Music and Social Structure: the *Takht* Tradition of Early-Twentieth Century Cairo

ALI JIHAD RACY [*]

The relationship between music and its social context has both preoccupied and intrigued music scholars. Ethnomusicological studies have generally attested to music's resonance with its human setting. An argument has been made for studying "the juncture of the social and musical" and for establishing a direct link between music and "musical culture", as compared to culture in general (Nketia, 1981, p. 34). Parallels have been established between social relationships, including personal hierarchies within the performing group, and the order in which musical components are presented in performance (Nettl, 1979, p. 129 and 1983, p. 138-139). Moreover, Regula Qureshi has interpreted Indian classical music in terms of its underlying social, political, and historical dynamics, and in light of relevant social theories (2000, p. 15-33). However, also noted is music's inherent symbolic power and abstract orientation, traits that enable it to create alternative social dynamics, identities, and mind sets, as well as to reinforce current social patterns (see for example Seeger, 1979; Roseman, 1987; and Abu Lughod, 1986). In this article, I recognize that music and its cultural base are inextricably linked, as well as experientially distinct, in other words, combined through a form of "disjuncture" or "embeddedness" that "results not

[*] Ali Jihad Racy is Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California at Los Angeles, with a specialization in music of the Near East.

from an attraction based on similarity but instead from an affiliation predicated on difference" (Bohlman, 2003, p. 55)[1].

With this in mind, I examine a relatively discrete milieu, or musical setting, within which the domains of music and society appear strikingly aligned. In other words, their basic configurations and contours tend to converge, although in some ways they also seem to stand apart. The material investigated here represents the urban secular mainstream of early-twentieth century Egyptian music, which was associated with a traditional type of ensemble known as the *takht*. I present a social analysis of the musicians' professional world followed by an exploration of *takht* instrumentation, repertoire, and modes of performing. A specific *takht* recording is used as a reference. The aim is to gain a closer perspective into the musical culture of early-twentieth century Cairo and furthermore, to provide a nuanced interpretation of the relationship between the musical and the social.

The *Takht* Ensemble

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the *takht* ensemble was the backbone of Cairo's secular music (Kāmil, 1974, p. 23). It usually consisted of three to five male instrumentalists who accompanied a *muṭrib* or male singer, and a chorus of three or four men, collectively known as the *sannīdah* (literally "supporters" or "buttresses"). This entire combination typically appeared at a *ḥaflah* or "musical party", held at weddings and other festive events. Existing concurrently with the *takht* was a female ensemble (*takht al-'awālim*), which in the nineteenth century, performed exclusively for women and differed from its male counterpart in both instrumentation and repertoire[2]. Between approximately 1904 and 1930, *takht*-related songs and instrumental pieces were disseminated *via* thousands of commercial recordings, although after the early 1930s, the *takht* and its repertoire were gradually eclipsed by modern ensembles and repertoires. By the middle of the twentieth century, the *takht* legacy had become virtually obsolete.

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[1] This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Egypt during 1971 and 1972 and on a previous work (Racy 1988). Further information on the topic is presented in a recent book (Racy 2003). Throughout this article, quotations from Arabic and French sources have been translated by the author. Photographic reproductions for Figures 1, 2, and 3 are by Barbara Racy.

[2] For information on the status of female entertainers in Egypt, especially in later decades, see Nieuwkerk, 1995.

Musicians in Society

In many ways, the *takht* tradition of the early-twentieth century was a continuation of nineteenth-century musical practices and institutions. Each *takht* ensemble functioned as a small team of socially compatible individuals who traditionally belonged to professional guilds. In the Ottoman Near East, members of various trades and crafts (bakers, carpenters, barbers, masons, and others) were organized into separate guilds or *ṭawā'if* (singular, *ṭā'ifah)*. Each guild was presided over by a guild-master, or *shaykh,* an elderly or retired member who mediated between craftsmen and their clientele and who represented the official authority as he collected taxes for the government from practicing guild members (Ḥifnī, 1935, p. 2). The *shaykh* also conducted the ceremonies in which the auditioning and initiation of new qualified members took place (Baer, 1964, p. 46 and Landberg, 1883, p. 1).

Cairo's musicians constituted more than one type of guild; pre-World War I sources alluded to at least half a dozen. An 1801 listing (Raymond, l957, p. 150) included guilds and guildmasters for: 1) female dancers and their accompanying musicians; 2) *raqqāṣīn,* literally "male dancers;" 3) performers on the *ṭabl,* a large double-headed drum, and *mizmār,* a double-reed wind instrument; 4) coffeehouse romance singers; 5) *'awālim,* or female musical entertainers; 6) *ālātiyyah,* or male instrumentalists; and 7) sellers of strings for musical instruments.

