

CROSS-CULTURE CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATION: ISSUES FOR WESTERN CHORAL
CONDUCTORS RELATED TO THE PERFORMANCE OF ARABIC CHORAL MUSIC

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The concept of choral music as defined by the Western world was foreign to Arab cultures until the colonization of the Arab world began in the seventeenth century when we began to see the Western choral style emerging in the churches of the Arab world. Group singing of traditional music was done in unison or heterophonic textures. Notated part-singing is a product of colonization, Westernization, Christianization, and now globalization. In recent years, singing music in mixed or multiple voicings not of a heterophonic nature has spread beyond the churches to the secular Arab world. As choral singing has increased in the Arab world, a new genre of Arabic choral music has emerged.

In order for Western conductors to effectively teach, conduct, or perform these new works, it is important for them to develop a basic understanding of traditional Arabic musical styles and pronunciation of the language, thereby making Arabic choral music more accessible and enabling it to become a part of the larger world's musical vocabulary. This study serves as an introductory resource for non-Arab choral conductors concerning key elements related to performing Arabic choral music and provides a context for how these elements relate to this evolving choral genre. In addition, through interviews with composers and conductors of Arabic choral music, this project will further inform the reader regarding the performance of this genre.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of choral music as defined by the Western world was foreign to Arab cultures until the colonization of the Arab world began in the seventeenth century when we began to see the Western choral style emerging in the churches of the Arab world.¹ Group singing of traditional music, however, was done in unison or heterophonic textures. Notated part-singing is a product of colonization, Westernization, Christianization, and now globalization.² In recent years, vocal music in mixed or multiple voicings not of a heterophonic nature has spread beyond the churches to the secular Arab world. As choral singing has increased in the Arab world, a new genre of Arabic choral music has emerged.³

In order for Western conductors to effectively teach, conduct, or perform these new works, it is important for them to develop a basic understanding of traditional Arabic musical styles and pronunciation of the language, thereby making Arabic choral music more accessible and enabling it to become a part of the larger world's musical vocabulary. This study serves as an introductory resource for non-Arab choral conductors concerning key elements related to performing Arabic choral music and provides a context for how these elements relate to this evolving choral genre. In addition, through interviews with composers and conductors of Arabic choral music, this project will further inform the reader regarding the performance of this genre.

While traditional elements of Arabic music are well researched and published, very little has been published about Arabic choral music and its relationship to these traditional Arabic

¹ André de Quadros, "Salamu Aleikum – Music of the Muslim World" (lecture, ACDA Western Division Conference, 2014).

² de Quadros, "Salamu Aleikum – Music of the Muslim World."

³ For the purpose of this paper, the term "Arabic choral music" refers to arrangements with more than one voice part.

music elements and issues of pronunciation of the Arabic language in regards to singing for the non-Arab choral conductor.

The Arab world spans many countries, numbering more than a quarter of the world's population. The impact of each country's cultural and musical traditions accounts for broad influences found in Arabic music.

The Arab tradition in music is not singular, but is often mixed with Persian and Turkish influences as well, particularly in timbres, melodic structures, and even in performance. This is not to suggest that all music of the Middle East is the same, but, rather, that it derives from a common repertoire and practice, reflecting an interchange of cultural ideas throughout the history of Islam, due to changing political structures in the Arab world.⁴

The evaluation of selected Arabic choral works relates which traditional elements have been maintained and how best to approach and understand those elements for the non-Arab choral conductor. The selected Arabic choral arrangements, discussed in this study, include: "Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa" by Shireen Abu-Khader, and "Ana'w Chadi" and "Yal Asmar Ellon" by Dr. Edward Torikian. An example of an original Arabic choral piece to be examined is "Ai'yu" by Egyptian composer, Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah.

⁴ James P. O'Brien, *Music in World Cultures: Understanding Multiculturalism Through the Arts* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1994), 92.

CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS OF ARABIC MUSIC

Darling outlines five characteristics of Arabic music: melodic mode (scale), embellishment, improvisation, rhythm, and homophony.⁵ Traditionally, the center of Arabic tonality is the *maqam* (plural *maqamat*), a collection of more than seventy Arabic scales or modes essential to the musical timbre and melodic motion of a piece. The tonality is based upon a quarter-tone system, divided into twenty-four equivalent intervals per octave. The augmented second found in many *maqamat* is a signature interval.⁶ The classification of each *maqam* is based upon the beginning and ending tones, as well as the character of its consecutive seconds, particularly the descending cadential sequence of consecutive seconds leading to the final tone of the piece.⁷ Rules for each *maqam* define the starting note or *Qarar*⁸ and the ending note, the *Mustaqar*.⁹ A series of eight pitches define the Arabic scales or *maqamat*, each containing quarter-tones, semi-tones and whole-tones. Each *maqam* has a defining character that is used to convey different moods in the music. Arabic singers often display their virtuosity by negotiating these scales or *maqamat* in an ornamented manner. Due to issues of tuning, modern composers typically avoid harmonizing the *maqamat* with quartertones. When quarter-tone scales exist, it is possible to execute the quarter-tone as a passing tone or in a quick figure embellishment.¹⁰ The sound created by the use of *maqam* gives Arabic music its identifiable characteristics or what

⁵ Leanne Darling, "From West to East: An Introduction to Arabic String Playing," *American String Teacher*, 54, no. 2 (2004).

⁶ Afif Alvarez Bulos, *Handbook of Arabic Music* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1971).

⁷ Habib Hassan Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, trans. Laurie Schwartz (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1999), 83-86.

⁸ *Qarar* in Arabic means decision. It is used to indicate the tonic note of the *maqam*.

⁹ *Mustaqar* in Arabic means resting place. It is used to indicate the ending note of a *maqam*.

¹⁰ John D. Perkins, "Engaging in Arabic Choral Music," *International Choral Bulletin*, 31, no. 4 (2012): 46, http://www.academia.edu/4952605/Engaging_with_Arabic_Choral_Music, (accessed January 15, 2015).

one thinks of as the “typical” Arabic sound. The musician plays or sings around the notes in slight variations, but never loses sight of the keynote of the *maqam*.

The use of *mawwal*, a call and response between the soloist and chorus, often sets the character of the piece and allows the soloist to show his/her virtuosity through *orrub* (or ornamentation).¹¹ A *mawwal* is often preceded by a *doulab*¹², a short instrumental introduction, or a *taqsim*¹³, an instrumental improvisation that can be metrical or non-metrical. These traditional elements are found in much Arabic choral music.

Embellishment is one smaller element of improvisation in Arabic music; the main form of improvisation is called Taqsim. It is used to outline and introduce the Maqam, and to showcase an individual player. It consists of short, simple melodic phrases, often traveling throughout the register of the instrument. A Taqsim usually contains at least one modulation from one Maqam to another. Thorough presentation of the Maqam and skillful modulation make up the artistry of the Taqsim.

Unlike western music, where an embellishment is used to highlight a note or series of notes, embellishment in Arabic music is woven organically into the music. A melody is almost never played in its simple form. Embellishment varies with the individual, the Maqam, and the type of instrument. A player never repeats any melodic phrase the same way twice, using embellishment as an improvisatory element in the music. A group of musicians each embellishing a melody slightly differently gives the music a heterophonic quality and a richness of timbre unlike homophonic music. The most common types of embellishment are trills, turns, and slides, and various combinations of the three.¹⁴

Rhythmic modes in traditional Arabic music are based upon on *iqa'at* (singular *iqa'*) or cycles of strong and weak beats. The beat cycles range from 2 to 34 beats, and often include asymmetrical meters such as 5/8, 7/8, and 10/8. These rhythmic cycles alternate strong and weak beats and rests. Each beat within the cycle represents one of two types of drum strokes with varying intensities. The strong beat or the *dum*, indicates a deep sound that might be produced

¹¹ A *mawwal* is a non-metric vocal improvisation.

¹² A *doulab* is a short instrumental introduction that establishes the *maqam* and mood of the piece generally performed in unison by a full ensemble.

¹³ A *taqsim* is an instrumental improvisation that begins and ends in the established *maqam*, but usually includes modulations to related *maqamat* that abide by certain rules of the established *maqam*. It is performed by a soloist, but may be accompanied by a percussionist or instrumental drone.

¹⁴ Darling, “From West to East.”

by striking the center of a drum. The weak beat or *tak* represents a clear, higher-pitched sound symbolizing the sound produced by striking the edge of a drum with one's fingertips. "Most Arabic music is accompanied by drumming, and each melodic phrase follows the emphasis of the beat cycle."¹⁵ An example of one 10/8 rhythmic structure used in Arabic vocal music would be the *Samai Thaqil* (see Example 1).

