

MARTIN STOKES

## *Listening to Abd al-Halim Hafiz*



This chapter concerns Egyptian film music of the mid- to late 1950s, specifically that of crooner and film star, Abd al-Halim Hafiz. Abd al-Halim was born in the province of Zagazig in 1929. He studied oboe in Cairo at the Arab Music Conservatory, found his way into recording and radio in the early 1950s, and into the film world a little later (making some sixteen musical films). He enjoyed the patronage of Gamal Abd al-Nasser as a singer of political songs at state-sponsored anniversaries of the revolution that deposed the king and brought the “Free Officers” to power on July 23, 1952.<sup>1</sup> He died in 1977, an ailing, bilharzia-racked figure, to massive public mourning.<sup>2</sup> Abd al-Halim’s music lives on in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world through state patronage, through intelligentsia-inspired nostalgia, and, currently, through the activities of media corporations, taking advantage of an eminently exploitable resource. And, in less obviously observable ways, he continues to be held in broad popular affection, both in Egypt and in many parts of the Arab world.

The durability of the popular Arab film musical “heritage” has inspired important questions and influential theorizations both within and outside the Arab world. In particular, the role of popular film in mediating broader experiences of modernity, in shaping both Arab and Egyptian nationalism, and in nourishing an—at least incipiently—democratic public life have been stressed by Walter Armbrust (1996), Joel Gordon (2002), Viola Shafik (1998), and others. Their work constitutes my own point of departure, to which I add a question that has not, I believe, been squarely addressed. To what degree does it matter that *music* and *musicians* are central to so many of these films? That those sitting in movie theaters, or, these days, watching at home on television or video, were hailed not just as people skilled in the conventions of narration and pictures in motion, but as listeners, steeped in Arab music history and the skills and

pleasures of interpreting voices, styles, genres, the play of musical form and nuances of instrumental artistry?

The issue has broader ramifications. If, as Frankfurian and post-Frankfurian media theory has insisted, the social productivity of mass media is conditioned by “lexes” particular to them; that they are, in other words, conditioned by the “structure of reading that a particular medium requires and allows” (Mazarella 2004:359), how might we go about identifying and critically engaging with the structures of listening that musical film both “requires and allows”? And how might we then go about considering the role of listening in the context of the broader social transformations wrought by states in pursuit of modernity, nationalism, and democratic public life?<sup>3</sup> These are somewhat abstract questions, with resonance in other parts of the world. But the Egyptian experience, even when grasped with the clumsy eyes and ears of an (admiring) outsider, such as myself, might add nuance, as well as some empirical specificity, to these questions. Where Frankfurian and post-Frankfurian media theory assumes Western experience as a norm against which all else is read and usually is deemed lacking or deviant, there is something to be gained in, quite simply, starting elsewhere and grasping modernity, and the familiar questions that cling to it, “otherwise” (c.f. Chakrabarty 2000).

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to pursue the question of listenership in Egyptian film musicals in response to three pieces of writing I have found productive and thought provoking in this context, each of which I will introduce with a quotation. Two relate specifically to modern Egypt, allowing me to say something of what I know about the conditions of film production, the position of musicians, composers, and arrangers in the general scheme of film production, and what seems to have been involved in the musical making and reception of these films. I should stress at the outset, with other scholars of Egyptian film in these years, that the material at hand is scanty (see Vitalis 2000) and add that my own expertise is far from complete. One can only hope that archival material will come to light and life once this rather ambiguous moment in Egyptian cultural history comes into clearer focus. The third quotation opens the door to some broader questions about listening, ethnography, and mass mediation, which may bear on how we consider music in film genres more broadly.



The flourishing (Egyptian) film industry captivated the fancy and imagination of the populace, not just in Egypt but throughout the Arab world, where the current

songs were on every lip, and where a faithful audience of urbanites from taxi drivers to porters memorized the dialogue of popular films and gave a running commentary to the new viewers. (Zubaida 2002:19)

Zubaida’s celebration of the secular and cosmopolitan cultural spheres of Cairo and Alexandria in the 1930s and 1940s challenges those who are inclined only to see state power and religious authority in Middle Eastern public life. He depicts not only lively cultural interactions across the colonial divide, but also within the colonized elite, bourgeoisie, and urban working classes. The contributions of Bela Bartok, invited to the Arab musical congress in 1932 and Edward Evans-Pritchard, lecturing on primitive religion at Cairo University are duly mentioned, but Zubaida comes to rest, in this paragraph, on a nice depiction of popular Arabic-language cinema, not only as shared cultural property, but a distinct vector for communication and interaction across classes and between strangers. Taxi drivers and porters memorize the dialogue and pass on their expertise to the “new viewers,” who they imagine, like them, to be animated by the possibilities for chat and banter that movies inspire, and, like them, to be steeped in a shared Egyptian cinema lore, a commonality that overrode, however temporarily, all other differences.

Zubaida’s depiction of this golden age also hints at the decline that was to follow, a decline that, despite the “current songs on every lip,” has been associated in the minds of many with the rise of Egyptian movie musicals. These began with Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab’s *al-Warda al-Bayda* [The White Rose] of 1933, a light romantic comedy involving star-crossed lovers. The nine films in which Abd al-Wahhab either starred or appeared as a musician between 1933 and 1963 established a formula to which his contemporaries and rivals, including Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, Layla Murad, Huda Sultan, and later, Abd al-Halim Hafiz, were highly indebted.<sup>4</sup> The Egyptian film industry hit its productive stride in the mid 1940s.<sup>5</sup> Nasser, the argument goes, was interested in cinema merely as propaganda, however. As a consequence, he stifled creativity and failed to provide proper infrastructural support. This resulted in an exodus of talent and an under-resourced industry, increasingly dependent on a small stable of stars, and a dwindling stock of ideas and storylines, in which song-and-dance numbers increasingly substituted for real creativity. The economic austerity and political catastrophes of the 1960s hammered a further nail in the coffin of Egyptian cinema. The introduction of television and, later, the VCR in the 1970s accompanied a fundamental reorientation of the Egyptian public sphere, part and parcel of Sadat’s *infitah* (“opening”) of the Egyptian economy to foreign trade and investment. This put broadcast media in the hands of (often) Saudi Arabian-based conglomerates. Media consumption shifted

from the public to the private space, a means no longer of radical social transformation, but a pernicious and deadening conservatism.<sup>6</sup>

The decline narrative can be read in various ways. Revisionists would stress that the roots of the crisis were systemic and deeply rooted even in the 1930s and 1940s. What happened in the 1950s, the period in which film musicals such as those of Abd al-Halim Hafiz predominated, was simply a working through of underlying contradictions inherent in this system. Vitalis for example, suggests that many accounts of Egyptian cinema neglect the crucial role of Hollywood cinema in Egyptian society throughout the “golden years” of the 1930s and 1940s, a role that created a space for the local industry, but damaged its long-term prospects. As Vitalis points out, Hollywood needed its overseas markets. During the 1940s, approximately 40 percent of the large Hollywood studios’ revenues came from overseas. Universal had established itself in Cairo in 1926, followed by MGM, Twentieth Century Fox, and Paramount, owning their own movie theaters (the Royal, Metropole, Triumph, Roxy, Olympia, and Diana among them) in Cairo and Alexandria. These catered mainly to English-speaking foreigners. The American Embassy, the State Department, and the Motion Pictures Association of America and the Motion Pictures Export Association lobbied energetically and effectively to keep these cinemas in profitable business. They had to negotiate the occasional hostility of the Young Egypt movement, the Wafdist vanguard, and the Muslim Brothers and also deal with British censorship. They also had to cope with efforts to establish and protect a national film industry. Misr Studios was founded in 1935, owning its own production plant and movie theater. Yusuf Wahbi, who ran it, worked hard and successfully to extract concessions from the Hollywood-owned theaters (such as requirements to show at least one locally produced film per year). After the coup of 1952, Nasser authorized the creation of a National Film Center in 1957, whose efforts to promote local production and inspire a revolutionary cinema, however, cannot be said to have been at all successful. The figures for production, attendance, and functioning theaters went into decline and never fully recovered.