Takht musicians belonged to the *ālātiyyah* guild. This may be demonstrated by comparing the performance mannerisms and instruments of the *ālātiyyah ('ūd, qānūn, nāy, kamanjah,* and *riqq)* as described in the early nineteenth century by Villoteau (1823 and 1826) and Lane (1860), with those of the *takht* as presented at the turn of the twentieth century by the Egyptian theorist and composer, Kāmil al-Khula'ī (*ca.* 1904). Khula'ī noted the aforementioned instruments, but instead of the *kamanjah* (a spike-fiddle made from a coconut shell), he discussed the violin as a locally accepted instrument.

It is not clear whether the *ālātiyyah* guilds technically incorporated singers, as well as instrumentalists. Although both Lane and Villoteau attributed certain songs to the *ālātiyyah,* apparently using this term loosely to mean male musical entertainers, singers may have been organized as a separate group. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, most vocalists had received religious training and were often associated with Egyptian Sufi orders. Thus singers' names were frequently preceded by the religious title *Shaykh.* On the other hand, instrumentalists, several of whom were of non-Egyptian and non-Muslim backgrounds, had an essentially secular musical orientation.

Members of the various guilds differed considerably in social status. For instance, donkey-drivers, magicians, and musicians had a much lower rank than physicians, barbers, and rice merchants (Baer, 1964, p. 35). Guild members were usually united not only by their ethnic and religious backgrounds, but also by their sex since separate guilds commonly existed for men and for women. Furthermore, guild members were connected communally through well-defined locations within a city, namely streets and quarters where they lived or worked. Even in post-World War I Cairo, vestiges of the guild phenomenon have remained visible. For example, Muḥammad ʿAlī Street is a name almost synonymous with musical entertainment.

In short, the guild system exercised a homogenizing effect upon *takht* members. Prior to the first World War, musicians of Cairo were generally a caste-like group whose members were compatible both socially and economically. By the first decade of the present century, however, guilds in general had already begun to disappear, partly due to modernization and in part as a consequence of social and demographic growth (Baer, 1964, p. 127). Furthermore, the spread of powerful record companies after 1904 may have contributed specifically to the final demise of musical guilds in large cities such as Cairo.

The *Takht* as a Social Unit

In terms of organization, each *takht* ensemble was a tightly-knit team of artists, a semi-permanent alliance of competent professionals. Indeed, the literal meaning of the word *takht,* "raised platform", was a physical symbol of the intimate work-relationship typical among the ensemble members. At the core of each *takht* ensemble was the *raʾīs,* or "head", whose name was connected with the ensemble. An outstanding musician and frequently a charismatic person, the *raʾīs* performed certain business tasks on behalf of the entire ensemble. Ensemble cohesiveness, on the other hand, extended to singers and chorus members. Many *takht* ensembles would perform extensively with the same vocalist. The relationship between singers and instrumentalists was symbiotic. A singer gained status by performing with a famous *takht,* and conversely, *takht* ensembles profited both socially and financially by performing with vocal celebrities such as ʿAbduh al-Ḥāmūlī (1841-1901), Shaykh Salāmah Ḥijāzī (1852-1917), and Shaykh Yūsuf al-Manyalāwī (1850-1911). Biographies of these and other singers indicate that established vocalists often earned handsome fees. The legendary ʿAbduh al-Ḥāmūlī and his female counterpart Almaẓ (1860-1896) were good examples (Ebers, 1879, p. 316).

The bond among ensemble members was not only artistic but in a sense spiritual. This link was eloquently described in a commentary written around 1936 by an Egyptian music critic and biographer, Qisṭandī Rizq. Disturbed by the

endemic Westernization of Egyptian music, he made an impassioned appeal to Egypt's Royal Academy of Arab music:

> The Academy is entrusted not to give heads *(ru'asā)* of *takht* ensembles license to replace performers who have previously worked in their ensembles with new performers who are ignorant of the heads' playing methods or distinctive musical traits. Each ensemble head has a particular style, special attributes, and a distinctive spirit. Testifying to this was the fact that the *takht* of Master *(Ustādh)* Muḥammad al-'Aqqād [1851-1931] never used to work [perform], except under the leadership of 'Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī. Each leader had his special *takht* and special players. Substitutions were obviously harmful, because new musicians were unable to tune their instruments with equal facility and in such a way as to allow the sounds to blend perfectly. (*ca.* 1936, p. 15)
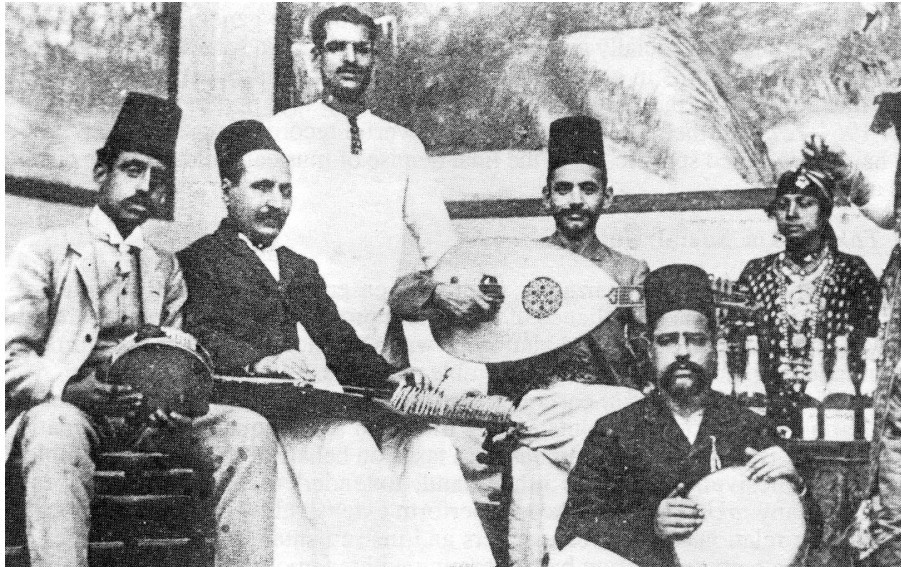

Figure 1. Detail of a photograph, probably from the turn of the 20th century, of an ensemble that accompanied female dancers at a Cairo café (courtesy of Mr. Badr al-Ḥājj).

Internal Relationships

The Egyptian *takht* was founded upon four social and economic principles that governed the nature of interaction among the performers themselves, as well as between the *takht* as a group and society at large. These principles may be characterized analytically as a) *compatibility*, b) *individuality*, c) *reciprocity*, and d) *hierarchy*.

Compatibility applied to the shared social and economic status of guild members and of musicians in general. It also stemmed from the comparable levels of

professional competence implemented by the guild establishment through its formal initiation rituals held under the guildmaster's supervision. *Individuality* was represented by the public acknowledgment of *takht* members, each of whom was a skilled artist appreciated in his own right. *Reciprocity* was a function of the interdependence and group cohesion typical of the *takht* ensemble. Since members of each ensemble worked as semi-permanent teams, their relationship to one another was one of economic as well as artistic cooperation.

Hierarchy existed on several levels. In cultural terms, the musicians tended to be of a lower social and economic rank than their patrons. Such asymmetry was in part predicated on the notion that the former served as providers of *ṭarab*, which may be translated as "musical ecstasy" or "musical entertainment", as well as applied to the urban secular music as a craft linked to ecstatic evocation[3]. Meanwhile, within the musicians' group, hierarchy existed between the singers and the *takht* accompanists. Considered essential to a musical event, the featured singer usually enjoyed a greater measure of popularity and economic power than did the instrumental and vocal accompanists. Such a profile was particularly shown by the early disc catalogues and labels that in some cases displayed the picture of the featured singer (see Racy, 1976). A comparable relationship existed between the *ra'īs* and other *takht* members. The percussionist, although indispensable, generally seems to have attained a lesser degree of fame and recognition than performers on melody instruments. For instance, record labels listing the names of performing instrumentalists almost invariably excluded the name of the *riqq* (tambourine) player.

These four social patterns applied to status, work relationships, and remuneration; and although neither rigidly applied nor universal, they appear to have functioned as norms that governed the professional lives of the musicians.

Instruments

Despite differences in their acoustic and aesthetic characteristics, *takht* instruments were significantly compatible. The melody instruments played at an approximately equal degree of dynamic intensity and enjoyed more or less the same musical capabilities. They produced a working melodic range of about two octaves in each case. None of the instruments was destined exclusively to lead or to play a secondary role. On the contrary, each was equipped to present a full-fledged performance, for example of *taqāsīm* or "instrumental improvisa-

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[3] This phenomenon is perhaps consistent with the role distinction made by Gilbert Rouget between the "musicant" and the one who is "musicated" (1985, p. 285).

tion". When instrumentalists took turns in such a performance, those not improvising often played a drone, or an ostinato, as in the *taqāsīm ʻalá al-waḥdah*, or "improvisation on the beat".