Example 1: *Samai Thaqil* rhythm.



As stated previously, traditional Arabic music does not use harmony, but is normally sung in unison or heterophonic textures. "Everyone in an Arabic ensemble plays/sings the melody, sometimes in different octaves, with the only exception being the occasional drone played under the melody."¹⁶ Traditional Arabic music's heterophonic nature is mostly negated after setting it in a harmonic, choral style.¹⁷ While the influence of Western choral music on Arabic choral music is obvious through its use of such Western elements as harmonic structure, rhythms and multiple voicings, these choral works can still clearly represent Arab cultures and traditions.

¹⁵ Darling, "From West to East."

¹⁶ Darling, "From West to East."

¹⁷ Perkins, "Engaging in Arabic Choral Music," 46.

CHAPTER 3

ARABIC CHORAL MUSIC

The origins of Arabic choral music arrangements vary from traditional Arab folk music to popular contemporary Arab music. Modern composers are also creating original compositions in this genre. Slobin states, “Music symbolizes a people’s way of life; it represents distillation of cultural style.”¹⁸ As in many cultures, some pieces have been written down, while others have been transmitted orally. The oral transmission of some of these traditional songs accounts for the variations found in both melodic material and texture.

One example of traditional music is “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa” (When He Swayed), a traditional *muwashshah* piece. *Muwashshah* is an autonomous genre of Arabian vocal art music that is textually based on the poetic form of the *muwashshah*.¹⁹ In the Arabian East, the *muwashshah* tradition is further distinguished by the adherence to the strict rules of Arabian meter.²⁰ The strophic *muwashshah* originated during the Muslim rule of Spain (1492) in Cabra. The song form continues to survive throughout the Arab world in oral tradition.²¹ The *muwashshah* ensemble consists of a solo singer, who usually performs a few lines of the text, and instrumentalists, who usually make up the “choir.”²²

In 2011, Palestinian/Jordanian composer and conductor, Shireen Abu-Khader published her arrangement “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa” for an unaccompanied four-part chorus. The piece’s melody is based upon *Maqam Nahawand* (see Example 2), which is a parallel equivalent to the Western harmonic minor scale (commonly used as *maqam* for composition and

¹⁸ Mark Slobin et al., “The Music-Culture as a World of Music,” in *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World’s Peoples* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 1.

¹⁹ The poetic form of the *muwashshah* is written in classical Arabic and consists of five strophes. It differs from classical poetry as each verse is divided into two metric halves and a single rhyme recurs at the end of each verse.

²⁰ Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, 83-86.

²¹ Shireen Abu-Khader, *Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa*, ed. André de Quadros (Corvalis, OR: earthsongs, 2011).

²² Touma, *The Music of the Arabs*, 83-86.

improvisation), and presents the traditional rhythmic structure *Samai Thaqil*, a complex Arab rhythm notated in 10/8 where rhythmic emphasis falls on beats 1, 4, 6, 7, and 8 (see Example 3). Abu-Khader transformed the traditional instrumental lines into the rhythmic vocal bass part. The singers create the sound and texture of the instruments through a rhythmic ostinato and the use of nonsense syllables “dum” and “tak” outlining the 10/8 meter. Through this simple example, it is evident that even a basic understanding of traditional rhythmic and melodic structures is necessary for a more informed performance of the Arabic choral music genre (see Example 4).

Example 2: *Maqam Nahawand*



Example 3: “Lamma Bada” shows the traditional complex rhythmic structure of the *Samai Thaqil* found in the instrumental line of the first *dawr* (section) in the *muwashshah*.



Example 4: arr. Shireen Abu-Khader, “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa” shows the treatment of the original rhythmic instrumental line as it is transformed into the vocal bass line.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa". It consists of two staves: a vocal line (S) and a bass line (B). The vocal line is in a 10/8 time signature and features a melodic line with lyrics: "Lam - maa ba - daa ya-ta-than-naa, Lam -". The bass line is in the same time signature and provides a rhythmic foundation with a pattern of "dum tak dum dum tak dum tak dum dum tak dum tak dum dum tak". The bass line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking.

In an interview with Abu-Khader, when asked about how she breaks down the complex rhythmic structure when conducting “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa” she stated:

I think of it as being the “dum” (the “dum” indicates the strong beat of the *Samai Thaqil* rhythm). I think of it as being exactly as written. You look at the poetry. This is why you have all of these crazy rhythms. No one was thinking symmetrically in measure numbers. They were thinking poetry. For example, I’m looking at certain *muwashahat*. You have a whole line written 32/16, so you have to think of it as 10/8. You have to feel it as 10/8, because the poem that goes on top is a 10/8, so it is the poem and you are not thinking the rhythm. You are shifting your thought, thinking words and not thinking rhythm. Just understanding that because the poem was written that way and the way the poem works with the rhythm.²³

Abu-Khader tries to emphasize the importance of poetry and the horizontal line of Arabic music by barely including portions of Western-influenced part writing, such as passing tones and neighboring tones in her works. This horizontal approach allows the voice to sing “naturally” and allows the choir to explore different vocal colors.²⁴ For the performance of “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa,” Abu-Khader suggests that the piece is open to different interpretations by the choir. Some suggestions include having singers improvise using the text and pitches from the *maqam* above the rhythmic foundation, repeating various sections using the main melodic line

²³ Shireen Abu-Khader, phone conversation with composer, Sharjah, UAE, April 23, 2015.

²⁴ Perkins, “Engaging in Arabic Choral Music,” 47.

and incorporating the bass ostinato at the end, and using a non-pitched drum along with the bass ostinato.²⁵

“Ana’w Chadi” (Me and Chadi) by Edward Torikian is an arrangement for four part mixed choir of the Rahbani Brothers’ popular song “Chadi” for four-part mixed choir.²⁶ In his arrangement, Torikian initiates the piece with a *mawwal* sung by a soloist, which follows the original composition by the Rahbani Brothers. The original instrumental accompaniment for the soloist has been transformed into the *SATB* choral parts. Percussive Arabic rhythmic elements are represented in the choral parts (see Example 5). Lebanese conductor, Barkev Taslakian remarks, “I believe the human voice includes all the musical instruments, and satisfies all the tastes.”²⁷

Example 5: arr. Edward Torikian, “Ana’w Chadi”, Bass and Tenor lines in mm. 34-35.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Ana'w Chadi" by Edward Torikian, specifically the Bass and Tenor lines in measures 34-35. The score is written for five parts: Solo, Soprano (S.), Contralto (CA.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The Solo part has the lyrics "way-nak ra - yeh ya Cha - di". The Soprano part has "wèel - 'et aa - tra - fil - wa - di". The Tenor part has "Ram pa ra Ram pa ra ra pa pa pa pam pam". The Bass part has "Ram pam pa Ram pam pa ra pa pa pa pam pam". The score is in a key with two sharps (F# and C#) and a 3/4 time signature. The Solo part is in treble clef, while the other parts are in bass clef. The Solo part is marked "Solo" and the other parts are marked "S.", "CA.", "T.", and "B." respectively. The measure numbers 34 and 35 are indicated at the beginning of each line.

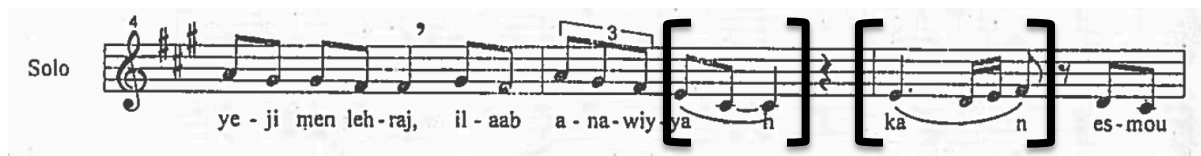
²⁵ Abu-Khader, *Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa*, 2011.

²⁶ The popular song, “Chadi”, was first made famous in the Arab world by Lebanese pop singer Fairuz.

²⁷ Perkins, “Engaging in Arabic Choral Music,” 47.

In addition to these other traditional elements that have been altered to create this choral work, Torikian deals with the original improvisation in the solo line by writing in slur lines under the notes where the original performer used ornamentation, as seen in mm. 5 and m. 6 (see Example 6).

Example 6: arr. Edward Torikian, “Ana’w Chadi”, Solo line mm. 4-6.