As Vitalis shows, a rather complex balance of power prevailed during Abd al-Halim’s film career, in which Hollywood called the shots. This state of affairs prevailed until Nasserite legislation, later in the 1950s, began to make life difficult for the movie companies. By the 1930s, Hollywood had a Cairo-based apparatus in place to ensure regular profits from (elite, European) audiences across the Arab world. Dominating this niche, it had relatively little interest in branching out into Arabic-language film, which flourished in a space that Hollywood was for the most part able to control to its own advantage. The local industry’s financial and institutional footing was

always shaky, despite the boom-time of the war years. Each Hollywood film typically made 8,000 LE in Egypt alone, all costs having been covered by the time it reached the overseas markets: Hollywood could afford to show a large number of films and turn them over quickly. By contrast, the local industry operated on a fine margin. A typical Egyptian film would cost about 20,000 LE and would only just recoup these figures at the box office.<sup>7</sup> Films were few in number and turned over in movie theaters rather slowly, at least by comparison with the Hollywood films. The state enterprise Misr Studios functioned below capacity, relying on rental income from its production plant and the showing of foreign films at its one downtown movie theater. With the establishment of the National Film Center, things went from bad to worse. Although figures are hard to establish, it seems clear that local cinema, viewed as a whole, struggled to remain profitable. The number of functioning cinemas and films in production declined rapidly from a high point at the end of the 1940s.<sup>8</sup>

Two questions arise when we consider Abd al-Halim Hafiz’s film musicals in the context of “decline.” How might we understand their extraordinary commercial success and how do we understand their enduring cultural significance? Like his predecessors (and later business associates Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab and Farid al-Atrash), he starred in films that involved remarkable talents as writers, directors, actors, composers, musical arrangers, and instrumentalists who were, by the mid-1950s, experienced and very much in their stride. Egyptian cinema could still exploit the buzz of wealth, social mobility, and excitement bought by the war years. Cinemas were established firmly in the urban imagination not just as places to watch films, but to attend concerts and other events, places to see and be seen.<sup>9</sup> The films told stories that chimed subtly with the anxieties and excitements of the time, of young love prevailing despite the will of the old order and the tired patriarchs who preside over it, of wit, humor, and charm overcoming the adversity of fate, stories that now seem to brim with the anticolonial, nationalist, and revolutionary sentiments of the day. The continuity of Abd al-Halim’s films with those of the past was cultivated and palpable, inviting the kind of intertextual referentiality that made Egyptian cinema tick from the very outset. Thus Abd al-Halim’s first film role, Ustaz Galal in *Lahn al-Wafa* of 1955, reprises Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab’s Ustaz Gallal in *al-Warda al-Bayda* of 1933.<sup>10</sup> Abd al-Halim’s success surely owes something to the ability of the movie companies of his day to exploit a lively set of formulae and an energetic culture of cinema-going, despite straitened circumstances.

This doesn’t fully explain why Abd al-Halim’s light shone with such a peculiar intensity during those years. It may have been that the straitened

circumstances of the mid- to late 1950s meant that there was little room at the top for more than a very small handful of successful companies and stars. If Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, Layla Murad, Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, and Asmahhan could share the musical cinematic stage a decade earlier, from 1955 onwards, it would seem that there may have been only room for one. Companies working with Abd al-Halim could rely on a smoothly running and highly talented “machine,” involving a stable of composers who took on rather specific jobs (Munir Murad, Kamal al-Tawil, and Mohammed Mougi in particular), music arrangers (Ali Ismail and Andreas Reider), musicians (particularly Ahmed Fuad Hassan and the Firqa al-Masiyya, and Ali Ismail and Andreas Reider’s jazz bands). Most of these had known Abd al-Halim since their youth, and had forged close musical relationships with one another as contemporaries at the Ma had al-Musiqa al-Arabiyya in Cairo in the late 1940s. Their work in cinema constituted just one element of complexly interdependent careers, divided between “day jobs,” work in the radio, the commercial recording market, and live performance.<sup>11</sup> Abd al-Halim, a dominant force, was clearly at the center of a large network of musicians. He could be relied on to make the music “happen” in film productions efficiently, dominating an industry facing a shrinking market and rising production costs.<sup>12</sup>

One can readily understand why the Egyptian movie companies of the mid-1950s might have been so dependent on the charisma and the technical and organizational skills of a small number of musicians. By the late 1950s, they were able to flex their muscles, seeking a percentage share in profits, rather than one-off fees, and a greater degree of control of the production process. In 1959, Abd al-Halim bought his way into Aflam al-Alam al-Arabi, with whom he made *al-Banat wa al-Sayf* in 1960. It was, according to his biographer Magdi al-Amrussi, his frustrations with his dealings at this time with Cairophon, the state-run sound recording enterprise, which pushed him further in this direction (1994:81). Abd al-Halim had signed a contract with Cairophon for which they had offered LE 400. He asked for LE 2,000, plus 20 percent of the profits. Cairophon, by all accounts, readily agreed to the fee, but refused the percentage. Abd al-Halim then formed a partnership with Mohammed Abd-al Wahhab and Magdi al-Amrussi, adding a sound-recording and distribution arm to Aflam al-Alam al-Arabi, and renaming the company Sawt al-Fann. Abd al-Halim continued to manage his business through Sawt al-Fann until his death.

One can get a sense of how and why Abd al-Halim was quickly able to occupy such a powerful position in the Egyptian film and recording industry. This does not, however, fully explain the extraordinary appeal of the movies in their own time, or their resonance since.<sup>13</sup> Why are the songs still sung, and

the stories of the films recalled by so many with such pleasure? Any account of the enduring popularity of these films must take into account their musical content. Rather than seeing the music as part of a general dumbing-down process, as the conventional “decline” narrative insists, I would argue that the musical content of Abd al-Halim’s films was sophisticated, subtle, and intimately related to the powerful narratives of nationhood, modernity, and revolution circulating elsewhere. The audiences assumed by these films were, very evidently, not only knowledgeable and well versed in Egyptian movie history, particularly movie musical history, but intelligent listeners. The films assumed, and rewarded, an extensive knowledge of the conventions of Arab classical music, of Western classical and popular genres. They demanded, and played on, a subtle awareness of the debates and arguments being fought over Arab music, between traditionalists and modernists, between purists and cosmopolitans; they evoked discussions concerning the role of microphones and the effects of mass media, over conflicting interests in the music business, over the legitimacy of dance. They were, in other words, not simply films containing music that people loved; they were films *about* music.



The experience of this imagery (in film) was analogous to the mass rituals of reading novels and newspapers that Benedict Anderson identifies as an important means for knitting together “communities” of anonymous strangers. But more than the newspaper or novel, this film and others like it were intensely reflexive. *The Flirtation of Girls* was not really about anything other than itself. (Armbrust 2000:315)

Armbrust’s discussion of *Ghazal al-Banat* [The Flirtation of Girls], Anwar Wajdi’s classic from 1949 starring singers Layla Murad and Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, engages many of the themes of his earlier study of Egyptian cinema (Armbrust 1996). Cinema in Egypt, he argues, did much of the work of novels and newspapers in Anderson’s well-known account of print media in shaping a public, one preoccupied by the question of national belonging and the place of their nation in the world. The particular and peculiar formations of Egyptian national experience can be understood through, and with a proper regard of cinema, he argues; particularly its ambiguous frame of reference (Egyptian or Arab nationalism?), its formulation of a “split vernacular,” in which language both unified and maintained abiding tensions between more and less legitimate cultural strata, its functions in a largely illiterate society. Armbrust brings the social and political significance of popular cinema into focus, complicating the claims of those overly focused on “art” cinema in the production of national and modern identities, particularly in a postcolonial context.