At the same time, the instruments were in certain ways individually distinct. Given their different modalities of sound production, blowing, bowing, or plucking, the melody instruments exhibited varied yet complementary tonal qualities. Doubling of the same instrument, for instance, having more than one *nāy* (reed flute) or *ʻūd* (fretless, short-necked lute) was avoided as a rule. The sound of the *qānūn* (trapezoidal zither) was produced by plucking open triple courses of mostly gut (later nylon) strings, and by playing the melody with slightly delayed imitation an octave below. The skin-covered rectangular facial areas supporting the bridge contributed to the distinctive timbre and resonance of the instrument. The *ʻūd* also provided plucked notes on both open and stopped double courses primarily of gut (later nylon) strings. It played in a bass register, in a relatively dark and mellow timbre. The violin rendered sustained tones in a treble register, while the *nāy* produced breathy, sustained tones mostly in a register an octave higher than that of the violin. Meter and tempo were regulated by the *riqq* (small tambourine), which produced crisp, tapping strokes. Conveying the sung text, the male singer's voice provided another layer of sound at a tessitura essentially matching that of the *ʻūd.*

As a collection of parallel yet distinct layers of sound, the Egyptian *takht* differed from certain world ensemble-models. It could be contrasted for example with the European Renaissance consort that featured several "unitimbral" instruments of various sizes or registers (e.g. recorders or viols), or the classical string quartet. A further contrast can be found in India's classical combination, in which a melody instrument such as the *sitar* or *sarod* is functionally distinguishable from a drone device such as the *tambura.* In the absence of harmonic layering, *takht* musicians probably did not perceive the different melodic registers (unisons and octaves) as a hierarchy of pitch levels, but rather as timbral pigments in a multi-colored sound mosaic.

In short, the instruments' sound properties enabled them to be easily discerned individually, as well as to complement one another. Within the ensemble, the instruments were also capable of performing in various contexts of musical reciprocity, as well as to accommodate different forms of musical hierarchy.

Performers' Roles

Individuality of character, compatibility of means, reciprocity, and hierarchy were traits of a music that favored structured improvisation, spontaneity, and freedom in interpreting musical models. In a sense, the *takht* ensemble was a coordinated group of accomplished soloists, as the instrumentalists were ex-

pected to fulfill comparable musical tasks. Each member was capable of performing in all formats of *takht* playing: alone, with the group, metrically, non-metrically, accompanying a singer without other instrumentalists, accompanying a singer with other instrumentalists, playing a drone or melodic ostinato, and if needed, even playing the role of musical leader within the instrumental ensemble. These roles obviously did not apply in the same way to the *riqq* player, who was usually given utilitarian epithets such as *ḍābiṭ al-īqā'* (rhythm-keeper) or *māsik al-waḥdah* (one who holds the beat), and who "will mark the rhythm and firmly force melodic form into some rigid pattern of meter and accent" (Sachs, 1953, p. 88). These attributes, however, did not mean that the percussionist, who introduced a variety of rhythmic subtleties and timbres in performance, was not acknowledged and appreciated.

Heterophony

The basic character of *takht* music was eloquently expressed through the art of heterophony. This term describes a style in which musicians played roughly the same melodic passages, but each reinterpreted them slightly differently by creating his own nuances and ornaments spontaneously. Consistent with aspects of individuality, compatibility, and reciprocity, heterophonic texture was facilitated by the timbral demarcation of domains. Differences in tone color, both among instruments and between the instrumental and the vocal lines, made coordinated textural diversity more transparent, discernible, and effective.

Such division of labor took many forms. A downbeat, for example, would be skipped by the melody instruments and left for the percussionist alone to produce. Even more typically, it may be heard as a stroke in the lower register of the *'ūd*, and on the *qānūn* with the violin starting immediately after, thus treating the downbeat as a rest. Sometimes also a performer would lengthen a basic note thus creating a drone-like effect.

Furthermore, heterophony may have entailed a type of rhythmic "covariance", or what Curt Sachs refers to as "heterorhythm". Although the melodic parts would basically adhere to the rhythmic mode in terms of the accentuations and durations, they would differ from each other in the details of temporal treatment. For example, the *'ūd* may reproduce a beat by a single stroke or by a succession of two short strokes an octave apart, while the *qānūn* may subdivide the note into several shorter strokes. Thus, divergent components would operate within a unified rhythmic framework, as "counteraccents often disguise the basic rhythm, which, however, remains latent and is easily recognized by those who know" (Sachs, 1953, p. 87-88).

Also common was the creation of melodic disparity, or perhaps a polyphonic effect when, for example, in a short ensemble refrain some instruments played a

melodic sequence that ascended to the upper tonic while others concurrently provided a "countersequence" that descended to the lower tonic. Heterophony also occurred when an accompanist for example a *qānūn* player, interpreted each of the phrases of a leading vocalist with a slight delay, as he trailed behind rather discreetly. Furthermore, heterophony was discernible through the subtle variances that characterized the ways in which the vocalists sang together and in relation to the leading soloist.

Musical Hierarchies

Within the ensemble, hierarchy typified the musical relationship between the featured singer, referred to as *muṭrib*, literally the producer of *ṭarab*, and the accompanying ensemble. Conveying an added textual message through *kalām* (words), the singer enjoyed certain musical liberties and prerogatives. As shown by detailed analyses of *qaṣīdah* performances recorded in Cairo roughly between 1904 and 1932 (Racy, 1977), in a typical *takht* performance the vocal line of the *muṭrib* tended to be more elaborate in terms of rhythmic nuances and melodic embellishments than that of the vocal or instrumental accompanists. Furthermore, the singer's part was dynamically more prominent than that of any other ensemble member. During a performance the *muṭrib* was the musical vanguard who enjoyed greater freedom to interpret and improvise, as well as to take the lead in exploring the tonal areas within the *maqām* and to execute modulations to new *maqāmāt*.