When dealing with the incorporation of ornamentation in arrangements of his popular music, Torikian states, “my concept is to not overload the Arabic attractive melody by a sophisticated polyphony.”²⁸ As there are no indications in the score to signify this ornamentation, the Western choral conductor would only gain this insight by listening to the original version of the piece, sung by Fairuz. Composer/conductor Shireen Abu-Khader explains her approach when incorporating ornamentation into her arrangements of Arabic music:

The first thing I do is I try to imitate. For example, now I am looking into doing a *muwashah*. I’ve heard different interpretations and then I’ve stuck to Sabah Fakhri, the Syrian *mushahat* singer. What I did was listen very carefully and I actually tried very hard to listen to that specific interpretation, that specific recording, because he is known to be one of the most amazing singers. Whatever I take from that, chances are it is going to work. I try to take a couple of elements from what he does, and I am trying to actually write the ornamentation within the score to see if that could work. Other than that I don’t [write in ornamentation]. I just write it very straight and then within our singers I’ll say, “Can you sing this line for me? Can *you* sing it?” or I’ll have a certain interpretation in mind. I don’t like to stick to my own interpretation all of the time because it doesn’t give the freedom that we need. So, I will approach other singers and ask if they can record a line, something as simple as an eight measure thing and go from there. It is a little bit of hard work, but I think it is very important to bring that element that makes the music

²⁸ Edward Torikian, email exchange with the composer, Sharjah, UAE, May 2, 2015.

what it is. So, listening to authentic good singers, I think that is key. It is very important when you are trying to write or even trying to model.²⁹

The marriage of harmonic textures with traditional Arabic melodies is often a part of the Lebanese culture in which Dr. Torikian lives and works. "Though the melodies are mostly Levantine in origin, the arrangements are influenced by Western part-songs."³⁰ Torikian's arrangement of "Yal asmar ellon" (Hey, Beautiful Dark One!) is such an example. Perkins states, "Toriguian's largely homophonic approach tends to operate in the Western harmonic progressions; some in the Arab choral world argue that this compromises the authenticity of this style."³¹ With the past influence of French culture, however, the mixing of harmonic textures with Arabic melodies is often part of Lebanese music."³² In Torikian's arrangement of "Yal asmar ellon", we see how he is able to maintain the connection to traditional Arabic music through the atmosphere of maintaining the use of the *maqam* and the melodic and textual variations found in orally transmitted music (see Example 7). He maintains this connection by writing the melody in *maqam hijaz* (see Example 8), similar to the Western harmonic minor scale.

²⁹ Shireen Abu-Khader, phone conversation with composer, Sharjah, UAE, April 23, 2015.

³⁰ Perkins, "Engaging in Arabic Choral Music," 47.

³¹ Toriguian and Torikian are used interchangeably in publications to reference Dr. Edward Torikian.

³² Perkins, "Engaging in Arabic Choral Music," 47-48.

Example 7: arr. Edward Torikian, “Yal asmar ellon”, mm. 10-13.

10

S
baan ya ga - lib khay - yu ha - waak ra - ma - nii, ta -

A
baan ya ga - lib khay - yu ha - waak ra - ma - nii, ta -

T
baan ya ga - lib khay - yu ha - waak ra - ma - nii, ta -

B
baan ya ga - lib khay - yu ha - waak ra - ma - nii, ta -

“Yal asmar ellon” is a traditional popular song from Aleppo in northern Syria. It is classified as *qudud halibīyya*. Closely related to the *muwashshah*, the *qudud halibīyya* is “a form of Syrian Arab classical music found in both Arabic poetic form and the secular musical genre.” The piece, with its beautiful melancholic atmosphere, conjures a renewed sense of hope. It originated in the nineteenth century and has been orally transmitted.³³ Torikian uses rhythmic and dynamic momentum throughout the piece to exploit the vocal tessitura for a dramatic musical effect. To enhance the performance, the editor suggests adding a simple rhythmic percussion pattern, to be performed by any un-pitched instrument, called a *maqsum* (see Example 9).³⁴

Example 8: *Maqam hijaz*

³³ Edward Torikian, *Yal asmar ellon*, ed. André de Quadros (Corvallis, OR: earthsongs, 2013).

³⁴ Torikian, *Yal asmar ellon*, 2013.

Example 9: An example of a *maqsum* rhythmic pattern



An example of an original Arabic choral piece is “Ai’yu” by Egyptian composer, Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah. The composer uses his native knowledge of traditional Egyptian melody and ornamentation as the basis for this new composition.³⁵ The composer mixes Egyptian traditional culture, which inspirits the work, “including the traditional music in the Egyptian western desert (*Badawin*), coastal cities (*Swahly*), south Egypt (*Saedi*) and the rural neighborhoods in Cairo (*Shaaby*).”³⁶ The text consists of a single word “Ai’yu” expressing wonder, surprise and astonishment. “Though it appears so at first glance, the *maqam* is not F-major, but holds more similarities to Phrygian mode with a minor second degree from the tonic; therefore, the piece is written without a key signature.”³⁷ It begins with a traditional *mawwal* sung by a tenor soloist, whose *call* is answered by the entrance of the four-part mixed choral voices in unison. As the piece progresses, one sees Abdelfattah’s use of lyricism and complex ornamentation, common to traditional Egyptian music. There are two motivic ideas on which nine sections are built. Both motives are developed throughout and increase in complexity as the piece progresses. In the construction of the piece Abdelfattah expands the form by the repetition and swapping between the two motivic concepts, gradually building from four to six to eight to nine voice parts including solo sections. Abdelfattah layers as many as seven solo vocal lines at one time.

³⁵ Mohammed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah, *Ai’yu*, ed. André de Quadros (Corvalis, OR: earthsongs, 2008).

³⁶ “Ai’yoh,” <http://abdelwahabsworks.blogspot.ae>, accessed April 15, 2015.

³⁷ “Ai’yoh,” <http://abdelwahabsworks.blogspot.ae>, accessed April 15, 2015.

The opening's simple melodic cell consists of only four notes (C D E G) moving up and down (see Example 10). Abdelfattah uses sequencing, repetition and inversion of the melodic cell to build the melodies found in both sections of the piece. The repetitive nature exhibited in the bass voice is reminiscent of the instrumental line found in traditional Arabic music pieces (see Example 11).

Example 10: Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah, "Ai'yu", mm. 13-17 shows the opening melodic cell.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Ai'yu" by Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah, measures 13-17. The score is for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). A box labeled 'A' highlights the first measure of each voice part, which is marked 'Dark' and 'a tempo'. The lyrics 'ai - yu ai - yu ai - yu ai - yu ai -' are written below the staves. Dynamics include 'f' (forte) and 'mp' (mezzo-piano).

For more authentic performance, the composer requests that the solo sections be sung with a “very bright tone color” specifically requesting it not be sung with operatic techniques, while he suggests the choral parts be sung with a “dark,” melancholy tone generated from the “throat and larynx.”³⁸ The technique is related to the traditional style of singing for the people of the Egyptian desert. The piece employs traditional singing techniques and oscillates between

³⁸ “Ai’yoh,” <http://abdelwahabsworks.blogspot.ae>, (accessed April 15, 2015).

unison octaves, heterophony and counterpoint. Through these techniques, Abdelfattah showcases the blending of Arabic and Western musical techniques (see Example 11).

Example 11: Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah, "Ai'yu", mm. 116-119.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Ai'yu" by Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfattah, covering measures 116 to 119. The score is written for a vocal ensemble and piano accompaniment. It consists of nine staves. The top three staves are for Soprano (S), Alto (A), and Tenor (T) voices, each with its own line of lyrics. The bottom four staves are for piano accompaniment, with the first two staves (Tenor and Bass clefs) containing the vocal line and the last two staves (Bass clefs) containing the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "yu ai - ye - yu ai - yu ai - ye - yu ai - yu". The music features complex rhythmic patterns and melodic lines, characteristic of the composer's style.

LANGUAGE

Language has a profound impact upon the performance of any vocal music, but the pronunciation of the Arabic language can be especially challenging for the non-native speaker. Arabic “throat sounds,” due to their articulation in proximity to the larynx, may highly influence both pitch and articulation.³⁹ In order to overcome tuning issues, conductors and composers of the genre suggested finding a compromise between the production of Arabic vowels in the back of the throat and the *bel canto* style of singing most Western choirs use as their technique. Regarding the affect of authenticity of language pronunciation when such modifications are made, Shireen Abu-Khader stated, “I think finding a happy medium between Western singing style and Arabic language formation is the best you can do. You need to find that medium and soon enough you will figure it out.”⁴⁰

The Arabic language consists of twenty-eight consonants, six vowels, both long and short, and two diphthongs. Consonants are considered the structural basis for the Arabic language. Singing in Arabic is considered an extension of speech and the expressivity of the text is of the greatest importance.⁴¹ The ornamented or improvisational treatment of the *maqamat* relates directly to text declamation.

