

ASPECTS OF ADAPTATION IN THE EGYPTIAN SINGING FILM

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores aspects of adaptation in the Egyptian singing film in the period from 1932 to 1962. The primary types of adaptation examined are those that are evident in the stories the films told, the ways in which the songs functioned within the stories, and the music for which these films formed the setting. Research was conducted through the viewing of over sixty Egyptian films as well as time spent in Cairo to study Arabic language and music, and to collect primary sources in the form of films, press books, books, and periodicals.

The goal of this study is to deepen our understanding of both the films and the music they feature as creative examples of adaptation that resulted in stories that resonated with Egyptian values and humor, and music that appealed to Egyptian taste.

This examination also affords us the opportunity to consider the nature of cultural objects when they are adapted for use outside of their culture of origin. In the case of the movie musical, this study reveals that while plot structures, usually considered central to the identification of a film genre, were altered to suit local tastes and values, songs functioned within the plots in very similar ways to those featured in Hollywood musicals of the same period. This fact suggests a refinement of the definition of the movie musical in an international context that emphasizes the function of the films to present musical performance. The songs themselves exhibit hybrid tendencies that incorporate elements borrowed from

Western popular and classical musical practice within compositions that adhere to Arab practice regarding intonation and overall structure.

Finally, this study is intended as a case study in narrative musical film outside the Hollywood system. As such, it seeks to add to the growing literature on this topic and provide a perspective that is informed by various scholarly disciplines including film studies, anthropology, and comparative literature. Considering both film and musical genres can reveal essential characteristics of the adapted objects as well as values and tastes that are important to the culture that adapted them.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION, TRANSLATION AND DATES

Table i. Library of Congress ALA-LC Romanization tables.

Letters of the Alphabet

Initial	Medial	Final	Alone	Romanization
ا	ا	ا	ا	omit (see Note 1)
ب	ب	ب	ب	b
ت	ت	ت	ت	t
ث	ث	ث	ث	th
ج	ج	ج	ج	j
ح	ح	ح	ح	ḥ
خ	خ	خ	خ	kh
د	د	د	د	d
ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ	dh
ر	ر	ر	ر	r
ز	ز	ز	ز	z
س	س	س	س	s
ش	ش	ش	ش	sh
ص	ص	ص	ص	ṣ
ض	ض	ض	ض	ḍ
ط	ط	ط	ط	ṭ
ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ	ẓ
ع	ع	ع	ع	‘ (ayn)
غ	غ	غ	غ	gh
ف	ف	ف	ف	f (see Note 2)
ق	ق	ق	ق	q (see Note 2)
ك	ك	ك	ك	k
ل	ل	ل	ل	l
م	م	م	م	m
ن	ن	ن	ن	n
ه	ه	ه , هـ	ه , هـ	h (see Note 3)
و	و	و	و	w
ي	ي	ي	ي	y

Vowels and Diphthongs

ā	a	ā	ā (see Rule 5)	ā	ī
ū	u	ū	ū (see Rule 6(a))	ū	aw
ī	i	ī	ī	ī	ay

The Arabic transliterated and translated in this dissertation is mostly colloquial Egyptian. The transliteration system is based on the Library of Congress 1997 edition of the ALA-LC Romanization Tables (Table i). Exceptions to this system occur in two main areas: names and Egyptian pronunciation.

Names

Table ii. Transliteration of featured performers.

TRANSLITERATION	ARABIC
Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (Moḥammad 'Abd' al-Wahhāb)	محمد عبد الوهاب
Farid al-Atrash (Farīd al-Ātrash)	فريد الأطرش
Abdel Halim Hafiz ('Abd' al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiḍ)	عبد الحليم حافظ

The names of some prominent Egyptians have acquired common spellings in English. In particular, I have chosen a simplified English spelling, without diacritics, for the three main film stars featured in this study (Table ii.). There are also other famous Arab figures whose names have acquired widely used spellings in English. These include both individuals involved in the arts and other public figures, such as Umm Kulthum, Youssef Chahine, Taha Hussein,

and Gamal Abdel Nasser. Aside from these limited exceptions all names are transliterated according the Library of Congress standards with diacritics.

Egyptian pronunciation

Table iii. Transliteration of Egyptian pronunciation

<u>TRANSLATION</u>	<u>TRANSLITERATION</u>	<u>ARABIC</u>
many / actor	t / s (katīr / mumasil)	ث (كثير / ممثل)
handsome or beautiful	g (gamīl)	ج (جميل)
that / to wilt	z / d (zalik / dibil)	ذ (ذلك / ذبل)
one who has committed the Qur'an to memory	z (ḥāfiz)	ظ (حافظ)
my heart	' ('albī)	ق (قلبي)

Egyptian colloquial Arabic (ECA) has some differences in pronunciation from the Arabic spoken elsewhere. These exceptions are not always utilized, particularly in more formal speech and song lyrics. In the case of song lyrics, artistic considerations may play a part in the choice of pronunciation. Table iii lists the most common alternate pronunciations of consonants, along with word examples and translations. Differences in the pronunciation of vowels are not indicated in the transliterations.

Translation

The majority of the translations of quotations from books, articles, and song lyrics were created by me, with the help of Arabic scholars. Where indicated

they are quoted directly from translations made by others. Translations of film titles are based on known common translations found in literature on the films and on commercial recordings (VHS tapes and DVDs).

Dates

Wherever possible, the birth and death dates for individuals have been provided. In some cases the birth dates are approximate and based on available information in books and on the internet, in other cases they were not available. The work of M. M. Badawi and (1987 and 1988) and Philip Sadgrove (2007) provided dates for many of the musical plays discussed in chapter 2. Dates for the films were gleaned from Maḥmūd Qassim's encyclopedia of Egyptian film (Qassim 2006) as well as from advertisements and references in various texts.

Chapter 1. Aspects of Adaptation and Periodization

Globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization, and to the extent that different societies appropriate the materials of modernity differently, there is still ample room for the deep study of specific geographies, histories, and languages. (Appadurai 1996, 17)

A play or film is a musical if its primary entertainment value and investment lie in the musical numbers themselves. (Mast 1987, 2)

This dissertation examines aspects of narrative, cinematic and musical adaptation in the Egyptian singing film from the introduction of sound film in 1932 to the nationalization of the film industry in 1962. This examination is organized by decade and prefaced by a historical survey of musically enhanced narrative in Egypt. The main focus of this study is to demonstrate the ways in which foreign, both Western and Middle Eastern, models were indigenized for local consumption by Egyptian filmmakers and composers. What was changed illustrates cultural values that were important to mid-twentieth-century Egyptians while what remained the same helps us to identify some essential characteristics of the borrowed forms.

Narrative musical film is an excellent subject for the study of adaptation in that it allows us to examine a variety of aspects of the process. For example, the content of the stories was often often tailored to appeal to local values. In particular, the predominance of melodrama in Egyptian films is a striking

difference from the American model that is also evident in other musical film systems, such as those that have developed in India and Mexico. In the case of Egyptian film, French novels and plays were early sources for narrative adaptation. The use of English and American narrative models became more common in the 1940s but the plots often included some melodramatic element. After the 1952 Egyptian revolution, filmmakers mixed melodrama with a realist approach inspired by Italian neorealism and Soviet socialist realism in a return to the nineteenth-century Egyptian conception of Western-style drama as an educational tool.

In addition, the plots of the Egyptian films discussed in this study reflect negotiations with modernity in an increasingly cosmopolitan urban Egyptian society. The issues explored in these films include the conflict between conceptions of romantic love and the local tradition of arranged marriage; the stigma associated with being a professional musician; and shifting conceptions of Egyptian, and Arab identity.

The ways in which songs functioned within narrative structures are more consistent across the various manifestations of the movie musical outside of the Hollywood system, but the extra-filmic cultural functions of the songs are unique to each interpretation. The incorporation of foreign musical elements in the composition of the songs provides yet another opportunity for examining the

process of adaptation both from the viewpoint of the adopting culture and considering the phenomenon of transcultural genres, such as tango. These songs are examples of how musical styles, genres, and even compositions, have been utilized outside of their culture of origin and incorporated into songs that were not meant to be imitations but instead were hybrid forms in which indigenous musical aesthetics predominated.

In addition, a study as this can contribute to refining the definition of the movie musical. The ways in which narrative structures have been altered while methods of integrating songs into the stories have been more closely imitated supports a definition of the movie musical that, unlike other film genres, is based on the centrality of the music and the mechanisms that are utilized for facilitating musical performance.

Existing scholarship on Egyptian music and film includes examinations that focus on individual aspects of the Egyptian singing film. Ethnomusicological studies, such as Virginia Danielson's monograph on Umm Kulthum (Danielson 1997) and Nabil Salim Azzam's dissertation on Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (Azzam 1990), have revealed a great deal about the songs and the singers but little about the nature of the films themselves. Film scholar Viola Shafik (1998, 2007) and anthropologist Walter Armbrust (1996, 2000, 2003) have made significant contributions to the understanding of the forms and cultural contexts of

the films, which can certainly be enriched by a discussion of the songs for which they formed the setting. This study not only considers these aspects in detail but also the ways in which they affected one another. It is informed by the research and ideas of scholars from various disciplines, including film studies, theater studies, anthropology, and literary criticism, and thus provides a more comprehensive view of these films and their music.

For this exploration of adaptation I have chosen Egyptian singing films, locally referred to as *al-aflām al-ghinā'iyyah*. This is the term that was used by Egyptians when I discussed these films with them, and this designation is important because, in the Egyptian film system, singers were not expected to dance and dancers were not expected to sing. Films that centered on a dancer as star were a slightly different but related genre that often also incorporated singing, but the songs were not often integrated into the plots of the films. Singing films sometimes featured a dancer in a secondary role, but the main attraction was always the singing star. In addition, these singers were often also the composers of the songs they sang and were expected to be able to improvise within the Arabic modal system in a sophisticated way. These are two more ways in which the movie musical was adapted in Egypt in order to conform to local musical practice.

In order to narrow the focus of this study I feature three singing stars whose films exemplify dominant tendencies in the genre as it was manifest in Egypt: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (c.1910-1991), Farid al-Atrash (c.1915-1974), and Abdel Halim Hafiz (1929-1977). The first two of these also composed the songs they sang, thus providing the possibility for enriched analyses of their songs in terms of both compositional and performance style. The importance of composers as icons of Egyptian culture is illustrated by caricatures of them that appeared in print [Fig. 1.1].¹ These three stars also exemplified an ideal version of the Egyptian man, from the conservative elegance of Abdel Wahhab, who was both traditional and cosmopolitan, to the nightclub dandy often played by Farid in the 1940s, to the earnest and honest model of a post-revolution man often portrayed by Abdel Halim. The poets who wrote the lyrics for the songs will also be considered, where pertinent, but they are not the focus of this study.

One might ask why I have chosen to study films that have been called “slavish imitations” of Hollywood.² Film critics, both Egyptian and Western, have often been harsh in their assessment of this ‘Hollywood on the Nile’. In 1958, Jacob Landau declared that though “literature, music and the plastic arts represent a synthesis of local Arabic tradition and European innovations, the

¹ Figures are included at the end of each chapter.

² Aḥmad Korshīd 1953 – “The Crisis of Egyptian Cinema, *Akḥbār al-Sīnimā*, September 1953, p.12

modern theater and cinema in the Arab countries were wholly foreign products” (Landau 1958, 2). In a more recent assessment, Claude Michel Cluny accused the “cineastes” of Cairo and Alexandria of acculturation, claiming that they “allowed themselves to be dominated by scarcely analyzed European ideas” (quoted in Shafik 1998, 5).³ The Egyptian film critic Samīr Farīd has suggested that, though these films were made in Egypt, their content was Western, and that the reason for this is the “prevalence of the Western model in Egyptian filmmaking” (quoted in Armbrust 1996, 112).⁴ Such assessments discount indigenous creativity and fail to consider the ways in which the adopted model was adapted.

Putting aside the question of whether or not Egypt is a Third World country, Third World Cinema scholarship may be more useful. Teshome Gabriel has proposed three phases of development in Third World Cinema that might be applied to the Egyptian film industry. In the first phase of “unqualified assimilation,” “Hollywood thematic concerns of ‘entertainment’ predominate” and the sole purpose of the products is to generate profits. The second phase

³ Quoted from Cluny, Claude Michel. 1984. “al-Sīnimā al-maghribīa” (“North African cinema”). In *al-Sīnimā al-`Arabīa wa lfrīqīa / Arabic and African Cinema*. Muhammad Kamil al-Qalyubi, ed. Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadāta. p. 46

⁴ Farīd, Samīr. 1986. “Ṣūrat al-insān al-Miṣrī ‘alā al-shāsha bayn al-aflām al-istihlākiyya wa-l-aflām al-fanniyya.” (“The Portrayal of the Egyptian on the Screen Between Commercial and Art Films”) In *al-Insān al-Miṣrī ‘alā al-shāsha / The Egyptian on the Screen*. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization. p. 209.

exhibits an indigenization of the model, including control of talents, production, and distribution, as well as the development of an indigenous style. Gabriel describes the third and final phase as characterized by the nationalization of the industry and the use of cinema as an ideological tool (Gabriel 1994, 341-344). Egyptian cinema does not fit neatly into this scenario because the model was indigenized early on in its development and only later became more concerned with emulating the Hollywood model. Gabriel's final phase, however, is evident in the post-revolution Egyptian musicals of the 1950s, but these films also exhibit indigenous preferences for certain kinds of stories and music, as well as a continuing emphasis on entertaining the audience.

My approach has more in common with those of Shafik and Armbrust, who have both considered Egyptian films as cultural objects that illustrate not clear-cut acculturation or resistance to the hegemony of the West but instead a dialogue that reflects the negotiation of a modern Egyptian identity, in which filmmakers and composers sought to appropriate useful elements of foreign forms and concepts without sacrificing what they valued in their own culture. Shafik has proposed that "The idea of cinema as an alien cultural element, implanted in an 'authentic,' quasi-virgin Arab culture, has to be questioned in the same way as the notion of cultural 'authenticity' " (Shafik 1998, 5). She has also suggested that it is inappropriate to label the Egyptian musical as a "variation on

Hollywood,” and that such a view “ignores the specific needs of the Arab audience and their rootedness in native culture” (Shafik 1998, 107). I also agree with Armbrust that the Third World viewpoint may not so easily apply in this case and that “to interpret Egyptian popular culture either as straightforward imitation of the West, or, conversely, as cryptic resistance to hegemonic power, would as often as not lead one to misunderstand the character of the art” (Armbrust 1996, 3). As is evident in the films discussed in the following chapters, “blind adoption of Western culture has never been an unambiguous or uncontested feature of modern Egypt” (ibid.).

These issues highlight the importance of Egyptian singing films as cultural objects, which anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge have pointed out are “vehicles for cultural significance and the creation of group identities.” In their view, “each society appears to bring to these forms its own special history and traditions, its own cultural stamp, its own quirks and idiosyncrasies” (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1998, 5). As such objects, the films, and the songs they featured, have had a life beyond their original presentations, becoming icons that continue to be referenced and enjoyed by audiences throughout the Arab world. In addition, the Egyptian cinema industry is part of the complex of mass media that has emerged in the last two centuries.

Finally, these films are valuable ethnographic objects in that they allow us not only to hear but also to see the major singing stars of twentieth-century Egypt. In the first film starring Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (*al-Warda' al-Baīḍā* / *The White Rose*, 1933) we even have rare examples of live performance on camera, before the cinematic practice of lip-syncing to pre-recorded music became the norm. Singing films, and the associated dancing films, were major venues for musical performers in mid-twentieth century Egypt and thus provide a variety of examples of musical performance practice.

Imitation vs. Adaptation

A word often applied in criticisms of Egyptian commercial film produced in the mid-twentieth century is “imitation.”. Discussion of this process is evident as early as the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. For Plato (428 BCE – 348 BCE), a visual representation of a physical object that was itself modeled on an unchanging eternal form was an imitation of an imitation and thus even less valuable than the object itself. In contrast, Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE) appreciated the role of imitation (*mīmēsis*) in learning and in the creative process. In Latin, the term became *imitatio* and its artistic usefulness continued to be debated.

The notion that what is created in the process of imitation is inferior to the original continues to be a central issue in the critical use of the term. It has informed evaluations of Egyptian filmmaking as an imitation of Western models, thus devaluing Egyptian commercial films in comparison to the Hollywood originals. Ali Jihad Racy has discussed the critical usage of the term *taqlīd* (“Imitation”) in relation to music and has pointed out that criticism is “usually harsh when an Egyptian artist is considered to be blindly imitating Western music, especially popular music” (Racy 1982, 400). In this case, its usage implies a lack of creativity and a process of acculturation that threatens the existence of indigenous artistic culture. As noted by Shafik in reference to Egyptian cinema, this type of criticism suggests that Western culture has been passively received in the Arab world. I agree with her that it has not been adopted completely or without resistance (Shafik 1998, 7).

That resistance is evident in the process of adaptation. Thus, appropriation and indigenization, which suggest active creativity on the parts of the borrowers, are more useful terms than imitation and acculturation in describing the processes involved in creating Egyptian singing films and film songs. First and foremost it was the technology of sound film that was appropriated from the West by Egyptian filmmakers to create films that would appeal to Egyptian, and wider Arab, markets. Narrative models were selectively

appropriated to appeal to local preferences, and often indigenized in their content to conform to local values. Some of the methods of integrating songs into a narrative were already in use in the local practices of musically enhanced narrative. While other devices, such as the large-scale finale production number, were borrowed from Hollywood, the cultural references included in their content were often specific to the Arab world. In the musical style of the songs featured in Egyptian singing films, Western musical styles and techniques were appropriated as compositional elements that were clearly subordinate to dominant local practice regarding intonation, vocal timbre, and song structure. The only area in which direct imitation of Western music is evident is in quotations of Western compositions, which were usually brief and undeveloped or altered in intonation and/or melodic structure. The alterations apparent in these aspects of the Egyptian singing film suggest that they would be more productively considered as adaptations than as imitations.

Linda Hutcheon has proposed a definition of adaptation as process and product that is particularly useful in discussing these films (Hutcheon 2006). As Hutcheon pointed out, the word adaptation is used to describe both the method of creation and the resulting product. In the process of creation an original work or works is re-interpreted in some way. The result of this process is the adapted work, a product upon which a further process of reception takes place. In the

reception process, according to Hutcheon, the original model continues to resonate through our memory of it, somewhat like the original text of a palimpsest⁵ (Hutcheon 2006, 7-8). In the case of the Egyptian singing film, we can see the films themselves and the songs they featured as products that illustrate the processes of adaptation involved in their creation. These products were also subject to the process of reception by an audience that, at least in part, was aware of the original foreign models.

In Arabic the term used to describe adaptation in music and film is *al-iqtibās*, which can be translated as “excerption / quotation,” “borrowing,” or “plagiarism.” Racy has suggested that this is a less demeaning charge than *taqlīd* (“Imitation”) and includes “adaptation” amongst its meanings. The use of *iqtibās* in describing Abdel Wahhab’s compositions reflects an assessment of his work as more than blind imitation (Racy 1982, 401).

We must also consider the reasons for these appropriations, which involve the aspirations of Egyptians to modernize their culture through innovations inspired by the West. As noted by Racy, Arabic terms describing innovation can be double-edged, reflecting concerns over the benefits of progress at the risk of

⁵ A palimpsest is a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another. The term has also come to be used to refer to something that is multilayered and still retains traces of its earlier form. (OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136319?rskey=jBi1zU&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed January 21, 2012).

sacrificing tradition. He has described the term *taṭwīr* (“development”), for example, as being equated with “both making the music artistically more sophisticated and rendering it more modern,” but has also noted that it carries “strong connotations of Westernization” (Racy 1982, 394-95). To be considered a product of *taṭwīr*, an innovative work must, however, not only meet standards of Arabic taste but also “maintain the essential character of Egyptian music” (ibid. 395). *Tajdīd*, a term describing a more conservative form of modernization, is often applied to the songs that were sung by the most revered of Egyptian singers, Umm Kulthum (1904-1975), in which the foreign elements were commonly restricted to the arrangement of the compositions (size of ensemble, instrumentation, use of harmony). This term, which can also be translated as “renewal,” implies a connection with tradition (*turāth*), which has been significant in Egyptian and Islamic thought. Egyptian singing films featured this concept as a continuing theme in their references to *isnād*, which, in Islamic tradition, refers to the uninterrupted chain of authorities on which a tradition is based. In addition, as discussed by Danielson in reference to Umm Kulthum, assessments of singers are informed by perceptions of the source of their authenticity in their religious training in Qur’anic recitation (Danielson 1991a). In the broader context of mass communication, Armbrust has proposed that “while intellectuals allow for European influence on their modernism, they also insist strongly that the roots of

their transition to modernity lie in their own culture, and that the essence of Egyptian modernism is to maintain an unbroken link with their own tradition” (Armbrust 1996, 41).

Mass Culture and the Egyptian Singing Film

The complex of technological advances that has come to be called mass communication has created what Appadurai (1996) has described as a “mediascape” that carries ideas, images, and sounds, often emanating from the dominant culture of the West, over large distances, and distributes them to a wide range of the world’s population. Commercial film is a common site for responding to this influx and an example of what Renato Rosaldo calls “cultural border zones” (Rosaldo 1993, 217), where relationships between cultures are negotiated. In Egypt, this flow of information provided models that were adapted by the writers and directors of singing films. In addition, these films were made possible by Egypt’s involvement in the “technoscape” that facilitated this distribution as early as the introduction of the printing press to Egypt by Napoleon at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Finally, the Egyptian film industry began as an international enterprise, with investors from both Europe and the Middle East. The films it produced were exported to other Arabic-speaking

countries, further connecting them to what Appadurai has termed the “financescape.”

Before the development of mass communication, artistic borrowing was largely confined to neighboring cultures or contact brought about by expeditions of discovery and/or conquest by powerful empires. The invention of the printing press and, later, audio recording, greatly increased the distribution of ideas and artistic forms outside of their original cultural context. This fact may have made it easier to adapt musical genres and styles for local consumption without the need to imitate the clothing, venue, and performance structure of their original manifestations. Sound film provided models for musical performance, such as the large-scale Hollywood production number, as well as a set of narrative models that were appropriated and adapted by Egyptian filmmakers.

As part of the concern with adaptation that is central to this study, it is important to look at both sides of the issue, to investigate what happens to genres when they become transcultural. As such, this is also a case study of the movie musical as a transcultural genre that considers what is altered in the process of adaptation and what remains largely the same. In the case of the Egyptian singing film, it is evident that borrowed narrative models were commonly altered while the methods of integrating songs into them were more closely imitated. Musical genres such as the Argentine tango song were also

subject to interpretations that imitated enough of the rhythmic, melodic, and structural tendencies of the form to allow us to identify them. At the same time, they were subject to local musical practice regarding intonation and compositional structure and were often relegated to a subordinate position within a composition.

The Movie Musical as a Transcultural Genre

Genre is defined by the Oxford American Dictionary as a category of artistic composition that is characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter.⁶ As was noted as early as the writing of Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the similarities that make it possible to identify a genre are the result of imitation. What is imitated is what defines the genre through its repeated usage, while what is original is what distinguishes each work from its model and makes it more than just a copy. In literature, organizational structures and narrative tendencies help to identify genres, while the specific contents distinguish the work as original. As suggested by Steve Neale, film genres are best understood as processes that are dominated by repetition, but “they are also marked fundamentally by difference, variation, and change” (Neale 2000a, 165)

⁶ OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77629?redirectedFrom=genre> (accessed January 21, 2012).

The majority of film genres, such as melodrama and romantic comedy, are marked by the repetition of certain narrative tendencies. The movie musical differs from such genres in a crucial way in that its central defining characteristic is the centrality of musical performance. Investigations of this genre in its international manifestations highlight the fact that it is this aspect that is imitated most closely. Some narrative models have been adopted as well, but usually with some alteration. Other generic narrative models have also been adopted that are not usually associated with the Hollywood musical. In particular, the popularity of musical melodrama not only in Egypt but also in India and Mexico shows that a conceptual model may be adopted without the associated narrative ones.

Analysts of film genre have often turned to literary criticism for theoretical models. Many have begun their discussions with some mention of Aristotle's *Poetics* and the process of imitation that he described is practically the only characteristic that remains undisputed. The adoption of literary models in the analysis of film genres is most apparent in Rick Altman's "semantic/syntactic" approach to genre criticism. The essence of Altman's thesis lies in a process wherein a set of semantic elements, among which may be included music, stabilize over time into recognizable plot syntax. Altman has insisted that "A genre does not exist fully until a method is found of building its semantics into a stable syntax" (Altman 1987, 115).

In this process from semantic to syntactic dominance, Altman has suggested that two corpuses are established: first an “inclusive” list based on the recognition of semantic elements (for example, he cites the Western as being equated with a film that takes place in the American West), and later an “exclusive” list that reflects those films, such as *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), that have come to be regarded as models of the American musical (Altman 1999, 216-217). Neale has criticized this aspect of Altman’s approach, saying, “I do not believe the aim of generic analysis is the redefinition of a corpus of films ... We can easily end up identifying the purpose of generic analysis with the rather fruitless attempt to decide which films fit, and therefore properly belong to, which genres” (Neale 2000a, 162).