Reflexivity is a constant refrain in Armbrust's account of Egyptian cinema. This was cinema about itself, engaged in endless intertextual games and overt acknowledgement of the conditions of viewing, listening, and movie fandom. In *Ghazal al-Banat*, for instance, the characters reprise, in a spirit of high satire, roles they had already played earlier in their career. Al-Rihani reprises his role as Kishkish Bey from the days of the theatrical Franco-Arab reviews as the old man thwarted in love. Layla Murad's very first appearance with Abd al-Wahhab in *Yahya al-Hubb* (1938) is recalled. Abd al-Wahhab's advice to al-Rihani at the end directly evokes the plot and Abd al-Wahhab's sorry state at the end of *al-Warda al-Bayda*. In the through-the-looking-glass, story-within-a-story world the characters eventually enter in *Ghazal al-Banat*, the owner of the mansion, where the crazy resolution of the plot takes place, is Yusuf Wahbi, famous actor, director, and playwright. Anwar Wajdi, the director and playwright, was also Layla Murad's husband, who had co-starred with her in numerous romantic comedies. Dense intertextuality and reflexivity, Armbrust stresses, was central to the pleasure of Egyptian popular cinema, and central to its social processes and effects.

This insight can be extended to the place of music and musicians in Abd al-Halim's films. First of all, we should put Abd al-Halim's musicals in their context. Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab's first film musical, *al-Warda al-Bayda* of 1933, shows a genteel aristocrat fallen on hard times, whose musical struggles to define a route between tradition and modernity parallel his struggle to define his social and amorous relationships with the beautiful daughter of a vulgar but wealthy family. Umm Kulthum's films, by all accounts less successful at the box office than those of Abd al-Wahhab, but still well-known nonetheless, use musical scenes to dramatize the struggle between the innocent and the exploiters, the licentious and the decent, in settings that were often historical fantasies, yet clearly bore on contemporary moral concerns about the place of music and musicians in Egyptian life. Farid al-Atrash's films, which dominated Egyptian cinema in the years immediately preceding Abd al-Halim's rise to fame, dramatize the quest for an authentic musical modernity in various ways. In *Akhir Kizba*, for example, he travels with his troupe to Cairo to find the sheikhs who will help him in the task, tracking them down to a café where an ecstatic *dawr*, the culmination of the traditional *wasla* (suite) is in progress. Abd al-Halim's first film of 1955, *Lahn al-Wafa*, has the young singer bringing to fruition the musical dream of his estranged adopted father, a distinguished maestro. His character takes the name of Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab's hero in *al-Warda al-Bayda*. In this as in many other ways, the films of Abd al-Halim clearly were designed to be placed in a certain context: a history of

Egyptian musical films that narrate the making of Egyptian, and, more generally, Arab music.

Abd al-Halim's films dramatize some rather specific conflicts and tensions within this field. Western popular music is dangerous (as in *al-Wisada al-Khalin*, 1957), but correctly handled, it also can make Arab music modern and cosmopolitan (*Maw'id Gharam*, 1956). Musicians must be revolutionary, but must also be true to the past, as well as the street (*Lahn al-Wafa*, 1955; *Sharia al-Hobb*, 1958). Poor performance by singers and musicians can reduce the efforts of the most intelligent composer and poets to cheap and tawdry entertainment; performing musicians and audiences must be educated, too, if music is to move "forward" (*Dalila*, 1956). Singers need to balance the intimate aesthetics of enchantment (*tarab*) with the demands of studios, concert halls, and other disenchanting modern spaces (*Maw'id Gharam*, 1956).<sup>14</sup> Stardom treats men and women differently (*Ma'abudet el-Jamahir*, 1967). Decency is always under duress, with quite different effects either side of the gender divide.

One particular element of musical reflexivity is at issue in all of these films: how music (and sound more generally) circulates under conditions of mass-mediation. Films lend themselves to this kind of reflexivity, as Michel Chion (1994) has argued. The processes of assembling a story on celluloid involves separating sound from dramatic action and reassembling it in a complex process that has elicited, from various filmmakers, subtle narrative play on the relationship between diegetic and nondiegetic sound. At the most general level, twentieth-century mass-mediation technologies separated bodies and voices in ways that fascinated, absorbed, and perplexed producers and consumers. This splitting has gendered implications, as Chion's analysis of thrillers suggests. Women's voices are separated from and reconnect with their bodies on screens in ways that differ from those of men's voices. The questions this raises for female spectatorship are complex and fascinating (see Hansen 1991 for an extended discussion).

Abd al-Halim's films exemplify many of the general points in Chion's analysis. They are almost obsessively absorbed by the question of how voices circulate around public space, not only on radios and televisions, but in cafés, on streets, and around houses, between young and old, informed and uneducated, men and women. In a nicely subversive joke at the expense of Umm Kulthum in *Dalila*, Dalila's ancient mother wants to tune in to (we assume) the Thursday Umm Kulthum program, but the radio is broken.<sup>15</sup> Abd al-Halim, always on the alert for an opportunity to fool around, goes into the next room and speaks through a hole in the wall behind the radio set, announcing the number and faking an Umm Kulthum song with his oboe and own voice. Her mother appears not to notice the

joke being played; Dalila and Abd al-Halim are in stitches. A popular image of Abd al-Halim, an image that recurs in a large number of his films, involve a circulating voice, whether cycling around Cairo, or circling the world as he shoots to fame (see Gordon 2002).<sup>16</sup> Entire plots revolve around messages overheard or missed, on encounters in crowded and noisy spaces where verbal messages cannot be exchanged, on voices present but bodies far removed in space, of messages left and picked up either too soon or too late. It is impossible to watch an Abd al-Halim movie without constantly being struck by the preoccupation of those who made the film with the properties of voices circulating around (and between) public and private spaces: their speed or slowness, the ease or difficulty with which they circulate, the extent of their emotional or coercive impact. To a point, one might say, this preoccupation is contiguous with the more general phenomenon noted by Chion, and shared, to a degree, by Hollywood and other film musicals, known—at least to the elite—in Abd al-Halim's Cairo.

Some rather more specific issues are at play, though. Alongside a preoccupation with the making of music and the making of the musician is a preoccupation with the act of listening. In this one might detect echoes of a much longer concern in Arab culture with the legitimacy of music, and the conditions and contexts in which listening might most productively and appropriately take place. However, the central questions being posed in these films are distinctly modern. If “traditional” performance contexts enable and sanction a particular, socially validated kind of emotionality through close feedback loops connecting performers and audiences (*tarab*), does mass-mediation produce deviant listening and listeners? Is *tarab* possible under modern conditions? What are the alternatives?

In most regards, concert life and mass-mediation never proved too detrimental to *tarab*, as Racy (2002) demonstrates. However idealized the small-scale event (the *jalsa*) might have been in Arab society, something of its intimacy and subtlety and something of its intricate social protocols could be reproduced on stage or in recordings (where the appreciative comments of listeners often were included in the final cut). At issue, one might say, is not the problem of modernity per se, but, rather, an anxiety about what *can* happen under modern conditions; specifically, musical emotion produced and consumed in conditions of solitude and isolation. Without the intricate but rigorous checks and balances of *tarab*, in which emotion circulates, but is also regulated, sanctioned, and socialized, the modern subject is incapable of withstanding the psychically destabilizing effects of music well-known to Middle Easterners through scholarly and popular Islamic traditions.

