific and religious knowledge.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Yunis al- Qadi, "*al- Aghani al- muwashshaḥāt, al- mawāliyyā, Adwar al- al- al- taqātīq tasmiyat taqtūqa*" [*Sung Forms muwashshahāt, Mawwal -s, Adwar taqātīq, of the name of taqtūqa*], journal al- Masrah, no. 20, 1926, p. 9-10, in: <http://ethnomusicologie.revues.org/1345>, Christian Poché, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ See <http://ethnomusicologie.revues.org/1345>, Christian Poché, *op. cit.*, p. 17

⁴⁸ Christian Poché, *Musiques du monde arabe. Ecoute et découverte*, Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, 1994, p. 239-240.

⁴⁹ Husayn Fawzi, "*How to Achieve Universal*", the Lebanese newspaper *Le Jour*, December 18, 1965

"The ways of the Occident and the Orient are like two parts of a flowery counterpoint: from one approach to another, a pattern anticipates another, or echoes it, sometimes or synchronously crossing over some notes and in parallel progressing at a consonant distance, yet without ever their voices to merge or to lose their own tone or register"⁵⁰.

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⁵⁰ Jean During, *op. cit.*