A more useful approach focuses on the role of recognition and associated audience expectations regarding a particular genre. As the repeated usage of both semantic elements and syntactic structures is central to the phenomenon of genre, it is logical to assume that audiences will expect a particular genre to include certain semantic elements and/or follow familiar patterns of plot syntax. Neale has proposed that “genres are not simply bodies of work or groups of films ... they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis that spectators bring with them to the cinema and that interact with films.” These systems “provide spectators with a means of recognition and

understanding” and “regimes” of “verisimilitude” which “vary from genre to genre.” Not surprisingly, he uses the example of bursting into song as being something that is expected and thus within the regime of verisimilitude in a musical (Neale 2000a, 158).

Since its beginnings in the 1920s, the Egyptian film industry has developed a number of film genres. Three lists compiled by scholars of Egyptian cinema are laid out in Table 1.1. Landau’s list reflected the state of the industry at the end of the period that is considered in this study. He did not include the musical as a genre but he did express his opinion that the “feature film is mainly musical, revue-like, even when music is integrally unnecessary” (Landau 1958, 202). Ali Abu Shadi included the musical under the category of comedy, along with dance, suggesting a closer connection to the Hollywood narrative model than was perhaps the case. Only Samīr Farīd provided a separate category for the musical.

Table 1.1: Common Egyptian Film Genres

Landau (1958)	Abu Shadi (1996)	Farid (1996)
FARCE		
HISTORICAL	HISTORICAL	HISTORICAL
MELODRAMA	MELODRAMA	MELODRAMA
DRAMA (social film)	REALIST	REALISM
COMEDY	COMEDY (social; musical; dance)	COMEDY
		MUSICALS
POLITICAL	POLITICAL	
	BEDOUIIN	BEDOUIIN

	RELIGIOUS	
	NATIONALIST	
	WAR	
	NATURALIST	
	FANTASY	
	SCIENCE FICTION	
	THRILLER	POLITICAL POLICE THRILLER

The majority of the genres listed by these three scholars can also be found in the corpus of Hollywood commercial film. What is interesting to note is which genres appear to be most popular in Egypt. Four genres appear on all of the lists: historical, melodrama, realist or socially conscious drama, and comedy. This suggests a process of selection in what has been imitated from the Hollywood system. The content of the films that utilized these generic models was also tailored to appeal to the tastes and values of an Egyptian, and a larger Arab, audience. In particular, the concept of creating a comedic film may have been borrowed from Hollywood, but what is funny is often culture-specific. In addition, the absence of certain genres, such as the Western, shows how some genres may be less suited to become transcultural. What Abu Shadi and Samīr Farīd have identified as the “Bedouin” genre could be seen as an adaptation of the Western in its focus on rural adventure, but the differences in the setting, costuming, and cultural customs suggest that, although this genre may have been inspired by the Western, it is not an imitation of it. The change in the setting

is significant here as it marks a change in genre, as was also evident in director Robert Sturges' 1960 remake of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954) as a Western (*The Magnificent Seven*). Italian director Sergio Leone's reinterpretation of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961) as the "Spaghetti Western" *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) included the setting of the American West but departed from many of the visual semantic elements associated with the American Western (such as white hats for good guys).

Egyptian filmmakers did at times produce direct remakes of Hollywood films, such as director and star Anwar Wagdi's remake of *It Happened One Night* (1934) as *Layla Bint al-'Agniya` / Layla, Daughter of the Rich* (1946). They also produced screen adaptations of Western literary works, such as the adaptation of the French novel *Sous les tilleuls* (Alphonse Karr, 1832) as the early Mohammed Abdel Wahhab musical melodrama, *Damū`a al-Ḥubb / Tears of Love* (1935). The associated genres of these adapted works also reflect local preferences (French melodramatic works were popular choices), while the alterations made to the stories illustrate that even these works were not "slavish imitations."

The layering of genres within the Egyptian singing film illustrates another aspect of adaptation. Hollywood musicals produced in the mid-twentieth century commonly employed some form of romantic comedy as a central element, following in a dramatic tradition that can be traced back to the New Comedy of

ancient Greece. A striking difference can be found in the first Egyptian musicals, which were mainly melodramas. Romantic comedy became a more popular narrative model in the 1940s but it was often tempered with some degree of melodrama. In the 1950s, critical concerns over the frivolity of musical comedies and the recognition by the post-revolution regime of the potential of film as a tool for educating the Egyptian public led to a return to melodrama as a dominant model. This layering of genres, along with the continuing popularity of melodrama as an element of musical film is significant: while the concept of incorporating musical performance into a narrative film and some of the techniques for facilitating it were borrowed from the West, the content of the narratives was unique to the Egyptian manifestation of the genre.

The difficulty in applying narrative tendencies as a defining element of the movie musical as a transcultural genre becomes even more apparent in Altman's work on the American movie musical (Altman 1987). The first troublesome aspect of Altman's scheme is his insistence on the inclusion of a romantic couple, which excludes films that feature a mixture of diegetic music⁷ and dialogue but no romance, such as some children's musicals. That being said, all of the Egyptian films discussed in this study do feature a romantic couple.

⁷ This term refers to music that occurs within the world of the story (the "diegesis") as opposed to the non-diegetic music of the underscore that is only heard by the cinematic audience.

However, Altman's syntactic requirement for the success of the couple is problematic, since this was not guaranteed in Egyptian singing films. The concept of a couple marrying for love was utilized, but it was often "put at the mercy of social prohibitions and restrictions" (Shafik 2007, 137). The Egyptian custom of arranged marriage could still interfere with the success of the couple, or it might be conveniently revealed that the couple's marriage has already been arranged by their families, thus reaffirming local tradition. In addition, a "causal link" between the "formation of the couple and success in plot ventures" is as often apparent in non-musical romantic comedies as it is in the American movie musical, and so would not qualify as an identifying feature of the genre.

Altman's emphasis on the syntactic importance of a "dual focus" on both members of the romantic couple is also restricting. The films featured in this study most often focused primarily on one star. Even if the other member of the couple was a singer, he or she usually didn't get much in the way of solo screen time. This is true of some Hollywood musicals as well, such as *The Court Jester* (1955), starring Danny Kaye, in which he is the only musical performer.

Altman has also identified three dominant subgenres within the American musical that have only selectively been adopted by the Egyptian film industry:

In the *fairytale musical* (so named because of its tendency to predicate the future of a kingdom on the romance of a 'princess' and her suitor), the creation of an imaginary kingdom creates ample opportunity to stress the transcendence of the real that characterizes the musical as a whole in

comparison to other Hollywood genres. The *show musical* (so named for the type of production set in parallel to the couple's success) maximizes the genre's general expression of joy through music and dance. The *folk musical* (after the characters, music, and general atmosphere), plays up the togetherness and communitarianism characteristic of the genre's general choral tendencies. (Altman 1987, 126)

I have yet to find an example of an Egyptian *fairy tale musical*, but some of its elements of fantasy and romance were utilized in the "operetta" finales featured in the films of Farid al-Atrash. The *show musical* was often utilized as a model, especially in Farid's films, but always with some alteration, including addressing Islamic concerns over the status of musicians and the infusion of melodramatic elements. The community feeling of the *folk musical* is apparent in some Egyptian singing films, but tends to be accompanied by melodramatic plot lines.

The syntactic categories in Altman's scheme that involve the incorporation of music into a narrative feature film are more useful. Music was often utilized as an expression of joy in Egyptian singing films and the grand finales of the films produced in the 1940s and 1950s often served in part to signify the romantic triumph of the couple. However, song was also used to express pain and longing, a use not unknown in American musical theater and film. A famous Hollywood example would be Judy Garland's rendition of "Over the Rainbow" (words: E.Y. Harburg, music: Harold Arlen) in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Altman's syntactic

categories of “Narrative/Number” and “Image/Sound” are the most useful, and it is in them that we may find the dominant defining characteristics of the movie musical. They describe dual modes of narrative and musical presentation that have also been noted by a number of other scholars and that are evident not only in Egyptian singing films but also in other international manifestations of the movie musical.

Altman has described these dual modes as involving two separate and seemingly mutually exclusive approaches to life: “the real world, in which the diegetic track alone is heard, and the ideal world, represented by the film’s production numbers, in which only the music track is heard” (Altman 1987, 65). Stanley Solomon has also observed that musicals move back and forth between a “realistic presentation and a metaphorical musical presentation” (Solomon 1976, 63). Leo Braudy has made a similar observation that “the relationship between realism and stylization is a central issue in musicals” (Braudy 2005, 665).

Transitions between these two modes, registers, or worlds are facilitated by an aesthetic device that Altman has called the “reversal of the sound/image hierarchy,” which, in his opinion “lies at the very center of the musical genre, so much so that any definition of the genre must take it into account” (Altman 1987, 71). Alan Williams had earlier identified this device in the American musical and

described it as being manifested in two ways: either the “sound remains diegetic while the image introduces extra-diegetic material” or “the image remains diegetic while the soundtrack introduces extra-diegetic material” (Williams 1981, 149). The first could be illustrated by a Busby Berkeley production number, in which the performance takes place within the diegesis but the image presents a stage that could not fit into any existing theater. The second method often applies to personal expressions by the characters, in which the visual setting is diegetic and non-performance related, while the orchestra accompanying the song is nowhere to be seen. In either case, as Williams has observed, the music “dominates the image track” (Williams 1981, 150).

The importance of aesthetic devices such as these, including expected elements of the *mise-en-scene*,⁸ in identifying a movie musical is most readily apparent in non-musical or “straight” films that contain what I refer to as “movie musical moments.” In these films the “reversal of the sound/image” hierarchy and a look that imitates that which we recognize as belonging to the “movie musical” momentarily transport us into the world of the movie musical. The most common usage of these “moments” is ornamental, adding atmosphere and

⁸ Translated from the French as “putting into the scene,” this film term refers to various aspects of the image and the ways they are manipulated by the filmmaker. It thus includes costume, make-up and *décor* as well as lighting, framing, and editing. As suggested by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *mise en scene* “can control not only what we look at but also when we look at it” (Bordwell & Thompson 2003, 218).

entertainment value to the film but only tenuously connected to the narrative and featuring performers who play little or no part in the rest of the film, such as The Andrews Sisters' famous performance of "The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy"⁹ in *Buck Privates* (1941).

Other uses are more self-conscious and reflexive. One of these is comedic and usually takes the form of generic parody. A prime example of this would be the "Men In Tights" number from Mel Brooks' film *Robin Hood, Men in Tights* (1993). Within this parody of the "swashbuckler" genre is nestled a parody of the movie musical, in which Robin's Merry Men sing a rousing chorus, reminiscent of one that might have been sung by Nelson Eddy and company in an operetta-inspired musical of the 1930s, and kick up their heels in a chorus line [Fig. 1.2]. Another referential usage can be found in the play with generic form apparent in director Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965). In this primarily straight film, the songs provide Godard with an opportunity to practice the upending of generic expectations that he so relishes. The setting of "Jamais je ne t'ai dit que je t'aimerai toujours" ("I Never Told You That I Will Always Love You")¹⁰ is decidedly unlike that of a movie musical with its stark white walls and scanty furniture, as well as the disquieting presence of artillery and a murdered corpse [Fig. 1.3]. In addition, in order to highlight the aesthetic aspects of the

⁹ Words and music by Don Raye and Hughie Prince.

¹⁰ Antoine Duhamel and Boris Bassiak

movie musicals he was referencing, Godard did not reverse the “image /sound hierarchy”. In contrast, Egyptian director Youssef Chahine utilized the identifiable *mise-en-scene* and sound/image relationship of a movie musical number for his own semantic purpose in *Iskandariyya...Kamān wa Kamān / Alexandria Again and Again* (1990). Yehīa and `Amr’s dance to a non-diegetic recording of Nat King Cole singing “Walkin’ My Baby Back Home”¹¹ [Fig. 1.4] recalls Gene Kelly’s performance of the title song in *Singin’ in the Rain* in its street setting, framing, lighting, and camera movement. It also functions in a similar way as an expression of joy. All these reflexive “movie musical moments” manipulate the image and the soundtrack, as well as the hierarchy between them to cue their audience as to what they are referencing.

It appears then that, in the case of the movie musical, it is not narrative tendencies that identify it as a transcultural genre but rather the centrality of the music and the devices for incorporating it into the narrative. Differences in the narrative content of the films can tell us something about the cultures that have adopted the form, while the similarities in the function and integration of song can help to refine definitions of the genre.

¹¹ Words by Roy Turk and music by Fred E. Ahlert (1930)

Song Function: Concept and Content

Similarities between the functions of songs in Hollywood and Egyptian musicals support the definition of the genre proposed above. We must, however, also consider more generally the ways in which songs have been integrated into narrative performance as well as the functions of local and regional musical genres. In addition, the contents of the songs reveal functions beyond the story world of the film and address issues of importance to mid-twentieth-century Egyptians.

As noted by Neale, the musical has always been a “mongrel genre” that incorporates a variety of semantic and syntactic elements, with musical performance being its only essential ingredient (Neale 2000b, 105). My favorite definition of the musical, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, comes from Gerald Mast, who has said that a “play or film is a musical if its primary entertainment value and investment lie in the musical numbers themselves” (Mast 1987, 2). He went on to suggest that “the real service that the book performs is to provide slots for the most lively, imaginative, and meaningful musical numbers” (ibid., 3).

It is thus apparent that entertainment is the primary function of songs in the movie musical, but the songs also serve the stories. While some functions of songs in Egyptian films may appear to be imitations of Western practice, parallel

functions can be found in Egyptian narrative musical performance practices that long precede exposure to European musical drama in the early nineteenth century. For example, epic storytellers in Egypt, as in other parts of the world, have enhanced their stories with musical performance for many centuries. Their songs too were meant to entertain but also provided opportunities for the personal expression of the characters' emotions.

John Mueller (1984) has proposed several ways in which songs may be integrated into a movie musical, all of which were utilized in the Egyptian singing film. Folksy atmospheric numbers, such as "Yāllī zaratū al-burtu'ān" ("You who planted the oranges") in *Yaḥya al-Ḥubb/ Long Live Love* (1938), contribute to the theme of the film by celebrating the wholesome rural roots of the main characters. Grand musical finales may be relevant to the plot, signifying the achievement of a goal, though the content of the number may have little to do with the story. In Egyptian singing films, the content of finales may contribute to the spirit of the film as well by celebrating local Egyptian and broader Arab culture. Mueller has also suggested that numbers may enrich the plot but not advance it: they may establish a situation or tell us something about a character. This type of function can be found in Egyptian films as early as Abdel Wahhab's performance of "Yā wardet al-ḥubb al-ṣāfī" ("Oh rose of pure love") in *al-Warda'*

al-Baīda (1933), which establishes that Galāl has fallen in love and illustrates the nobility of his character.

Other numbers are integrated in such a way that they advance the plot. Mueller cites audition scenes as an example in which it is the situation rather than the content of the song that is relevant to the plot. Examples of this type of scene can be found in Egyptian singing films, especially the “show” musicals of the 1940s and early 50s. Finally, Mueller describes numbers that advance the plot in both their situation and their content. An example that can be found in both American and Egyptian versions of the musical is the love duet, which continues the dialogue through vocal performance.

Table 1.2 lists some common functions of songs in Egyptian musicals. As in all movie musicals, entertainment is the most prevalent function but numbers included for this purpose usually perform at least one other function as well. Formal performances may fulfill a narrative goal. The content of the lyrics may also express the feelings of characters or reveal something about their personalities. In addition, the words of the song may speak directly to another character, thus advancing the plot by replacing dialogue. Other extra-filmic functions may not be directly related to the plot. The most obvious – and one that is common to the Hollywood and Egyptian media industries – is that the inclusion of a song in a film serves as an advertisement that to sell records and fills the

seats of concert halls. The songs, in turn, fill the seats of cinemas as audiences come to see their favorite singing stars.

Table 1.2: Common Song Function Types in Egyptian Singing Films

Entertainment
Personal expression
Character development / atmosphere
Plot development – content and/or context
Group or community expression
Cultural or nationalist expression
Title song
Commentary on plot
Occasional songs (performed at life-cycle or seasonal events)

As in Hollywood films, the songs may also function as what Jane Feuer has called an “ode to entertainment” (Feuer 1982, 36-37). Of course, the perception of what is entertaining is often culturally specific. While “That’s Entertainment” (*The Band Wagon*, 1953) celebrates Western culture, including familiar comedic, romantic and dramatic elements, the finales of Farid al-Atrash’s films often celebrate Arabic culture, with musical tours that feature various musicals styles (and costumes) and occasional comparisons to Western musical culture. Both systems used songs to express more overt nationalist sentiments, though once again the chosen content was locally relevant. While James Cagney raised the spirits of an American public facing a second world war with his

performance of “The Yankee Doodle Boy”¹² (*Yankee Doodle Dandy*, 1942), the Egyptian youth of the late 1930s who were seeking the withdrawal of the British were encouraged by the support of Umm Kulthum in her performance of “Nashīd al-gāmi`a” (“The university anthem”) in *Nashīd al- ‘Amāl / Song of Hope* (1937).

A key difference from Hollywood practice that is apparent in these examples is the choice of the musical genres used. While musical genres borrowed from the West were sometimes utilized as compositional elements, Egyptian composers structured their songs according to indigenous and regional practice. Some of the genres in which they composed, such as the *taqṭūqah*, *mūnūlūg*, and *nashīd* were relatively recent inventions that had been featured in Egyptian musical plays of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The use of the *mawwāl* form of improvisation to a set text as an expression of emotion and an opportunity for a display of virtuosity is common in the performance of the epic storytelling tradition of the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, which has a history that long pre-dates exposure to Western musical drama (Slyomovics 1987, Reynolds 1995). This fact suggests that the Egyptian singing film is in some sense the latest development in a local musical narrative tradition that can be traced back as far as the twelfth century rather than an imported form with no indigenous antecedents. It might thus be considered the product not of *taqlīd*

¹² This song, with words and music by George M. Cohan (1878-1942), was originally featured in his 1904 stage musical *Little Johnny Jones*.

(imitation) but instead of *taṭwīr* (development). The *mawwāl*, along with the more classically oriented poetic-musical form of the *qaṣīda*, also evolved to suit new venues and audiences. A perceived need for a more serious pre-composed form was met in the concept of the *ughniyya*. Literally meaning “song,” this term is used to categorize a type of longer pre-composed song that is serious in its textual and musical content. Like the inclusion of Western classical performance in Hollywood musicals, performances of the *qaṣīda* and *ughniyya* add artistic weight to what is often considered a light and frivolous film genre. This artistic weight is of particular importance in an Islamic culture concerned with the danger of distraction caused by the entertainment function of the songs in these films.

Even when foreign musical forms were appropriated for use they were commonly used only for sections of compositions and did not dominate the overall musical structure. Farid often incorporated Western musical genres, or aspects of their styles, as part of the musical accompaniment for the spectacle of his grand film finales. While often referred to as “operettas,” these numbers often do not have a distinct narrative, but are instead parades of visual and musical variety. Latin American music was a particular favorite for Farid, and other Egyptian composers, for incorporation into multi-part compositions such as these. In contrast, North American popular music styles, such as jazz and rock, were incorporated rarely and much later. More often these styles function in

recorded versions that accompany scenes of questionable setting and behavior, thus representing the dangers of Westernization.

It is not clear to me why Latin American styles were exempt from this stigmatized usage or why they were so popular with Egyptian composers. There may have been something familiar found in musical styles that had roots in Spain, which had historic musical ties to the Arab world (see Frischkopf 2002). It may also have been the early international popularity of Latin genres, created in part by record companies. Amongst Latin genres, the earliest and most often adapted as a compositional element was the Argentine tango song form, or *tango canción*. In this case, it may have been a familiar sentiment as well that appealed to Arab appreciation for intense musical expressions of emotional suffering, such as what Pierre Cachia has identified as the “red” variety of *mawwāl*, so named for the pessimism of its subject matter (Cachia 1977, 93). A similar enjoyment of what some might call wallowing in self-pity can be found in the Argentine concept of *mufarse*. An approximate translation from the local dialect of *lunfardo* is “to mope,” but it also implies a kind of enjoyment in the contemplation of one’s misfortunes (Taylor 1976, 277). The subject matter of Egyptian film songs that incorporated tango often invoked a similar sort of bittersweet pleasure in sadness. The earliest example is “Sahirtu minu al-layyāli” (“You kept me up all night”) composed and performed by Abdel Wahhab in

Damū`a al-Ḥubb / Tears of Love (1935), which included the line by poet Ḥussayn Shawqī “Love is my existence, love is my dissipation” (“al-ḥubbu fīhi baqāṭī, al-ḥubbu fīhi zawāli”). In addition, the visual settings of these Egyptian interpretations of tango song are always elegant, adding a cosmopolitan sophistication to its functions.

Two final aspects of the function of music in Egyptian singing films need to be considered. The first of these is repeated performance of a song, known in Western musical theater as a reprise. A piece might be heard in the process of composition, culminating in its triumphant premiere, or a song sung in a different setting could evoke memories of its earlier performance. Songs were also incorporated as narrative and character themes in the non-diegetic underscore of films. This practice became more common in the late 1940s and the 1950s, along with the slow introduction of customized underscores originally composed for the films. Prior to this, many films featured mainly pre-existing recordings, often of Western classical and popular music, as rudimentary underscores. It was not until the 1950s that original scores for Egyptian singing films became more common.

The films and songs discussed in this study illustrate that though the functions of songs were usually similar, they were not necessarily imitated from Western musical theater practice. It is more likely that many of the ways in which

songs can enhance a narrative and in which a narrative can facilitate song were already familiar to Egyptian filmmakers. The movie musical was thus not an alien form but a development in a tradition of narrative musical performance facilitated by appropriated technology. This suggests that the movie musical as a transcultural genre is a conceptual model that can be utilized by any culture that has had access to it to fill with locally relevant content, to continue their own narrative musical traditions, and transmit them, via Appadurai's *technoscape*, to become part of our world's *mediascape*.

The Development of a Modern Egyptian Film Song Style

The aspect of the Egyptian singing film that displays the least amount of imitation and the greatest degree of adaptation is the music for which these films provided the setting. If the primary function of song in a musical film is to be entertaining, then the songs must appeal to the tastes of the target audience. The largely urban Egyptian, and broader Arab, audience for these films had been exposed to Western popular and classical music, and it does appear that Egyptian film song composers sought to appeal to their cosmopolitan tastes by incorporating Western musical elements. The presentation of musical ideas was also altered to suit the medium, with a greater emphasis on pre-composed pieces that took up less screen time than long improvisations, and larger

ensembles – often including Western instruments – that provided appropriate accompaniment for the expected spectacle. Nevertheless, the overall structures of Egyptian film songs are different those of Hollywood ones, and the treatment of melody continued to conform to local modal practice, albeit in forms sometimes restricted by the incorporation of harmony. The songs were also structured to include improvisation, indicating the importance of this aspect of musical performance to Egyptian musicians and audiences. In addition, performance practice continued to stress proper intonation in the presentation of Arabic musical modes (*maqamāt*), as well as appropriate vocal timbre.

The style of Egyptian film songs is thus best identified as the result of *taṭwīr* (development). The connotations of Westernization inherent in this term reflect a kind of cultural inferiority complex apparent in the pursuit of creating a music that has the status of Western art music. This kind of music has been called *al-mūsīqa al-‘ālamīyyah*, or “international music.” As noted by Danielson, the creation of music that was “authentically Egyptian” and “fundamentally Arab, yet modern” required that new components be “successfully integrated into a recognizably Arab style” (Danielson 1991a, 113).

The modernization of Arab music was a conscious choice, discussed by intellectuals and implemented by composers. In Egypt, an early driving force in this movement was the Oriental Music Club (Nādī al-Mūsīqā al-Sharqī), which

organized the Congress of Arab Music (Mu'tamar al-Mūsīqā al-Arabiyyah) held in Cairo in March of 1932¹³. In January of that year, one of its organizers, Muṣṭafa Riḍā stated the goal of the club as “reviving and systematizing Arab music so that it will rise upon an artistic foundation, as did Western music earlier” and that the king’s support of this endeavor “will bring the country to a zenith of cultural refinement and lead it to compete in the area of civilized nations” (Racy 1991, 70). Similarly, in 1950, a committee of writers and musicians submitted a petition to the Lebanese government claiming, “There is no Arab music. What is called such is simply one of the stages in the development of any music” (quoted in Berque 1978, 209). These statements are evidence that Egyptian and Lebanese musical intellectuals believed in a kind of cultural evolutionism that equated Westernization with modernization.

This is not to say that Western musical practice was adopted without reservation. In particular, a heated debate arose from the session on instrumentation at the 1932 congress. One side, mostly comprised of Western scholars, felt that Western instruments should be prohibited because they could potentially “disfigure the beauty of Arab music.” In contrast, some Arab participants argued that the use of these more ‘advanced’ and ‘scientific’

¹³ The Congress met for three weeks beginning on March 14, 1932. The participants included musicians and scholars from throughout the Arab world as well as prominent European musicologists such as Henry Farmer, Curt Sachs, and Erich von Hornbostel.

instruments would “advance the renaissance of Arab music and move it forward toward progress” (Racy 1991, 76). In the end it was generally agreed that keyboard instruments, such as the piano, were unsuitable for playing Arabic music (Racy 1991, 77).