Abd al-Halim's *Maw'id Gharam* of 1956 might be read not just as a dramatized confrontation of two very different ways of being a modern Arab musician, but of being a modern Arab listener. The film is worth describing in a bit of detail. It conforms in many respects to Joel Gordon's (2002) characterization of revolutionary melodrama in this period, marketed, as it was, as a “love story,” full of the “noblest human sentiments” (*qissas 'ati-fiyya tanbid fiba anbal al-abasis al-insaniyya*) (*Akhir Sa'a*, 1957), but also clearly a parable about the social responsibilities of the artist. It is a story of how love for a serious young female journalist (Nawal, played by Fatin Hamama) transforms the carefree life of an urbane young man (Samir, played by Abd al-Halim) into one of social commitment and responsibility. Having heard him singing to her, Nawal encourages Samir to consider taking up a career in music, to do something serious with his life. At the very point that Samir's career takes off, Nawal succumbs to an illness, which confines her to a wheelchair, though, through complicated narrative mechanisms, this information is kept from Samir. This provides an opportunity for a rival to Samir's affections to enter the scene, the stiffly upright and decent Dr. Kamal, played by Imad Hamdi. He takes responsibility for looking after Nawal, though with a growing realization that she really loves Samir. Samir finally declares his love and returns from Beirut, where he is on tour. Dr. Kamal arranges a trip to the Gulf for Nawal for hospital treatment, secretly arranges for the lovers to be reconciled at Cairo Airport, and gracefully steps out of Nawal and Samir's life.

How does musicianship and listenership figure in this film? The emotional epicenter of the film falls shortly after the halfway point, framed by two large musical numbers that configure musicianship and listenership in two contrasting ways. In the first, Samir is launching his career as a musician. A few fragmentary scenes show him hard at work with an orchestra, and before we know it he is giving his first concert, in the al-Andalus gardens in downtown Cairo. We hear an up-tempo number with a foxtrot feel, in melancholy *maqam* (mode) Nahawand, with some gracefully descending chromatic phrases.<sup>17</sup> It is typical of many of Kamal al-Tawil's songs for Abd al-Halim: modally clear and rhythmically robust, with an instantly identifiable tune and verse/chorus structure. The refrain in the lyrics, by Ma'amun al-Shinnawi, ask “*beyni wa beynak eb?*” [what is there between us?] If there is a hint of ambiguity here, it is dispelled in the scene we observe. Nothing seems to come between Samir and his admiring listeners. The voice circulates effortlessly and the camera tracks its movements, playing over a well-drilled orchestra, a well-groomed audience listening quietly but with obvious pleasure, and the attentive talent scouts from Beirut nodding to one another with professional interest. Nawal, sick, is at home in

bed, but is shown briefly, listening with friends to the live broadcast of the concert on the radio. A scene, in other words, of disciplined musical production, mediation, and consumption. This is definitely what Nawal had in mind for Samir, and, one might say, for Arab culture more generally.

The moment this musical number comes to an end, the plot is thrown into turmoil. Samir is offered a contract by the Beirut entrepreneurs. He does not realize the extent of Nawal's illness at this stage, or the full nature of her relationship with Dr. Kamal. So at this point he is torn between his career and his affection for Nawal. But the matter is decided when he sees Nawal and Dr. Kamal together in the latter's car. He quickly jumps to the understandable conclusion, accepts the Beirut deal, and phones Nawal reproachfully from the airport. All of this takes place within a few minutes of screen time. The sounds of the last song are still ringing in our ears as the next one strikes up, and the contrast could not be more pronounced.

A crash of drums and a dramatic orchestral flourish introduces a concert hall scene. A serious and disciplined orchestra sets to work, once again. But, fairly quickly, we realize from the music that something is amiss. The long instrumental introduction meanders. Quasi fantasia gives way to something that sounds as though it is going to be a tango, and then settles on a relentless and featureless motoric rhythm. Modally, a fluctuating D natural/D flat suggests that a conflict between Nahawand (with a lower five-note grouping of C-D-E flat-F-G) and Kurd (with a lower four-note grouping of C-D flat-E flat-F) is not going to be resolved.<sup>18</sup> Nahawand is only established along with a sudden shift in tonal center from C to G in the final *qafla* (cadence). Experienced listeners will detect at once all of the hallmarks of the work of Abd al-Halim's other main composer, Mohammed Mougi, with its wrenching changes of musical affect, its emotional excess, its rhetorical bombast and lachrymosity.<sup>19</sup>

So far, neither audience nor singer is in evidence. The camera dwells at length on the huge orchestra, instrument by instrument, section by section. Finally, the singer appears, the camera moving down rather oddly over his head, so Samir seems to rise up in front of the orchestra as he sings the opening lines of the song, "Law Kunt Yawm Ansak" [If the day were to come and I were to forget you]. The camera remains on his face as he sings the opening verse. Samir is clearly already a star: here he is in Lebanon, with massive forces at his disposal and broadcasting live to the entire (Arab) world. And yet Nawal's betrayal clearly has crushed him. He has achieved success, but at a terrible price. The song meanders, even by the standards of Abd al-Halim's "dark night of the soul" songs. The Nahawand/Kurd ambiguity persists. A central section introduces another set of tone colors (woodwinds) and a contrastive tonality. The ends of the verses

cleverly dovetail with the opening line of the choruses, both musically and lyrically; there is no clear transition. Though one can interpret it in terms of the *mazhab*/refrain structure of popular Arabic song of the time, Mougi has set out to write a song that will disorient listeners, to pose musical questions that can't easily be resolved.

And the dramatic focus, at this moment, is indeed on the listener. During the long orchestral sections, we switch from Samir in Beirut to Nawal listening in Cairo, alone in her room, confined to her wheelchair, tears streaming down her face. The camera moves closer and closer to Samir's face as he sings; during the instrumental interludes, it moves closer and closer to Nawal. First her wheelchair-bound body dominates the frame, then her face, then a teardrop forming on her eye. This slow-motion, dual-focus zoom is broken when the song ends. Dr. Kamal walks through the door as the announcer tells the listeners that they have been listening to Samir live from Beirut. In a guilty panic, Nawal jerks forward on her chair and switches off the radio.

The contrast with the first scene of listenership is marked. The first is collective; this is solitary. In the first we see couples, professional folk, friends and strangers, present at the concert and elsewhere. Here we see only Samir and Nawal. In the first, we see an audience visibly following the music, nodding, tapping their feet, exchanging appreciative glances. Though disciplined and a little passive (and not quite the *tarab* audience described by Racy and others), they are clearly very much part of the musical scene. Here, Nawal is lost in her own misery, and hardly seems to be listening at all. The contrast is emphasized by the contrast in musical styles. In the first, we hear music that is palpably modern, but which reaches out to and engages with audience expectations and conventions. The conventions at play here are rooted in *tarab* and *turath*, but they also assume a familiarity with the American dance styles and genres of the 1940s and 1950s. In the second, we hear a music that follows its own unruly and whiny emotional outbursts wherever they take it. Long sections of it can be heard as *mawwal*, classical vocal nonmetered improvisation, or as the long "*bidun mis-ura*" (nonmetered) sections, in which singer and unison strings move together at the opening of long concert songs (*ughniyya*).<sup>20</sup> But a listener with some knowledge of the rhetorical flourishes of nineteenth-century Western orchestral art music also seems to be assumed.