Arabic music does not measure itself in terms of technical perfection, but by the degree of intensity and emotion in the tone, feeling, ornamentation, performance and singing. The Western musician repeatedly practices a piece as it is written in the sheet music until he is able to play and interpret it perfectly. The classical Arabic musician, on the other hand, is only able to access the music through its “soul” and what it stimulates within him. If he touches this “soul”, he surmounts all other difficulties. Here, then, a great deal of personal initiative is required from the interpreter.⁴²

³⁹ Paul S. Meers, “Choral Music in Arabic” (lecture, The Salt Lake City Choral Artists Summer Folksong Session, 2008).

⁴⁰ Shireen Abu-Khader, phone conversation with composer, Sharjah, UAE, April 23, 2015.

⁴¹ Meers, “Choral Music in Arabic.”

⁴² Suleman Taufiq, “Arabic Music and Its Development: An Overview.” *Fikrun wa Fann*. Translated by Charlotte Collins. Goethe Institut. (November 2011). <http://www.goethe.de/ges/phi/prj/ffs/the/a96/en8626486.htm> (accessed January 23, 2015).

Western conductors may find singing in Arabic problematic for two key reasons; first, in contrast to the vowel-centric approach in Western languages, clear and expressive consonants are paramount in Arabic singing, and, second, one sings “on the consonants” presenting tuning challenges for the ensemble. Transliteration systems, unfortunately, are not currently uniform.⁴³ There are as many different systems as there are dialects of the Arabic language.⁴⁴ André de Quadros, the editor of the *Salamu Aleikum* series of Arabic choral works published by *earthsongs*, is currently moving his series towards the Bikdash Arabic Transliteration Rules (BATR).⁴⁵ The BATR is designed as a highly phonetic guide that enables a person with little or no knowledge of the Arabic language to be able to read and pronounce the Arabic text in a reasonably accurate manner. Dr. de Quadros stated in an interview that the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland is currently working to find a uniform system.⁴⁶ There are still exceptions that appear in his editions. Two examples can be found in the score of “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa.” For a more authentic pronunciation, he suggests the “th” or /θ/, found in the words *yatathannaa* and *thanaa* (see Example 12), be articulated as the English word “think” and “sh” or /ʃ/, found in the word *shakwaty*, should be pronounced as in the English word “shell.”

Transliteration systems, when combined with the *International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)* (see Appendix A), and the use of native speakers or their recordings, can assist conductors in more accurately teaching the Arabic text and aid in preserving the intended expressive quality of the piece.

⁴³ *earthsongs* publishing provides transliterations following the Bikdash Arabic Transliteration Rules (BATR), prepared by Afaff Haddad.

⁴⁴ Meers, “Choral Music in Arabic.”

⁴⁵ The BATR is a compromise between the Qalam transliteration and the Buckwalter Transliteration. Each consonant is represented by a single letter and possibly a modifier (an apostrophe or single quotation mark), and uses one or several Latin vowels to represent the long and short Arabic vowels.

⁴⁶ André de Quadros, phone conversation with composer, Sharjah, UAE, April 25, 2015.

Example 12: arr. Shireen Abu-Khader, “Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa”, the original Arabic language combined with Bikdash Arabic Transliteration Rules (BATR) and *International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)*.

لَمَّا بَدَا يَتَنَّى، لَمَّا بَدَا يَتَنَّى

Lammaa badaa yatathannaa
[lam:ma bada jataθan:na]
When he started to sway
When whom I love started to sway

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEWS

The following interviews were conducted with Shireen Abu-Khader, Dr. André de Quadros, Dr. Edward Torikian and Barkev Taslakian.

CE: Cari Earnhart

SAK: Shireen Abu-Khader

ET: Edward Torikian

BT: Barkev Taslakian

ADQ: André de Quadros

Interview with Jordanian composer/conductor Shireen Abu-Khader, April 23, 2015

Shireen Abu-Khader is a choral conductor and composer from Jordan. As a composer she is dedicated to rearranging traditional Arabic music and composing new works for choirs. She is the founder of *Dozan wa Awtar*, a musical establishment that promotes Arab composers and the performing arts.⁴⁷

CE: Are there traditional elements of Arabic music that conductors should be familiar with/understand *before* approaching Arabic choral music?

SAK: I think this is a tough question. One thing that is very important about Arabic music is that it is not choral music and was never meant to be choral music except at the churches, and

⁴⁷ “The Conductor: Shireen Abu-Khader,” dozanwaawtar.com, <http://dozanwaawtar.com/conductor>, (accessed April 7, 2015).

you do find a lot of choral music in the churches. Most of the time it is taken from Western traditions and translated. Only in the last 50 years has there been an attempt to do something more authentic in the churches, but you do find it in the churches. When you do want to approach Arabic music there are two things I think are very important, one is the language because everything is built on poetry and language. You can have the worst melody, but if the language is good it doesn't really matter. People are really listening to what you are saying with the words. So this is a big one, right. So for an international it is understanding that language and being able to do it when you have a rehearsal with very short time and you want to approach it. It usually is not easy and most of the time you don't have the time to really spend the time working on the language. I go between feelings. I sometimes go to YouTube and listen to certain ones of my arrangements and my feeling is "Wow, I can't believe she has the courage to actually approach this piece even though she butchered the language, but I have the respect that she actually tried, because it is not an easy language." So, I think language is a big one.

The other thing is because it is not choral it is more linear and I come very much from the philosophy that if you want to keep the authenticity of the Arabic music, you have to leave room for people to explore that, to play with that. So there has to be some kind of knowledge of the piece maybe, of different interpretations of the piece of the conductor and maybe really try to come out of the score and do it a little bit. Try to figure out different ways it could be sung and maybe choose one that is not so much a part of the score like, for example you have the "Lammaa badaa" – you can sing it as written and that would be nice, it is pretty. There is nothing wrong with it, but if you do want to give the feeling of what Arabic music is and because very little has been done as a choral tradition it is always someone singing a solo and usually a

good soloist. They will have their own interpretation. So, my thought is always, if you can listen to different interpretations and actually take one, even if it has a little bit of ornaments here or there and actually try to apply it, it is always, I think, a healthier solution than just doing it as written. And that takes, I think, a lot of guts. These are my two things: how do you leave room for the choir to play with it? For example, for me with my singers, even though they are Arabic singers, I either decide exactly how I want the ornamentation to be and I will do it consistently throughout, and I will teach them that or sometimes I will actually give certain parts to a soloist. So that they [the soloist] can explore that and we can work. However, having said that I actually do think that just like you approach other world music in the Western choral tradition where you do not have a lot of time in rehearsals, if you have someone who speaks Arabic you bring them in and try to work with them and have them talk about the language and really try to bring out the language much more. It is more for the experience of the singer and the audience. If you talk to André [de Quadros] he'll say it doesn't really matter because there are 50 different ways of saying the letter "n" in Indian and who cares how it is going to sound, right. There has to be a fine line of how deeply you go into the language when you are just teaching a three-minute piece that is a part of a long repertoire. Trying to be authentic in language and the linearity of the lines are very important. These are my top two elements.

CE: What are some misconceptions conductors have about Arabic choral music or your compositions? Are there any potential roadblocks or challenges you foresee with conductors performing Arabic choral music for the first time?

SAK: I think for one, they [conductors] feel it is unapproachable. They are scared of it just like I'm scared of other kinds of pieces. There is always that fear of approaching new music, which

I think is one. How do I approach a new piece? The one thing I have been thinking about arrangements is actually providing CDs with actual pronunciations and rhythms to try to make it easier for international conductors to approach the music more comfortably. I definitely think that is a roadblock, not knowing, “the unknown”. We are always afraid of the unknown. The other thing to keep in mind is that not always is Arabic choral [music] accepted even within the Middle East. That is interesting, right? These are not Western [musicians] I am talking about but the Eastern musicians. So, for a composer like myself, I have challenges when I am writing to try to write and keep the authenticity, whatever that means, right? When an Eastern musician comes to my concert and says, “You’ve butchered this song. You’d never do that song this way, it is just not right.” Trying to keep that medium and trying to take it to the American composer or Western composer and conductor and then having them completely take it to another level. I’m repeating myself, but I think it is the “unknown” that is the biggest roadblock. The more they know the better. It is about getting more comfortable with the language, understanding how the rhythms work, all of these concepts that go within a piece of music. Why is “Lammaa Badaa” written in a *Samai Thaqil*? What is a *Samai*? Being willing to really take that step forward and saying, what is that rhythm and why is the “dum” here and the “tak” here? Why is it a 10 over 8? Why is it not divided?