Concerns over the modernization of Egyptian music often center on the issue of authenticity. As Danielson has pointed out, twentieth-century Egyptian music criticism has stressed the association of musical authenticity with performers who were trained in Quranic recitation (*al-mashāyikh*) and their attention to the importance of properly presenting the text (Danielson 1991a, 115-116). Another important concept is that of *turāth*, or “heritage,” which is used to describe music in which traditional elements are prominent. The songs sung by Umm Kulthum, as well as her way of singing them, are seen as reflecting her early religious education and as examples of Egyptian heritage. Abdel Wahhab and Farid strayed further from traditional parameters, often utilizing foreign elements and incorporating personal innovations. Abdel Halim has been criticized for his inability to perform traditional genres as well as a vocal style that was too Western (al-Najmī 1972, 50).

Despite these concerns, the adoption and adaptation of foreign musical forms was not new to Egypt. By the twentieth century, Ottoman musical genres, such as the *samā'ī* and *peşrev*, were commonly utilized by Egyptian composers;

and these genres continue to be composed and performed. The *muwashshah* song form developed in Islamic Spain and became a popular genre throughout the Arab world. In addition, longer suite-like forms, such as the *wasla*, were a common way of presenting a variety of musical material in many parts of the Middle East, and a preference for this structure may have played some role in the musical choices of modern Egyptian film song composers.

Musical borrowing is also not unique to the Arab world. As has been pointed out by Bruno Nettl, a large portion of the world's music has "resulted from the combination of styles and style elements, concepts and ideas, and forms of musical behavior from several cultures" (Nettl 1986, 360-1). Such music has been described as "syncretic," "creole," or "hybrid"¹⁴. In the case of Egypt, the authenticity of hybrid music was of concern but it was also considered important to the modernization process. As noted by Azzam, Abdel Wahhab "sought early on to blend Western ideals with the indigenous Egyptian style of music" in order to revive it with "an injection of Western elements" (Azzam 1990, 42).

Nettl has suggested that the twentieth century was different from previous ones in that one music could be brought to many others and that "thus the world became a laboratory in which we can see how different cultures and musical systems respond to what is essentially the same stimulus" (Nettl 1986, 362). I

¹⁴ I have chosen to use the term "hybrid," meaning simply something that is composed of elements taken from various sources.

would add that we could also learn something about the stimulus itself. The genre of the movie musical is such a stimulus and the exploration the Egyptian response can tell us great deal about both the nature of the genre and Egyptian culture. The musical stimulus that will be featured throughout this study is the Argentine tango song form known as *tango canción* (as opposed to instrumental versions of the genre) that emerged in the early twentieth century. Analysis of how it was incorporated as a compositional element in Egyptian film songs reveals the characteristics that make it possible to identify its use as well as features of Egyptian musical practice that resulted in changes made to the borrowed form. Tango is a particularly interesting stimulus to study as it is itself a product of culturally diverse Argentine and Uruguayan port cities that contains elements of Spanish, African, and indigenous Latin American musical styles.

Of particular interest to this study are the ways in which foreign musical styles were adapted for use in the composition and arrangement of Egyptian film songs. I have identified three aspects of musical adaptation that are listed in Table 1.3. Arrangement (*tawzī'a mūsīqa*) is the aspect in which Western practices were most often adopted, even in the presentation of songs of a more traditionally Egyptian style, such as those sung by Umm Kulthum. Borrowed elements included Western instruments, some of which, like the violin, were well suited for playing the microtones that are necessary to the presentation of Arabic

musical modes, whereas others, like the piano, limited the intonational, and thus modal, possibilities of the song. The accompanying ensembles also grew significantly in size from the *takht*¹⁵ ensemble configuration popular in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, to the larger *firqa* (“band”) or orchestra, which, in the case of ensembles featured in Egyptian films included multiples of both Arabic and Western instruments, imitating the volume of a Western orchestra but differing in timbre. Harmony was also a limiting factor and thus was used sparingly. Its use, however, does seem to have had an effect on the modal selections made by composers, illustrated by the use of fewer *maqamāt*.

Table 1.3: Some Aspects of Musical Adaptation in Egyptian Film Song

ARRANGEMENT (<i>tawzī'a</i>)	FORM	QUOTATION / PARAPHRASE (<i>taqlīd</i> or <i>'iqtibās</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instrumentation • size of ensemble • harmony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rhythm • structure • mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brief direct quotation or paraphrase • extended reinterpretation

Formal elements of Western musical genres were also appropriated by Egyptian composers as compositional elements. The most common, and

¹⁵ From the Persian for “stand” or “platform,” a *takht* was the standard accompanying ensemble for solo vocalists. It was traditionally comprised of several instrumentalists and a chorus of several vocalists. The instruments usually associated with *takht* ensemble are the *qānūn* (a trapezoidal plucked zither), *'ud* (short-necked pear-shaped lute), *nay* (endblown reed flute), violin (*kamanja*), and *riqq* (small frame drum with jingles).

perhaps both most easily identifiable and least invasive, was rhythm. As early as 1933, Abdel Wahhab utilized his interpretation of a Cuban rumba rhythm in “Gafnuhu `alama al-ghazal” (“Her eyelids taught me flirtation”), which was featured in his first film, *al-Warda’ al-Baīda/ The White Rose* (1933) (see chapter 3). Other Latin rhythms associated with the tango, samba, and mambo were also incorporated into Egyptian film songs. Sometimes, particularly in the case of tango song, borrowed compositional structures are also apparent, which include the length of musical phrases and sections, as well as expected points for modulation. Finally, Egyptian film songs sometimes contained brief direct quotations of Western compositions. It is central to the argument of this study that none of these adopted elements dominated the overall structure of the Egyptian compositions. They were not imitations of Western music, but, instead, were examples of another aspect of adaptation apparent in the Egyptian singing film.

One more issue to consider regarding musical style is why some composers incorporated foreign elements into their compositions more often than others. Abdel Wahhab’s formal musical training was exclusively in Arabic music. His knowledge of Western classical and popular music came from informal personal exploration, encouraged by his mentor, the poet Aḥmad Shawqī (1869-1932). As a result his compositions are firmly grounded in the Arabic tradition. In

contrast, Farid had formal training in both Western and Arabic music. In addition, his mother had taught him to sing and play the *`ūd* in the style of his family's Syrian roots. This may be why Farid incorporated more Western elements, along with elements of Levantine music, into his songs. In contrast, the three main composers who worked with Umm Kulthum were much more conservative in their use of Western style elements, largely restricting them to musical arrangements. The two most frequent composers for Abdel Halim trained with him in Western instrumental music but were composing in a patriotic period when a more conservative approach to the adaptation of Western music was preferred.

Rather than as the result of "cultural imperialism," the songs featured in Egyptian singing films might be better described as examples of musical hegemony. The concepts of consent and resistance inherent in the use of this term by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) are apparent in the musical debates described above and in the hybrid nature of the music itself. I would go one step further to say that the composers of these songs were not trying to become a part of the Western musical tradition but instead to enhance their own by appropriating some of its elements. The West was a model of modernization to be admired and emulated but not at the cost of abandoning their own culture. The songs they composed were thus creative adaptations rooted in their own tradition.

The Periodization of the Egyptian Singing Film

This study divides its exploration of the Egyptian singing film into three periods of development in the mid-twentieth century from 1932 to 1962, which will be discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5. Chapter 2 sets the stage by discussing antecedents to the Egyptian film musical, including indigenous, imported, and hybrid forms. The first question to be answered is why I have chosen this overall period. This is primarily because, as in America, this span of time covers the rise and fall of the movie musical in its popularity as a film genre. Shafik has reported that, of the 918 feature films produced in Egypt during this period, more than a third were musicals (Shafik 1998, 103).¹⁶ As was the case with the Hollywood musical, the Egyptian singing film began its descent from popularity in the early 1960s and has not risen again to the same level.

A more pressing question is why I have divided this time span differently than other scholars. Table 1.4 compares periodization schemes proposed by Landau and Samīr Farīd to the periodization proposed by this study. According to Landau, the Egyptian film industry didn't really get under way until World War II. The sophistication of the films produced in the 1930s challenges this assessment. I agree with Samīr Farīd that the introduction of sound in 1932 was the start of a new period in Egyptian filmmaking that is highly relevant to this

¹⁶ According to al-Hāmi Ḥassan (1995), the total number of films produced in Egypt from 1932 to 1963 is 1,117 (see translation of his tables in Appendix B).

study. His next period begins with first production (*Wedād*) of Studio Misr in 1936 and is characterized by the development of Egyptian film genres. Samīr Farīd has called the period from 1945 to 1952 “the cinema of war profiteers” (Farid 1973, 42), an era during which capital sometimes came from dubious sources and profit took precedence over quality. I would argue that the commercialism he complains of is evident as early as the first film starring Farid al-Atrash in 1941, and that though genres began to emerge in the late 1930s, it was not until the 1940s that they solidified into recognizable structures. Samīr Farīd and I are in agreement again on the year of the next significant stylistic shift, which followed the 1952 Egyptian revolution. In the early Nasser era, from 1952 to 1962, the government encouraged the production of socially relevant films that would educate the public in how to become a good citizen of the new society. Government control of the film industry would not come until the 1960s, thus explaining Samīr Farīd’s assessment of the latter part of this era as a golden age of artistic freedom.

Table 1.4: Three Periodization Schemes for the Egyptian Film 1896-1962

Landau (1958)	Farid (1996)	Farrell (2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> early experimental amateurish films WWII: unrivaled prosperity post-war period: higher quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1896-1907: foreign films 1907-31: low quality silent films 1932-35: change from amateur to professional 1936-44: development of Egyptian genres 1945-52: financial golden age 1952-56: social realism in the service of a new society 1956-62: second golden age – artistic freedom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapter 2 antecedents Chapter 3 1932-40: the development of the singing film Chapter 4 1941-52: diversification and commercialization of the singing film Chapter 5 1952-62: musical social realism

The periodization utilized in this study is also informed by important events in Egyptian nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. The first key historical event considered in chapter 2 is the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798, which resulted in a great increase in exposure to Western culture and the creation of Egyptian musical theater. The involvement of Shaykh Sayyīd Darwīsh (1892-1923) in the revolutionary movement of 1919 is reflected in his 1920 operetta *Al-ʾIshara al-Ṭayyiba / The Good Relationship*, which foreshadowed the use of musical drama for the expression of political ideals that is evident in

Nasser-era singing films. Chapter 3 examines the impact of mass media on narrative musical performance in Egypt and explores the early period of Egyptian filmmaking, beginning with the first full-length sound features in 1932. The narratives of the films in this early period deal with issues of identity and class that were being debated amongst Egyptian intellectuals. Escapist musicals, resembling those produced in Hollywood, did not become the norm until Egypt entered World War II in 1941. The popularity of lighter films in the 1940s may have stemmed from Egyptian frustration at the inability of their political leaders to remove a decadent monarchy and the British government powers that supported it. This trend, along with the diversification of the genre, is explored in chapter 4.

A clear change in the approach to making musicals is again apparent in chapter 5, which considers the films produced after the 1952 revolution that finally brought Egyptian independence. A return to the use of film as an educational tool is illustrated by films starring Abdel Halim Hafiz, who was known as “the voice of the revolution.” Even the films of Farid al-Atrash take on a more serious tone after the revolution with his first melodramatic and patriotic films. This study ends with a light-hearted Farid film that premiered in 1961. The declaration of the Socialist Laws in that year was the culmination of increasing control by the Nasser regime over the production and distribution of cinema.

Nationalization of the industry soon followed; this limited the artistic freedom of filmmakers until Anwar Sadat's declaration of the *Infitāḥ*, or "open door" policy in 1973, which returned control of the nation's economy to the private sector. It was also around this time that the movie musical began to wane in popularity in the West and so the decline of the Egyptian singing film may have been brought about by both the politics and the fashion of the times.

A final consideration concerns the music itself, along with its composers and performers. The musical antecedents discussed in chapter 2 were later developed or discarded by composers of Egyptian film song. The composers of this pre-film period continued to be important as links in a chain of transmission that enhanced the musical authority of later composers considered to have descended from their tradition. The songs composed by Abdel Wahhab for his early films carry on the development of Egyptian music. They were products of his modernization plan to incorporate foreign elements while maintaining the essentially Egyptian quality of the music in overall structure, treatment of modes, and performance style. The music for Farid's films of the 1940s incorporated more Western elements, which sometimes dominated the compositions more than those of Abdel Wahhab. A return to a more conservative use of Western music can be heard in the songs sung by Abdel Halim. The music featured in the films of each period thus reflects a progression in which the dominance of

Western music ebbs and flows as Egyptians worked out their relationship with the West.

Conclusion

The comprehensive examination of the Egyptian singing film that follows in subsequent chapters is a case study not only in aspects of adaptation but also in transcultural manifestations of cinematic and musical genres. The films and songs discussed are examples both of the ways in which imported elements have been adapted and of which elements enable us to identify borrowed genres. In addition, the plots of the films reflect debates regarding the creation of a modern Egyptian identity, including issues of the relationship of Egypt to the rest of the world, and the status of individuals within Egyptian society. It turns out that much can be learned from films that were once considered to be insignificant imitations of Hollywood.

Figure 1.1. Caricatures of Egyptian composers.



Mohammed Abdel Wahhab
(*al-Sīnimā*, April 1945, p. 12)



Shaykh Zakariyyā Aḥmad



Riyād al-Sunbātī
(*al-Sīnimā*, April 1945, p. 12)



Farid al-Atrash
(Ḥasanayn 1996, 11)

Figure 1.2. Chorus line of Merry Men in “Men in Tights” number from *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993).



Figure 1.3. Anna Karina singing “Jamais je ne t’ai dit que je t’aimerai toujours” in *Pierrot le fou* (1965) with artillery in the background.



Figure 1.4. Similar mise-en-scene in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and *Iskandariyya ... Kamān wa Kamān* (1990).



Chapter 2: From Epic to Operetta: A Brief History of Egyptian Musical Narrative Traditions

The inherited form [music] was being enriched with a new content before eventually breaking out into new forms derived from those of the West. A study of Arab genres and styles, in their modern development, would provide remarkable examples of branching-out and interchange of forms, and of permutations between form and content. The whole evolution of these societies might be reconstructed, we believe, by studying these complex artistic developments from a historical and structural point of view. (Berque 1972, 348)

In the study of the film musical it is necessary to distinguish the medium from its content. The medium of sound film is a tool that, in theory, could be utilized to present any kind of performance. In Hollywood, for example, it provided a new method of presenting pre-existing forms of musical performance. The limitations and possibilities of film certainly shaped the way in which songs and stories were presented, but the plots, which included common narrative themes, character types, and methods of integrating song, were drawn from a theatrical tradition that originated in ancient Greece.

This same tradition was brought to Egypt, along with other forms of entertainment,¹ following Alexander's conquest of Egypt in 332 BCE. The center of Greek cultural activity was the city of Alexandria, which counted theaters among its many impressive buildings. The works of Greek playwrights even

¹ Dio Chrysostom, in a first-century AD description of Alexandria, listed "mimes and pantomimes, stand-up comedians, harpists, singers, dancers, charioteers and jockeys" among the performers he encountered there (Barry 1993, 92).

made it as far as the current location of Cairo where, in 1907, papyrus fragments were found containing the most complete examples of the plays of Menander (342-291 BCE).² The Greek culture of the Ptolemaic rulers, however, does not appear to have been adopted by the majority of the Egyptian population and I have not discovered any evidence of local imitation of Greek theater.

While evidence of formal theater, in the Greek tradition, is lacking, there is evidence of a long history of musically enhanced narrative performance in Egypt, from epic singing traditions to the Egyptian operettas of the 1920s. These forms of presentation established narrative themes, provided models for performance practice, and incorporated genres that would continue to develop in the twentieth century. When Egyptian filmmakers began to make sound films in the early 1930s, they, like their contemporaries in Hollywood, realized the potential of the medium for the presentation of narrative performance. In her 1998 study of Arab cinema, Shafik suggested that mass media became a substitute for traditional forms of storytelling. I would suggest that aspects of the storytelling tradition were incorporated into the adopted presentational format, creating a uniquely Egyptian type of musical film.

² “This papyrus codex, found by Gustavo Lefebvre in 1905, had been dismembered to wrap the private documents of the Coptic notary and would-be Greek poet Dioscorus of Aphrodito” (Cockle 1976, 47).

This chapter chronicles various indigenous and imported types of musically enhanced narrative performance that preceded the emergence of musical film in Egypt. By examining these forms of musical narrative we can learn something about the kinds of stories that have historically appealed to Egyptians and how songs were traditionally incorporated into those stories. We will also encounter older poetic and musical genres such as the *mawwāl* and the *qaṣīda* that were adapted for the screen, as well as modern genres, such as the *taqṭūqah* and the *mūnūlūg*.

Egyptian Singers of Tales

Probably the earliest examples of stories that were augmented by some kind of musical performance would be those told by professional storytellers. The age of such oral traditions is hard to determine since we must rely on reports of their performance. In his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1860), Edward Lane described three different types of storytellers he encountered in the cafes of early nineteenth-century Cairo. According to Lane, only one type, the “Sho’arà” (*sha`ir*), meaning “poet” and also a common designation for a popular storyteller, included musical accompaniment in his performances. The poet pictured in Figure 2.1 is playing a *rabāba*, a two-stringed spiked fiddle that Lane referred to as “the poet’s viol” or the “Aboo-Zeyde viol.” These singers of tales

are common figures throughout the Arab world. They can still be found in a few rural Egyptian villages but many of the traditional performers have passed away and some of those remaining perform more often now in commercial or state-sponsored folkloric events (Dwight Reynolds, personal communication). The genres they present are “presumed nearly dead nationally” (Zirbel 2000, 133) and are functioning now primarily as symbols of Egyptian heritage rather than playing an active part in rural or urban cultural life.³

These storytellers perform an oral epic, which, like many oral epics around the world, it is an episodic narrative that has developed over centuries. The Arabic term is *sīrat* [pl. *siyar*], which Dwight Reynolds has defined as “lengthy narratives recounted in alternating brief prose passages and lengthy poems in colloquial or pseudo-classical Arabic” (Reynolds 1994, 55). The *sīrat* performed by the Egyptian storytellers is that of the Banī Hilāl tribe, who traveled from the Arabian Peninsula to Tunisia during the tenth through twelfth centuries.⁴ The “Aboo Zeyde” (‘Abū Zayd) mentioned by Lane is one the epic’s five main characters. He is “crafty and cunning,” a “father of ruses” (“abū ḥiyal”) who “often prefers, through stratagems and trickery to avoid battle” and who commonly disguises himself as an epic poet (Reynolds 1995, 13). He is the brains, while the

³ One group of traditional musicians, Les Musiciens du Nil (The Musicians of the Nile), has succeeded in selling their exotic authenticity to the world market.

⁴ An early written description of this epic was provided by the fourteenth-century writer Ibn Khaldun (Slyomovics 1987b, 1-2)

warrior Diyāb is the brawn. Sultān Ḥassan is a wise mediator and the representative of moderation. The villain al-Zanāti Khalīfa is based on an actual historical figure who was the leader of the Berbers of North Africa. One woman, the beautiful and wise al-Jayza, rounds out the central cast (Reynolds 1995, 14).

Usually divided into three parts, this epic collection of tales begins with the birth of these main characters and, in many versions, ends with the death of the villain al-Zanāti at the hands of the warrior Diyāb (Reynolds 1995, 15). Along with the *One Thousand and One Nights* (*‘Alf Laylah wa Laylah*) so popular with nineteenth-century Western scholars, the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* is among the most widely known and loved collections of narrative episodes in the Arab world. The performance of the Egyptian version was fondly remembered by twentieth-century writer and social critic Taha Hussein in *al-‘Ayām / The Days*⁵ (Hussein 1997), and the decline of its popularity in an increasingly media-saturated urban culture was depicted by Naguib Mahfouz in his 1947 novel *Zuqāq al-Midaq / Midaq Alley*. The granddaughter of composer Zakarīyyā Aḥmad has reported that pictures of Abū Zayd and al-Zanāti Khalīfa hung on his bedroom wall (Noshokaty 2000). His fondness for the epic inspired him to compose the song “Ya ṣalat al-zīn” (“Oh the blessings of the beautiful”) with his frequent writing partner, the poet Bayram al-Tūnisi (1893-1961). This pseudo folk song was based on an episode

⁵ All three volumes of this autobiography were first published in Arabic under the title *al-‘Ayyām*: volumes one and two in 1929, volume three in 1973.

from the epic that features an attempted seduction. More recently, in 1997, a serialized dramatization of the epic appeared on Egyptian television during the holy month of Ramadan (Abu-Lughod 2000, 97).

The length of the performances witnessed by Reynolds in the 1980s in a rural village of the Nile Delta depended on the occasion and the amount of musical and verbal material added by the performer. The entire cycle could take as long as one hundred hours to perform but, as in most epic traditions, it is almost always told in sections. All of the performances Reynolds attended, however, were “primarily musical, utilizing both song and instrumental accompaniment” (Reynolds 1994, 57). Amongst the musicians studied by Reynolds, the most common accompanying instrument is the *rabāba*. In contrast, the central subject of Susan Slyomovic’s study of the Upper Egyptian tradition of performing this epic viewed the *rabāba* as “frivolous and unworthy of serious subject matter” (Slyomovics 1987b, 19). She also noted the distinction between a reciter (*rāwi*) of the epic, who would never use musical instruments and the more creative role of the *sha`ir* (which she translates as “poet”) who restricted his use of musical instruments to the simple frame drum known as a *ṭār* (Slyomovics 1987b). Larger ensembles are also sometimes employed (see Reynolds 1994) but the *ṭār* and *rabāba* appear to be the most common accompanying instruments.

Traditional venues and occasions for performance have varied from religious and life-cycle celebrations to performances in cafes and at private gatherings. There is no stage, no set, no costumes, and no cast aside from a lone poet. While more settled now than in former times, these performers are still perceived to some extent as outsiders and their position within the community is an ambiguous one. Traditionally given the respected religious title “Shaykh,” they are also associated with gypsies. When Slyomovics asked inhabitants of the village of the poet (*sha`ir*) `Awaḍullah why they thought he was a gypsy, they responded with the phrase “whoever beats upon the drum lacks honor and good lineage.” (Slyomovics 1987b, 13).

In his article on the musical dimensions of the epic, Reynolds made a convincing comparison between these storytellers and the Yugoslav ‘singers of tales’ encountered by Albert Lord and Milman Parry in the 1930s: “In the process of (re-) composition in performance à la Parry and Lord, music emerges within the SBH [*Sīrat Banī Hilāl*] tradition as the most fluid of the resources marshaled together by the singer” (Reynolds 1994, 84). The *shā`ir* is able to vary the musical dimension of his rendition without changing the story. This suggests the kind of formulaic improvisation that is described by Lord in *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 1960).

According to Reynolds, the existing melodies are “restricted in ambitus (most commonly ranging from a fourth to a sixth)” and their “melodic motifs” are common ones that are “also used in other folk song genres” (Reynolds 1994, 66). These motifs are one of the structural elements that are manipulated by the performer to create each new telling of the tale. While the text is fairly stable, it is in the musical realm that each performance is unique.

Perhaps most helpful are the genres that Reynolds identified as being utilized in the telling of these tales. Of particular interest is the use of the *mawwāl* (pl. *mawāwīl*) both as a virtuosic set piece and as part of the narrative. This genre of colloquial folk poetry exhibits textual stability and musical flexibility. It is said to have originated in Iraq, perhaps as early as the eighth century (Cachia 1977). In its traditional form, the text fits into a set scheme of rhythm and rhyme. The importance of puns⁶ is worth noting here as well. Word play continued to be an important element in twentieth-century Egyptian poetic and narrative presentations, often for comic effect.

The textual themes most often featured in the *mawāwīl* of the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* tradition could be described as belonging to the variety that is categorized by the singers and their audience as a “red” *mawwāl* because of its pessimistic

⁶ Slyomivics reported that the word used by `Awaḍallah to describe puns was *tashkīl*, which can mean to vocalize a word as well as to create, shape and bring variety (Slyomovics 1987b, 72-3)

perspective (Cachia 1977, 93). The most common theme is that of the *shakwa* (“complaint”), which facilitates the expression of emotion by characters within the narrative. This use of sung poetry was confirmed by Reynolds when he suggested that “Situations and emotions must reach a confluence that impels a character to stand up and sing” (Reynolds 1995, 156). Thomas Elsaesser has identified a similar function for song in the American film musical, suggesting that it is “when emotional intensity becomes too strong to bear that a Gene Kelly or Judy Garland has to dance and sing in order to give free play to the emotions that possess them” (Elsaesser 1987, 221). We must not forget, though, that the *mawwāl* is also an opportunity for the *shā`ir* to display his musical virtuosity. Songs perform both these functions in Egyptian films. Slyomovics has focused on one particular function of song in the performance of this epic in the form of the “death-song.” This genre “both summarizes the essential characteristics of, and is itself an action belonging to, the hero’s life” (Slyomovics 1987, 63). As noted by Slyomovics, the death-song is a common element in folk epics. The version featured in the performance of the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* described by Slyomovics begins with a brief improvisation followed by a six-line *mawwāl* (Slyomovics 1987a, 65). Her monograph on the Upper Egyptian performance of the epic also describes functions of songs that are external to the narrative, such as songs directed and even referencing audience members (Slyomovics 1987b)

The programmatic musical effects that Reynolds described are quite like those used in cinematic scores. One example is the *rabāb* being used to imitate the sounds of battle. This kind of imitative sound technique is common in storytelling and theatrical traditions. It can be seen as being related to a film score technique known as “mickey mousing” (from its early use in Disney cartoons), in which the musical score mimics the action. Reynolds has also observed the semantic use of instrumental melodies, in particular the use of “a wedding song to mark a wedding scene” (Reynolds 1994, 79), which is a common function of music in film.