The contrast is also emphasized by the relationship between what we see and what we hear in the two scenes. In the first, we start off diegetically: What we see is what we hear. When the accordion strikes up the "Woody the Woodpecker" instrumental hook, we see the accordion and the accordionist. When Abd al-Halim starts singing, we see the singer. From that

point on, sound and visual image part company. Abd al-Halim's voice accompanies the camera as it circulates, across the orchestra and the audience, and across the faces of listeners at home. The conjoint movements of camera and voice depict—within the conventions of the story—ideal conditions: modern music and listeners constituting an organized, modern, disciplined public in and through the act of listening to this voice. The second depicts conditions that are far from ideal: modern music, certainly, but music that fails to generate any significant social solidarities. We see one singer and one listener, trapped in their own misery. The movement of the camera emphasizes the point. When Abd al-Halim is singing, we see his body, and eventually only his face. It is only when the orchestra is playing that we cut to Nawal. (Eventually we only see her face, too.) If, as Chion suggests, the technique of moving voices toward and away from the bodies visually represented on screen can be put in the service of particular dramatic and expressive ends, a contrast between the two scenes seems to be established here in precisely these terms. In the first, the voice circulates; in the second, it doesn't. In the first, it is depicted generating community; in the second, social atomization.

Walter Armbrust suggests that reflexivity and self-referentiality are general properties of popular Egyptian cinema, and of particular resonance in the rather specific colonial conditions in which an Egyptian modernity was being fashioned in the 1930s and 1940s. Abd al-Halim's films are clearly no exception, although they complicate the picture in certain ways. The madcap, helter-skelter, humorous reflexivity of *Ghazal al-Banat* is rather distant from Abd al-Halim's films. In *Maw'id Gharam*, for instance, as we have seen, Samir is asked to consider a musical career as a means of putting his talents, his leisure and his wealth to productive social effect, and thus win the love of Nawal. The (rapid) scenes in which Abd al-Halim is shown learning his craft and honing his musical skills before his first appearance in public are clearly not intended to be comic or fantastic. Rather, they assert that music is socially productive, socially self-constitutive *work*. One might want to distinguish, then, reflexivity as a kind of subversive, excessive humor operating in a colonial context (Armbrust's characterization of *Ghazal al-Banat*) from reflexivity operating in a revolutionary context, promoting a rather sober message about the artist in the service of the community. It is also worth noting that musicianship in the films of the older generation (Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, Farid al-Atrash, Umm Kulthum) is usually a sign of actual or potential social marginality, a problem to be overcome or an issue to be negotiated on the route to respectability, decency, and social approbation. In Abd al-Halim's films, it is usually the reverse. Music—properly modern music—is a social virtue.

Abd al-Halim's films seem to echo their predecessors, but also inject new concerns and preoccupations. The revolutionary context is important. Nasser's political power, to an extent unprecedented in Egyptian society, was mediated by the sound of his voice. This was a voice full not only of political power and persuasion, but of subtle emotional inflection and a certain kind of intimacy: a voice both public but also *close*. This was a public, one might say, in which the central institution was not the book, or the newspaper, or even the cinema, but the *microphone* (see Stokes, forthcoming). Gamal Abd al-Nasser and Abd al-Halim were linked closely in this regard. Like Nasser, Abd al-Halim, too, had a voice that exploited the microphone for its powers and effects.<sup>21</sup> His films, though, spell out the anxieties associated with this new technology of public address and mobilization. How does one guarantee the emotional effects of one's voice when those listening to it are not co-present, their reactions not gauged and calibrated, their feedback not at hand to help the speaker or singer shape his/her rhetoric, his/her improvisatory flow? In a dyadic scene of listenership, how is the listener to be protected, to be safeguarded from powerful emotions that burn too powerfully when not appropriately collectivized? Can mass media be relied on to reproduce, in other words, the kind of constructive emotional circulation of *tarab* culture?



Ethnographic approaches to mediation are potentially powerful because they do not have to rely primarily on speculative abstraction to render visible those potentialities that are constitutive of, and yet disavowed in, any social order. Given a well-chosen field site, an anthropologist has access, as events unfold, to the precarious relationship between determination and indeterminacy that structures mediation in the flow of social practice. Nonethnographic critical theorists of the media may strive to rescue or redeem these potentialities by projecting them into a radical future or mourning them in a receding past. But anthropologists enjoy the empirical benefits of being in the thick of it while not succumbing to the plain empiricism that characterizes instrumental and applied analyses of culture, globalization, and mediation. (Mazarella 2004:359)

One can sense the ways in which Abd al-Halim renders visible (and audible) potentialities constitutive of, and yet disavowed in, the Egyptian social order. If, for example, the dominant discourses of Egyptian social life since Nasser have been male-oriented, revolutionary, and laying a high store on wit and good humor, Abd al-Halim's appeal to women (often commented upon in his lifetime), and the current of melancholy, tearfulness, and sentimentalism that runs through his films and music, strike a very different note. One needs to ground these intuitions, though. Can



one aspire to a critical ethnography of Abd al-Halim Hafiz, in Mazarella's terms? Can one avoid the dangers of projecting one's sense of such "potentialities" onto a radical future, or mourning them in a receding past? What would constitute a "well-chosen field site" in this case, where the artist in question is dead and gone, his business interests dispersed, his voice and image omnipresent, but fleeting and elusive? How can one place oneself "in the thick of it" when one only has fragments, memories, silences? The difficulties involved in such a project are all too obvious.

Things can be "done," of course, despite—and in some cases because of—these very difficulties. Less plugged in to local networks of expertise and habits of scholarly deference and dependency, I found myself, a newcomer to Egyptian studies in 1999, able to notice and ponder at least some of the quirks, blind spots, disavowals, and silences that accumulate in the discourses surrounding such major cultural icons. Struggles to follow colloquial language, whether in conversation, watching films, or listening to recordings, occasionally could free me (in moments of exhaustion and frustration) to attend to nuances of language use before they had become fully naturalized, normalized, and "understood" in routinized ways. They also enabled me to consider how stories are being told, points being made, and emotional effects produced *beyond* the linguistic, narrowly conceived. It is precisely in these moments, one might argue, that one can get a rather direct access to the "precarious relationship between determination and indeterminacy" of which Mazarella speaks, a relationship one must surely understand if one is to get a sense of the complex social life still lived by Abd al-Halim Hafiz, his music, and his films in Egypt today.

I will conclude with a brief analysis of sites characterized, I believe, by just such a "precarious relationship between determination and indeterminacy." One concerns the public memorialization of Abd al-Halim Hafiz over the last decade. Abd al-Halim's music gradually was removed from the airwaves during Anwar Sadat's rule as a legacy of a Nasserite policy. His nationalist anthems, such a prominent feature of the Egyptian mediascape in the latter part of the 1960s, disappeared after Camp David and Sadat's peace with Israel. Hosni Mubarak succeeded Sadat in changing circumstances, characterized by growing popular support of the Palestinian intifada, and the decline of oil revenues and migrant remittances that previously had propped up the state and mitigated the effects of economic liberalization on the poorer sections of society. This produced an ambiguous and highly conflicted nostalgia for Nasser and the signs and symbols of his era, prominent among which was Abd al-Halim Hafiz. Celebrations of Abd al-Halim Hafiz's death, previously a matter of journalistic reminiscence, took a more official and overtly serious tone. Highbrow newspapers

began to join in the celebration with scholarly, rather than anecdotal and gossipy articles. The Cairo Opera celebrated anniversaries of his death with gala performances of songs he had made famous, and singers who had, to my eyes and ears, carefully studied not only Abd al-Halim's voice but also his mannerisms and general demeanor on stage. Cairophon, the state recording company, began to distribute Abd al-Halim's *wataniyat* (nationalist anthems) alongside those of Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab and Umm Kulthum. Official celebrations of the half-century of the revolution in July 2002 involved a sound-and-light show over the Nile in downtown Cairo, in which "Sura Sura," Abd al-Halim's nationalist anthem of 1967, to words by Salah Jahin and music by Kamal al-Tawil, was played repeatedly on the public address system.

