

The Music of Arab Detroit: A Musical Mecca in the Midwest from "The Music of Arab Detroit: A Musical Mecca in the Midwest." by Anne K. Rasmussen

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Taksim 'Ala al-'Ud (Improvisation on the 'Ud)

IU Libraries provides access to ['Taksim 'Ala al-'Ud \(Improvisation on the 'Ud\)](#) The piece was recorded in 1955 by Al-Chark Records and features a performance by Professor Jalil Azouz on the 'Ud.

Jalil Azouz (also Azzouz) began his professional career as a versatile instrumentalist and composer at the radio station al-Shark al-Adna in Jerusalem, Palestine. Along with singers Sana and Amer Khadaj, Azouz traveled to North America in 1947 to entertain the growing Arab immigrant community, and ended up staying on for the rest of his life due, in part, to the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war and its outcome. Azouz eventually made his way to Detroit, Michigan where he was an invaluable artistic leader for more than 50 years, serving as a key performer, private teacher, and public educator. This solo taqasim (also taksim) or improvisation in the maqam Nahawand, (the musical mode that sounds like a minor scale) demonstrates the lucidity of Jalil Azouz's 'ud playing as well as his inventive musicianship.

The performance was recorded by the label Istiwanat Al-Chark (Orient Records) owned by Albert Rashid, one of the most important figures in the early years of the ethnic music industry in the United States. Rashid was a trail-blazer in the transnational transfer of mass media between the old world and the new. Although not completely alone in his endeavor to provide cultural goods for Arab immigrant communities, Rashid's efforts were perhaps the most earnest and enduring. Beginning in 1934, Albert Rashid, whose family still owns and operates Rashid Sales Company in Brooklyn, New York, imported musical films from Egypt, arranged for public showings, and then recorded, with permission, the hit songs from the films and sold them as 78 r.p.m. discs on his record label, Al-Chark. During a conversation in 1987, Rashid explained the process to Anne Rasmussen:

"We managed to book a certain place, like the Brooklyn Academy of Music or the Detroit Institute of the Arts, or we would show them (the films) out in Los Angeles, or San Francisco, then from there they'd go to Texas. Move them around. We had a limited number of places to show them, but we did show them in places where they had a population of Arabic speaking people. We bought the rights to the films and then from the films, we bought the rights to the music, which we recorded on records" (personal communication, Albert Rashid, 1987).

During World War II, when commercial traffic between the United States and the Middle East was at a standstill, Rashid brought blank record discs over to Cairo, Egypt to make recordings with musicians for the Arab American market. He also recorded numerous Arab American musicians on the Al-Chark (Orient) label both on 78 r.p.m., and later on, 33 r.p.m. discs.

To learn about early Arab American musicians and the "ethnic" recording industry of the first part of the 20th century check out the compact disc, *The Music of Arab Americans: A Retrospective Collection* (Rounder 1122).



Figure 1: This snapshot of Jalil Azzouz was taken at his home in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1990s. Mr. Azzouz was very active as a performer and educator for his entire career. Photo by Anne Rasmussen

Lebanese Folk Genres: Ataba and Mijana, and 'Ala Daluna

IU Libraries provides access to "[Lebanese folk genres "Ataba and Mijana"](#)". The pieces were recorded in 1995 in Dearborn, Michigan, and feature Rana Homaidan on vocals, Naim Homaidan on 'Ud and Anne Rasmussen on violin.

The non-metric, improvised performance of Rana's "Ataba" is complimented by metric refrains sung by all present as well as taqasim (improvisations) on both violin and 'ud (faded out due to time constraints). The tune that follows, "Ala Daluna" is sung for the dabkah dance, a percussive line dance that can go on for hours. Rana and Naim's family is heard clapping, dancing, and singing along in this spontaneous afternoon performance in their living room. The text of "Ala Daluna" for which there can be found thousands of verses, translates roughly:

Ala Daluna, the loved ones left us, they didn't even say good-bye;

I don't want my mother or my father, I just want my dark, handsome, beloved.

Oh you, young man riding the bicycle, Stop!, Tell me your story.

Give me your handkerchief, I want to wipe my brow, Oh the handkerchief smells like lemon.



Figure 2: Rana and Nadim Homaidan. This photo was taken on the same day the recording was made in the mid-1990s at their home in Dearborn, Michigan. Photo by Anne Rasmussen.

Yemeni Wedding Party

IU Libraries provides access to a "[Yemeni Wedding Song](#)". The pieces were recorded in 1994 in the Detroit Area. The recording features Abd al-Nur on vocals and 'ud, Salah Najjar on darabukkah and Mufadal Yaswer on bongos.

A brief excerpt of the Yemeni American group Afrah al-Yemen performing at a wedding during the summer of 1994. Group members include 'Abd al-Nur, vocals and 'ud and Salah Najjar and Mufadal Yaswer, percussion (darabukkah and bongos). The Yemeni repertoire and style of Afrah al-Yemen are among the most distinctive in Arab Detroit. Listen for the unique timbre of the singer's voice and the way it is intertwined with the 'ud line which both supports the vocal line and provides musical interludes between lines of text.



Figure 3: Afrah al-Yemen perform on the “men’s side” of the banquet hall for a wedding party. The videographers in the foreground capture the action.

Zaffat al-Hilu (The Procession of the Beautiful Bride)

IU Libraries provides access to a ["Zaffat al-Hilu \(The Procession of the Beautiful Bride\)"](#). The piece was recorded in the summer of 1995 in the Detroit Area and was performed by the Bells Band, directed by Majid Kakka. The recording features Majid Kakka as the lead vocalist and keyboard player, and Salam Kakka and Johny Sana on percussion synthesizers.

The Bells Band performs traditional music in a completely synthetic idiom using an impressive array of keyboard and percussion. Note the way the band samples Arab instruments as well as the Iraqi rhythm, jurjuna, usually notated as 10/8 (3+2+2+3). The Bells Band have had a long history in Detroit and are still performing under the leadership of Iraqi American musician, Majid Kakka. In the 1990s the distinctive popular music of Iraq was so popular in Detroit that it became part of the Arab American musical mainstream. Today the band continues to perform for community events and to pursue innovative musical projects and collaborations including a concert with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra titled "Sounds of Babylon" which helped to raise awareness about Chaldean Christians.

Translated Lyrics

Tonight we do the Zaffah for the bride and groom of the black eyes [a sign of beauty].

The ring that she's wearing is shining all over her dress;

There is nothing else like it in the market.

Congratulations to you (two), the beloved ones



Figure 4: The Bells Band. Photo courtesy of Majid Kakka.