The existence of this tradition confirms that Egyptians were already familiar with the concept of mixing story and song when they encountered Western forms of musical theater. The narrative themes of Egyptian musical films tended more toward the romantic than the heroic, but there is evidence of traditional tales being utilized, such as the tragic tale of *Majnūn Layla* (see chapter 3) and the collection of narrative episodes known as *A Thousand and One Nights* (see chapter 4). The songs presented in Egyptian musicals were certainly more complex than the simple repetitive melodies featured in this epic, but it is significant that the programmatic uses of instrumental accompaniment that have been so important to the development of film score composition were also familiar to Egyptians.

The *Khayāl al-Zill* or “Shadow Play” and *Qaragoz*

We have established that Egyptians were familiar with the concept of augmenting their stories with songs but these performances bear little resemblance to theater in the Western sense. A genre closer in presentational format to the European theater tradition is that of the Egyptian shadow puppet theater known as the *khayāl al-zill* or “shadow play”. In this form of theater the action is created by the shadows of flat leather puppets on a screen that is illuminated from behind. The Egyptian puppets are translucent flat leather figures decorated with cutouts and bright colors [Fig. 2.2]. Unlike the storyteller tradition, performances are usually a group effort with the puppet master, known as *al-rayyis* (“the boss”) or *al-miqaddim* (“the presenter”), assisted by as many as five people (Badawi 1988, 12).⁷

The origins of the form are unclear but it is likely that it arose in Central or South Asia. Fen Pen Chen has made a persuasive argument for an origin among nomadic peoples of Central Asia who lived in tents that could serve as screens, had access to fire, and are known to have used leather and felt figures in their religious rituals (Chen 2003, 47). Scholarly interpretations of terms found in the fourth-century BC Indian *Mahabharata* epic suggest a possible ancient Indian origin for the form (Chen 2003, 30). Mamlūk warrior slaves may have brought the

⁷ Shadow plays are still performed in Egypt as a reconstructed folkloric form.

shadow puppet tradition from Central Asia to Egypt some time in the twelfth century. A passing mention of the genre by mathematician and scientist Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1039) suggests that it may have arrived even earlier (Monroe & Pettigrew 2003, 167).

Beginning as an often-obscene comic folk tradition performed at seasonal and life-cycle celebrations, it became entertainment for the ruling classes as well. In 1171, the legendary ruler and warrior Ṣalaḥ al-dīn (Saladin) made his grand vizier watch a “shadow show” (Chen 2003, 30). This report not only confirms the existence of the shadow play in Egypt but also that in the twelfth century it was a form considered worthy of being presented at court. Another report by the late twelfth-century Egyptian Sufi poet `Omar Ibn al-Farīd (1182-1235) mentioned “cheerful and mournful songs” as being one of the components of *khayāl al-ḡill* (Moreh 1987, 49).

The earliest surviving examples of shadow plays are three that were written by the poet and humorist Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Dāniyāl (1248-1311). Ibn Dāniyāl came to Cairo from Iraq at the age of nineteen and quickly became a court favorite who was known for his bawdy wit. With these plays he sought to elevate “the plays of buffoonery (*bābāt al-mujūn*)” and to transform it into a more sophisticated genre worthy of the court (Monroe & Pettigrew 2003, 166). M.M. Badawi’s descriptions of the plays include mention of singing and

dancing, mostly for comic effect. However, it is not clear if these songs were integrated into the narratives and there is no mention of the nature of their melodies. Written in a combination of verse and the rhyming prose style known as *saj'*, they are stronger on characterization than on plot. In the first, we are introduced to a hunch-backed fool named Ṭayf al-Khayāl and his debauched friend Prince Wiṣāl. The prince wants to repent, which will result in the loss of all his lands (the tombs and ruins of Old Cairo), as they are held on the condition that “he does not leave any source of fun, however immoral, untapped” (Badawi 1988, 16). The second play features a trickster and representations of the various types of people he has impersonated. Like Abū Zayd, he uses his wits to survive, and the various characterizations provided Ibn Dāniyāl with plentiful opportunities for satire. The final play once again deals with redemption, this time of a love-stricken man who is obsessed with an attractive young man he met in the baths.

Shadow plays continued to be performed in Egypt into the twentieth century, but by the seventeenth century they had returned to the folk tradition. Badawi has described existing seventeenth-century texts⁸ as being “written in the colloquial Egyptian, mainly in verse and designed to be largely sung, more like the libretto for a comic opera than drama proper” (Badawi 1987, 3). While

⁸ Badawi did not provide names for the authors of these plays but suggested that they were the work of several hands (Badawi 1987, 3).

considerably sanitized of explicit material, the comedy featured in Egyptian singing films shares with the shadow plays of Ibn Dāniyāl an emphasis on comic characterization and word play. The difference appears to lie in the purpose of comedy. Long utilized as a method of social criticism, in many Egyptian musicals it is relegated to the role of comic relief.

A related tradition is that of the *Qaragoz* ('*Aragoz* in Egyptian colloquial Arabic) puppet shows. It may be that this Turkish tradition, often compared to the English Punch and Judy shows and the Italian commedia dell'arte, was inspired by the Egyptian *khayāl al-zill*. A tale often cited by scholars tells of the Ottoman conqueror Sultān Selīm I (r. 1512-1520) having watched a shadow play depicting the hanging of the last of the Mamlūk sultans and being so impressed by it that he brought the performer back to Istanbul (Chen 2003, 39).⁹ *Qaragoz* ("Karagöz" in Turkish) is the central character in these often bawdy and violent folk farces. His name means "black-eyed" in Turkish, but Egyptians may also have associated it with a tyrannical thirteenth-century Egyptian government official named Qarāqūsh (Badawi 1988, 13).

Nineteenth-century reports by Europeans residing in Egypt reveal that this term was also applied to another form of puppet theater that utilized "wooden or

⁹ Chen also mentions the use of shadow theater as a literary metaphor in earlier Turkish documents so it is possible that the form reached Turkey earlier (Chen 2003, 39).

plaster figures” or “string puppets” (Sadgrove 1996, 15). In addition, the male puppeteer, or “presenter,” may have been joined on “grander occasions” by a few musicians playing “tambourines, a reed flute and a drum” (Sadgrove 1996, 14).¹⁰

In these traditions we can see a number of elements of musical theater, including the depiction of multiple characters, the integration of song, and the use of a dedicated, if mobile venue. We are still missing a key ingredient: the portrayal of a story by live human performers.

Mohabbazeen

Jean-François Detroye, a French officer who arrived with Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798, described the public places of Cairo on the day of the Prophet Mohammed’s birthday as:

crowded with small sideshows: bear or monkey trainers, singers, songstresses who performed scenes with dialogue, women who chanted poetry, magicians working with goblets who made live snakes disappear, children who performed the most indecent dances, gladiators who engaged in single combat, etc. (Cole 2007, 124).

Lane described similar street entertainment and reported on the performance of a farce by performers he called “Mohabbazeen” (“lovers”). These performances occurred in the same public places as well as at life-cycle

¹⁰ The instruments were probably the *riqq*, *nay*, and *tabla*.

celebrations and in “the houses of the great.” The farce was full of sex and violence but there is no mention of music (Lane 1860, 388-389).

What becomes clear from this survey of indigenous forms of musically enhanced narrative is that Egyptians were already accustomed to the concept of ornamenting their stories with songs and had even developed forms of presentation that incorporated the representation of multiple characters by both puppets and live performers. We have also encountered two common narrative themes: the heroic and the comic. One main difference remained between Egyptian and European performance practice. In Egypt, performances took place in the streets or in private residences. Aside from the ruins of ancient Greek theaters, there were no permanent performance venues. This would change following the French invasion at the end of the eighteenth century.

The Introduction of European Theater

General Napoleon Bonaparte was still on his way to becoming Emperor when he arrived in the harbor of Alexandria on July 1, 1798 with a force of soldiers, bureaucrats, and scholars numbering more than 35,000. Having been unable to defeat Admiral Horatio Nelson and the powerful British navy, Napoleon hoped to thwart the British by taking control of the ancient route to India. Egypt was also a valuable colonial asset, with its rich soil on the banks of the Nile that

had long provided for invaders. Of course, this is not what he told the Egyptians. Instead Napoleon promised to deliver the Egyptians from the Mamlūks, who had been the ruling class of Egypt since the thirteenth century and whose almost constant infighting in the eighteenth century had brought hardship to the Egyptian people. His plan was to recreate Egypt in the mold of the new French Republic (Cole 2007).

In August of 1798, the Egyptian Institute (L'Institute D'Égypte) was founded, where the scholars who accompanied Napoleon would study Egypt (Cole 2007, 145). The resulting product was the massive *Description de l'Égypte*, published in 20 volumes from 1809 to 1822.¹¹ The Institute was not only a research institution but also one that sought to have an impact on Egyptian culture. Napoleon viewed theater as a means of educating the public in morality and taste, and he attached great importance to sponsoring theatrical events and festivals (Cole 2007, 154). In 1799, the French-language newspaper produced by the expedition, the *Courier d'Égypte*, published the earliest existing report on a European theatrical production in Egypt. It described amateur productions of the plays of Voltaire and Molière in a theater that had been built by the expedition (Sadgrove 1996, 28-29).

¹¹ A digitized version of the entire series is available on the Bibliotheca Alexandrina website at <http://descegy.bibalex.org/index1.html>.

Although Napoleon's two-year rule of Egypt was brief, the contact with Europe had been made. This was the first extensive contact Egypt had with the Europe since the Roman era (20 BCE – third century CE). Exposure to the advances of Western culture, often through French connections, inspired admiration and imitation, beginning an association of modernization with Westernization in the minds of Egyptian intellectuals that would continue to be evident in the twentieth century. A key figure in the modernization of Egypt was Moḥammad `Alī (1769-1849), an Albanian officer sent by the Ottomans to defeat the French who then declared himself ruler of Egypt. As part of his modernization plan, he sent expeditions to Europe to gather information. The first of these included the translator, teacher, and reformer Rifā`a Rāf`i al-Ṭaḥṭawī (1801-1873) [Fig. 2.3], who spent from 1826 to 1831 in Paris. Matti Moosa has described him as “the first Egyptian intellectual who thoroughly understood Western ideals which he transmitted to his conservative society without prejudice” (Moosa 1997, 5). While in Paris, al-Ṭaḥṭawī attended numerous theatrical performances that incorporated music and dance. He concluded, “In short, for them the theatre (*tiyātr*) is a kind of school for the general public, which gives instruction to both the educated and uneducated” (Sadgrove 1996, 36). It seems that the French succeeded in persuading at least one Egyptian to view

theater as a way of educating the people, with the entertainment, including music, as a kind of theatrical ‘spoonful of sugar.’

By the 1840s, professional productions of European, often Italian, operas were being attended by the Egyptian elite in Alexandria and Cairo. Dedicated venues for these productions were constructed, most notably in the Azbakiyya Gardens of Cairo. Moḥammad `Alī had created this park out of marshlands but it was his grandson, Khedive Ismā`īl (r. 1863-1879), who financed the building of both the Théâtre de la Comédie / al-Masraḥ al-Komīdī on Azbekīa Square and the first incarnation of the Cairo Opera House (Théâtre Khédivial de l’Opera / Dār al-Opera) [Fig. 2.4], both of which opened in 1869 with European productions. The opening of the Opera House was set to coincide with the opening of the Suez Canal, and the Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi was approached by the manager, Paul Draneht, with the Khedive’s request that Verdi compose a celebratory hymn for the event. Verdi declined, citing his busy schedule and “because it is not my custom to compose occasional pieces” (Busch 1978, 3). The Opera House was opened instead with a performance of Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, on November 1, 1869. Ismā`īl persisted in pursuing a commission from the composer and, by the end of May 1870, Verdi had agreed to compose an opera for him (Busch 1978, 18). *Aida* premiered at the Cairo Opera House in December of 1871, but Verdi did not attend the performance.

The Beginnings of Arabic Musical Theater in Egypt

Now that the Egyptians had the requisite venue, what they needed was an Arabic play to perform. Translations of European works were made but no original indigenous play was performed until the 1870s. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's translation of Jacques Offenbach's opéra bouffe *La Belle Hélène* was reviewed in the January 1869 issue of the Egyptian newspaper, *Wādī al-Nīl*. The reviewer remarked, "we have witnessed a good creation, a useful means to order Arab morals" (Sadgrove 1996, 61). Once again an Egyptian praised the value of a Western form that could be adapted to serve the Egyptian people, and, as is evident in the films discussed in this study, the predominant source was French.

Western-style theater, in Arabic, had come to Beirut in 1847, when the Lebanese Christian Marūn al-Naqqāsh (1817-1855) staged his version of Moliere's *L'Avare / The Miser*, called *al-Bakhīl*. The guests invited to this performance, given in his own home, included foreign consuls and Lebanese dignitaries (Moosa 1997, 26). Al-Naqqāsh was inspired to write his comic opera after a trip to Italy, where he was impressed by the theatrical performances he witnessed there. In the introduction to a collection of his plays edited by his brother Niqūlā, Marūn al-Naqqāsh expressed his reason for choosing opera as his medium, saying that it "was to me more tasteful, desirable, splendid and delightful" and that in his opinion it would be "preferable to my people and

kindred” (Moosa 1997, 28). The presentational form chosen by al-Naqqāsh may have been Italian but the narrative source was French.

The full title of the piece was *Riwāyah Muḍḥikah Kulluha Mulahhana Dhāt Khamsat Fusūl Marufa bi Riwāyat al-Bakhīl I / A Comical Play in five acts, all of which are set to music, known as the play of the Miser*. The melodies to which the verse was set were taken from well-known Arabic songs along with two French songs (Badawi 1988, 45). One of the latter was the folk song “Marlborough s'en va-t-en guerre” (“Marlborough has left for the war”) (Moosa 1997, 379), which also provided the basic melody for the English folk song “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.” This is the first documented example of musical borrowing from the West in an Arabic theatrical production, a practice we will encounter again in Egyptian film songs. The use of familiar melodies also invites comparison to *The Beggar’s Opera*. Englishman John Gay’s 1728 production similarly utilized the melodies of popular songs and is often cited as an early contribution to the development of musical theater in the West.

Marūn al-Naqqāsh wrote two more musical farces before his early death at the age of 38. These plays were brought to Egypt with the troupe of his nephew, Saīm al-Naqqāsh (1850-1884), who arrived in Alexandria in December 1876. Their repertoire also included Saīm’s version of *Aida*, based on Antonio Ghislanzoni’s libretto for the Verdi opera (Sadgrove 1996, 130). Once again,

popular tunes were utilized, along with some of Verdi's music. It is illustrative of the emphasis on adaptation, rather than blind imitation, that Arabic poetic forms were utilized for the expression of the characters. Thus the forms of the texts and most of the music were Arabic, rather than European. These two Arabic playwrights were not just aping European ones: they were creating their own, albeit hybrid, form. Badawi has identified several tendencies in this form, including the dominance of love as a theme, the importance of song, and an emphasis on the "moral function of drama" (Badawi 1988, 56). Salīm strongly believed in the moral worth of drama, and argued that it should depict both virtues and vices in order to inspire people to do good and shun evil (Moosa 1997, 33).

Like the Levantine productions that preceded it, Egyptian theater was musical from the very start. In 1870 or 1871, Ya`qūb Şannū` (1839-1912), also known as James Sanua, presented a musical farce to Khedive Ismā`īl. More than three thousand people attended the performance, including members of the Egyptian elite as well as European dignitaries, visitors, and residents (Moosa 1997, 43). One of the titles given for this work is *Ghinā'iyah fī'l lughah al`ammīyah* (an operetta in the colloquial language) (Sadgrove 1996, 91). It was a satire that poked fun at Europeans and "was meant to explode the popular, western notion about the moral depravity of the harem system" (Badawi 1988,

32). Şannū` had crafted this play to send a message that would reach the widest possible audience. Although the manuscript has not survived, descriptions of his plays suggest that his use of familiar language and storytelling techniques, within the structure of a musical play that included elements of the puppet theater tradition, appealed to both educated Egyptians and the general population (Gendzier 1961, 22). Once again, as in al-Naqqāsh's 1847 production, the melodies of popular songs were utilized to set poetic couplets composed by Şannū`.

Following the success of this performance, the religious and political thinker Jamāl al-Dīn al-'Afhānī (1838-1897) encouraged Şannū` "to found a popular Arabic theatre to promote the general political consciousness of the populace" (Sadgrove 1996, 96). Şannū` soon became known as "the Egyptian Moliere" for his role as playwright of satires and for his entrepreneurial activities as leader of a theatrical troupe. The fact that he was compared to a French playwright reflects the importance of French drama as a model for nineteenth-century Egyptian theater. The sting of Şannū`'s satire appears to have invoked the wrath of the Khedive, and his theater was closed by royal decree in 1872 (Gendzier 1961, 22). Şannū` soon found another medium for his message and

became even better known for his journalistic endeavors, most famously the multilingual satirical journal *Abou Naddara*.¹²

The success of Levantine productions in Egypt continued with the arrival of actor and dramatist Shaykh Aḥmad Abū Khaḫīl al-Qabbānī (1833-1902). Known as the father of Syrian theater, al-Qabbānī brought his troupe to Alexandria in 1884. *Afifah / The Chaste Woman* provides us with an example of how songs were incorporated into his plays. According to Badawi, two scenes of this play depict “a drinking party at which songs including bits from well-known, classical Arabic poems and *muwashshahāt* ... are sung.” In his opinion, the “only justification for these scenes is to provide an excuse for the singing which the audience loved so much” (Badawi 1988, 59). This observation is reminiscent of Mast’s definition of the musical, in which the primary purpose of the plot is to facilitate musical performance (Mast 1987, 3). In addition, it is interesting to note that the themes of al-Qabbānī’s plays were based on local Arabic rather than imported stories. The genres featured also included familiar forms, such as the *muwashshah*, a kind of strophic song, often for soloist and chorus, that originated

¹² Roughly translated as “the man with the spectacles,” the journal was known for its political cartoons. Originally published in Egypt, it was the first journal written in the Egyptian Arabic dialect and also included articles in French, English, Turkish, Persian, Hebrew, and Italian. It was later published in Paris (Gendzier 1961, 24). The title also became a nickname for Şannū` himself.

in ninth-century Islamic Spain. More than adaptations, these plays were original works in an adopted form.

Shaykh Salāma Ḥijāzī (1852-1918) [Fig. 2.5] was the first star performer of Egyptian musical theater. Trained from an early age in Qur’anic recitation and various genres of religious vocal performance, Ḥijāzī earned the right to be called “Shaykh” and gained popularity as a religious singer. Yūsuf al-Khayyāt, who took over the management of Salīm al-Naqqāsh’s troupe in 1877, hired the reluctant young singer to perform between scenes and later persuaded Ḥijāzī to act in the musical pieces he produced.

In the 1878-79 season Ḥijāzī, now a member of Sulaymān al-Qardāhī’s troupe, was “picked out for praise” in the press for his performance as the lead character in *Tilīmāk*. The periodical *Miṣr* proclaimed that he had “bewitched the minds with the gentleness of his singing (*inshād*)¹³ and the softness of his voice” (Sadgrove 1996, 157). Ḥijāzī went on to work for Iskandar Faraḥ before forming his own company in 1904, and ended his career working for a giant of the next generation, the European-trained actor George Abyad.

The most common genre listed in an index of songs included in the biography of Ḥijāzī by Isis Faṭḥ Allah and Maḥmūd Kamāl is the *qaṣīda*, which number seventy-one and comprise around 34% of his total repertoire. The

¹³ This term literally translates as recitation, recital, or declamation.

qaṣīda (pl. *qaṣā'id*) is an Arabic poetic form with roots in pre-Islamic times. Early examples were written in praise of rulers, but by the time of Ḥijāzī the subject could range from a loved one to the beauties of nature. It is traditionally constructed in hemistiches (half-lines) with the same rhyme used for each line and one poetic meter being utilized throughout. Its musical manifestation is not fixed and would have been at least partly improvised by Ḥijāzī. Recordings exist, made between 1906 and 1910, of two *qaṣā'id* that were featured in musical plays.

“In kuntu fī il-jayshi ud’a ṣaḥīb al-‘alam” (“I was a standard bearer in the army”)¹⁴ was featured in the play *Ṣalaḥ al-Dīn al’Ayūbī / Saladin* (1889) The text for this operetta was written by Lebanese poet Najuib al-Ḥaddād (1867-1899), who based his libretto on Sir Walter Scott’s novel, *The Talisman* (1825). Thus, though the story was local, the interpretation was an adaptation of a European’s Orientalist view of the great warrior. According to Faṭḥ Allah and Kamāl, this was the first song that Ḥijāzī recorded (Faṭḥ Allah and Kamāl 2003, 166). That it was later recorded by the singer and actress Munīra al-Muhdiyyah, confirms Frédéric Lagrange’s assertion that this song assured Ḥijāzī’s popular triumph (Lagrange 1994). The song displays some of the virtuosity and musicality for which Ḥijāzī

¹⁴ Ḥijāzī recorded this *qaṣīda* for the Odeon recording company around 1906 (Odeon 45232). It was reissued on *Archives de la Musique Arabe – Vol. 1*. Ocora C-558678 (1987).

was famous, including melismatic melodic runs and the repeating of lines with melodic variation. This was clearly a performance meant to show his virtuosity as he hangs on syllables, particularly at the beginning of lines, ornamenting them in various ways. Ḥijāzī also displayed his range with octave leaps, and his mastery of the Arabic modal system with several modulations. Appreciation of his mastery is suggested in the exclamations of praise that can be heard on the recording. This audience participation may have been included to provide the feedback needed for an inspired performance and/or to create the illusion of a live concert for commercial purposes (Racy 1977, 148-149).

“Salāmun `ala ḥusnin” (“Greetings for a beautiful one”)¹⁵ was featured in *Shuhadā’ al-Gharām / Martyrs of Love* (1899), an adaptation by al-Ḥaddād of William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. This time the story was English but the melodic content of the featured song reflects Hijāzī’s Arabic musical training. Once again, he modulates several times during the performance. In the liner notes for this song, Lagrange commented on the fact that the recording does not end in the *maqām* in which it starts, an unusual occurrence in a performance from the early twentieth century. The recording actually ends with three lines left to sing. It may be that Ḥijāzī planned to modulate back to *Bayyātī* in those last few lines but ran out of recording time.

¹⁵ Ḥijāzī also recorded this song for Odeon around 1906 (Odeon 45242). It was reissued on Club du disque Arabe AAA 085 (1994).

The utilization of *maqām Jihārkāh*, a mode commonly used in Qur’anic recitation, suggests that Ḥijāzī’s modal sensibility was still firmly Eastern. The *maqām* he used most often was *Nahawānd*, while *Rāst* and *Jihārkāh* tie for second (Fath Allah and Kamāl 2002, 212). The closeness of *Nahawānd* to the Western minor mode complicates any assessment and may be an indication of a transition towards the use of fewer modes, often those that are compatible with the Western modal system.

The next most common genre in Ḥijāzī’s repertory is given the generic label “*laḥn masraḥī*” (theatrical melody). This broad category includes a variety of songs that didn’t fit into traditional generic categories. Most significant for this study is the appearance of the modern *taqtūqah* (pl. *ṭaqāṭīq*) and *mūnūlūg* (monologue) forms. A simple song in colloquial Arabic, it tends to be shorter in length and lighter in subject matter than traditional forms. The *taqtūqah* was used in films, often appearing as an expression of joy, such as “*Ghannī lī shwaya*” (“Sing to me a little”) in *Sallāma* (1945), or as a vehicle for a comic character. The *mūnūlūg* (“monologue”) was inspired by European operatic arias. It is a longer and more complex form that enables characters to express emotion and composers to demonstrate their creativity. In addition, the list includes the *salām* (“salutation”) and a few marches, a form borrowed directly from the West.

This survey of early Egyptian musical theater reveals a continuing interest in comic and heroic themes along with a growing preference for tragic love stories. Egyptian playwrights, such as Şannū`, sought to educate with musical satire but by the end of the nineteenth century it appears that virtuosic musical performance had become more central to the form. A uniquely Egyptian form of musical theater was emerging, which would serve as one of the models for the early musical films of the 1930s. The prevalence of the *qaṣīda* suggests that existing forms were being utilized in these early musical plays. However, we also see the emergence of new forms that would eventually outnumber the *qaṣīda* in musical theater and film.