And yet this official recuperation has in some regards been a rather cautious and selective affair. Cairo contains a number of statues of Umm Kulthum and Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, though none, at the moment, of Abd al-Halim Hafiz. Large new museums and research centers have been dedicated to Umm Kulthum (on Roda Island) and to Abd al-Wahhab (at the newly renovated State Conservatory near Ramses Square), though none have to Abd al-Halim Hafiz. There has been a disproportionate emphasis in the official recuperation of Abd al-Halim's political songs and the long concert songs sung at the end of his career. Only a relatively small proportion of his many film songs get sung in state-sponsored performances at the Cairo Opera and by state-sponsored ensembles elsewhere. Why this ambiguity and selectivity? On the one hand, I would venture, one sees a state anxious to recuperate the pride, glamour, and excitement of the Nasserite era, though equally anxious to distance itself from its social radicalism. On the other is a nostalgic intelligentsia, combing the past for recognizably "high cultural" signs of a vigorous political modernism that might yet be regained. The film songs and the film career have no obvious role to play in this recuperation, but they cannot be entirely forgotten, as long as the rest of his career is being celebrated. Hence an ambiguous, cautious, and highly selective top-down recuperation of Abd al-Halim that has focused disproportionately on his political songs, and the long concert songs of his late career. This ambiguity has been explored subtly in a number of recent films that have evoked the image (and soundtracks) of Abd al-Halim Hafiz, notably Muhammad Khan's *Zawjat Rajul Muhim* of 1987, and Khayri Bishara's *Ice Cream fi Glim* of 1992 (see Gordon 2002).

Another such site is the highly public struggle over the fate of the recording company that Abd al-Halim established with Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab and Magdi al-Amrussi, Sawt al-Fann. The Abd al-Halim trust, established by family members, contested Amrussi's right to exploit the large

catalogue that Sawt al-Fann had built up over the years, including not only many of the early Abd al-Halim recordings, but many of those of Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab, as well. The dispute rumbled on through the Egyptian press throughout the later 1990s and the early 2000s. At the same time, EMI, who had garnered the rights to Abd al-Halim's film songs and many of his later concert songs through the efforts of John Deakin in their Dubai office, were busy exploiting a relatively new market in CDs, both in the Arab world and among Diasporic audiences in Europe and the United States. Internet music providers were simply helping themselves. New legislation in 1998 opened the doors for the large transnational media corporations, Sony, AOL Time-Warner, and Vivendi, who quickly moved into Egyptian media markets. A newly formed conglomerate, the Arab Company for Arts and Publishing (known in Egypt as the "Funun") seized the moment, buying up the distribution rights to some nine hundred Egyptian films and a number of large recording companies, amongst them Sawt Libnan (which owned the rights to Farid al-Atrash's recordings) and Sawt al-Fann (Faulks 2001:74). Their aggressive expansion into Arab media markets (which included their purchase of the large entertainment complexes owned by the Renaissance Group and the Osman Group in Egypt, and the al-Masa chain in the Gulf, as well as launching their own film production company) eventually landed them in financial trouble. In 2004, they were bought out by Rotana, a major Saudi media conglomerate owned by al-Walid ibn Talal. Egyptian film critics launched a campaign to stop the sale of "heritage" to foreigners. The Egyptian government recently responded by proposing a law to protect cinematic and musical heritage (Awad 2004:235).

If there is a broad shift here as far as Abd al-Halim's music is concerned, it is from larger to smaller (and less controllable) commodity forms, and from circulation in public places (in movie theaters) to circulation in private places (in the home, on television, CD and DVD). This has been enabled by political and technological developments common to many parts of the world, in which miniaturization and privatization have gone hand in hand. However, the process has not gone without commentary or dispute in Egypt. As we have seen, Sawt al-Fann's claims to Abd al-Halim's music were disputed by family members. Local lobbies have protested the free circulation of his music on the internet, and its expropriation by foreign capital. The state has made half-hearted efforts to address these concerns to make a show of protecting heritage and cultural patrimony, all the while seeking to promote (selected aspects of) Abd al-Halim's legacy for its own political purposes, as described above. Here at least, though, Abd al-Halim's film music, in the smoky and jazzy original versions orchestrated by Ali Ismail and Andreas Reider, are being given a new lease of life, thanks

to the widely available EMI film soundtrack CDs. Although both state and corporations have struggled to control Abd al-Halim's legacy in recent years, no one version of this legacy yet predominates.

Finally, one can consider the musical spaces in which Abd al-Halim's songs still circulate. A newcomer to Cairo will quickly notice the sound of Abd al-Halim's voice, if he or she has been taught how to recognize it, more or less everywhere. One hears it on cassettes in taxicabs, on a popular state radio program (the *Idha'a al-Aghani*) often tuned into by shop and stall owners, and thus all over the streets of Cairo, and on late-night TV movies on the state channel, often on Thursdays as the weekends begin and families relax together in front of their televisions. As already mentioned, one heard his *wataniyat* on the radio and television with increasing frequency as the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution approached. Concerts of classical *takbt* music at official downtown venues such as the Cairo Opera and the Gumhurriya Theater include renditions of songs that Abd al-Halim made famous sung by young conservatory-trained singers. It is easy to lay one's hands on publications of his song lyrics and musical notations, particularly those published by the Dar al-Sharq al-Arabi, designed with educational intent (Fakhouri n.d.). Although I know relatively little about vocal training in Cairo, I can attest to the fact that learning classical instrumental music, one quickly encounters the quirky and winding instrumental introductions to Abd al-Halim's songs as exercises in teaching not only *turath*, but also *maqam* and instrumental technique. Abd al-Halim's music is, in a sense, monumental: deeply internalized and naturalized as part of the legitimate cultural order and as materially tangible as a historic mosque or a portrait of the president. In another sense, it is a pedagogical resource: something to be studied, dissected, picked over, discussed, and appreciated by people seeking to gain serious musical knowledge, a knowledge that will produce new things as well as simply reproduce the past.

Abd al-Halim's film songs linger in the memory of musicians in Cairo, though, in ways that cannot be entirely reduced to their monumental or pedagogical status. A personal anecdote will serve to illustrate. At the end of the summer of 2004, during one of the minor (pre-Ramadan) Qandil festivals, one of the various Ministry of Culture sponsored ensembles was to perform a concert of religious music at a small downtown venue. I attended out of curiosity, partly because I thought it might offer an interesting contrast to the larger concerts of religious music I had been to earlier that week. It was poorly advertised and even more poorly attended. Most of the "audience" turned out to be part of a state radio recording crew, who were setting up their equipment and doing sound checks for nearly an hour

after the concert was supposed to have started. Evidently the point of the exercise was the production of a radio concert to be aired at some subsequent point.

Within seconds of starting the concert proper, a buzz, a bang, and a yell from the mixing desk, followed by the acrid smell of burning plastic, suggested that this was not to be. An hour passed, the audience melted away, technicians were summoned, and the musicians kicked their heels. I made small talk and waited to see what would happen, having nothing better to do. It was at this point that the accordion player, sitting on the stage on his own, quietly struck up the accordion phrase that starts “Beyni wa Beynak Eh?” the Abd al-Halim film song from *Maw'id Gharam* discussed above. A handful of musicians joined him, singing along quietly to the end of the song. Another Abd al-Halim song from the movies followed, and then another and yet another, each attracting a different singer and a handful of instrumentalists who wandered on and off the stage. They sang quietly, but were listened to by those left in the concert hall, attracting smiles and applause at the end of each. The songs continued for about an hour and half. Soon it was midnight. The director, who seemed to me to have made a point of not joining in, listening to, or responding to the music on stage, apologized and sent everybody on their way.