CE: Do you look at it and think 2+2+2+2+2 or 3+2+3+2?

SAK: I think of it as a *Samai Thaqil*, 10 over 8.

CE: The 1, 4, 6,7,8 being the strong beats in that, correct?

SAK: Yes, true. I think of it as being the “dum”. I think of it as being exactly as written. You look at the poetry. This is why you have all of these crazy rhythms. No one was thinking symmetrically in measure numbers. They were thinking poetry. For example, I’m looking at certain *muwashahat*. You have a whole line written 32/16, so you have to think of it as 10/8. You have to feel it as 10/8, because the poem that goes on top is a 10/8 so it is the poem and you are not thinking the rhythm. You are shifting your thought, thinking words and not thinking rhythm. Just understanding that because the poem was written that way and the way the poem works with the rhythm. It is an incredible path of music. I am falling in love with it all over again now. You must absorb, absorb, absorb!

CE: What inspires your selection of particular traditional or popular music that you arrange? What influences your arrangements? Are your arrangements defined specifically by your culture and heritage?

SAK: I think they are very much defined by my culture and heritage. I feel that there was a time, pre-60s or pre-70s when there was absolutely beautiful music written and then something happened afterwards when you don’t get that amount of richness. You do get some pieces that are beautiful and there is a lot of stuff out there, but for some reason there is a period of time where music was very rich and I am very much keen on bringing back that to life. So, I love working with *muwashahat*. This is a big thing for me, because they are some of the most incredibly written pieces that are secular and they have lasted all of these years almost orally. When you think about it something is really beautiful about this and that is where I am heading now with my research a little bit. So, *muwashahat* is a big one for me. Beautiful folkloric music

of the Levant, you know obviously the music that I grew up listening to. So a lot of the Syrian, the Lebanese the Jordanian, the Palestinian, the Iraqi and the Egyptian, these are the areas that I really love and that I grew up with and that I still think there is a lot of work to be done before I can think of expanding anywhere else. I have done the Sufi piece, you know the “Adinu”, which was inspired by a piece I heard from a Tunisian singer, so things like that do happen. I am mostly interested in developing and bringing that back to life, because a lot of the younger generations in the Middle East now are so far away from that music. That is a big part of why I am rearranging stuff.

CE: Does text influence your writing or how you select pieces to arrange?

SAK: Yes, of course. I mean you can't do it without doing that. My recent piece the “Hanin” that was one piece in which I was very keen on making sure that the lyrics are exactly where I wanted them to be, so I was very inspired by the Egyptian, Sayed Darwish, who was an incredible folk singer, a folk composer and who wrote incredible music for Egypt. He [also] did the “Helwa di”. He is the original writer of this one. I was also very affected politically by what has been going on in the Middle East, so Egypt, was for me, a role model of standing up as a community and speaking out as a culture. So, I paid tribute to that, to Egypt. But, I did put in as well, because Sayed Darwish is very much about the folk and the people, the tangible day-to-day. Then you have Khalil Gibran. He was extremely spiritual at a completely different level, but somehow they are both talking about the same thing from way too many different angles. Definitely there is no way I would do a piece of music just because the melody is cool, there has to be something more. For writing, at least for me, in our region there is always another purpose.

I have to keep in mind that includes the community, includes the political situation and includes the poetry and you know the more beautiful the poetry the more successful I think the pieces become.

CE: When you compose do you have a particular choir in mind? If so, can you briefly describe the make-up and musical abilities of the choir?

SAK: *Dozan* is a community choir, probably one of the only secular, big community choirs that has lasted this long. In terms of the Jordan level, we are among the best, I think. However, having said that, we do not have the best singers. We are always short on singers. It is not a singing culture, and that is one of the biggest issues we're dealing with in Jordan specifically. It is not like Lebanon or Syria or Palestine. We are not a singing culture. They do not have singing in schools, so education is a big issue with music education in the schools. It is a really tough environment, so really we are trying to build that platform for Jordan for really more than just *Dozan*. Now, with starting the children's choir, we have built a little bit. Now, we do have our 50 singers that are children and we are hoping that will grow eventually. *Dozan* is meant to be the platform in Jordan for anyone who wants to explore singing or even write for singers, for composers who are interested in exploring writing. We try to do new arrangements of different composers. So, when I do write it depends. When I did "Lammaa Badaa" I did not have a choir in mind. I did it because I loved it and I wanted to explore different things and I wanted to write it for SATB, so I did not think very much of the makeup of the choir. However, if I am working towards a season, and I have a piece I want to do, and I am thinking about that particular season, I would do it and think about my singers and cater it for the singers.

CE: Traditional and popular Arabic music incorporates ornamentation in the vocal line. How do you handle this in your choral writing?

SAK: The first thing I do is I try to imitate. For example, now I am looking into doing a *muwashah*. I've heard different interpretations and then I've stuck to Sabah Fakhri, the Syrian *mushahat* singer. What I did was listen very carefully and I actually tried very hard to listen to that specific interpretation, that specific recording, because he is known to be one of the most amazing singers. Whatever I take from that, chances are it is going to work. I try to take a couple of elements from what he does and I am trying to actually write the ornamentation within the score to see if that could work. Other than that I don't. I just write it very straight and then within our singers I'll say, "Can you sing this line for me? Can *you* sing it?" or I'll have a certain interpretation in mind. I don't like to stick to my own interpretation all of the time because it doesn't give the freedom that we need. So, I will approach other singers and ask if they can record a line, something as simple as an eight measure thing and go from there. It is a little bit of hard work, but I think it is very important to bring that element that makes the music what it is. So, listening to authentic good singers, I think that is key. It is very important when you are trying to write or even trying to model.

CE: The Arabic language is challenging for non-native speakers. How do you recommend conductors prepare to teach the texts of your works?

SAK: If you have someone who speaks Arabic, you bring them in and try to work with them and have them talk about the language and really try to bring out the language much more.

CE: Arabic vowels are formed in the back of the mouth or the throat, which could cause tuning difficulties. How do you deal with tuning issues?

SAK: Well, it is tricky because if you are dealing with an all-Arab choir you are going to have tuning issues most of the time. In my case, I do have a balance of non-Arabs and Arabs, so actually that helps very much with the tuning because it just supports the notation a little bit better. Having said that, it goes back to all of the concepts of good singing. You need to have a deep understanding of breath control and support. They need to make sure they are listening a lot to each other. I think it is mostly about breath, because the formation [of the vowels], if you bring them in the front you are going to lose the authenticity of the language. If you are in front of a non-Arab community, they are not going to say it does not sound authentic, but if you are [Arab] and they [the choir] are not pronouncing well, then I am going to get criticized. There is no compromise on the language. I think it is really about breathing and listening. It is very basic, but soon enough they start understanding what their breath supports and by listening very well they are able to understand pitch and formation of vowels in terms of tuning. I think finding a happy medium between the Western singing style and Arabic language formation is the best you can do. You need to find that medium and soon enough you will figure it out.

CE: Does your work in bringing multi-part choral music to the Arab music world and beyond have any underlying mission? What was your inspiration to begin writing in this genre?

SAK: I come from a very musical family, in terms of not musicians, but they love to sing and I grew up in that. I grew up with every single dinner party we had at home there was somebody at the piano, somebody with an *oud*, somebody with another instrument playing and singing. So I grew up falling in love with this music and realizing that it is really such an important part of a

person's being and understanding, and it really can bring people together. It really can be a force that can bring all of the cheesy concepts of tolerance and dialogue and all of that. I am an idealist when it comes to that. I do believe that if there is any hope for any peace in the Middle East, it actually might be through singing. That is very powerful and very idealistic and nobody believes what I say, but I am very hopeful, because I do not see any other form of unity at this point with all of the separations that are happening on so many different levels. What we are trying to do in *Dozan* is to actually build a model for how that can actually work. I do have Christians, I have Muslims, and we've had occasional Jewish singers with us, we don't talk about it, but there has been. We have had our occasional Jewish people that did not want to deal with that music [Arabic Choral music], we've had Muslims that did not want to sing Christian music and we had to deal with that, and we had Christians that did not want to do Islamic music and we had to deal with that. We have an Arab community that felt having an international choir was causing issues, the same with the internationals that thought the cliques were happening. So, actually all of these social issues were happening within the choir and we made it work and we are still making it work. We are finding ways to really make that easier for people and more tolerant and develop that. I really believe that the power of singing and music is very important. My underlying mission at this point is to create that space where people can actually come explore and try. To really keep the channels open by not excluding anybody, but including everybody who wants to be included.