Collectively, the accompanists had to support the singer through a steady metric or accentual background and to fill in the short pauses between the vocal phrases with short instrumental "interludes" or *lawāzim* (singular, *lāzimah*). Either together or individually, they also inserted fillers that roughly reiterated each of the vocal phrases, thus producing what is generally known as *tarjamah* (imitation, literally "translation"). While the singer was performing, the instrumentalists reinforced his vocal line through subtle heterophonic "echoing" in the background, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as *tawrīq,* literally "covering with a thin layer of paper or plaster". The role of the vocal accompanists was similarly directed toward supporting the leading vocal line. For example, in the middle of the *dawr,* (a partially precomposed vocal genre), they alternated with the *muṭrib* in call-and-response passages and held brief drones against which the *muṭrib* improvised and deviated momentarily from the mode.

Sometimes a sense of hierarchy was implicit in the process of establishing a musical-mental state conducive to performing or improvising effectively. The accompanists were expected to prepare the leading soloist, whether singer or instrumentalist, musically by inducing within him a feeling of *salṭanah.* This state of ecstatic inspiration is linked to the *maqām* of the performance and is

usually explained as the domination of a melodic mode over the listener. When under the influence *of salṭanah* in *maqām Rāst,* for example, a musician would feel an urge to play in that *maqām,* and would thus perform well and with intense feeling in *Rāst.* In a *takht* performance, *salṭanah* was created through a collective and collaborative process.

Historical data and reports of older musicians indicate that the *waṣlah*, a suite-like compound form typical of *takht* music during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the sequence of the inner genres (all in the same *maqām*) had an implicit teleological purpose. Throughout the decades, the generic components appear to have varied, and the generic order and content to have been flexible. For example, in the early 1930s, one common order of components would have been: an instrumental prelude often consisting of a short solo improvisation on the *'ūd* followed by a precomposed instrumental *takht* piece, typically a *samā'ī* or a *dūlāb*; *taqāsīm*, for example on the violin or *nāy*; a precomposed vocal piece, usually a *muwashshaḥ* (a metric song performed by the entire ensemble); *taqāsīm* on the *qānūn* followed by *layālī* and *mawwāl* (two improvisatory vocal genres sung by the *muṭrib* with *qānūn* accompaniment); and finally a *dawr*[4]. Such a generic sequence was perfectly suited for arousing a sense of *salṭanah* in the performers, especially the vocalist. By hearing the preliminary material and engaging in the precomposed and improvisatory "warm-ups" in the *maqām* of the performance, the *muṭrib* would have gradually entered into a state of *salṭanah*. This psychological state continued throughout the *waṣlah* eventually leading to the *dawr*, and may have manifested itself best in the virtuosic and ecstatically charged responsorial passages[5].

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[4] Some Egyptian writers, including Kāmil al-Khulaʿī, (*ca.* 1904, p. 89-90) and Aḥmad Abū al-Khiḍr Mansī, (1965/66, p. 61-65) both of whom briefly discuss the *waṣlah* content of the late 19th century, provide further information for example stating that at the time, the performance began with a *bashraf* (or *peshrev*, a precomposed instrumental piece that also prefaced the Ottoman classical *fasil*) and that the evening performance consisted of three *waṣlāt*, the last ending with a *qaṣīdah,* a song usually improvisatory using classical poetry as text (Khulaʿī ca. 1904, p. 90. For further information, see also Lagrange 1996, p. 86-97 and Abou Mrad 2004, p. 204-207). Lack of early recordings of complete *waṣlah* performances obviously makes it difficult to determine the exact content of this genre, keeping in mind that the 78-rpm disc medium and the commercial considerations of the record companies gradually favored short works that were newly composed and commissioned (see Racy 1977, p. 138-160). Nonetheless, these and other authors speak of the ecstatic implications of the *waṣlah* as structure. The sequence described in this article, according to older Cairo musicians I met in the early 1970s and to some historical accounts, was accepted as the norm by the Cairo Radio Station in the early 1930s and was essentially followed in the performances of such major artists as Ṣāliḥ ʿAbd al-Ḥayy (see Racy 1983b).

[5] For further information on the phenomenon of *salṭanah* and ecstatic transformation, see Racy (2003, p. 120-146).