The event said much to me about the complex ways in which Abd al-Halim is remembered today: a demonstration of musical chops and memory to peers; a sardonic and humorous evocation of a secular age in increasingly religious times; a kindling of social warmth in an anonymous modern space; a whiling away of time when the apparatus of officialdom breaks down. Where Abd al-Halim's music serves official purposes, monumentalizing *turath*, bringing musicians in conservatories and audiences in the large state-sponsored downtown concert halls into the disciplinary force field of Arab modernism, it serves unofficial purposes as well, in everyday spaces on the fringe of officialdom (for officialdom is omnipresent), spaces shaped by daydreams, boredom, frustration, humor. It is a curious and powerful property of Abd al-Halim's film music that it can shape such different kinds of cultural memory. Some, as we have seen, are very much determined by the apparatus of power and cultural legitimacy in Egyptian society. Others are more elusive, hinting at critique and a vision of how things still could be.

I am most grateful to John Deakin (formerly of EMI), Martin Hart (of widescreenmuseum.com), Ziyad al-Tawil (son of Kamal al-Tawil), and Zakariya Amir (former recording engineer in Studio 49, Cairo Radio) who

provided me, in interviews and e-mail correspondences, with much of the information that appears in these pages. I am indebted to Joel Gordon, Charles Hirschkind, Ron Inden, and Farouk Mustafa for patient feedback, thoughts, and encouragement as this project has progressed. If I haven't always been able to respond adequately here, I hope to in the future. I pursued some of this research, and did much thinking about it, on a fellowship generously provided by the Howard Foundation and by the Franke Institute for the Humanities at the University of Chicago. I use common and recognizable English orthography for Egyptian names as far as possible, but the IJMES standard for transliterating written Arabic elsewhere.

### Notes

1. Gamal Abd al-Nasser (also transliterated as Jamal abd al-Nasir), led the “Free Officers” in the coup of July 23, 1952, installing one of their number, Muhammed Naguib, as President. Naguib was eventually deposed, and Nasser, then vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, took over as President until his death on September 28, 1970. Land reform, the nationalization of resources and industry, and the development of pan-Arab socialism were early goals, though by the later 1950s, Nasser was absorbed by the suppression of dissent, and the collapse of public confidence after the catastrophic 1967 war against Israel. His rule took an increasingly authoritarian cast, and the later years were marked by increasingly close ties with the Soviet Union. He was succeeded by Anwar Sadat, a fellow Free Officer, who chose a diametrically opposed route: rapprochement with the West and Israel, and an “open door” (“*infitah*”) to foreign investment.

2. Bilharzia, otherwise known as schistosomiasis, is a parasitic disease picked up in water, often by wading or swimming. It gradually debilitates those who have caught it, affecting digestive and urinary systems, liver, and spleen, ultimately causing nervous system lesions and fibrosis. The disease is associated with poverty in Egypt; even in decline and death, Abd al-Halim was an emblematic figure.

3. The question has been broached in Egypt by Charles Hirschkind (see, for example, Hirschkind 2001), and, at a general and theoretical level, in Viet Erlmann's recent collection (Erlmann 2004, containing essays by Hirschkind, among others).

4. I draw from (and refer readers to) Walter Armbrust's detailed discussion of Mohammed Abd al-Wahhab (in Armbrust 1996, particularly chapters two and four) and the filmography that appears in a footnote (1996:238, f.n. 4). Abd al-Wahhab was a noted *oud* (lute) player, composer, and film star, born in 1907. He died of heart failure in 1991. His film career wound down in the 1950s; composition, including for his famous rival, Umm Kulthum, increasingly occupied him. For his longevity and continued activity as a singer and composer right up to his death, he was known as across the Arab world as the “musician of generations.”

5. Armbrust mentions that about nine hundred films were made in the heyday of the musical, which is to say the period stretching between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s (2002:237). Of these, approximately one-third might be described as musicals.

6. For a useful account of the history of the introduction of electronic media technologies in Egypt, see Boyd 1999. The “conventional” narrative being evoked at the end of this paragraph draws—perhaps a little crudely—on Ezzedine (1966)

and on Shafik for the impact of television (see particularly 1998:27). Ezzedine (1966) is emphatic on the subject of the ruination caused by film musicals. Both are particularly concerned with the domination of singers in the industry, the growing hegemony of their poor taste, and the high fees they were commanding. Shafik also finds little to praise in the musical cinema of this period. On the introduction of television, Abu-Lughod offers some important nuances. Recent television soaps effect an “emotionalization of the quotidian” (2005:124) thoroughly bound up with the nation-state project in Egypt. But their political effects are complex and hard to predict from their overt messages. Soaps like *Hilmiyya Nights*, which dominate much Egyptian television programming today, are thoroughly imbued with the ideologies of national development and Arab socialism held dear by the media elites who script and produce them. But they are also complicit in the religious conservatism and consumerism ushered in by Sadat’s *infitah* (economic “open door” policies) of the late 1970s. Soap morality, whilst individuated, is also squarely located in domestic networks and other collective environments. As a political force-field, they are often conflicting and contradictory.

7. Abd al-Halim’s final film, *Abi Fawq al-Shajjara*, reputedly cost LE 168,000 to make in 1967, an intermediary stage between the figures for the 1950s and those of today, where Shafik suggests a figure of LE 750,000, of which up to LE 300,000 will be spent on actors. A constant here is the high cost of securing the services of stars, leaving little for other production costs.

8. Vitalis (2000) and Shafik (1998) indicate annual production of some 49 films per year late in the 1940s, showing in some 315 movie theaters in Egypt.

9. On cinemas as sites of modern self-fashioning in other contexts, see Larkin 2002 and Hansen 1991.

10. Amrussi mentions that Mohammed Karim, respected director of the first Egyptian film musical, Abd al-Wahhab’s *al-Warda al-Bayda*, had Abd al-Wahhab very firmly in mind when he was crafting the Abd al-Halim character for *Dalila*; Abd al-Halim, apparently, dug his heels in and insisted on doing things his way (al-Amrussi 1994:291).

11. Mougi was, in 1956, still a schoolteacher (Mahir 1956). Hassanayn (1995) mentions his rising stock as a film-music composer, earning EL 600 for the two songs he often would compose for Abd al-Halim’s films in this period, each of which would typically have six songs, divided up between Kamal al-Tawil, Mohammed Mougi, and Munir Murad.

12. Cinemascope technology was an important contributor to these rising costs. *Dalila* was Abd al-Halim’s first experiment with Cinemascope. Briefly, Cinemascope involved an apparatus by which film images were compressed in the making of the film, and then expanded to fill a broad screen in new, specially designed movie theaters. The costs and licensing fees were, by all accounts, prohibitive. The movie apparently was a flop (al-Amrussi 1994:291), and his next several movies reverted to the old system. Perhaps the local industry was not yet ready to make the leap. Perhaps, too, audiences were slow to appreciate the new aesthetic of Cinemascope, appropriate for epics in which one could watch action and sound moving around on the big screen, captured by a more or less stationary camera and stereo recording, but less appropriate for intimate dramas, in which head shots and close-ups of facial expressions were important, and much could be made, dramatically, of a relatively mobile camera (as my analysis of *Mawid Gharam* here suggests).

13. In what sense were the films “successful”? This is extremely difficult to establish in a quantitative sense. Otherwise uncritical biographers (for example, al-Amrussi) comment that *Dalila*, his first Cinemascope film, was not a success,

though whether this means that numbers were low, or that it attracted adverse comments in the press is hard to tell. Likewise, *Abi Fawq al-Shajjara* apparently showed for a full year in the Diana cinema in downtown Cairo when it was released in 1969, though it is difficult to say whether this also means that it showed for a corresponding long period of time elsewhere. Certainly, leafing through the pages of the popular press of the 1950s, *Ruz al-Yusuf*, *Kawakib*, *Akbir Sa’a*, articles on Abd al-Halim start to proliferate very soon after 1955, and advertisements and promotional pieces on his films begin to predominate. They were, at the very least, successful in capturing media space, whatever the details of their reception.