From *Faṣl Muḍḥik* to Franco-Arab Revue

Around this same time, at the end of the nineteenth century, a kind of variety show, known as *faṣl muḍḥik*, or “comic scenes,” was also becoming popular. Laila Abou-Saif is one of the few scholars who have examined this form in any depth. It appears to have resembled the Italian *commedia dell’arte* tradition in its use of stock characters and low comedy. A surviving performer interviewed by Abou-Saif told her that “the scenarios of these comic acts were plagiarized from the plays of Beaumarchais, Rossini and Goldoni, by Italian

circus managers who were familiar with these plots” (Abou-Saif 1973, 1).¹⁶ It is likely that the characters of these European farces reminded Egyptian audiences of ones they had already encountered in their own comic tradition.

Abou-Saif has suggested that the *faṣl muḍḥik* evolved into what has come to be known as the “Franco-Arab revue.” In her discussion of the comedy of Naguīb al-Rīḥānī (1890-1949), she described al-Rīḥānī’s early productions as skits that “consisted of comic actions with songs and dances interspersed” (Abou-Saif 1973, 2). These skits featured Kish Kish Bey, a character developed by al-Rīḥānī and still remembered by Egyptians. According to Abou-Saif, these skits had some dramatic structure and, much like an “afterpiece” in a nineteenth-century American variety show, were one-act plays that capped off an evening of entertainment.

Al-Rīḥānī began working at Casino Shahrazād in the 1910s when he became enamored of one of the European female dancers. It was there that he developed the sketches and plays described above (Danielson 1997, 46). It may also have been there that he was inspired to include female actors in his Franco-Arab revue. The *faṣl muḍḥik* had previously been performed exclusively by males, with young boys playing the female parts. Ṣannū` had earlier included a

¹⁶ Only two of these men, Pierre-Augustine Caron de Beaumarchais (1732-1799) and Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), were playwrights. The mention of the composer Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) is probably a reference to his 1816 opera, based on Beaumarchais’ *Le Barbier de Seville* (1775).

few women in his troupe but it wasn't until the twentieth century that female stars began to appear regularly on the Egyptian theatrical stage.

The First Female Musical Theater Stars

As noted by Danielson, documentation of female performers before the twentieth century is sparse. Lane encountered professional female singers, known as *`awālim* (s. *`āllimah*) who sang in the homes of the wealthy. Literally “learned women,” these singers performed for mixed groups from behind a latticework wall or directly in front of an all-male audience. They were accomplished women who often played an instrument and were well read. Lane spoke less kindly of the *ghawāzī* (s. *ghāziyyah*) [Fig. 2.6]. He identified these dancers as belonging to a distinct tribe that claim to be descended from the Barāmikah family who served the eighth-century Baghdad court of Harūn al-Rashīd. He described their dancing as having “little of elegance” and reported that they were “never admitted into a respectable hareem” (Lane 2003 [1860], 377-379).

Women had always performed separately from men, aside from the male instrumentalists (*ālātiyyah*) who accompanied them. The introduction of Western-style theater to Egypt brought about a significant change in performance practice. Women could now perform alongside men. While some of the *`awālim* did take to

the stage (Danielson 1991b, 294), it was a new type of female professional performer that dominated Egyptian musical theater in the early twentieth century. Danielson has noted the strength of female stars who “eventually assumed the management of their own careers and money” and who were both “competent business people” and “tenacious negotiators” (Danielson 1991b, 303). Two of the most powerful of these professional female performers were Badī`a Maṣābnī (1892-1974) and Munīra al-Muhdiyyah (c.1895-1965).

The Syrian-born Christian Badī`a Maṣābnī [Fig. 2.7] was a star of Naguīb al-Rīḥānī's troupe and, for a time, his wife. In 1926 she opened her legendary music hall, *Ṣālaṭ Badī`a*. It became a sort of informal school for singers and dancers who would come to dominate the musical film industry in the 1940s, including the singers Layla Murād and Farid al-Atrash, as well as the dancers Taḥīa Carioca and Sāmīa Gamāl.

Munīra al-Muhdiyyah [Fig. 2.8] was educated in a French nun's school in Alexandria and began her career singing in coffee houses (Awad and Hamouda 2007, 115). In 1915 she joined Ḥijāzī's troupe and even took on his male roles when he became ill to perform. Eventually, she formed her own company (Danielson 1991b, 296). She was a pioneer of women's roles in musical theater and many of the roles she played were written especially for her, including adaptations of *Tosca*, *Carmen*, and *Madame Butterfly* (Danielson 1997, 46).

Munīra was also a powerful cultural presence at whose house the members of King Fū'ād's cabinet often gathered (Umm Kulthum 1977 [1969], 156). In addition, Munīra and her company "frequently performed nationalistic songs that were summarily censored by the British" (Danielson 1997, 47). Badawi has reported that "as early as 1900 the Egyptian theatre had become not only a permanent feature of Egyptian urban life, but a political force of some significance" (Badawi 1987, 5). As Egyptian frustration with the British protectorate and their own decadently impotent royal family grew, culminating in the 1919 revolution, a composer appeared who would create music to support the call for Egyptian independence, and compose the first nationalistic operettas.

Shaykh Sayyīd Darwīsh and the Egyptian Operetta

Shaykh Sayyīd Darwīsh (1892-1923) [Fig. 2.9] was perhaps the most political of Egyptian musical theater composers. In his short life, Darwīsh composed an impressive number of operettas, many of them for the troupe of al-Rīhānī.¹⁷ He also created a new style of musical theater that drew on indigenous themes and musical styles. This was more than verse set to existing melodies: the words were original (sometimes by Darwīsh himself) and the music that he

¹⁷ The number reported varies from twenty to thirty. Ḥassan Darwīsh's biography lists twenty-eight plays for which Sayyīd Darwīsh wrote the music (Darwīsh 2005, 277).

crafted was composed to be heard as uniquely Egyptian. The most common description of Darwīsh's theater music emphasizes its folksy Egyptian character. Danielson has described Darwīsh's songs and musical plays as being "modeled on melodies and tales of working-class people, cast in local dialects, and aimed toward both resistance to the British in particular and an affirmation of the viability of local cultural and political precedents in general" (Danielson 1997, 50). Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco's assessment of Darwīsh's musical style is that it was "rooted in Egyptian tradition and free from Turkish influence" (El-Shawan Castelo-Branco 2011).

Born to a poor family in Alexandria, Darwīsh learned to recite the Qur'an and perform religious genres as a child as well as later studying at a branch of al-Azhar, the great seat of Islamic learning (El-Kholy 2011). It is often said that he was discovered when the Syrian `Aṭṭāllah Brothers overheard him singing while he was working as a bricklayer. They asked him to join their troupe and return to Syria with them. While in Syria, Darwīsh had the opportunity to study with the master Iraqi composer and singer `Uthmān Mawṣilī (1854-1923). This fact is often mentioned but rarely commented upon. Darwīsh is considered to be the most Egyptian of composers, championed for his use of local folk music in his composition. His musical training by an Iraqi master in Syria reminds us that Egyptian composers, such as Darwīsh, belonged to a broader Arab tradition and

were thus looking East as well as West for musical inspiration. It is also said that upon his return to Egypt, around 1917, Darwīsh went to Cairo where he met Salāma Ḥijāzī, who introduced him to the world of the theater. He also joined the nationalist cause, supporting it with patriotic anthems (‘*anashīd*, s. *nashīd*). One of these anthems, “Baladī, baladī” (“My country, my country”), would eventually become the Egyptian national anthem.

The operetta most often mentioned in biographies of Darwīsh is *Al-`Ishara al-Ṭayyibah / The Good Relationship*,¹⁸ which premiered on March 11, 1920 (Fath Allah et al. 2003, 310). In 1937, English scholar Nevill Barbour called this work “Egyptian operette in its highest form” (Barbour 1937, 996). In her memoirs, Umm Kulthum said, “Sayyid Darwish summarized the political situation with his satirical operetta” (Umm Kulthum 1977 [1969], 154).¹⁹

The libretto was written by Moḥammad Taymūr (1892-1921), a young aristocrat who had dreamed as a child of entering the world of his idol, Shaykh Salāma Ḥijāzī (Berque 1970, 348). Lagrange has identified the plot as a nationalistic adaptation of the legend of Bluebeard (Lagrange 1994b), a vicious

¹⁸ The title is often translated as *The Ten of Diamonds*. Without the necessary short vowel markings it is difficult to confirm either translation but, considering the plot, *The Good Relationship* seems more likely.

¹⁹ This translation was done by Elizabeth W. Fernea and Basima Bezirgan, based on excerpts from *Umm Kulthum Allati la Ya’rifa Aḥad / The Umm Kulthum That Nobody knows*, an autobiography of Umm Kulthum as told to Maḥmūd `Awaḍ and published in Cairo, in 1969, by Akhbār al-Yawm.

Breton nobleman in search of a new wife. In *al-`Ishara al-Ṭayyiba* the nobleman character is transformed into the Mamlūk Hājī Bābā, who is seeking a new wife from among the peasants who tend the fields alongside the Nile. The peasants are the heroes, led by the shepherd, Sayf al-Dīn. The occupation of the lead character, as well as a plot line that features poisoning, suggest that this play was probably adapted not directly from the legend but instead from Offenbach's French opéra bouffe *Barbe-bleue* (1866). The narrative themes of the plot could be described as nationalistic in that they reflect a growing belief in the power of the people and disgust at the decadence of the idle nobility. In addition, Taymūr's words include a direct reference to the current political situation. The final line of the first act finale, "Yā ḥalālak yā balālak bīhā" ("Oh your solver, oh your property"), calls out to the political leader of the opposition (the Wafd party) to the British protectorate, Sa`ad Zaghlūl (1859-1927), asking him if their country will have victory from God soon.

According to Umm Kulthum, the song that brought down the house was "Ashān mā ni'alā wa ni'alā wa ni'alā lāzim niṭāṭī niṭāṭī niṭāṭī" ("To rise and rise and rise we have to bow and bow and bow") (Umm Kulthum 1977[1969], 154). I sense a note of sarcasm in these lyrics and a reference to the perceived need to bow down to the British in order to rise up as a modern state. This opening line is set with a melody that consists of an ascending and descending major arpeggio

starting on 1, or do, and ending with a very Western-sounding 5-6-7-1 (*sol-la-ti-do*). The song as a whole is composed in the *maqām `Ajam*, the Arabic mode that resembles Western major. In fact, almost half of the songs in the operetta are in `Ajam. The remaining *maqāmāt* – *Būsalīk*, *Hijāzkār*, *Hijāz*, *Nahawānd*, *Shahīnāz kurdi*, *Hijāzkār kurd*, and *Şabā būsalik* – are all relatively compatible with Western tuning. This trend in the use of modes did not go un-noticed. The issue of intonation was a hotly debated topic in musical circles of the 1920s and 30s, especially regarding the introduction of the piano (see chapter 1). It is also reflective of the fact that Darwīsh’s operettas were accompanied by an orchestra, led by “il Signore Casio” (Lagrange 1994). I have not encountered a full score but orchestral parts exist for some of the operettas revealing that they included overtures and instrumental dance pieces [Fig. 2.10].

The following year Darwīsh heard a young singer named Moḥammed Abdel Wahhab (c.1910 – 1991) [Fig. 2.11] singing for the troupe of the blackface comedian `Ali al-Kassār (1897-1957). Darwīsh was so impressed that he asked Abdel Wahhab to join his troupe and perform in his new operetta *Shahrazād* (Armbrust 1996, 71). Unfortunately, the production was a failure with Darwīsh in the lead role. They presented it again, with Abdel Wahhab taking the lead, but once again success eluded them (Azzam 1990, 25). Darwīsh died in 1923, at the age of 31, but his music continued to inspire composers for decades to come.

Two Icons of Egyptian Musical Culture

As noted by both `Azzam (1990) and Armbrust (1996), it is hard to determine the exact year of Mohammed Abdel Wahhab's birth. He officially claimed 1910 as his birth year, but that would have made him only eleven years old when Darwīsh cast him in *Shahrazād*. A piece in the magazine *al-Sīnimā / The Cinema* gives the year as 1905 (*al-Sīnimā*, August 2, 1945, 31). The place of his birth clearly was Cairo, in the Sha`rānī quarter. Abdel Wahhab did receive some religious training as a child, but he was much more interested in popular music and only learned to recite a third of the Qur'an. By the age of nine he was already known for his mastery of the songs of Cairo's famous singers (Azzam 1990, 18).

Abdel Wahhab's professional career began in 1917 when he impressed theatrical impresario Fawzī al-Jazāyirī with his knowledge of Salāma Ḥijāzī songs, including "Salāmun `ala ḥusnin." He soon began singing these songs between scenes, using the stage name "The genius young Mohammed al-Baghdādī" (Azzam 1990, 20). His family was not happy with this development but Abdel Wahhab was determined to follow the path of a performer and "even threatened suicide if the family would not allow him to continue his music" (Azzam 1990, 21).

The following year Abdel Wahhab joined the troupe of `Abd al-Rahmān Rushdī. While singing between the acts of the play *al-Shams al-Mushriqah / The Rising Sun* he was heard by the celebrated poet Aḥmad Shawqī (1869-1932) [Fig. 2.12]. Shawqī protested that the boy was too young for the stage and informed the British authorities, who banned him from singing in public (Azzam 1990, 23).

After the failure of *Shahrazād*, Abdel Wahhab worked for al-Rīhānī's troupe before entering Nādī al-Mūsīqā al-Sharqī (The Oriental Music Club) for formal training in Arabic music theory and the playing of the 'ūd under the noted musicians Moḥammad al-Qaṣabjī (1892-1966) and Shaykh Darwīsh al-Ḥarīrī (1881-1957). It is also here that Abdel Wahhab began composing his own music.

At a benefit concert in Alexandria in 1925, Abdel Wahhab was heard again by Shawqī. The great poet was so impressed by Abdel Wahhab's performance of the Ḥijāzī song "Jaddidi yā nafsu ḥazzik" ("Oh soul, try your luck again") that he asked to meet the young singer (Azzam 1990, 27), beginning a mentorship that would continue until the poet's death in 1933. Shawqī soon introduced Abdel Wahhab to the elite of Cairo's musical and intellectual scene. He also broadened the young singer's cultural outlook with exposure to European music and literature. This cultural education included a number of trips abroad to Lebanon, Turkey, and France. In Paris, Abdel Wahhab was exposed to a variety of

Western art, as the pair attended concerts and operas, art shows, theater, and the cinema (Azzam 1990, 33). Shawqī encouraged him to incorporate Western techniques into his compositions in order to create a modern Egyptian style, saying “Since you are young, [you have to] compose music not for our generation but for future generations” (Azzam 1990, 35).

Abdel Wahhab’s early compositional innovations included the addition of instruments to the traditional *takht* ensemble (see chapter 1); an attention to the correspondence between the music and the text, in the form of word painting; the introduction of melodies borrowed from or inspired by Western classical music; and the incorporation of Western rhythms (Azzam 1990, 39). This was farther than either Ḥijāzī or Darwīsh had gone, and Abdel Wahhab became known as “Za`īm al-tajdīd” (The Pioneer of Innovations) (Azzam 1990, 36). It is important to note that one thing that never changed was his vocal timbre. Abdel Wahhab thus became a new kind of singer as well, who transformed Western melodies with his Eastern interpretation.

His growing fame as a composer led Munīra al-Muhdiyyah to ask him to complete *Klībātra wa Mārk Anṭwān / Cleopatra and Mark Antony*, an operetta left unfinished by Darwīsh. Danielson gives the date of its premiere as January

20, 1927.²⁰ Composer Dāwūd Ḥusnī (1870-1937) had attempted to complete the opera but never finished. What Munīra wanted was new music for the third act (Darwīsh 2005, 384). Unfortunately, critics hailed the songs Abdel Wahhab wrote for himself as Antony and were unimpressed with those he wrote for Munīra (as Cleopatra). Friction between the two led Abdel Wahhab to quit in anger and object to Munīra recording his compositions, saying that he would prefer Umm Kulthum to record them (Danielson 1997, 65). Thus began the fall of one star and the rise of a country girl who was to become the most famous singer in all of Egypt, and even the whole of the Arab world.

Born in the small village of Ṭammāy al-Zahāyra, in the Nile delta region, to a traditional and religious family, Umm Kulthum (1904-1975) [Fig. 2.13] was named after one of The Prophet's daughters. Her father, Shaykh Ibrāhīm, was the imām (religious leader) of the local mosque who yielded to his daughter's unusual request to attend a religious school known as a *kuttāb*, where she learned to recite the Qur'ān. It was here that Umm Kulthum developed an understanding of the Arabic modal system as well as impeccable diction.

²⁰ The biographies of Darwīsh by Faṭḥ Allah et al. (2003) and Darwīsh's son Ḥassan Darwīsh (2005), report that a production had started before Darwīsh's death in 1923. They also give 1926 as the year of the premiere of Munīra's revised version.

Shakyh Ibrāhīm soon began bringing her along to *mawlid* celebrations in honor of The Prophet's birthday. At this point, her repertoire was primarily religious. In her memoirs, Umm Kulthum explained that her father was having trouble accepting the idea of his daughter becoming a singer, so he began to dress her as a boy (Umm Kulthum 1977, 145). As her fame spread throughout the delta, the circumstances of her family improved and she was soon invited to perform in Cairo. On the advice of the religious performer Shakyh `Abu al-`ilā Moḥammad (1884-1942), the family moved to the Cairo neighborhood of Zamalek. While `Abu al-`ilā was her first important teacher, it was his friend the poet Aḥmad Rāmī (1892-1981) [Fig. 2.14] who was to become Umm Kulthum's most important mentor, much as Shawqī was to Abdel Wahhab. He taught her about poetry and provided her with valuable contacts in the world of the urban elite. She described their first meeting in her memoirs: "Ahmad Rāmī came to one of my concerts in Azbakiyah Gardens and during the intermission came backstage and introduced himself as a friend of Shaykh Abu al-`alla . . . Everyone in Cairo at that time knew of Ahmad Rami's work" (Umm Kulthum 1977, 150).

Cairo audiences were pressuring her to sing lighter popular songs. Umm Kulthum's response was to "work harder" and "improve myself and the music" (Umm Kulthum 1977, 160). This strategy worked to her benefit and contributed to a perceived moral foundation that served her well throughout her career. In 1926

she was already earning well over 5,000 Egyptian pounds (then equivalent to \$25,000) annually from concerts and recordings (Danielson 1991b, 302). The press was reporting a rivalry between Umm Kulthum and Munīra al-Muḥdiyyah; by the late twenties, it was Umm Kulthum who was coming out on top. She was earning 50 LE (Egyptian pounds) per recording for records that were known to have sold half a million copies (Umm Kulthum 1977, 161).

The young singer lived a sheltered life for the first few years she was in Cairo, but she did attend and perform at the salons that took place at the homes of the artistically minded elite. As noted by Danielson, these gatherings were networking opportunities for young performers and it was at one of them that Umm Kulthum first met, and even performed with, Abdel Wahhab. They reportedly sang the *dīālūg* (duet) “‘Ala qadd al-layl mā yaṭūl” (“All through the night”) from Darwīsh’s *al-`Isharah al-Ṭayyibah* (Danielson 1997, 171 and 245). By the early 1930s these two artists were established as the top Egyptian singing stars and the press tried to stir up some controversy with talk of rivalry. A 1934 article in *al- Ithnayn* described a meeting between these two “frienemies” (*al- Ithnayn*, November 5, 1934, p. 16) [Fig. 2.15]. By the time this picture was taken Abdel Wahhab had already made the first successful Egyptian musical film and Umm Kulthum was considering making one herself, with him as her co-star.

Conclusion

From this survey of Egyptian musical narrative traditions we can see that Egyptians were already familiar with many of the conventions of the musically enhanced narrative performance when sound film arrived in Egypt. It was not surprising to see a character in a film break into song, since their storytellers had been incorporating sung poetry into their narratives for at least a thousand years. In addition, some character types represented on a screen were familiar from the shadow play tradition. Egyptians also had one hundred years of exposure to European musical theater and had absorbed some its conventions into indigenous musical plays and operettas. While the concept of drama on a dedicated stage was generally a Western one, it was particularly French literature that was providing the majority of the narrative inspiration.

In a relatively short period of time Egyptians developed their own form of musical theater that featured both old genres of music and poetry and new forms that were either adopted or invented to suit a new mode of performance. That the composers of the music were often performers as well is a significant difference from the European model. Beginning with Ḥijāzī, a cult of the composer/performer as star was established that was not the norm in Hollywood. The building blocks of this music came from the Arabic musical tradition, but some changes were made to accommodate the incorporation of Western

melodies and instrumentation. The librettos of early Egyptian musical plays and operettas were written by the most revered of poets who, like the composers, incorporated both local and imported elements into their narratives and poetic imagery. They sought to educate as well as to entertain, crafting stories that satirized those who deserved it and celebrated the honorable.

Finally, a stock of talent was ready for musical film to arrive. Stars had already emerged who would go on to dominate Egyptian film musicals for years to come, not only as performers, but also as producers who were involved in all aspects of production. This new medium would enable them to expand their fame and wealth by sending out their voices and their images across the Arab world and beyond.

As suggested by Jacques Berque in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, adopted forms of musical theater were enriched by local content and developed into a uniquely Egyptian form of musical theater. In this development we can see the emergence of a society that incorporated admired aspects of Western culture in the service of creating a modern Egyptian identity.

Figure 2.1. A “shá’er” encountered by Edward Lane in the early nineteenth century (Lane 2003 [1860], 393)



A Shá’er, with his accompanying Violist, and part of his Audience.



Figure 2.2. Egyptian Mamlūk shadow puppets. Collected by the Ledermuseum at Offenbach, Frankfurt-Main, Germany (Chen 2003, 49)

Figure 2.3. The Egyptian translator, teacher, and reformer Rifā`a Rāf`i al-Ṭaḥṭawī
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tahtawi.jpg>)



Figure 2.4. First Cairo Opera House / Théâtre Khédivial de l'Opera / Dār al-Opera (<http://rashamd.wordpress.com/>)





Figure 2.5. Shaykh Salāma Hijāzī (*al-Kawākib/The Stars*, October 10, 1932, p.19)

Figure 2.6. *Ghawāzi* –
Egyptian dancing girls
(Lane 2003 [1860], 378)



Dancing-Girls (Ghawāzee, or Ghāzeeyehs).

Figure 2.7. Badī'a Maṣābnī in an elaborate costume from the production of *Yasmīna*, one of her greatest successes with Naguīb al-Rīḥānī in the mid-1920s (*al-Iṭḥnayn*, no. 166, August 16, 1937, p.26).



Figure 2.8 Munīra al-Muḥdiyyah (*Rūz al-Yūsuf*, October 26, 1931)



Figure 2.9. Shaykh Sayyid Darwish (Darwish 2005, 75)

Figure 2.10. Flute part for the overture of Darwish's operetta *Umm 44 / Mother 44* (1922) (Fath Allah 2003, 198)

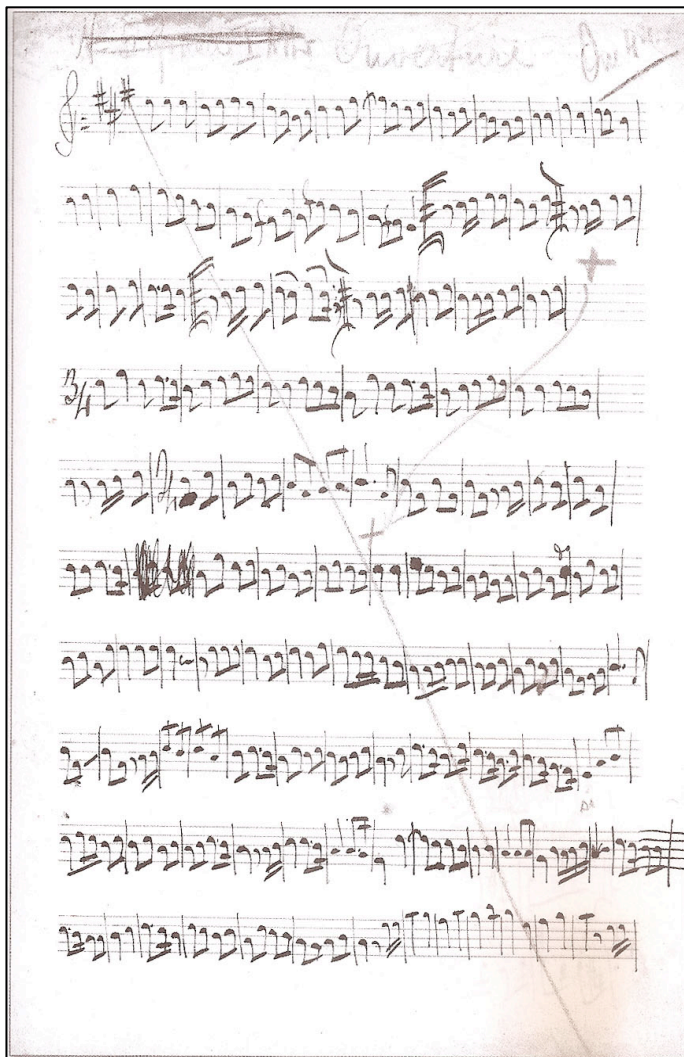


Figure 2.11. Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (*al-Kawākib*, May 30, 1932, p.17)



Figure 2.12. The poet Aḥmad Shawqī, mentor to Abdel Wahhab (Berque 1972)

Figure 2.13. Umm Kulthum (*al-Kawākib*, May 30, 1932, p.4)



Figure 2.14. The poet Aḥmad Rāmī from the press book for *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935) (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)

Figure 2.15. Umm Kulthum and Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (*al-Ithnayn*, November 5, 1934, p.16)



Chapter 3: Mass Media and the Development of the Egyptian Singing Film

We thought of creating this company because we believe that the ideal means to fight against the vices and depravity conveyed by the films that come from the West lies in the success of our modest efforts in this factory. It will enable us to produce Egyptian films, with Egyptian subjects, Egyptian stories and Egyptian aesthetics, films of high value for us to project in our country and in its Eastern neighbors. – Ṭal`at Ḥarb in his 1925 inaugural speech for the Misr Company for Acting and Cinema (quoted in Farid 1973, 40)

Cinema in Egypt, like the musical theater that preceded it, is an adopted form that was adapted to entertain and educate a local, as well as a wider Arabic, audience. This medium was accessible not only to the educated Egyptian elite, but also to the masses in Egypt and beyond its borders. The technology may have been borrowed from the West but the content of the stories told by these films addressed issues of local interest, and the music they featured was composed to appeal to local tastes.