When the *takht* played purely instrumental music, aspects of compatibility, individuality, reciprocity, and hierarchy remained fundamental to the musical texture and structural organization. Heterophony still predominated and in many cases displayed a high level of complexity. A *takht* performance of a *bashraf* (Turkish: *peshrev)* or *samāʿī* (Turkish: *saz semai),* played by the entire ensemble, often sounded like a group of simultaneous interpretations in full synchrony with one another. Each instrumentalist was fully recognized, not only by the timbre of his instrument but also by the individualized nature of his musical rendition of the melodic outline.

In a performance featuring a leading solo instrumentalist, often the *takht* leader*,* a coordinated hierarchical relationship existed. The featured artist's role vis-à-vis the rest of the group became comparable to that of a singer in terms of prominence, degree of ornamentation, and freedom of interpretation and deviation.

The *Taḥmīlah*

Genres allowing for more than one solo segment in alternation with ensemble refrains, such as the *taḥmīlah,* were part of the *takht* repertoire. The *taḥmīlah* structure enabled *takht* members to affirm their individuality as well as their ability to work together musically, thus serving as an ideal vehicle for expressing the basic social and aesthetic principles of *takht* music. In Arab music of the Near East, particularly Egypt, the *taḥmīlah* is recognized as a standard compositional genre. It is an instrumental piece, usually between five and ten minutes long, or perhaps longer. Although precomposed in a specific *maqām*, a *taḥmīlah* incorporates improvisatory passages that usually modulate to other *maqāmāt*. Essentially metric, it follows an overall rhythmic pattern known as *waḥdah,* meaning "unit" or "single accent", and has four or eight beats, one of which is a *dumm* (accented stroke or deep-sounding beat) on the *riqq*. Salīm al-Ḥilū, an Arab music theorist, remarks that one of the most distinctive features of this form is its flexible nature. He adds that although the *taḥmīlah* follows established rules, it incorporates creative solo passages that alternate with responses by the rest of the ensemble (1961, p. 183) [6]. Meanwhile, such display of individual talent in a *taḥmīlah* performance, particularly in the solo-ensemble alternations, was described by Erlanger (1949, p. 184) as follows:

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[6] According to Ḥilū, the *taḥmīlah* form originated among Turkish musicians as a stylized dance piece (1961, p. 183).

> Through this principal theme, each instrumentalist uses his ingenuity in creating variations, thus superbly demonstrating his virtuosity, musical knowledge, and skill as he passes from one mode to another, or transposes a melodic formula to diverse tonal degrees, or executes the most delicate modulations, or combines sustained notes, glissandi, syncopations, and trills that are the most audacious.

Such musical features are well illustrated in a 78-rpm disc recording of a *taḥmīlah* in *maqām Rāst Sūznāk*[7], made by Columbia, a record company active in Egypt in the 1920s (Racy 1976:32). The earliest listing I have found of this disc was in one of the company's Arabic catalogues that showed the date 1927 marked in ink and that advertised a wide variety of electrically-recorded discs (*Sharikat Kūlūmbiyā ca.* l927). Listed in an entry of instrumental (or *takht*) music by well-known artists from Egypt, this *taḥmīlah,* the composer of which is unknown, is approximately six and one-half minutes long, three minutes on Side One and three and one-half minutes on Side Two.

This recording features an *'ūd* player, a *qānūn* player, a violinist, and a *riqq* player, each of whom, with the exception of the *riqq* player, is specified by name on the disc label. The catalogue entry presents the musicians' names in the following order: the violinist, the *qānūn* player, and the *'ūd* player. All three performers were well-established artists.

The violinist, Sāmī al-Shawwā, was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1889, and came from a family of distinguished musicians. Growing up and pursuing his musical career in Cairo, Shawwā became one of the foremost violinists in the Arab world, as indicated by his popular honorific, *"Amīr al-Kamān"* (Prince of the Violin). He helped found a music school early in the last century, wrote methods for the violin, and emerged as a prolific recording artist and *takht* leader. Before his death in 1965, he earned numerous awards and performed in Berlin (1931) and Paris, as well as cities in North and South America (Rizq, 1936, p. 137). Shawwā was known for his hundreds of 78-rpm recordings (on Odeon, Columbia, and His Master's Voice), featuring solo *taqāsīm* and other instrumental pieces for *takht* ensemble, and as an accompanist for both male and female singers.

Muḥammad al-Qaṣabjī (1892-1966), the second artist, was a major Egyptian composer, perhaps more widely known in that role than as a performer on the *'ūd.* He too came from a family of musicians, and received religious training at an early age before becoming totally involved with secular music (Kāmil, 1971,

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[7] This *taḥmīlah* is also widely referred to as *taḥmīlah Rāst,* and was listed as such in the record catalogue. The two *maqāmāt* are closely related. In relative pitch, the *Rāst Sūznāk* scale is usually written as: *c, d, e* half-flat, *f, g, a* flat*, b, c.*

p. 13). By the late 1920s, he accrued considerable fame as he composed numerous songs for the celebrated female singer, Umm Kulthūm. He was associated with an innovative vocal genre called *mūnūlūj ʻāṭifī* (sentimental monologue), which departed from the traditional norms of composition at the time. Modal and technical complexity characterized his compositional style and appears to have extended to his *ʻūd* playing as well.