14. On *tarab*, see, notably, Racy 2002. Racy describes the intimate art of “enchantment” in Arab classical music, involving knowledge of “heritage” (*turath*), *makam* (modes), *qafiat* (cadential patterns), the unwritten rules of ensemble playing and accompaniment, improvisation (*taqasim*), and the intricate protocols of the musical gathering, involving musicians and listeners, the latter, in key regards, co-authors of the musical event. *Tarab*, as defined by Racy, describes the key aesthetic goals of urban art music practice in the major urban centers of the Arab Levant, between Cairo and Aleppo from, roughly, the later nineteenth century to the present day. On the complex imbrications of *tarab* and modernity in Syria, see Shannon 2006; on sentimentalism and “the limits of enchantment” in the Arab world, see Stokes 2007.

15. It is worth mentioning that by this stage, the great diva Umm Kulthum had consolidated her hold of the national media, assuming, among other things, the presidency of the powerful Musician’s Union in 1945. This gave her significant control over broadcasting, and facilitated her own increasing domination of the airwaves (if not cinema, a space she effectively ceded to Muhammed abd al-Wahhab, Farid al-Atrash, Abd al-Halim Hafiz, and others). By the time of Abd al-Halim’s film, her Thursday evening live concerts were already an institution. See Danielson 1997.

16. Note the song “Gabbar” in *Ma budet al-Jamahir* of 1965. Abd al-Halim’s rise to fame is tracked, during the course of the song: As the press rolls, larger and larger audiences appear in a montage in front of him and a globe spins in the background.

17. The opening tag apparently was inspired by the theme tune to *Woody the Woodpecker* (interview, Ziyad al-Tawil, September 2003).

18. These four- and five-note pitch-sets are often referred to theoretically as tetracords and pentacords, or as *jins* (plural *ajnas*) in Arabic, a version of the ancient Greek *genus*, from which they derive. Each constitutes a specific and recognizable affect in the Arab musical universe, and movement between them constitutes an important form of musical signification. For a detailed and clear account, see Marcus 2002.

19. These long, meandering instrumental introductions are by no means unique, but have a distinct aesthetic function and purpose in Abd al-Halim’s films. See Stokes 2007, focusing on the finale of *Lahn al-Wafa* (1955) for more discussion of a similar instrumental opening, this time by Riyadh al-Sunbati (a composer associated closely with Umm Kulthum, who only worked on this one Abd al-Halim film). The kinship between these rambling modernist fantasies and the instrumental music of some of Abd al-Halim’s subsequent nationalist anthems are to be noted, and discussed, in a preliminary way, in this article.

20. The first of these long concert songs is often considered to be Umm Kulthum’s celebrated collaboration with Abd al-Wahhab, *Inta ‘Umri*, of 1964. With repetitions and improvisations later in life, concert versions of this song could last over two hours, containing within it most of the elements of the classical Arab suite form (separate songs, instrumental numbers, solo and chorus items, and vocal

and instrumental improvisations, all connected by *makam*). See Danielson 1997:136–37.

21. Abd al-Halim's use of the microphone was often the topic of commentary and satire, if one is to judge by the cartoons that appear in *Ruz al-Yusuf and Akhir Sa'a* at the time. Umm Kulthum, by contrast, could manage without, and made much of her power to fill a concert hall with her unaided voice (Danielson 1997). For a detailed discussion, see Stokes (forthcoming).

### Works Cited

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- al-Amrussi, Magdi. 1994. *A'iz al-Nas*. Cairo: al-Tab'a al-Rabi'a.
- Armbrust, Walter. 1996. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2000. "The Golden Age Before the Golden Age." In *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust, 292–327. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2002. "The Impact of the Media on Egyptian Music." In *Garland Encyclopedia of Ethnomusicology*. Vol. 6, *The Middle East*, ed. V. Danielson, Scott Marcus, and Dwight Reynolds, 233–41. New York: Garland.
- Awad, Sherif. 2004. "Sex, Cries and Video Tape." *Egypt Today* 25, no. 9 (25th Anniversary Issue): 230–35.
- Boyd, Douglas. 1999. *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East*, (3d Edition). Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Chion, Michel. 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Costello-Branco, Salwa al-Shawan. 2001. "Performance of Arab Music in 20th Century Egypt." In *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Middle East, Volume 6, ed. Virginia Danielson, Scott Marcus, and Dwight Reynolds, 559–62. New York: Garland.
- Danielson, Virginia. 1997. *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- El-Charkawi, Galal. 1966. "History of the U.A.R. Cinema (1896–1962)." In *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, ed. Georges Sadoul, 69–97. Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema and Television.
- Erlmann, Viet, ed. 2004. *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*. Oxford: Berg.
- Ezzedine, Salah. 1966. "The role of Music in Arabic Films." In *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, ed. Georges Sadoul, 46–53. Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema and Television.
- Fakhouri, Jozef. n.d. *Abd al-Halim Hafiz: I'adad wa Tadwin*, (two volumes). Beirut: Dar al-Sharq al-Arabi.
- Faulks, Ben. 2001. "Whose Property?" In *Egypt Almanac 2001: A Yearly Review of the Egyptian Scene*. Wilmington: Egypto-file.
- Gordon, Joel. 2002. *Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser's Egypt*. Chicago: Center for Middle East Studies.
- Hansen, Miriam. 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hassanayn, Adil. 1995. *Abd al-Halim Hafiz: Ayamna al-Hilwa*. Cairo: Amadu.

Hilmi, Hassan. 1966. "The Industry in the U.A.R. 1955–58." In *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, ed. Georges Sadoul, 166–67. Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema and Television.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2001. "The Ethics of Listening: Cassette Sermon Audition in Contemporary Cairo." *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 3: 623–49.

Larkin, Brian. 2002. "The Materiality of Cinema Theaters in Northern Nigeria." In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Faye Ginsberg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, 319–36. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mahir, Ahmad. 1956. "Qissat al-Malahhin al-Rabi wara Umm Kulthum." *Akhir Sa'a* (no number): 20–21.

Marcus, Scott. 2002. "The Eastern Arab System of Melodic Modes in Theory and Practice: A Case Study of Maqam Bayyati." In *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Volume Six: *The Middle East*, ed. Virginia Danielson, Scott Marcus, and Dwight Reynolds, 33–45. New York: Routledge.

Mazarella, William. 2004. "Culture, Globalization, Mediation." *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 33: 345–67.

Racy, Ali Jihad. 2002. *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shafiq, Viola. 1998. *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press.

Shannon, Jonathan. 2006. *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.

Stokes, Martin. 2007. "Adam Smith and the Dark Nightingale: On Twentieth Century Sentimentalism." *Twentieth Century Music* 3, no. 1: 1–18.

———. Forthcoming. "Abd al-Halim's Microphone." In *Music and the Play of Power: Music, Politics and Ideology in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin. London: Ashgate.

Vitalis, Robert. 2000. "American Ambassador in Technicolor and Cinemascope: Hollywood and Revolution on the Nile." In *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond*, ed. Walter Armbrust, 269–91. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wahab, Munir Abdel. 1966. "The Industry in the U.A.R. 1964–5." In *The Cinema in the Arab Countries*, ed. Georges Sadoul, 168–70. Beirut: Interarab Centre of Cinema and Television.

Zubaida, Sami. 2002. "Mass Media and the Arab Public Sphere." *ISIM Bulletin* 40.

### Filmography

*Maw'id Gharam*, 1955. Gamal Elleissi Films, Cairo.

### Discography

*Aghani Film "Maw'ed Gharam"/Songs from the Film "Maw'ed Gharam."* Abdel Halim Hafez, Soutelphan 1995/EMI Arabia 1996 0946 310597–2 8.