While the West continued to be admired as a model for the modernization of Egyptian culture, some, like Ṭal`at Ḥarb, were concerned about the imitation of its vices and the loss of a distinctly Egyptian identity. Others went further and rejected Western culture in favor of an Islamic solution. To this end, schoolteacher and imam Ḥassan al-Bannā (1906-1949) founded the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimun*) in 1928, an organization that opposed Westernization and advocated a return to Islamic ideals and religious law

(*sharī'ah*). Others, such as the writers Moḥammad Ḥussayn Haykal (1888-1956) and Taha Hussein (1889-1973), struggled to reconcile Islamic spiritualism with a Western scientific approach to reform. Haykal expressed his concerns in his 1937 memoir *Fi Manzil al-Waḥī / In the Dwelling Place of Inspiration*:

A nation whose present is not connected with its past is bound to lose its way ... Hence, the chasm has kept widening between the masses of the peoples of the East and those calling for the ignoring of our past and turning with all our might in the Western direction; and hence the revulsion of the masses at adopting the ideological life of the West while yet insisting on emulating its science and industry. But since ideological life is the foundation of existence for both individuals and for peoples, there was no escape from going back to our history in search of foundations for our ideological life so that we may emerge from our humiliating stagnation ...” (quoted in Safran 1961, 174)¹

The “science and industry” that was emulated included the technology and business of mass media. This chapter examines the impact of the introduction of mass media into Egypt and the early development of Egyptian musical film. It focuses on the ways in which foreign narrative and musical forms were blended with local traditions to create a uniquely Egyptian form of the movie musical. The films of Mohammed Abdel Wahhab provide the primary material for illustrating the syncretic nature of early Egyptian film musicals and the music they feature. The plots of these films exhibit elements borrowed both from European melodrama and, as the decade progresses, from Hollywood romantic comedy. The featured music provides examples of cross-cultural adaptation in which

¹ Safran refers to this period as the “Crisis of Orientation.” (Safran 1961)

foreign musical genres were utilized as compositional elements in the service of creating a modern form of Egyptian song. The resulting films appealed to an audience with more entertainment choices than ever before while still seeking to uplift and enlighten them.

The Introduction of Mass Media

The communicative and performative platforms facilitated by the technological advances of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries exposed a much larger portion of the Egyptian population to a variety of ideas and art forms ever before. The publication of periodicals made possible by the printing press provided a forum for debates on cultural issues and artistic criticism that formed subsequent formal views on taste. Recording technology and the radio exposed Egyptians to a variety of local and foreign musics, thus broadening their musical knowledge and enabling the rise of musical stars to unprecedented heights.

When he arrived in Egypt in 1798, Napoleon had exposed Egyptians not only to European culture but also to a device that made it possible to reach a wider portion of the population than ever before. Timothy Mitchell has noted that “the absence of printing over the preceding centuries has often been cited as evidence of the backwardness and isolation of the Arab world that the French occupation was to shatter” (Mitchell 1991, 133). The nineteenth-century

European powers of France and England utilized the printed word as what Mitchell calls “the machinery of truth” (Mitchell 1991, 138). The printing press, along with other tools of mass communication, enabled these colonial powers to disseminate their version of the truth, as well as their ideologies.

The Muslim elite of Egypt were at first somewhat suspicious of the printing press. In Arabic, it is common for only consonants and long vowels to be visually represented. Short vowels are often included in more formal documents and a mistake in placing one would change the meaning of a word. This potential for miscommunication concerned nineteenth-century imāms, who went so far as to ban the use of printed texts at the important Egyptian seat of religious learning, al-‘Azhar (Messick 1996, 116). Political leaders were more pragmatic.

Moḥammad `Alī saw the potential of printing as a tool of military instruction and set up the first Egyptian printing press for that purpose. Early publication was largely governmental but by the time of the nationalist uprising in 1882, an active civilian press had emerged (Mitchell 1991, 134). Though sometimes suppressed by the government and denounced by scholars, early Egyptian journals and newspapers not only reported the news but were also at the center of cultural and political debates.² In addition, print media formalized standards of taste. A

² *Abou Naddara*, published by the writer Ya’qūb Ṣannū’, is an early example of the periodical press in Egypt being utilized for political and social criticism (see chapter 2).

prime example is a 1931 article that asked the question, “Why do we like the voices of Sayyīd Darwīsh, Umm Kulthum and Abdel Wahhab?” (*Rūz al-Yūsuf*, November 9, 1931).

The introduction of audio recording to Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century facilitated both access to music performed half a world away and the ability of local performers to create a commercial product that could be marketed at home and abroad. Customers and record company executives were replacing traditional patrons, and genres were being transformed to accommodate the limitations of early recording technology. In addition, through the medium of the cylinder, and later the disc, musical forms and styles were able to travel great distances and to be consumed outside of their original cultural context.

It was in the first few years of the twentieth century that advertisements for recorded cylinders began to appear in Egyptian periodicals, and a number of record companies, both European and Arab, began to produce recordings for the Egyptian market. Salāma Hijāzī was among the first Egyptian musical celebrities to be recorded by the German Odeon Company. The British Gramophone Company counted Umm Kulthum and Mohammed Abdel Wahhab among its stars. By the 1920s, the Lebanese Baidaphon Company had expanded its distribution to cover most of the Middle East and even shipped records to Europe and the Americas. Its main star was Munīra al-Muhdiyyah and by the end of the

decade it became the primary recording company for Mohammed Abdel Wahhab. Abdel Wahhab later became a partner in the company and transformed its Egyptian branch into a new company known as Cairophon (Racy 1977, 113). His involvement in the record industry may explain the source of the capital he used to start his film company.

While European companies did expend some effort to appeal to the local Egyptian audience with recordings of their established musical stars, their primary purpose was to expand the market for their Western products. The resulting popularity of Western popular music is evident in a series of articles that appeared in the Egyptian periodical *al-Mumathil / The Actor* in late 1926 to early 1927. Starting on November 4, 1926, with an article entitled "How to Learn to Dance at Home," the series informed interested Egyptians about several types of social dance that were popular in Europe at the time: the tango, Charleston, waltz, and java [Fig. 3.1].

The introduction of the radio in the 1920s exposed a much larger portion of the Egyptian population to foreign musical styles, as well as to the innovations in Egyptian music. Radio facilitated the distribution of music to Egyptians of all classes, who could listen in cafes and other public spaces. As early as 1923, a wealthy Cairene owned a radio transmitting station (el-Shawan 1980, 94). In 1934, the Egyptian State Broadcast Station was inaugurated in a joint venture

between the Egyptian government and the British Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company. The station broadcast two programs, one European and another Arabic, both consisting primarily of musical material (el-Shawan 1980, 97). Thus, the radio became not only a source of musical inspiration from the West but also an outlet for indigenous composition and performance.

While these forms of mass media presented a multicultural collection of words and music to a widening Egyptian audience, the local theatrical tradition established modern models for musical narrative performance. Yet another new technology – that of film – provided this tradition with a method of presentation that could reach an audience beyond the walls of the theater and beyond the borders of Egypt. It also expanded exposure to images, and later sounds, of the West. The resulting musical films are examples of cross-cultural creativity, combining visual, narrative, and musical elements into a new form that reflect the multicultural nature of early twentieth-century Egyptian society.

The Emergence of the Egyptian Singing Film

The history of Egyptian musical film began with another French invasion, albeit a cultural one. On November 5, 1896, less than a year after they premiered their first film in Paris, the Lumière Brothers presented a short film in Alexandria. The screening took place in Café Zawani within a building known as the

Toussoun Bourse, and it seems to have made quite an impression on the cosmopolitan elite in attendance (Awad and Hamouda 1007, 5). An account of the event in the periodical *al-Maw'id* (November 12, 1896) reflects a cultural inferiority complex that was not uncommon in the Middle East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The anonymous writer pleaded, "Oh people, our only salvation lies in following in their footsteps and making the progress of our country our only aim, so that we can catch up with them" (ibid.).

Mitchell has shown how this attitude towards the West was propagated in the late nineteenth century. In particular, he has cited the writing of the Lebanese immigrant Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914) who, in his journal *al-Hilāl*, "warned Egyptians of the social disruption that faced them if they did not follow the steady course of development whose stages had been marked out by the West" (Mitchell 1991, 169). This pro-Western attitude reached a wide audience, not only through Zaydān's journals but also through formal education (Mitchell 1991, 170). Ella Shohat has suggested that this inferiority complex is reflected in " 'El-Iktibes' [al-'iqtibās] adaptations sometimes amounting to plagiarism" (Shohat 1983, 26) that appeared on Egyptian screens. I would argue that these adaptations were more than mere copies and that a great deal can be learned about Egyptian society by identifying what differentiates them from the borrowed models.

According to the American trade commissioner, in 1926, at least half of all films shown in Egypt were made in the United States (Vitalis 2000, 280). Articles and advertisements in Egyptian periodicals of the period confirm the popularity of Hollywood films. The cover of the March 16, 1932 cover of *al-Dunya Al-Muṣawwarah / Picture World* [Fig. 3.2] featured a photograph of Charlie Chaplin wearing a *ṭarbūsh*.³ The article inside celebrated his visit to Egypt as if he were a foreign dignitary. *Fann al-Sīnimā*⁴ also published many articles on American stars such as Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson, but this announcement addressed to theater owners shows an early concern for the associated dangers of Westernization:

To the movie theaters:

1. The Arabic language must always be in the credits, the program, and in the films.
2. Arabic translation must be accurate and in the correct style.
3. The Egyptian is the owner of the country and thus must be respected.

Remember this well, oh owners of the movie theaters, as we will not forgive you after today.

(*Fann al-Sīnimā*, July 5, 1933, p. 37)

Even the early films shot in Egypt were largely foreign productions. The first indigenous Egyptian production is often claimed to be a short documentary

³ *Ṭarbūsh* is the Egyptian name for the Greek/Ottoman Turkish “fez.” This head covering was an essential item in the wardrobe of an early twentieth-century Egyptian gentleman.

⁴ Published by the Organization of Cinema Critics, *Fann al-Sīnimā* appears to have been primarily a trade journal for the film industry that included articles on filmmaking techniques along with news on the American and Egyptian movie business.

made in 1907 by Alexandrian photographers Aziz Bandarli and Umberto Doras.⁵ The first narrative film featuring local content, *Fī Balād Tūt 'Ankh Āmūn / In the Land of Tutankhamun*, premiered on July 1, 1923. It was the work of Italian director and producer Victor Rossito, who employed Mohammad Bayoumi (1894-1963), soon to become the first Egyptian director, as a cameraman. In 1925, the banker Ṭal`at Ḥarb (1867-1941) [Fig. 3.3] founded *Shirkat Miṣr l-il-Tamthīl wa al-Sīnimā* (The Misr Company for Acting and Cinema) with the help of King Fū`ād (1868-1936). As is evident in the quote from his inaugural speech for the company that was included at the beginning of this chapter, Ṭal`at Ḥarb envisioned his new enterprise as a means to fight against the vices propagated by Western films by making films that promoted Egyptian culture and that could be projected in their own country as well as being exported to the rest of the Arab world (Farid 1973, 40). This vision likely reflects the nationalist and pan-Arab ideals popular amongst an Egyptian intellectual elite who continued to work for an Egypt independent from British control, despite the failure of the 1919 revolution.

From the start, native Egyptian productions were more star than studio driven. Actors created their own vehicles, relying on their own capital or that of

⁵ The film, first shown on June 20, 1907, was entitled *Ziyarat al-Khedive Abbās li Masjid al-Mursi Abul ala al-Iskandariyyah / The Visit of Khedive Abbas to al-Mursi Abu al-Abbas Mosque in Alexandria*.

private investors. Directors were often also screenwriters and sometimes producers as well. In 1927, actress `Azīza `Amīr (1901-1952) founded one of the first Egyptian film companies with the Turkish writer Wahad Orfey. The silent film they produced, *Layla* (1927), addressed Egyptian concerns over the seductive nature of Western culture (Culhane 1995). A 1931 catalog of the Odeon recording company advertised six discs of background music for the film, composed by Bahīga Ḥāfiz (1908-1983) [Fig. 3.4], who also played a role in the film (Racy 1977, 106). It is notable that the driving creative force behind this film was partly female, as one of its directors and the composer of the music were both women. We have already met powerful women in the Egyptian theatrical scene of the 1920s. A number of these entrepreneurial performers entered the movie business and participated in its early development, but only one of them, Umm Kulthum, became a successful film star.

Local film production was sparse in the silent era, averaging around two to three films a year. This number rose dramatically to six in 1932, the year of the first Egyptian sound film, and continued to rise to a level of forty to sixty films a year by the late 1940s before dropping off again in the early 1960s (Ḥassan 1995, 228-36). An article by early Egyptian film critic Ḥassan Goma`a in the December 1929 issue of *al-Hilāl* illustrates an awareness of Hollywood's experiments with sound, including *Don Juan* (1926), *The Jazz Singer* (1927), and

Show Boat (1929) (quoted in Awad & Hamouda 2007, 368-69). These films inspired similar experimentation in Egypt. *M`agazat al-Ḥubb / Miracle of Love* premiered in Alexandria on December 10, 1930. Directed by Palestinian-Chilean Ibrāhīm Lāma and starring his brother Badr, this film was advertised as a singing film but in actuality was a silent film augmented by discs made by the singer Nagāt `Alī (1910-1993) (Qāssim 2006, 514). Songs were also added to another silent film entitled *Taḥt Daw' al-'Amar / Under the Moonlight*. The silent version premiered on June 19, 1930 (al-Ḥadarī 1989, 49). A revamped version, with songs composed by Ibrāhīm Fawzī and performed by the musical theater veteran `Abd al-M`uṭī Ḥijāzi, premiered at Cinema Olympia in Cairo on July 4, 1932 (al-Ḥadarī 1989, 50). This re-release may have been a response to the premieres of Egypt's first sound features earlier that year.

Awalād al-Dhawāt / Sons of the Aristocrats was the first of these to premiere, in March of 1932. In the October 1965 issue of *al-Hilāl*, Bahīga Ḥāfiz claimed that she was invited to Paris by director Moḥammad Karīm and actor Yūsuf Wahbi to participate in this milestone production (quoted in Awad & Hamouda 2007, 380). Unfortunately, Wahbi was not easy to get along with and

after she returned to Egypt he declared in print that her voice was not suitable for the microphone.⁶

Moḥammad Karīm (1886-1972) [Fig. 3.5] had begun his film career as an actor in the 1918 Italian production *Sharaf el-Badawī / The Honor of the Bedouin*, making him the first Egyptian actor to appear onscreen. In the 1920s, he played roles in two Italian films and studied filmmaking techniques at the innovative UFA (Universum Film AG) Studios in Berlin, where he may have participated in the production of Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927) (Thorval 1975, 11). Karīm returned to Egypt in 1928 and applied for a job at the Misr Company for Acting and Cinema. His first feature film was *Zeinab* (1930), starring Bahīga Ḥāfiz. This adaptation of the 1912 novel by Moḥammad Ḥussayn Haykal depicts characters who are grappling with the complexities of modern Egyptian life and questioning the worth of Westernization.

The second sound film to premiere, on April 3, 1932, is often cited as the first Egyptian singing film. *Unshūdat al-Fū'ād / Song of the Heart* [Fig. 3.6] would be more accurately described as a family melodrama to which a couple of songs were added. Filmed in Paris and directed by Mario Volpi, this was, at least partially, a foreign production. The cast included the distinguished

⁶ Contemporary accounts in the periodical *Rūz el-Yūsuf* reported that she asked for a retraction and filed a lawsuit against Wahbi. They also indicate that he was still casting in November of 1931, which puts the March 1932 premiere date in question (*Rūz el-Yūsuf*, November 2, 1931).

Shakespearean actor George Abyad (1880-1959), as well as the singer, `ūd player, and composer Nādira. The film contains two songs written by the Lebanese poet Khalīl Muṭrān (1872-1949) and the Egyptian composer Shaykh Zakariyyā Aḥmad (1896-1961)[Fig. 3.7], who also made an appearance in the film.

Zakariyyā Aḥmad is considered among the most ‘Egyptian’ of composers. Like Ḥijāzī and Darwīsh, he received training in religious recitation and thus earned the right to use the title “Shaykh.” Not surprisingly, his father was less than thrilled when Zakariyyā announced that he wanted to compose for the theater, but he found success there and is known for his development of the *taqṭūqah* form. In 1919 or 1920 he encountered a young Umm Kulthum and was impressed with her talent (Danielson 1997, 34-35). He went on to write forty-six songs for her, including many of her film songs.

Poet Khalīl Muṭrān, a contemporary and colleague of Aḥmad Shawqī, is known for his incorporation of European Romantic images and ideals into an Arabic classical framework (Ostle 1971 & 1995). His association with Abyad went back to a 1912 translation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In his lengthy introduction to the play, Muṭrān described it as an Arabization (*ta`rīb*) rather than as a translation (*tarjamah*) (Ghazoul 1998, 3).

The length of the songs in *Unshūdat al-Fū'ād* is often given as the reason for the film's financial failure, but the press clippings provided by al-Ḥaḍari make no mention of song length and, in general, praise Nādira's singing. The main criticism was the European nature of the story (al-Ḥaḍari 1989, 44-47). Existing recordings reveal that the two featured songs, "Unshūdat al-Fū'ād" ("Song of the heart") and "Yā baḥr al-Nīl yā ghālī" ("Oh Nile River oh treasure"), were not particularly long or different from what Egyptian theater audiences had heard in the operettas of Sayyīd Darwīsh. The first is the more traditional piece of the two, although it does juxtapose the Western violin technique of pizzicato with an Arabic `ūd solo. The second is a *nashīd*, or anthem, to the Nile. Without seeing the film it is hard to evaluate the integration of these songs into the plot. They may simply be ornaments to a primarily straight, or non-musical, film.

Mohammed Abdel Wahhab and the First Successful Singing Film

Whatever the reason for the failure of this first musical, it was not until December 4, 1933 that the first successful Egyptian musical film premiered. Samīr Farīd has claimed that *al-Warda' al-Baīḍa / The White Rose* (1933) [Fig. 3.8] "marks the beginning of the change in Egyptian filmmaking from amateur to professional" because it was "shown in all the Arab countries and its box-office receipts were ten times its cost of production" (Farīd 1996, 6). The film illustrates

a preference for melodrama in its plot structure, as well as some ways in which songs were utilized within the plots, and the development of a modern Egyptian film song style.

The project was initiated by Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, whose interest in film arose from a wish to reach a wider audience (Azzam 1990, 114). He approached Moḥammad Karīm in 1931, beginning a collaboration that would continue into the late 1940s. Two years went by before production began at Tobis Studios, in Paris, in July of 1933. Unlike the makers of early Hollywood musicals such as *42nd Street* (1933), Karīm did not create a backstage extravaganza, but instead a melodramatic tale of a musician that addressed issues of class and Westernization. Armbrust has called the film “fundamentally ‘Egyptian modernist’ in the sense that it attempts to couple an image of authentic tradition with one of revolutionary transformation” (Armbrust 1996, 94). I would add that melodrama, the narrative model utilized by the filmmakers, was a European one and reflective of the serious nature of early Egyptian musicals.

In this early melodrama, Moḥammad Galāl Effendi (Abdel Wahhab) is an impoverished but cultured young man who falls in love with a spoiled rich girl named Ragā’, played by Samīra Khulūṣī, but loses her to the brother of her scheming stepmother. This modern Egyptian hero wears a *ṭarbūsh* and Western suit. He also displays knowledge of European culture when he alerts a piano

tuner, in French, to an out-of-tune note. And yet this modern middle-class youth is still connected to tradition. Jacques Berque might call him “*Misri effendi*,” a persona he identified in Egyptian newspaper cartoons and jokes. This “Egyptian man-in-the-street ... wore a Western-style jacket, though he still sported the traditional tarbush. He might speak a little French, but remained faithful to the culture and cuisine of his forebears” (Berque 1972, 475-76).

This connection to tradition is most effectively portrayed in a sequence in which Karīm utilized both visual and musical means to convey it [Fig. 3.9]. After being separated from the object of his affection, a despondent Galāl is seen wandering the streets of Cairo. When he comes upon a sign advertising a concert by “Maḥmūd Aṭiyya,” Galāl’s aspiration to become a famous musician is revealed with the use of a transitional technique called a *dissolve*, in which the second shot is briefly superimposed on the first, and the name changes to “Moḥammad Galāl.” This portion of the sequence is similar to one in *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927) in which Freder imagines that the workings of his father’s factory have turned into a monster. The internal life of the characters in the two films is different, but the concept of using visual means to reveal their thoughts is something that Karīm likely learned while studying in Berlin.

Once Galāl reaches his flat, we hear an instrumental piece by Abdel Wahhab called “Fikrah” (“idea”). The room is decorated with portraits of three

important figures from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Egyptian musical culture. The camera first focuses on a picture of the composer and singer Shaykh `Abduh al-Ḥāmūlī (1843-1901) and then pans to a portrait of Salāma Ḥijāzī. This shot is accompanied by a recording of Ḥijāzī singing a bit of his *qaṣīda* “Salāmun `ala ḥusnin.” When the camera moves on to a picture of Sayyīd Darwīsh, we hear a few phrases of his *dawr* “Ana `asheqt” (“I fell in love”). As pointed out by Armbrust, this scene established an *isnād*,⁷ or “chain of transmission” from these artists to Abdel Wahhab (Armbrust 1996, 110). In film studies terms, this visual manner of carrying on the story and expressing meaning would fall under the category of *mise-en-scene*. Most definitions of this filmic term don’t include music, but in this example, Karīm’s choice of pieces associated with the artists depicted amplifies the impact of the images.

In a similar fashion, the Western-style waltz associated with Ragā’, as well as her appearance and the setting of the mansion where she lives, represent her connection to the West. Most of the instrumental music in the film was provided by an Egyptian ensemble that included the `ūd player and composer Riyāḍ al-

⁷ This term is derived from the Arabic verb *sanad* (“support”) and is applied in Islamic theology to a list of authorities who have been recognized as accurately reporting the actions and statements of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions or the interpretations of later authorities. Messick has described it as an “uninterrupted ‘chain’ joining and guaranteeing the accuracy of the human transmission of hadiths” (Messick 1993, 207)

Sunbātī (1906-1981). In the case of this waltz, it sounds as though this ensemble was either augmented or replaced by a Western classical chamber group.

Featuring eight songs rather than two, *al-Warda' al-Baīda* is more of a musical than *Unshūdat al-Fū'ād* (1932). All of the songs, listed below in Table 3.1, are integrated into the plot to some degree. Abdel Wahhab felt that “the songs should serve the general atmosphere of the film. They must be light in style and short in length” (Azzam 1990, 114). The first song, “Yā wardet al-ḥubb al-ṣāfī” (“Oh rose of pure love”) establishes the purity of Galāl’s love for Ragā’, symbolized by a white rose. “Saba’ sowāqī” (“Seven drivers”) is a traditional *mawwāl* that serves not only as a spontaneous expression of joy, but also as an opportunity for Abdel Wahhab to display his vocal artistry without accompaniment. Of particular interest is the inclusion of “Al-Nīl nagāshī” (“The Nile is a king”), based on a poem by Abdel Wahhab’s then recently deceased mentor, Aḥmad Shawqī. This charming vignette of life on the Nile functions as a tribute to Shawqī, and Galāl even announces the name of the poet before the performance. The style of the setting may have been modeled on the folk-inspired theatrical songs of Sayyīd Darwīsh, including the incorporation of a dialogue among the fishermen and an emulation of their call (“Haila huppi haila”).