CE: As a composer and a conductor do you often make revisions to new arrangements based on the rehearsal experience with the choir?

SAK: Oh, definitely. There is nothing I have written that has been performed as I have written. There are certainly things I fix on the spot, so I've heard arrangements of stuff that I've written with mistakes that I do not want. What happens sometimes now is that when I do write anything new, I will actually take a first draft and I will say, "okay, lets sing it," and I'll sit and record it and then think about it and say "okay, this worked or I really didn't like this part", so I will go back and change it continuously until it works well. I definitely revise.

Interview with Armenian composer Edward Torikian, May 2, 2015

Composer Dr. Edward Torikian from Lebanon and of Armenian origin began arranging Arabic choral music for *Fayha Choir* in Lebanon. Choirs throughout the Middle East, Turkey, France, England and the United States have performed Torikian's pieces.⁴⁸

CE: Are there traditional elements of Arabic music that conductors should be familiar with/understand *before* approaching Arabic choral music?

ET: The rhythm formulas, in order to respect the necessary accentuations and the Arabic language. The language is important in order to understand the lyrics and to interpret them properly.

CE: What are some misconceptions conductors have about Arabic choral music or your compositions? Are there any potential roadblocks or challenges you foresee with conductors performing Arabic choral music for the first time?

ET: Arabic choral music or my compositions aren't always created in the same genre. Conductors must distinguish between the dance song, popular or light-music tune, Arabic classical song, etc. Each genre requires a different interpretation.

CE: What inspires your selection of particular traditional or popular music that you arrange? What influences your arrangements? Are your arrangements defined specifically by your culture and heritage?

⁴⁸ "Biography of Edward Torikian," [fayhachoir.org](http://www.fayhachoir.org), <http://www.fayhachoir.org/index>, (accessed April 7, 2015).

ET: I like all kinds of Arabic music, without any special selection. Usually, I arrange the songs chosen by the choirmasters. Sometimes also I suggest personally to the masters several songs in order to introduce variety into their repertoire. Yes, my arrangements are defined specifically by my Armenian culture and heritage. However, I combine there the classical and modern occidental styles, the Arabic specifications and even the Jazz style.

CE: Does text influence your writing or how you select pieces to arrange?

ET: Yes, the text is the first influencing component in my arranging operation.

CE: When you compose do you have a particular choir in mind? If so, can you briefly describe the make-up and musical abilities of the choir?

ET: I compose for several choirs: Lebanese *Fayha Choir* and other choirs, Syrian choirs, Jordanian choirs, Armenian choirs, children's choirs (and now Emirates choir), etc... Mixed, women, men, polyphonic choirs... So, I ask first the make-up of the choir. Rarely members are professionals; usually they are amateurs. Usually I prefer to write simply, without sophistications. The difficulty level is generally medium.

CE: Traditional and popular Arabic music incorporates ornamentation in the vocal line. How do you handle this in your choral writing?

ET: My concept is “Do not overload the Arabic attractive melody by a sophisticated polyphony”.

CE: The Arabic language is challenging for non-native speakers. How do you recommend conductors prepare to teach the texts of your works?

ET: Yes, the Arabic language is a big challenge for non-native speakers. So, the presence of a native speaker is absolutely necessary. This person can teach the members the right pronunciation. In this case, the conductor can teach the melody and the rhythm and conduct more simply.

CE: Arabic vowels are formed in the back of the mouth or the throat, which could cause tuning difficulties. How do you deal with tuning issues?

ET: This point is one of the crucial problems of Arabic singing in polyphony. The conductor must neglect the occidental vocalizing pure vowels and try to find a middle solution with the Arabic vowels. There are also Arabic consonant soft letters that can replace sometimes the vowels like m, n, l...

CE: Does your work in bringing multi-part choral music to the Arab music world and beyond have an underlying mission? What was your inspiration to begin writing in this genre?

ET: Polyphony can add a beauty and universality value to Arabic charming monody. I was inspired by the Armenians experience in this field. Armenian music is a Middle-Eastern heritage: The polyphonic arrangements began there in 1900. As my origin is Armenian, I aspired to try this experience in Arabic music and, if I find success, I will be glad to contribute somehow to the Arabic culture and the Arabic peaceful and generous people.

Interview with Lebanese conductor Barkev Taslakian, May 13, 2015

Lebanese conductor Barkev Taslakian directs Fayha Choir in Tripoli. Their purpose, under his leadership, is to develop and spread Arabic music and show its importance and richness to the world.⁴⁹

CE: As a conductor of Arabic choral music, what challenges have you found in preparing the choir?

BT: I had many challenges. First, the polyphonic choral singing didn't exist in the Arab music culture; the concept of the choir was the group singing behind the soloist. So I had to create a new way of singing polyphony in a culture that counts on monodic music. Second, it's almost impossible to create harmony with the Arabic language, because of the difficulty in some letters that come from the throat and that can't be sung in a choral arrangement. Third, it's also known that one of the biggest challenges in choral music is arranging the "three quarter" tone (known as quarter tone). And in Arab music you can never avoid this specification. Many people tried to arrange the quarter-tone, but it's always complicated because the chord isn't minor nor major. To solve this problem, when we have a quarter-tone in a sentence, it would be better not to use a full chord. But in case it is a full chord, the conductor should work on the performance; the volume of each note in the chord (the quarter tone could be more quiet or the main note of the chord could be more quiet, if the quarter tone is in the melody, it's better to make it louder than the other notes). Lastly, the last problem was that Arab people, although they can make big success individually, they don't use to work together as a team. And in a choir, it's a collective

⁴⁹"Biography of Barkev Taslakian," fayhachoir.org, <http://www.fayhachoir.org/index.php>, (accessed April 7, 2015).

work, you should count on the other and help him to grow together, or you fall together. If one singer sings a false note, the entire choir will lose. Also it's very important to promote the social life in the choir; the singers should stay long time together, cook and eat together, clean together. Briefly, it's a "One for all, all for one" situation.

CE: Do you have advice for the conductor who is new to this music?

BT: First, a conductor who plans to work on Arab music should be aware that it's not an easy job. It's totally different from the International music. Second, he should be aware not to change the music, but keep it with its characteristics, just develop it. All the voices should support the main melody and not dominate it, and the more the arrangement is simple the more it's beautiful. Third, because the conductors who work on Arab music are few in the world, they better work together to learn from each other's experience. Fourth, conductors should profit from other cultures' experience in involving the choral polyphony singing in the original local music.

CE: How closely do you work with composers of this genre?

BT: Most of our Arab songs were arranged by Dr. Edouard Torikian. It was because we were close friends and we were working together on the improvement of the arrangement techniques and tricks. But, also there are composers trying to write polyphonic Arab music like Dr. Jamal Aboul Hosn and others.

CE: Can you briefly describe the abilities and make-up of your choir?

BT: My singers didn't know anything about choir singing or about music; they learned everything in the choir. The secret of their good level is the faith and love in the group and the hard and serious work. We rehearse more than 10 hours per week, and we perform at least four times per month. It's surely difficult to work with singers who don't know music, but in the other side, it's very interesting, because you can form them just as you like them to be. Then they could become professionals.

CE: Due to the back placement of Arabic vowels, do you find Arabic choral music difficult to tune? If so, how do you deal with this issue?

BT: Well this is a big issue; Arab music is built on the Arabic language, and based on melody. And it's totally forbidden to change the pronunciation of each detail in a poem. Usually the tune goes down; here you should work on the posture of the singers, and you should know which note should be held and pushed to avoid the intonation problem. So this makes the arrangement and the performance more difficult. But we still find a way to manage; for example, when we have a vowel that shouldn't be long on a long note, here we try to keep hearing and feeling the music but in the pause...

Interview with Ethnomusicologist and conductor André de Quadros – April 25, 2015

Boston University professor André de Quadros has been included in these interviews because he is known across the world as a proponent of Arabic and other multi-cultural music. As an ambassador for Arabic choral music, in 2008 he co-created, with Shireen Abu-Khader, *Aswatuna: Arab Choral Festival* in Jordan bringing choirs together from all over the Middle East. In addition, Dr. de Quadros is the editor of *Salamu Aleikum: Music of the Muslim World* for *earthsongs* music publications.

CE: Are there traditional elements of Arabic music that conductors should be familiar with/understand *before* approaching Arabic choral music?