Figure 2. Samī al-Shawwā, from the cover of his violin method (Shawwā 1921).

The third performer was the *qānūn* player, ʻAlī al-Rashīdī, a virtuoso on that instrument. His father, Muḥammad al-Rashīdī was head of a nineteenth-century *takht* active during the life of ʻAbduh al-Ḥāmūlī (Kāmil 1974, p. 23). ʻAlī also led a *takht* that accompanied the celebrated singer Muḥammad ʻAbd al-Wahhāb in his early songs, notably his *mawwāl* improvisations of the late 1920s. Of the three recording artists, Rashīdī is probably the least famous. Although his performances appear on many recordings from the 1920s and 1930s, his name is seldom mentioned in modern biographies.

The *taḥmīlah* piece thus presented may be understood on a variety of levels. In specific ways the performance exhibits structural patterns comparable to those

characterizing the musicians' inner social world. Compatibility of musical skills is amply displayed by Qaṣabjī, Rashīdī, and Shawwā as well as by the *riqq* player. The three featured instrumentalists all engage in improvising, modulating to different *maqāmāt*, and executing heterophonic subtleties. They all exhibit versatility as ensemble players, as soloists, as leaders in call-and-response passages, and as accompanists who render short ensemble refrains for one another [8].
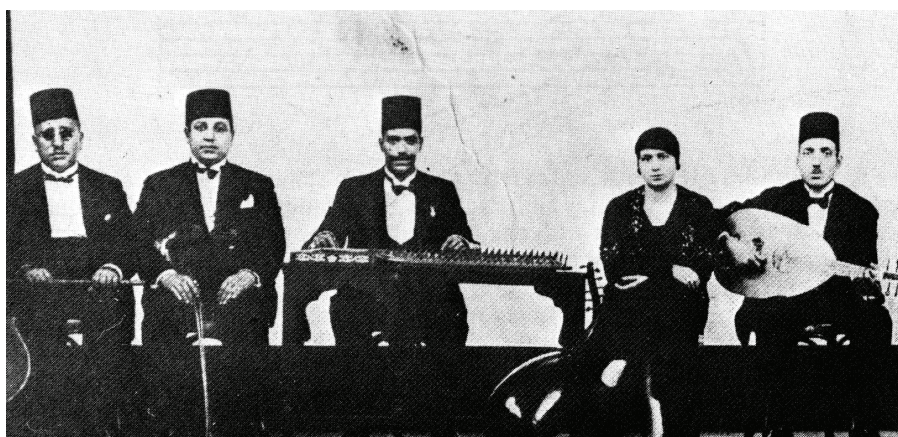

Figure 3. Detail of an ensemble that performed at the Cairo Congress of Arab Music in 1932. Qaṣabjī is shown on the far right next to the female singer Umm Kulthūm (*Kitāb Mu'tamar al-Mūsīqá al-'Arabiyyah* 1933, plate 1).

Individuality is a key feature of the recorded example. To begin with, each performer is individually recognized through the remarks addressed to him by name when he plays alone. Furthermore, the complex heterophony in the long ensemble parts highlighted the artists individually, as well as a group. Individuality is also made evident by each instrumentalist's individual style of playing throughout both the solo, and the call-and-response passages [9].

Reciprocity applies to almost all sections of the *taḥmīlah*. In the ensemble sections, it manifests itself in the heterophonic relationships of the melodic

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[8] Through the early part of the twentieth century, *qānūn* players produced the accidental notes by pressing their fingers directly on the strings. In an informal interview I conducted with the Egyptian *qānūn* player, Muḥammad al-'Aqqād (d. *ca.* 1992), the late artist stated that *qānūn* tuning levers did not become fashionable in Cairo until the mid-1930s. Incidentally, this artist is the grandson of the Muḥammad al-'Aqqād mentioned in this article.

[9] In this case, particularly noteworthy is Shawwā's violin solo-refrain set, in which the artist includes relatively long and highly florid phrases. Well suited for the violin, his playing style seems to grant him special prominence and to bring the performance to a final and climactic phase.

parts. Here, the individual instrumentalists seem to exhibit a highly coordinated division of labor as they partake in dividing some notes rhythmically or filling in certain spaces. The *riqq* player and the performers on melody instruments reinforce one another musically. The *qānūn* and *'ūd* occasionally contribute to the rhythmic accent by sounding the downbeats on their lower strings, an octave below the middle range, in synchrony with the downbeat stroke of the *riqq.* This effect is heard particularly in the opening measures of each large ensemble section of the *taḥmīlah.* At one point the *riqq* also seems to abandon the "rigid pattern of meter and accent" and to engage in "playful fancy" (Sachs, 1953, p. 88). During the violin solo, the *riqq* sporadically performs two *dumm*-s*,* perhaps to create a sense of variation and to match the highly virtuosic and climactic passages of the violin. Reciprocity is perhaps best illustrated through the exchanges of musical roles and responsibilities in the call-and-response passages.