Table 3.1. Songs in *al-Warda' al-Baiḍa* (1933)

SONG TITLE	WORDS
“Yā wardet al-ḥubb al-ṣāfī” (“Oh rose of pure love”)	Aḥmad Rāmī
“Saba’ sowāqī” (“Seven drivers”)	Traditional <i>mawwāl</i>
“Gafnuhu `alama al-ghazal” (“Her eyelids taught me flirtation”)	Bishārah al-Khūri
“Nādāni ‘albī elaykī labbaytu lamma nādāni” (“My heart called me to you”)	Aḥmad Rāmī
“Yā law’eti yā shaqāyā” (“Oh my agony, oh my misfortune”)	Aḥmad Rāmī
“Al-Nīl nagāshī” ⁸ (“The Nile is a king”)	Aḥmad Shawqī
“Yālli shagāk al-anīn” (“You who are tortured by pain”)	Aḥmad Rāmī
“Ḍahīt gharāmi ‘ashān hanākī” (“I sacrificed my love for your happiness”)	Aḥmad Rāmī

Perhaps the most interesting song in the film and certainly the most enduring is “Gafnuhu `alama al-ghazal” (“Her eyelids taught me flirtation”). This darkly romantic love song is an example of both musical and cinematic innovation. Abdel Wahhab was inspired to write the melody after receiving a poem, included in translation below, from the Lebanese poet Bishārah al-Khūri (1890-1968) with a note that stressed the newness of its meaning (Azzam 1990,

⁸ The word “nagāshī” may refer to an ancient Ethiopian king, also known as GDRT, who reigned c. 230 – 200 B.C.E. (Nesrine Basheer, personal communication).

124).⁹ Abdel Wahhab proceeded to provide the poetry with an appropriately modern setting.

“Gafnuhu `alama al-ghazal” (“Her eyelids taught me flirtation”)

Her eyelid taught me flirtation / such knowledge leads to death.

We burned ourselves / in a hill of kisses.

We sought and still seek / the dream of love and youth.

We sought the dream of roses and dew, / the dream of merriment and drink.

Give me from the blessed hand / the sip that drives me crazy.

How can she who has these eyes / complain of thirst?

Why, my love, / every time we meet somewhere

They burn fire around us / until we become smoke.

Tell whoever blames us / that this is what beauty commands.

Our excuse for falling in love / is that we have sight. (Azzam 1990, 353)

In composing “Gafnuhu,” Abdel Wahhab laid his vocal melody over an instrumental accompaniment that features what he called a “rumba” rhythm. It is likely that he, like the record companies marketing Cuban music at the time, was using this term rather loosely. The rhythmic ostinato Abdel Wahhab employed actually more closely resembles the Arabic *Wāḥda Kabīra* rhythm [Ex. 3.1] than a Cuban rhythmic pattern, but the use of maracas and what might be claves¹⁰ creates a timbral color that has a Latin feel. The use of this kind of rhythm was not unique to Abdel Wahhab and, in fact, variations of *īqā` Waḥda Kabīra* include

⁹ Al-Khūri was part of a modern movement of Arabic poetry that was inspired by the European Romantic poets. These Arab poets relied less upon traditional models and more upon personal emotional expression.

¹⁰ Claves are an idiophone consisting of a pair of dowels (traditionally made of wood) commonly used in Afro-Cuban music to mark out a key rhythmic pattern known as the *clave*.

some that musicians call *īqā` Rūmbā*. Definitions of this rhythmic pattern vary among musicians, especially those from different countries, but it is clear that its basis is Arabic rather than Latin. As suggested to me by Syrian percussionist Faisal Zedan, it is likely that Arab musicians recognized something familiar in the Latin rhythms they heard and created variations of existing Arabic rhythms to which they assigned this Latin name (Faisal Zedan, personal communication).

Example 3.1. Comparison of the ‘rumba’ rhythm used in “Gafnuhu” to the Arabic *īqā` Waḥda Kabīra*

The image displays two musical staves comparing rhythms. The top staff, labeled "Gafnuhu" rhythm, is written in 4/4 time with a treble clef. It shows a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The bottom staff, labeled "īqā` Waḥda Kabīra", is written in 4/4 time with a bass clef. It shows a sequence of notes: a quarter rest, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. Below the bottom staff, the rhythmic notation "D T T D D T" is written.

As noted by Azzam, the rhythm of the vocal melody is more closely associated with the syllables of the text of the *qaṣīda* (Azzam 1990, 157) than with this pattern. The resulting sound might be compared to the genre of *taqsīm`ala wāḥda*, in which an instrumentalist improvises in free time over a rhythmic ostinato. It may also have been inspired by the imitation of the *pregón* (street vendor’s cry) in the early Latin hit, “El Manisero” (“The Peanut Vendor”). This song, with words and music by Cuban orchestra leader Moise Simon (1889-

1945), achieved international success through the 1931 recording made by Don Azpiazu and his orchestra with the singer Antonio Machin, which could have been heard by Abdel Wahhab. In both cases, the vocal melody begins with a rising minor third and continues in a rhythmic framework in which it sometimes floats over the accompaniment and sometimes lines up with it. The musical evidence thus suggests that “Gafnuhu” may have been inspired by Cuban music but was not an imitation of it.

For Abdel Wahhab, the incorporation of foreign musical elements was part of his plan for creating a modern form of Egyptian music. In a 1983 interview with Azzam he described what he felt were the major problems of early twentieth-century Egyptian music. He felt that the indigenous music was overly exaggerated and ornamented, appealing to the senses of the working classes and not to the intellect of the elite. He hoped that the infusion of Western ideals and elements would appeal to all the people (Azzam 1990, 42-43). The innovations Abdel Wahhab implemented included expanded instrumentation; the incorporation of forms, melodies, and rhythms borrowed from the West; as well as some simple harmony.

It is also important to note the way in which this song was physically incorporated into the film. It was the last song to be recorded, after the primary shooting in Paris was finished and Karīm was already editing. Abdel Wahhab

insisted that the song be inserted into the film and a sequence was shot with him lip-syncing the lyrics. This appears to have been the first use of dubbing in an Egyptian film and the only song in the film to utilize this technique.

Al-Warda' al-Baiḍa was clearly more successful than *Unshūdat al-Fū'ād* (1932), playing for a record six weeks within a market dominated by foreign films, despite a complaint from al-'Azhar regarding Abdel Wahhab kissing Samīra Khulūṣī while wearing a *ṭarbūsh* (Ḥassan, 1995, 55). It was also the first Egyptian film to be exported to other Middle Eastern countries, contributing to the growing media hegemony of Egypt in the Arab world. The songs of Abdel Wahhab are often cited as the reason for this success. Its popularity established this film as a model for future musicals, which would continue to include melodrama as well as innovative compositions that often performed dramatic functions within the plots.

The Early Evolution of Egyptian Sound Film and the Founding of Studio Misr

Al-Warda' al-Baiḍa (1933) proved that a musical film could not only be successful in Egypt but also be marketed throughout the Arab world, generating larger profits than ever before. A number of new production companies were formed in this period to provide not only musicals but also comedies and socially relevant films for the expanding market, and to claim their share of profits. Other musical theater stars followed Abdel Wahhab onto the screen, but with varying

success. Munīra al-Muhdiyyah's 1935 film *al-Ghandūra / The Female Dandy*, based on a 1927 play, was not as successful as the theatrical production. The production of the Badī'a Maṣābnī vehicle *Malikat al-Masārah / Queen of the Stage* (1936) was plagued with financial difficulties and not well received by the critics.¹¹ The musical comedy star Naguīb al-Rīḥānī fared better and Abdel Wahhab starred in three more films. It took the establishment of a new studio, one unlike any before in Egypt, to establish a female musical film star.

In 1927, Ṭal'at Ḥarb again expressed his vision for Egyptian film at a screening of films produced by his Misr Company for Acting and Cinema: "Motion pictures are among the most powerful industries of the age, which may compete with journalism and, soon, even surpass it." He stressed the need to make pictures that depicted "an Egyptian story about Egyptian characters in a local setting, and of local production" (Mustafa 1998). It was not until 1934, however, that preparations began for the construction of Studio Misr, the first studio in Egypt – indeed the first anywhere in the Middle East – to be fully equipped for sound film production [Fig. 3.10]. The organizational structure and purpose of this studio was different from the Hollywood model, in that it was designed to be a production and distribution organization that could be utilized by any Egyptian filmmaker. Ṭal'at Ḥarb also intended it to be a training facility and even financed

¹¹ Ali Abu Shadi has suggested that, despite its critical failure, this film became the prototype for later dance films (Abu Shadi 1996, 100).

educational missions to Europe, where the director Aḥmad Badrakhān (1909-1969) and others were trained in film technique. Studio Misr went on to become the premier studio in Egypt, producing most of the major films for the next several decades.

The first production of Studio Misr was *Wedād* [Fig. 3.11], starring Umm Kulthum, which premiered at Cinema Royal in Cairo on February 10, 1936. Umm Kulthum became interested in film after the success of *al-Warda' al-Baīḍa* (1933) and originally intended Abdel Wahhab to be her co-star (Danielson 1997, 87). In the press book for *Wedād*, Aḥmad Rāmī reported that the idea for the story came from Umm Kulthum. The press book went on to proclaim that not only were the star and story Egyptian, but also the production itself. It also described the facilities available at the studio and included press clippings anticipating the premiere of this landmark film. *Al-Ṣabāḥ* called it “a breakthrough in the whole world of cinema” and *Wedād* did indeed break boundaries as the first Egyptian film to be shown at the Venice Film Festival. Aḥmad Badrakhān was the first director of the film, but he was soon replaced by the German Fritz Kramp (Ḥassan 1995, 72). It may be that the young director lacked experience and the studio was not willing to take a risk on him with their first production. Umm Kulthum’s lack of acting experience is evident onscreen, with the exception of sequences in which she sings.

By 1940, the Egyptian film industry had developed into a system in which stars had more power than in many Hollywood studios. Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum maintained creative control of their films, at a time when Hollywood actors and directors were often employees of a studio system dominated by executives such as Jack Warner (1892-1978) and Louis B. Mayer (1884-1957). Thus the Egyptian industry itself was an adaptation rather than a wholesale adoption of a foreign model. Similarly, the films it produced adapted foreign narrative, visual, and musical models, which garnered prestige by association with the modern world of the West, even while warning of the dangers of Westernization.

The Emergence of an Identifiable Genre

In his *Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema*, Landau claimed that melodramas were “probably the best-liked films” in Arab cinema (Landau 1958, 199). It is more than likely that Egyptians developed a taste for melodrama from their exposure to French culture, which began with Napoleon’s invasion. The genre had its roots in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France, from which it spread to England, America, and the rest of the world. Its stock of victims, heroes, villains, and comics were typically involved in a battle between good and evil. Usually, the victims were saved and the villains were punished.

Such happy endings were not guaranteed in Egyptian cinematic interpretations of the genre, as is evidenced by the final sequence of *al-Warda' al-Baīda* (1933), in which Abdel Wahhab sings mournfully of his lost love while standing behind a gate that makes him look like he is locked in a prison of love [Fig. 3.12].

Abdel Wahhab's second film, *Damū`a al-Ḥubb / Tears of Love* (1935) continued the melodramatic strain with a plot in which tension between the classes and the dangers of Westernization were again addressed. The original source was Alphonse Karr's novel *Sous les tilleuls (Under the Linden Trees*, 1832), which had been adapted into an Egyptian novel by the popular writer, Muṣṭafa Luḫfī al-Manfalūṭī (1876-1924) (Ḥassan 1995, 56). According to Moosa, al-Manfalūṭī "often took extensive liberties with the original to fit them to a Muslim background and to promote his own didactic purposes" (Moosa, 1997, 111). Thus the story had already been Egyptianized before its adaptation into a film with a similarly moral message. Fikrī (Abdel Wahhab) is rewarded for resisting the temptation to steal while Nawāl (Nagāt `Alī) and her husband are punished for their decadent lifestyle.

The story may have been French, but an increased attention to Hollywood is apparent in the visual style of the film as well as in the details of the action and the dialogue. Karīm used quite a few of "wipe" transitions, in which one shot "wipes" across another. This was a very common transitional technique in 1930s

Hollywood films and the “wipes” took a variety of shapes. An awareness of Hollywood stars is also evident in a scene featuring the comic character Ḥānafī, in which he celebrates an unexpected inheritance. He first performs a bit of an Egyptian cane dance and then tells his wife to strike a “Greta Garbo pose” so that he can kiss her. In this interesting cultural juxtaposition Ḥānafī expresses his joy in both a traditional manner and in one inspired by Hollywood.

In contrast to Abdel Wahhab’s first two films, *Yahya al-Ḥubb / Long Live Love* (1938) displays features borrowed from Hollywood-style romantic comedy, including misunderstandings of the sort that were common in the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers vehicles of the period. It also features singer and actress Layla Murād (1918-1995) [Fig. 3.13] in her film debut. Unlike his first two love interests, Nādia (Murād) has a strong moral character and the spunk one would expect from Rogers. The increased presence of Hollywood as a model is also evident in references to Hollywood stars made by characters in the film. However, the film does conclude by confirming traditional Egyptian values about marriage with the revelation that the parents of the lovers had actually already arranged their marriage.

Abdel Wahhab’s final film to appear in this period is both more Hollywood and more Egyptian than the last. *Yom Sa`īd / Happy Day* (1940) [Fig. 3.14] addresses issues of class and Westernization in a way that has more in common

with his last film than his first two. His love interest, Amīna, played by the actress Samīḥa, is another modern woman who works in a department store. Kamāl (Abdel Wahhab) is a struggling musician and composer. The story also features a young girl, Anisa, the daughter of Kamāl's landlord. Karīm and Abdel Wahhab searched for the right girl and found her in Faten Hamama (b. 1931) [Fig. 3.15].¹² Her character is not crucial to the storyline and may have been included in response to the international popularity of Shirley Temple. Class conflict comes in the form of a rich Westernized vamp, Sohayr Hānim, played by Elham Ḥussayn, who is more like the spoiled rich girls of the first two films. After hiring him as her personal music teacher, Sohayr becomes infatuated with Kamāl and kidnaps him, leading Amīna and her family to doubt his love. He escapes from her and rushes back to his true love. Once again, Egyptian values triumph over those of the West.

Umm Kulthum's films from this period are, in comparison, consistently serious as befitted an artist who had refused to succumb to early pressure to lighten her musical repertoire. Comedic content is minimal and relegated to secondary characters. Her premier film, *Wedād* (1936) is a melodramatic operetta featuring the trials of a singing slave girl in Mamlūk Egypt. *Nashīd al-*

¹² Faten had won a beauty contest sponsored by an Egyptian soap company and been declared "the most beautiful girl." She went on to become a major film star in the 1950s and the first wife of Omar Sharif (b. 1932).

‘Amāl / Song of Hope (1937) is a modern melodrama, in which Umm Kulthum played a divorcee who turns to singing to support her young child. In *Danānīr* (1940) she returned to historical drama. Set in the Baghdad court of the first Abbasid caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (763 – 809), the film was based on the life of an actual singing slave named Danānīr al-Bermakīa.

The Egyptian fondness for melodrama is evident in this sampling of early films. What becomes apparent by the end of the 1930s, however, is an increasing taste for lighter musicals dominated by the romantic comedy found in most Hollywood versions of the genre. Advertisements and articles in Egyptian periodicals of the period document Egyptian exposure to American films, including musicals [Fig. 3.16]. The response of Egyptian directors was documented in Aḥmad Badrakhān’s 1936 book *al-Sīnimā / The Cinema*, in which he suggested that local audiences did not want to see depictions of their own lives but instead to escape into stories set in glamorous locations that depicted romantic conflict resolved in a happy ending (quoted in Farid 1973, 42).¹³ This formula sounds suspiciously like that of a Hollywood musical and suggests a shift in the narrative approach to making an Egyptian musical. This trend would

¹³ Richard Dyer has described the American movie musical as providing just such an escape into a utopia that “offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day to day lives don’t provide” (Dyer 1993, 273).

develop in the 1940s, resulting in a backlash at the end of that decade and a return to more serious musical films after the 1952 revolution.

Song Function: Entertainment and Expression

While the plots of the musical films of this period dealt with issues of concern to Egyptian film audiences and were constructed to appeal to their increasingly Westernized tastes, the primary purpose of the plot in any movie musical is to facilitate musical performance, and the primary function of the music is to entertain. For the first time, fans of Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum throughout the Middle East could both see and hear their idols and, if they wished, relive their performances through multiple viewings of their films.

The entertainment function is most evident when the songs were presented in formal, or even informal, performance situations. This form of presentation was both a practical solution to the problem of integrating songs and a way to simulate the live experience for the cinematic audience. Feuer has suggested that a dominant impulse in musical films is to capture the quality of live entertainment and counterbalance the alienating effects of mechanical reproduction. When a song is presented as a performance, reaction shots of the audience encourage us to identify with them and, in Feuer's opinion "regain that precious live aura" (Feuer 1993, 29). I agree that this is an effect of this

presentational method but would suggest that the impulse was a pragmatic one: the easiest way to integrate a song is to put the performer on some sort of stage.

Although *Al-Warda' al-Baīda* (1933) features some informal performances, “Sahirtu minu al-layyāli,” (“You kept me up all night”) from *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935), was the first time filmgoers saw Abdel Wahhab performing on a stage. The mise-en-scene provides an elegant setting for the song, with both performers and audience in formal Western attire. The melancholy sophistication of the tango style of the song suits this setting, as well as Fikrī’s (Abdel Wahhab) mood at this point in the film. Karīm even added a bit of spectacle, perhaps in imitation of Hollywood musicals, at the beginning of the number, when Abdel Wahhab rises dramatically out of the stage, conducts the ensemble in the introduction of the piece, and then turns to face the audience and sing. The cinematic audience is expanded beyond the theater in Damascus, Syria through the radio microphone that is prominently featured in the frame. A montage of landscape and reaction shots depicts his voice as reaching as far as the pyramids of Giza. Women swoon and men in a café nod their heads in appreciation [Fig. 3.17]. It can thus be seen as a cinematic proclamation of Abdel Wahhab’s international success and the power of the Egyptian media. The presentation of this song also illustrates that even formal performances in musical films often serve purposes beyond entertainment. Fikrī’s appearance in

this prestigious venue and the broadcast of his voice throughout the Middle East represents his success as a legitimate artist and dilutes the stigma associated with being a professional musician in the Muslim world.

The excerpt from Abdel Wahhab's opera *Majnūn Layla / The Crazy Lover of Layla*¹⁴ featured in *Yom Sa'īd / Happy Day* (1940) is another example of a song functioning beyond its primary entertainment value as a performance. Based on a verse play written by Aḥmad Shawqī, it can be seen as another tribute to Abdel Wahhab's mentor and serves to associate its composer in the film, Kamāl (Abdel Wahhab), with high art, rather than the cabaret music preferred by the vamp Sohayr. Its production is also a fulfillment of Kamāl's professional goal, a plot element that was common in Hollywood backstage musicals and would continue to be incorporated into Egyptian ones. This sequence may have had yet another function as a response to the popularity of the Umm Kulthum costume drama *Wedād* (1936). Shawqī based the plot of *Majnūn Layla* on an early Arabic tragic love story in which the poet Qays writes love poetry to his beloved Layla resulting in alarm from her parents over his intentions and her purity. Qays is exiled and spends the rest of his life wandering the desert and composing odes to his lost love. Thus, like *Wedād* (1936), though the

¹⁴ This sequence was dubbed and the actors we see are not the voices we hear. Abdel Wahhab's choice for dubbing the voice of Layla was the young singer Asmahan (c.1917-1944), who would later star in two films before her early death in a car accident (see chapter 4). He provided the voice for Qays himself.

compositional concept is Western, the subject matter is firmly rooted in the Arab world.

Multiple functions are evident in the performances featured in the early films of Umm Kulthum as well. “Nashīd al-gāmi`a” (“The university anthem”; words: Aḥmad Rāmī, music: Riyāḍ al-Sunbāḥī),¹⁵ featured in *Nashīd al-‘Amāl* (1937), served more than the plot of the film. This patriotic anthem was sung in solidarity and encouragement to the university students who were demonstrating at the time for reform and the withdrawal of the British (Danielson 1997, 88). Similarly, a chain of transmission (*isnād*) between Umm Kulthum and the legendary musician Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (742-804) is implied when he picks up his ḥūd and joins her performance.

The entertainment value of the songs was also used to bring people to the theaters. To publicize *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938), Abdel Wahhab sang extended versions of the film’s songs at special screenings, which were announced with 20,000 promotional cards (Ḥasanayn 1991, 74). This may have been an Egyptian innovation: Hollywood stars did perform the songs from their films but I am not aware of them having done so at a screening. What the two systems shared was the mutually beneficial relationship between musicians and

¹⁵ Unless noted in the text, the composers of the songs sung by Umm Kulthum will be included with the translation of the title. Where appropriate the lyricists will be listed as well.

filmmakers: the films helped sell the songs and the songs filled the seats of the theaters.

Performance was only one way in which songs were integrated into Egyptian musical films. In addition to their entertainment function, songs were also utilized as personal expressions or to forward the plot by replacing dialogue. Early examples of these functions can be found in *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935), in which not only Abdel Wahhab but also his co-star Nagāt `Alī [Fig. 3.18] express the joys and sorrows of love through song. In addition to individual expressions, the film contains two duets. The second of these in the film, “Ṣa`abt `alayk” (“You felt sorry for me”), is actually sung dialogue, in which Nawāl (Nagāt `Alī) begs Fikrī (Abdel Wahhab) to forgive her for her betrayal. In reference to the American movie musical, Altman has suggested that the duet “serves the important function of crystallizing the couples’ attitudes and emotions” (Altman 1987, 37), and that function is evident in Egyptian films as well.

In *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938) Abdel Wahhab was not cast as a professional musician and the performances are informal ones. All of the songs are diegetic (occurring within the diegesis, or story world, of the film). In this case, it is Layla Murād whom he courts with song. Legend has it that she was discovered by Abdel Wahhab when she sang at a party hosted by her father, the singer Zakī Murād. Abdel Wahhab had finally found a singing partner who was his match;

though he often criticized his leading ladies, he had nothing but praise for Layla. Her presence thus enhanced the entertainment value of the film. Of particular interest is the song “Yā wabūr ‘ulli” (“Oh train, tell me”). It appears twice in the film, first as Fathī (Abdel Wahhab) tries to win over the reluctant Nādīa (Layla), and in a duet reprise at the end of the film to celebrate the reuniting of the couple as they ride off on a train to their happy ending. Both of these functions can be found in American musical films.

While most of the film’s songs are modern in style, the folksy quality of “Yāllī zaratū al-burtuqān” (“You who planted the oranges”) enhances the rural setting of the sequence. The performance of “Maḥalāhā ‘aīshat al-fellāḥ” (“How lovely to live like a peasant”) in *Yom Sa’īd* (1940) functions in a related way, representing the Egyptian culture that Kamāl reveres. Watching its performance from Sohayr’s balcony inspires him to climb down and escape back into his own world. It is soon followed by the final song of the film, which performs a different, more cinematic function. “Igrī, igrī” (“Run, run”) provides the underscore for Kamāl’s escape from Sohayr and return to Amīna. The arrangement even incorporates the underscore technique known as “mickey mousing,” in the form of a xylophone that mimics the sound of horses’ hoofs.

Perhaps the most integrated musical film of the period was *Wedād* (1936). The structure of the film is similar to that of an operetta, opening with the rousing

chorus “Ḥaywā al-rubī`a `āid al-zuhūr (“Hail spring, festival of the flowers,” Riyāḍ al-Sunbāḥī) sung by peasants in the street, and closing with the celebratory *nashīd* (anthem), “Yā bāshīr al-’uns ghannī” (“Oh harbinger of joy, sing,” Zakariyyā Aḥmad). The songs in between are facilitated by casting Umm Kulthum as a singing slave girl who both performs and expresses her emotions through song. The feeling of the film as an artistically cohesive whole, rather than primarily a vehicle for the songs, is reinforced by an integrated orchestral score, provided by the German composer Benno Bardi (1890-1973). Bardi had experience composing operettas and some of the music he used in *Wedād* came from an earlier Arabic-inspired composition (Irit Youngman, pers. comm.). The score incorporates two leitmotifs that run through the film, one of which, a folksy melody in triple time, is associated with the character of Wedād. The operetta plot structure and score were appropriate choices for the debut film of a serious artist who was already known as “the Star of the East” (“Kawkeb al-Sharq”).

Underscoring functions dramatically in the early films of Abdel Wahhab as well. In *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935), the American popular song “I Won’t Dance”, featured in the Astaire and Rogers film *Roberta* (1935), represents the decadent

Western lifestyle Nawāl is living in Paris, a function that American popular music would continue to perform in Egyptian musical film.¹⁶

As is evident from the descriptions above, the functions of songs in Egyptian films from this period are mostly the same as those that can be found in Hollywood musicals produced in the 1930s. In both cases the primary purpose of the songs is to entertain the audience, but they also often serve the plot of the film. The main differences lie in the balance between story and song, and extra-filmic references to Egyptian, and more broadly Arab, culture. In Hollywood musicals of the 1930s, the integration of the songs was often perfunctory and their ties to the plot tenuous: just cast a performer as a performer and you have a reason for them to sing or dance. By the end of the decade, the approach to integration began to change with the success of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), in which the characters sing of their hopes and fears. Perhaps following in their own, if brief, tradition of musical theater, Egyptian filmmakers, lyricists, and composers more carefully integrated the songs into plots that sought to educate as well as to entertain.

¹⁶ This song, with words by Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh and music by Jerome Kern, could be the first American song used as part of the underscore of an Egyptian film but it is difficult to confirm because of the relatively few (mainly Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum films) available examples from this period.