ADQ: We are talking about Western choral music in the Arab countries. The moment you talk about *SATB* you are talking about Western choral music in the Arab world. Post-colonial music. It is important to define. People ask me the question, “Is there such a thing as Arabic choral music?” The answer is “sure”. Any part of the world that has had Christianity that has had colonization is going to have choral music in the Western genre. And, in any part of the world that hasn’t had colonization, which is almost nowhere, there are indigenous group singing traditions and sometimes polyphonic. There are some very interesting polyphonic traditions in Indonesia, which is also referred to as choral music. There is a whole canon of Indonesian choral music that is not what people want to think of as choral music. They are looking for something that is written in staff notation and they are looking for something that is voiced for the traditional Western choir. So, the moment we talk about that, we need to really define the genre that you are looking at first. That is exactly what you need. Define the genre, because if

you do not define the genre, people do not know what we are talking about. There are all sorts of Arabic choral music, as in if we think about it in the true sense of what choral music means, and orally transmitted music, there are vast canons of it. The Yemenite traditions and other kinds of traditions, but they are not voiced for the Western choir. So what you're looking at is a narrower slice of choral music, as in Westernized choral music.

I think there are at least three, though there are others. Let's talk about three principle elements that need to be considered. The first one is language and it has two problems (I've gone now in the direction of simplification) the transliteration of Arabic is quite diverse and there isn't a standard. The Jordanians use the numeral 3, so when a Western conductor sees the number 3 it is very difficult for them to understand. Look at all of the Jordanian arrangers and what they have been using, their transliteration code, which has been "whatever" is still legitimate. One problem is actually how to read the transliteration depending on what the editions are. My editions have gone progressively towards making them more and more simple. In my most recent edition, I don't make the kind of differentiation because it is too awkward. So at least one of the things I think is the issue of language, because whatever the transliteration may be it is going to be a compromise. What I did was to use the BATR protocol, but I also compromised that, because I talked to some key language people at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, who have been working on trying to standardized the transliteration of Arabic and they said, "why don't you do this and that", but the problem is that the spoken language is one thing and is quite different then somebody wanting to sing the language. It [sung Arabic] is more problematic in some ways and in some senses less problematic because, you know the Western choir, the American choir, is never quite going to get the differentiated vowels that exist in

Arabic. Are they really going to bother to do that for the sake of maybe two words in an Arabic piece? I think the language is only an issue that the conductor needs to be aware of. You're asking about the elements. The first is language and understanding what the transliteration issues are, understanding the compromises being made in the transliteration and understanding how to sing what is a spoken language. A native speaker can be a problem, because a native speaker who is not a musician or even someone that is a musician can have unrealistic expectations on how it should be sung because of how they'd sing it. There are different pronunciations, too. You have Syrian, Jordanian, and within the Levant there are different pronunciations of Arabic and outside of the Levant you have Egyptians, Algerians, Tunisians. They all have different pronunciations so that also can become difficult to work with, so I think language is the first main category that one wants to think about.

Second is the *maqam*. I think understanding the *maqam* is extremely important, but understanding only to the extent that it becomes an issue with the actual pieces. I would say in general Arabic music is about the most Westernized music you can find outside of Europe. If you look at a traditional Arabic orchestra, you see pianos and all of this harmony going on and Arabic choirs are always singing with pianos. They basically do accompanied music. If you take out the Arabic language and put German in there it would work just as well. They [the Arabs] actually lost something. A lot of the Arabic music is only notionally in a *maqam* because they made these huge compromises. You've got to understand that even if it comes from a *maqam*, what is the relationship of the music to the *maqam*. That is the first question. For example, if it is in *hijaz*, to what extent does *hijaz* work in a 4-part piece where the original melody might have come from a *maqam*? Simply understanding the *maqam* may not be helpful,

yet it may be. An educated conductor needs to understand not only which *maqam* it comes from, but also the relationship of the *maqam* to the actual structure of the four-part piece. It has to be this fairly complex way of thinking about it because a lot of Arabic choral music does have a fairly tenuous connection with *maqams*. Of course, regional *muwashahat*, for example, might have been from a *maqam*, but when people sing it they are not using the kinds of small differences of the third and the fourth that an Arabic *oud* player might use. In other words, we shouldn't want or need to "Arabize". We sometimes want to do more than what is called for and so it is about understanding what the role of that *maqam* is, that would be important to know.

Understanding whether the horizontalization and the verticalization [of a piece] and if the music permits, the composer might have intended the way the minor third, major third relate and sharpening or flattening this or that note. Does an American choir really want to concern itself with that? People want to sing it. They don't want to make a whole semester project for just one five-minute piece. Realistically speaking, conductors have a limit to how much they can expect their singers to get right inside something when it is really as difficult as that. Arabic is much more problematic than the languages they are used to singing. What is the *maqam*, the relationship to the *maqam* and how does that make the horizontalization/verticalization of the music? Where does the *maqam* actually come from, as different *maqams* come from different parts of the Arab world? These are the questions one needs to consider.

Then, I think the third area is, of course, rhythmic elements. Arabic music is not rhythmically complex. You take "Lammaa Badaa" and it is a little bit complicated but not really. In general, Arabic choral music is very uncomplicated rhythmically, but there are certain elements that

sometimes surprise one because the rhythm doesn't always correspond to the bar. Sometimes things carry over and sometimes accents are displaced, so I think understanding what that is has importance. How does one get close to that? I would say these days go to YouTube! You get a flavor for it. You actually see someone doing it on YouTube and it is completely different. You get sound and physicality. It is weird to say because it kind of defeats the purpose of program notes and all of the things we talk about needing and so on. I think that really if people want to understand how a particular thing fits in rhythmically, they might want to think about going to YouTube. The last two things are about phraseology. The phraseology of Arabic music is really different. It has been so influenced by Western music that they want to have things "square" but sometimes the phrases are different lengths and the voices [parts] are different lengths within the verticalization of the polyphonic quality. I think the phraseology really changes and I think that you can look at players and understand where the rhythms came from. Even traditional Arabic music is not so much like Indian music, which is complex. Arabic music is not really complex music. It has been so influenced by European music for so long. This connectedness is so important to understand. It [Arabic music] has been diluted so much because of its colonization. Understanding the rhythm is really important. All I have said, I have talked about this idea of Western choral music and the Western organism of being the SATB choir and you need to understand that within the genre the different aspects of the genre. For example, is it an arrangement of a piece or is it a piece that uses *maqam* but is an original composition, or is it an arrangement of a folk song? Is it an emulative piece that uses some original materials but is not simply an arrangement? Understanding that is very important. If it is a folk song it is kind of an easy thing. You need so listen to the original monophonic folk song.

CE: Do you have advice for the conductor who is new to this music?

ADQ: Do it! We are not afraid of doing Brahms, so why be frightened by Arabic choral music. We have a problem with performance practice, until about 40 years ago nobody cared. Do you think that people cared about whether we were performing Bach the way Bach intended? Nobody cared about that and then some came along, and now we want to do it in the way it was done. In Indian music, for example, nobody ever wants to do it in the way it was once done, so there is no such thing as a reproduction of a classical performance practice. The idea of Indian music is always do: it your own way, in a modern way and you shouldn't be imitating the way it was done before. Whereas Western music is about trying to emulate and imitate some notion of a reasonable performance practice. Why should we be putting that notion of performance practice onto a genre like Arabic choral music when who cares about that? I mean who cares? Do you think Indonesian or Chinese composers are looking for authenticity? They don't care. They're like "do my music!" It doesn't sound like maybe a Chinese choir would do it, but so what, you are doing it.

CE: As a conductor of Arabic choral music, what challenges have you found in preparing the choir?

ADQ: Where are the role models for Arabic choral music? I mean, I know most of the choirs in the Arab world. I know the ones in Syria. I know what they do and how they do stuff. The choir in the conservatory in Damascus, they just do what they do. The choir has been conducted by a Russian so long he makes it more like what he wants to do then authentic. Then you have the Arabic choirs in Jerusalem. They are so influenced by Christianity and influenced by what should be done in the church, so they are not concerned so much about the idea of authenticity. *Dozan* in Amman, Shireen's choir, about a quarter to a third of them are foreigners, and they are

loving it. There is no sense that we have to do it this way. They are not caring about getting this quarter- tone right and let's do this. It is not even an issue for them. Where else are there choirs? I mean there's *Nassim al Saba*. John [Perkins] had the choir and started the choir and those kids that sing in that choir in AUS they're basically American kids, you know. I know they're not really [American], but speaking of their background. What is their connection with a Palestinian piece? They don't know anything more than you do. You actually know more already because you are asking the kinds of questions they would never ask. This was one of the interesting conversations I had late one night, because of course I know lots of the Arab choirs, in Galilee. in Lebanon, you can look at Taslakian's choir *Fayha*. They do Torikian's arrangements and they are all I-IV-V-I progressions. How Arabic is that? You take out the Arabic words and put in English, German or French words and ask "Does it sound Arabic?" and the answer is "no" usually it doesn't sound Arabic. Which means where is the connection with original music anyway? There is *Al Baath* choir in Galilee and a few interesting groups here and there, but they are not role models. Where are the role models? There are none.