Aspects of hierarchy apply to the temporary roles of leadership played by each of the instrumentalists. When each musician plays his solo phrases within the call-and-response segments, the other melody instruments withdraw from the forefront into the more subtle role of droning or keeping the basic beat pattern. Then, when he introduces a new mode in his improvisatory "call", that mode is taken up by the ensemble in their refrain. The soloist also signals the end of his call-and-response set when he returns to the original mode of the piece, at the moment when a longer ensemble interlude would make an entry.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated some basic parallels between a) the manner in which musicians of early-twentieth century Cairo worked professionally and interacted with one another and with their public, and b) the content of their performances in terms of form, texture, instrumentation, and musical division of labor. In other words, such phenomena as heterophony, solo playing, accompanying, and leading in call-and-response passages implied musical relationships of compatibility, individuality, reciprocity, and hierarchy. These dynamics also characterized the musicians' social roles and interactions.

However, such findings do not necessarily mean that the relationship between social context and musical behavior is unidirectional or that the two realms determine or predict each other. In order to fully understand the relationship between the two realms we must take into consideration a variety of musical and nonmusical factors. These include the nature of the performance event, the audience, and, in the case of the *taḥmīlah* discussed here, the conditions under which the recording was made.

Furthermore, we may have to look at the concept of "musical culture", or the musicians' society in terms of the broader realms of culture and history. Musi-

cians are part of a larger social and physical space and, as Nketia stresses, their culture is shaped by ideas formed both within their own milieu and in "the wider environment of their world of reality" (1981, p. 32). As a cultural expression, music may interact with aesthetic and ideological values that extend beyond the "culture center as core" (Nettl 1983, p. 139). In pre-World War I Egypt, the *takht* was influenced by a multiplicity of historical, geographic, political, and religious factors. For instance, from West Asia the repertoire may have borrowed some aspects of instrumentation, ornamentation, and a certain emphasis on the soloistic aesthetic. It may have also reflected African musical ideals in such matters as ensemble coordination and textural complexity. Musical cohesiveness within the ensemble may have been inspired by the choral singing of Egyptian Sufi brotherhoods, or less directly by the intimate courtly settings of earlier decades.

The study of *takht* music must also take into account the musicians' own creative endeavors. Stressing "the importance of intentionality in group expression", John Blacking has pointed out that beyond the mere dictates of culture, individual musicians make decisions that are inherently musical (1977, p. 12). Egyptian biographers provide ample information about musical innovations introduced by individuals such as Muḥammad ʿUthmān (1845-1900), whose vocal techniques enriched the *takht* musical traditions of his time. The singer and composer, ʿAbduh al-Ḥāmūlī, is known to have borrowed from the Turkish and Syrian musical traditions new *maqāmāt*, which he had used creatively in his own works and "in a manner suiting the Egyptian taste" (Khulaʿī, *ca.* 1904, p. 142; see also Abou Mrad 1991, p. 141-150).

This paper has aimed at interpreting a particular society and its music. The *takht* ensemble has been analyzed as an artistic and social institution representing late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Cairo. Before its decline, the *takht* embodied a set of cultural and musical values that in some ways differed from those that characterized the Arab ensemble of later decades. By comparison*,* the latter, which often included more than twenty musicians, seemed to emphasize large group coordination and to adhere more closely to preset musical formats. In *takht* ensembles, musicians learned their repertoire aurally and often directly from the composers, who in most cases were *takht* members themselves. During *takht* performances, improvisation played a prominent role, and similarly precomposed pieces were subject to spontaneous reinterpretations, depending upon the audience's level of musical initiation and the degree of interaction between the listeners and the performers. Later on, the roles of the composers and interpreters became conceptually and artistically distinct. Thus, compositions were usually presented in fixed, often notated, renditions. Furthermore, exact unisons and octaves tended to prevail over flexible heterophony. Some ensembles have been performing with conductors in Western concert-like settings (Shawan

1984, p. 285-286). Although the larger Arab ensemble had inherited from the *takht* such features as the incorporation of the basic traditional instruments, the emphasis on the solo vocalist, and the modal treatment of melody, aspects of individuality, compatibility, reciprocity, and hierarchy seem to have become less obvious or to have taken new forms and configurations. In such a historical vein, we may look back at the *takht* music both as an intimate voice of its social milieu and as an expression of the local artists' creative minds.

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