CE: How closely do you work with composers of this genre?

ADQ: Always. Whenever I am working with an Arabic piece I am working with the composer directly. Every single bit of it.

CE: Can you briefly describe the abilities and make-up of your choir?

ADQ: With Indonesian, Swedish, European and Americans some are extremely good and some of them are beginning sort of choirs, a range of them really. It is about picking the appropriate

piece for the appropriate choir. Make it easy. Be willing to totally compromise on pronunciation or whatever to make it work.

CE: Due to the back placement of Arabic vowels, do you find Arabic choral music difficult to tune? If so, how do you deal with this issue?

ADQ: I've talked about this because I have actually done Arabic pieces with Americans, with Scandinavians, with Europeans, with my own Indonesian choir. I don't know anyone who has done Arabic music with so many different kinds of national groups as I have, and what I find to be interesting is that I don't think of it in terms of back placement or forward placement or necessarily getting people to cover. What I talk about is developing a voice posture that is consistent with a particular sound ideal. Why don't we darken that (most choirs if they know what you mean when you say darken then they will darken too much) or with my own choir, I'd say we are doing this piece you want to make a different kind of sound here. It is more the idea about sound and color rather than thinking about well, let's sing this in the back of the throat, which then creates a whole host of other problems, so I try to get away from that.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS: INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN FROM INTERVIEWS

Arabic choral music is a little explored genre that poses many questions for the Western choral conductor, ranging from modal structure to rhythmic complexity to challenges presented by the language to cultural context. The more important of these issues were briefly presented in the previous chapter through interviews with composers and conductors currently working in this genre. The interviews revealed the depth of the complexities facing Western singers and conductors.

How then are Western conductors to better understand these works? How accessible are these pieces for a Western choir? Western conductors can deepen their knowledge of this genre through the most modest of research. Just as a conductor must come to terms with the differences between singing a South American samba versus a tango, the conductor should strive to distinguish between the dance song, popular or light-music tune, Arabic classical song, etc. According to composer, Edward Torikian, each genre requires a slightly different interpretation.⁵⁰ One of the most important resources made available to modern conductors is the internet. Everyday more and more Western choirs are experimenting with Arabic choral music. Through listening to online recordings, conductors will be able to make even the simplest distinctions between these genres of Arabic music.

Another important element for Western conductors to consider in their preparation of Arabic choral music, is the basic understanding of the *maqam* and the role it plays in the composition. As discussed in the preceding chapters, Arabic choral music is accessible to all

⁵⁰ Edward Torikian, interview with composer, May 2, 2015.

who are willing to embark on the “unknown”. This music has been performed by choirs of all levels and backgrounds in the Arab world and beyond.

Through the help of publishers, like *earthsongs*, choral conductors are being provided with more and more resources such as: 1) transliterations, following the *Bikdash Arabic Transliteration System* (BATR) (See Appendix A), combined with the *International Phonetic Alphabet*, and 2) performance recordings of the pieces by non-Western choirs and poetic readings of the text by native speakers. In addition, information regarding the cultural context of these works, as well as performance suggestions and commentary, are making their way into the publisher’s editions of Arabic choral music. Unfortunately, at this time, not all of these resources are available for all published Arabic choral works. In that case, Western conductors are left to rely upon published recordings available online by predominately Arabic choirs in the Middle East and recordings found on YouTube. As Abu-Khader and de Quadros both stated, accessing these recordings online is the Western conductors most valuable resource. These recordings are not only valuable resources for acquiring a basic knowledge of Arabic rhythms and language, but also for making choices about ornamentation of vocal solo lines and the pairing of instruments with the choir to enhance the authenticity of the performance.

Most importantly, the Western conductor must be willing to step beyond his/her own comfort level and be willing to realize the difference between merely performing music of other cultures and being willing to engage the music on its own terms.

Several of the interviewers cited in Chapter 4 voiced opinions concerning the importance of the use of this new *blended* music in their own cultures as a means to unite singers and audience members from various cultural and religious backgrounds. This practice serves as a

profound example of the power of music to unite and transcend human differences. Such is the value of cross-culture education.

APPENDIX A

TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM WITH IPA FOR ARABIC LANGUAGE

Transliteration	Arabic	IPA	Pronunciation
'	ع	[ʕ]	a voiced version of h
'	ء	[ɔ]	a glottal stop
ā	ا	[æ]	as in <u>trap</u>
a	ا	[ɒ]	as in <u>not</u>
b	ب	[b]	as in <u>bet</u>
d	د	[d]	as in <u>do</u>
ḍ	ض	[d ^ɕ]	strong as in <u>dumb</u>
e	-	[e]	as in <u>get</u>
ē	ي	[eɪ]	as in <u>face</u>
f	ف	[f]	as in <u>for</u>
g	گ	[g]	as in <u>golf</u>
gh	غ	[ɣ]	guttural
h	ه	[h]	as in <u>how</u>
ḥ	ح	[ħ]	breathe out forcibly from throat as if cleaning glasses
i	ي	[i]	as in <u>sit</u>
ī	ي	[i]	as in <u>see</u>
j	ج	[ɟ]	as in <u>beige</u>
kh	خ	[x]	as in the German " <u>nach</u> "
l	ل	[l]	as in <u>lamb</u>
m	م	[m]	as in <u>man</u>
n	ن	[n]	as in <u>numb</u>
r	ر	[r]	Flipped
s	س	[s]	as in <u>mass</u>
ṣ	ص	[s ^ɕ]	strong as in <u>psalm</u>
sh	ش	[ʃ]	as in <u>she</u>
U	و	[u]	as in <u>put</u>
U	و	[ʊ]	as in <u>loot</u>
W	و	[w]	as in <u>war</u>
y	ي	[j]	as in <u>you</u>

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⁵¹ Salim Bali, *Fōg Elnā Khel*, ed. André de Quadros (Corvalis, OR: earthsongs, 2009).

APPENDIX B
AVAILABLE ARABIC CHORAL MUSIC

WORK	ARRANGER/COMPOSER	VOICING	ORIGIN	PUBLISHER/RECORDING	
Adinu	arr. Shireen Abu-Khader & Andre de Quadros	unison/men/women	Sufi Song	earthsongs publishing*	sacred
al-Amira wa al-Gharaji	Raman Subaram	SATB w/piano	Iraq	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Ai'Yu	Mohamed Abdelwahab Abdelfatah	SSAATTBB, tenor solo	Egyptian	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Fōg Elnā Khel	Salim Bali	SATB	Iraq/Syria	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Lammaa Badaa Yatathannaa	arr. Shireen Abu-Khader	SATB	Syria traditional mūwashshah	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Entarisi Ala Benziyor	Muammer Sun	SATB	Turkish folk song	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Yal Asmar Ellon	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB	Syria traditional song	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Zikr	arr. Ethan Sperry	SATB, guitar, percussion	Sufi Song	earthsongs publishing*	sacred

WORK	ARRANGER/COMPOSER	VOICING	ORIGIN	PUBLISHER/RECORDING	
Ana'w Chadi	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB, Mezzo solo	Lebanese popular song	Al-Fayha Choir of Tripoli**	secular
Bint'shalabiyya	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB	Lebanese folk song	Al-Fayha Choir of Tripoli**	
El-Helwa Dii	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB, S/T solos	Egypt	Al-Fayha Choir of Tripoli**	secular
Ha'l Asmar'Ellown	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB	Middle East Folk Song	earthsongs publishing*	secular
Leylētna	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB, 3 Sop		Al-Fayha Choir of Tripoli**	
Ya Zarata'L-Madain	arr. Edward Torikian	SATB		Al-Fayha Choir of Tripoli**	
Lao Rahal Soti	arr. Shireen Abu Khader	SATB, Alto Solo		Dozan wa Awtar publishing***	
Hanin	arr. Shireen Abu Khader	SATB, Solo and Tar	Lebanese	Dozan wa Awtar publishing***	
Lamooni Elli Gharoo Menni	arr. John Perkins	SATB, solo		Dozan wa Awtar publishing***	

*<http://earthsongschoralmusic.com>

**<http://www.fayhachoir.org/>

***<http://dozanwaawtar.com/online-store>

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