The Evolution of Egyptian Film Song: Modernization, Adaptation and the Use of the Tango as a Compositional Element

The songs from this early period illustrate three tendencies in the integration of Western musical practice into Egyptian popular compositions that would continue to be evident in the musical films of the 1940s and 1950s: arrangement, form, and quotation (see Table 3.2). Abdel Wahhab's project to modernize Egyptian music involved all three of these tendencies. In the arrangement of his film songs he utilized large ensembles, often including multiples of traditional Arabic instruments along with Western ones. Towards the end of the decade he even featured the piano in the accompaniment of "Al-ṣabā wa al-gamāl" ("Youth and beauty") in *Yom Sa'īd* (1940) [Fig. 3.19].¹⁷ Abdel Wahhab also occasionally incorporated harmony¹⁸ into his film songs. In addition, he adapted formal elements borrowed from Western classical and popular music for use in his songs, including rhythms inspired by the Afro-Cuban rumba, and structural elements adapted from the Argentine tango. Direct quotation or paraphrasing of a melody borrowed from a Western composer was the third, and

¹⁷ Although it appears that he is playing the piano, the style of playing and the fact that Abdel Wahhab's hands were not shown onscreen suggest that the piano part was actually recorded by another musician with Western classical training.

¹⁸ The introduction of harmony to what was a melodically based, primarily monophonic musical system can be heard as early as the songs composed by Sayyid Darwīsh (see chapter 2).

least common, way Abdel Wahhab infused his compositions with foreign elements.

Table 3.2. The Integration of Western Musical Practice

ARRANGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensemble size • instrumentation • harmony
FORM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concept (duet) • rhythm (rumba) • structure (tango)
QUOTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct quotation • paraphrase

In contrast, the compositions that were featured in Umm Kulthum's films tend to be more traditional in form and thus quotations of this type would not be easily integrated. The songs, however, were sometimes arranged in a grander fashion, with larger instrumental ensembles and harmony that was likely provided by Western-trained composers, such as Benno Bardi, and Moḥammad Ḥassan al-Shoga'āī (1903-1963). Most of the lyrics were written by the poet Aḥmad Rāmī, with music composed by her three main composers, Zakariyyā Aḥmad, Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, and Moḥammad al-Qaṣabjī (1892-1966). Zakariyyā Aḥmad was known for the authentically Egyptian character of his music. Al-Sunbāṭī was a neo-classicist and set many modern *qaṣā'id* for Umm Kulthum. Al-Qaṣabjī was known as an innovator and his compositional style may have strayed too far from tradition for Umm Kulthum as she stopped performing his compositions in the

late 1940s. Danielson has noted the development of al-Qasabjī's style of composition in *Nashīd al-'Amāl* (1937) with the inclusion of harmony and orchestration (Danielson 1997, 75). It may be that some of the Western elements were actually the work of Aziz Sadeq, who was the underscore composer for the film.

Abdel Wahhab's innovations went beyond arrangement. He first utilized the concept of the duet (*dīālūg*) in *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935). The melody of "Ma 'aḥli al-ḥabbīb" ("How beautiful is the beloved") mostly passes back and forth between Abdel Wahhab and Nagāt `Alī, but at the very end of the song Abdel Wahhab briefly sings above her melodic line, making this also Abdel Wahhab's first use of vocal harmony in a film song. In the duets he sang with Layla Murād in *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938) Abdel Wahhab included passages in which they sang in unison but not in harmony. The concept of two singers performing the same song was not unknown in the Arab musical tradition but it is likely that Abdel Wahhab's models were the *dīālūgs* composed by Sayyīd Darwīsh for his Egyptian operettas. Darwīsh's dramatic use of this form (as a conversation between characters in a play) suggests that he was inspired by European forms of musical theater (see chapter 2).¹⁹ Abdel Wahhab continued the development of

¹⁹ Sayyīd Darwish composed a number of *dīālūgs* for his musical plays. In the two recordings included with the biography of Darwīsh by Faṭḥ Allāh et al. (2003) the singers alternate singing the melody but do not sing at the same time.

the *dālūg* by adding unison and harmony singing, but the melodies and intonation remained largely Arabic in style. In the composition of his own opera, *Majnūn Layla*, Abdel Wahhab himself utilized compositional structure and arrangement borrowed from the European opera tradition. The excerpt included in *Yom Sa`īd* (1940) features an alternation of recitatives and arias, as well as orchestration that includes staccato and pizzicato violin techniques not native to the Egyptian tradition, and an oboe that adds an oddly Orientalist feel in its adoption of a Western classical conception of the timbre of Arabic music.

Abdel Wahhab also frequently borrowed elements from Latin American popular genres in the composition of his film songs. In these songs the most commonly borrowed and most easily identifiable element was rhythm. He used his version of the rumba rhythm again in “ ‘Indamā yā`tī il-masā’ ” (“When evening comes”), from *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938), and we even see couples dancing to it, although I am not sure I would call what they are doing a rumba. Badī`a Maṣābnī had already followed his lead with the song “Al-Ghairah nār al-ghairah” (“Jealousy is the fire for jealousy”), in *Malikat al-Masārah* (1936), which features a similar “rumba” rhythm and a rhythmic ostinato played on what sounds like claves.

Significantly more complex than these examples are the songs by Abdel Wahhab that incorporated the Argentine tango song form. The tango became popular in Egypt not only as a dance but also as a musical form to be imitated and incorporated into the works of Egyptian film song composers. Like the Egyptian compositions inspired by it, the tango itself is a hybrid form with roots in Africa, Europe, and the New World. From the musical melting pot of Buenos Aires various media carried it around the world. The earliest date that the tango could have reached Egypt was 1907, when the first Argentine musicians traveled to Paris to record (Collier et al 1997, 67). Among them was Angel Villoldo, whose early tango “El Choclo” is one of the most widely known and was briefly paraphrased by Abdel Wahhab in his very first film tango (see Ex. 3.3). This suggests that early Argentine tango recordings made their way to Egypt. Egyptians may also have been exposed to the imitations of the form that were springing up around Europe [Fig. 3.20].

Based on the Egyptian compositions I have examined that incorporate tango, the most likely model upon which they based their adaptation was the vocal version, known as *tango canción*, made popular by the Argentine singer and composer Carlos Gardel (1890-1935). Gerard Béhague has described this form as vocal with instrumental accompaniment and with lyrics always display a strong, often pessimistic, sentimental character). He also noted a predominance

of a two-part structure described that features a modal shift between sections (Béhague 2012). This structure element, along with some other common elements of *tango canción* are laid out in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Some Common Elements of Argentine *Tango Canción*

<u>Rhythmic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong pulse on each quarter note (“<i>marcato</i>”) • Syncopation in the accompaniment
<u>Modal</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modal shift between major and minor (either parallel or relative)
<u>Melodic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief instrumental interludes between vocal phrases • <i>Sol</i> up to <i>do</i> cadence
<u>Instrumental</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive use of strings, especially the violin • The use of the bandoneón²⁰

Mohammed Abdel Wahhab claimed to have written the first Arab tango in 1935,²¹ but there also exists an early pre-film Abdel Wahhab song that incorporates a tango as the final section. Possibly recorded as early as 1932, “Marrayt `ala bayt al-ḥabbāyib” (“I passed the house of the beloved”) displays what Racy has described as an “additive linearity” approach to song composition, in which the composer “utilizes a characteristically Near Eastern musical style as a matrix in which other different elements are incorporated” (Racy 1982, 395).

²⁰ Related to the concertina, this free-reed instrument became a popular tango instrument in the early twentieth century and continues to be featured prominently in the music.

²¹ The Syrian composer Aḥmad al-‘Ubrī (1885-1952) may have included one in an operetta that was presented in Aleppo in the early 1920s.

This method of composition features “stylistically contrastive musical segments, which do not necessarily reoccur at regular or predictable intervals, or reoccur at all. Consequently, a single musical work seems like a panorama of constantly shifting scenes and moods” (ibid. 396). Following an instrumental introduction, the first vocal section is slow and stately, with a *lawn*, or “color,”²² in its instrumentation and intonation that is clearly Eastern. The *lawn* of these first two sections could be described as *lawn ṭarab*, or “enchantment color.” They also provide the “neutral canvas” (Racy 1982, 396) from which Abdel Wahhab departs in the latter part of the composition. The next section is a brief one that maintains the character of the first but with a change in rhythm from *īqā` Maqsum* to a simple triple meter. For the final section the color clearly changes when an accordion joins the ensemble and the rhythm shifts to common time with a strong accent on the first beat of the measure (see Table 3.4 and Ex. 3.2) The simple eight-measure melody is quite short but it does make use of the *habanera* rhythm that underlies many tangos, while the accompanying ensemble marks time evenly. The final element that identifies this section as displaying what might be called *lawn tango* is the *sol* to *do* cadence that occurs on the second and third beat of the eighth measure of the instrumental rendition of the tango.

²² This color analogy is commonly used in discussions of the musical character or style of Arabic music.

Table 3.4. Structure of “Marrayt `ala bayt al-ḥabbāyib”

0:00 Intro	0:29 Vocal 1	3:27 Vocal 2	4:25 – 6:32 Tango
---------------	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------------------

The melody is repeated by both Abdel Wahhab and the ensemble. The vocal version is slightly slower, with less syncopation and much more ornamentation. The most significant difference is in the last measure, in which Abdel Wahhab draws out the last word without the expected *sol* to *do* cadence in the accompaniment. His vocal interpretation of the tango is much closer in color to the local musical tradition than to that of Argentina, anchoring the overall color of the composition firmly in the East. The combination of characteristically tango melodic, rhythmic and textural elements is enough for us to recognize this section as a tango, but the differences in structure and interpretation illustrate how this is not a wholesale adoption of the form but instead an adaptation.²³

²³ The use of the tango as a compositional element was not unique to Abdel Wahhab or to Egypt. Jelly Roll Morton (1885-1941) claimed to put “the Spanish tinge” into his composition “New Orleans Blues” as early as 1902 (Lomax 1993, 78). Also known as the “habanera beat,” W.C. Handy (1873-1958) used this rhythm in the introduction and ‘tango’ section of “St. Louis Blues” (1914).

Example 3.2. Melody and accompaniment structure for the tango portion of “Marrayt ‘ala bayt al-habbāyib” (c. 1932).

The image displays a musical score for the tango portion of the song "Marrayt 'ala bayt al-habbāyib" (c. 1932). It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has two staves: "Voice" and "Accomp.". The second system has two staves: a single melodic line and a piano accompaniment line. The music is in 4/4 time. The voice part features a melody with dotted rhythms and eighth notes. The accompaniment consists of block chords in the piano part and a melodic line in the second system.

While in this early ‘proto-tango’ Abdel Wahhab only used the form for a brief portion of the composition, his incorporation of the tango as a compositional element in his film songs developed into a more complex phenomenon that sometimes dominated the structure of the song and included aspects of its rhythmic, modal, and melodic tendencies.

“Sahirtu minu al-layyālī” (*Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935) [Ex. 3.3] was the first time Abdel Wahhab incorporated tango in a film song. According to Azzam, Abdel Wahhab asked Aḥmad Shawqī’s son, Ḥussayn, to write a *qaṣīda* based around the line “al-ḥubb fīh baqā’ī / al-ḥubb fīh zawālī” (“Love is my existence / love is my dissipation”) (Azzam 1990, 120). Abdel Wahhab then chose to set this Arabic poetic form within a framework that combined a tango with an Arabic vocal improvisation.

It is clear that this song was marketed as a tango, as the word was included on the label of the recording. This label is not enough, however, and we must inquire into what aspects of the composition identify it as a tango as well as the ways in which Abdel Wahhab deviated from the Argentine model. The most recognizable tango elements are the use of the accordion, in place of the bandoneón, a strong pulse on each quarter note, and the *sol* up to *do* cadence.

As in many tangos, there is a modal shift in the melody but it doesn't come between clearly demarcated sections, as is common in an Argentine tango song. The introduction begins in a mode that sounds very much like Western C minor. The quick introduction of B natural suggests harmonic minor but could also indicate the Arabic *maqām Nahawānd* [Ex. 3.4a]. When the vocal enters at m. 33, the B remains consistently natural and F sharp begins to appear, which may indicate a reference to either *maqām Nawā Athar* or *Nikrīz* [Ex. 3.4 b and c]. There is a modal shift at m. 54 but the mode is not clear. If Abdel Wahhab was following tango conventions, this section would be in C major. The scale used here could also be identified as *maqām `Ajam* [Ex. 3.4d] and it does sound like it until the section beginning at m. 75. The major feeling of this section is strengthened by the use of arpeggios on the accordion,²⁴ but lessened by the re-introduction of the A flat in m. 80, which creates an augmented second that is

²⁴ It is important to note that in this, and other cases, the composer may have had little to do with the arrangement of the song, aside from approving it.

decidedly un-tango. This may indicate that Abdel Wahhab set this section instead in a variation on *maqām Rāst* [Ex. 3.4e], including characteristic brief modulations to *maqām Sūznāk* [Ex. 3.4f]. When I discussed this piece with Racy, he described the mode of this section as “modally inflected *Rāst*,” in which the third is raised, but also commented that some musicians might call it “Turkish *Rāst*” or even *ʿAjam*. The tango ends back in *Nahawānd*, before modulating to *Sīkah Baladī* [Ex. 3.4g] for the *mawwāl* section. This *maqām* is known for its folkish quality as well its emotional intensity and intervals that lie somewhere between a major and an augmented second.²⁵ Thus Abdel Wahhab continues the emotional tone of the tango through a local idiom. At the end of the *mawwāl*, he uses the melody (but not the text) from mm. 69-74 to modulate back to the *Rāst* variant and repeats the second section of the tango from m. 75 to m. 115. It is not possible to know how much Abdel Wahhab understood of the modal structures of tango songs, but the inclusion of a modal shift, in this and other of his tango-inspired compositions, suggests that it was one of the elements he was borrowing. The key difference lies in the fact that he appears to have chosen to set his melody not in the Western modes of the model, but in modes that followed the conventions of the Arabic modal system [Table 3.5].

²⁵ Racy describes the interval between the second and third degrees of the scale as a “compressed” augmented second and notes that the seventh degree is only slightly raised, while the sixth is only slightly lowered (Racy 2003, 110-11).

Example 3.3. Tango portion of “Sahirtu minu al-layyālī” (*Damū`a al-Hubb*, 1935)

Sahirtu minu al-layyālī

words: Hussayn Shawqī
music: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab

Voice

Nahāwand [C minor]

Accomp.

8

8

17

17

paraphrase of
“El Choclo”

24

24

32

32

Sa - hir - tu min - u lay - ya li — ma lil gha -

Sahirtu minu al-layyali

40

ra - mi wa ma - li In sad-du 'an - ni hab-

47

bi - bi fa las-tu 'an - nu bi sa - li

54

Rast variant / Agam on C [C major]

Ya-tu-fu bil- hub-bi- qal - bi Ya-tu-fu

63

rit. rubato

bil- hub-bi- qal - bi fa-ra - sha-tan la tu - ba - li la tu-

72

D.S. Fine
a tempo

Suznak

ba - li la tu - ba - li Ah il- hub il hub-bu fi - hi ba - qa -

Sahirtu mimu al-layyāli

81

- 'i ah il hubb il hub-bu fi - hi za - wa - li

90

(Ah) il hubb il hub-bu fi - hi ba - qa i

99

(ah) il hubb il hub-bu fi - hi za - wa - li Qal-bun bi

107

Nahāwand [C minor]

gha - ri gha - ra - min gis - mun - i il ru-hi kha - li

115

Fine

Example 3.4. Modes used in “Sahirtu minu al-layyālī” (*Damū`a al-Hubb* (1935)

a. Nahawānd [C harmonic minor]



b. Nawā Athar



c. Nikrīz




d. `Ajam / modally inflected Rāst [C major]



e. Rāst



f. Sōznāk



g. Sikah Baladī

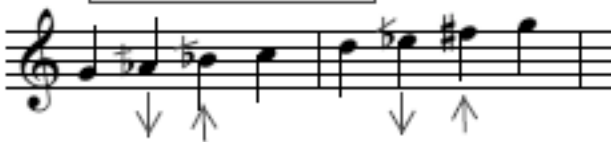


Table 3.5. Modal structure in “Sahirtu”

0:00 Tango • <i>Nahawānd [C harmonic minor]</i> • <i>Rāst variant / Sūznāk / `Ajam on C [C major]</i> • <i>Nahawānd [C harmonic minor]</i>	2:24 Mawwāl • <i>Sīkah Baladī</i>	3:56 – 4:44 Tango • <i>Rāst variant</i> • <i>Nahawānd</i>
---	---	---

The structure of the song differs in the setting of the text as well. Argentine tango songs tend to set the text symmetrically, while the phrases of Abdel Wahhab’s tango vary in length. This may stem from the fact that Abdel Wahhab was still exploring how to set Arabic poetry within a Western musical structure. The overall structure of “Sahirtu” is another example of his additive approach to composition.

Abdel Wahhab composed two more tango-inspired film songs during this period. In the case of “Yā dunya yā gharāmī” (“Oh my world, oh my passion”), from *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938) [Table 3.7], he utilized the tango only for the first section of the song, without returning to it. It is notable that the phrase structure of this tango section is more evenly balanced than in “Sahirtu,” with four measures of melody being used to set each line of text. *Yom Sa`īd* (1940) featured “Eih inkātib lī yā rūḥī ma`ākī” (“What is written for us darling”) [Table 3.8], in which his interpretation of the model is even looser. Considering these three songs as a group, it becomes apparent that Abdel Wahhab was not interested in

blindly imitating this foreign form but instead utilized it to enrich primarily Egyptian compositions.

Table 3.7. Structure of “Yā dunya yā gharāmī”

Tango	Faster Arabic section	Slower Arabic section
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Table 3.8. Structure of “Eih inkātib lī yā rūhī ma’ākī”

Tango	Quasi-tango	Arabic	Tango
--------------	-------------	--------	--------------

Direct quotation or paraphrase of a Western composition was not common in this period, but there is one case in which Abdel Wahhab directly quoted a Western melody. “Aḥibb `isha al ḥurrīya” (“I love the life of freedom”) from *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938) features the famous four-note motif from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony at the very beginning of the song, but then continues on with an original composition that does not incorporate the melody any further. Since he does not develop the quotation it was likely included to add a bit of Western class to the song.

Abdel Wahhab succeeded in creating a modern form of Egyptian popular music that was both sophisticated and cosmopolitan in its form and style while remaining fairly traditional in its intonational and melodic tendencies. The songs sung by Umm Kulthum remained more traditional in character, but the

arrangements became lush through the use of larger ensembles and conservative application of accompanimental harmony. Like *Miṣr effendi*, the compositions featured in these early films were modern but first and foremost Egyptian.

Conclusion

The introduction of mass media to Egypt significantly increased the flow of foreign ideas and cultural forms into the country. The Egyptian creative community responded by appropriating what they admired and adapting it for local use. Technology imported from the West also provided new platforms for indigenous cultural expression that often incorporated concepts and forms adapted from foreign sources. The early Egyptian singing film of the 1930s was a cinematic manifestation of the “Crisis of Orientation” described by Safran (1961), in which the Egyptian intellectual elite were working out how to modernize their society by appropriating aspects of Western culture without losing their native identity.

As is evident in the statements made by the banker Ṭal`at Ḥarb in the 1920s, the creation of the Egyptian film industry was a conscious effort to provide the local audience with an alternative to the growing hegemony of the Western media and its perceived moral dangers. The plots of the resultant singing films

differed from Hollywood models in their narrative tendency towards melodrama and concern with local social issues, such as class difference and the status of musicians. This began to change at the end of the 1930s, when the films starring Abdel Wahhab became lighter in character and Karīm borrowed more elements from Hollywood practice. This shift from Europe to Hollywood as a source for narrative models continued in the 1940s when backstage musicals became a more common plot type, but melodrama continued to be incorporated into many films.

The songs featured in these early films function in many of the same ways as those in Hollywood musicals of the period, but there was a greater emphasis on the integration of the songs in the diegesis. In contrast to the development of the musical in America, which began to become more musically integrated in the 1940s, Egyptian singing films would become less integrated in the next decade, reflecting an approach, suggested by Badrakhān, that valued escapist entertainment over enlightenment. The songs themselves are adaptations in which Egyptian composers incorporated aspects of Western genres and styles in the service of creating a modern musical style while retaining modal practices that were central to the Arabic musical tradition. These elements of narrative structure, song function, and musical style would continue to develop in the next

two decades, and the films would continue to reflect an ongoing exploration of the benefits and dangers of modernization through Westernization.

Figure 3.1. "A night in a dancehall ... the dance of the tango" (*al-Mumathil*, December 16, 1926)



Figure 3.2. Cover featuring Charlie Chaplin wearing a *ṭarbūsh* (*al-Dunya Al-Muṣawwarah*, March 16, 1932)

Figure 3.3. The banker Tal`at Ḥarb
(1867-1941) (*al-Hāmī*, 1995, 71)

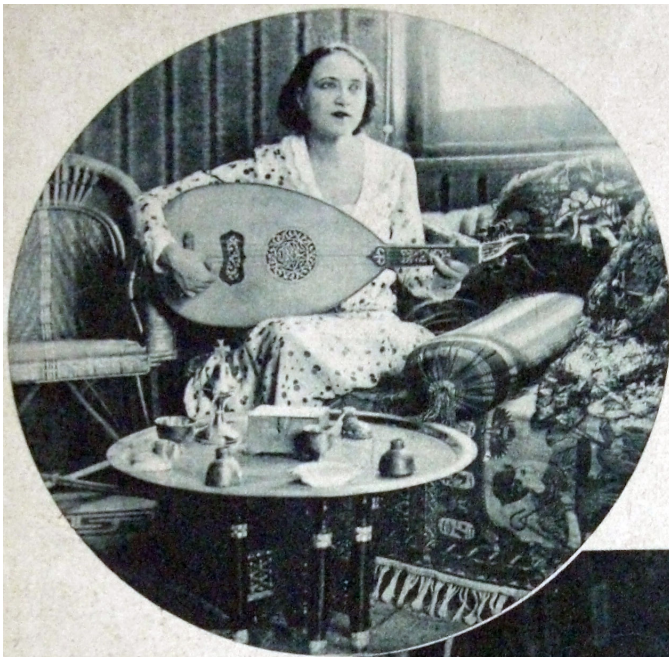


Figure 3.4. Bahīga Ḥāfiz (*al-Kawākib*, June 6, 1932, p.9.)

Figure 3.5. Moḥammad Karīm, press book for *Damū`a al-Ḥubb*, 1935 (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)

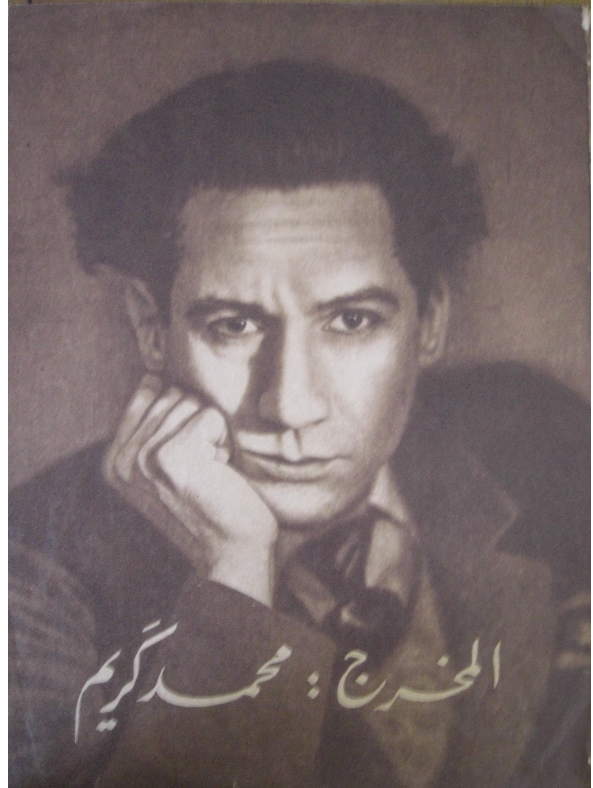


Figure 3.6. Nādira in *Unshūdat al-Fū`ād*, 1932 (Awad & Hamouda 2007, 110)



Figure 3.7. Shaykh Zakariyyā Aḥmad (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 24 Feb. - 1 March 2000, Issue No. 470; <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2000/470/herit2.htm>. accessed April 9, 2009)

Figure 3.8. The opening frames of *al-Warda' al-Baīda* (1933)



Figure 3.9. Comparison of visual transformation techniques in:

Al-Warda' al-Baīda (Karīm, 1933) and *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927)

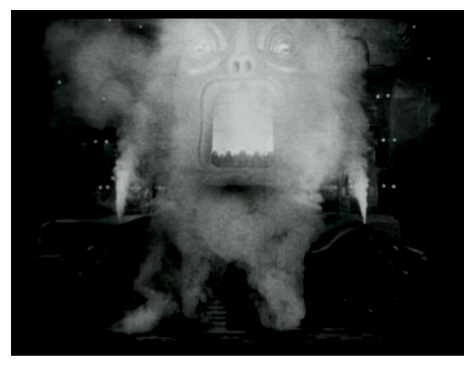


Figure 3.10. Photo of Studio Misr from the press book for *Wedād* (1936)
(courtesy of Walter Armbrust)



Figure 3.11. Cover of the press book for *Wedād* (1936) (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)

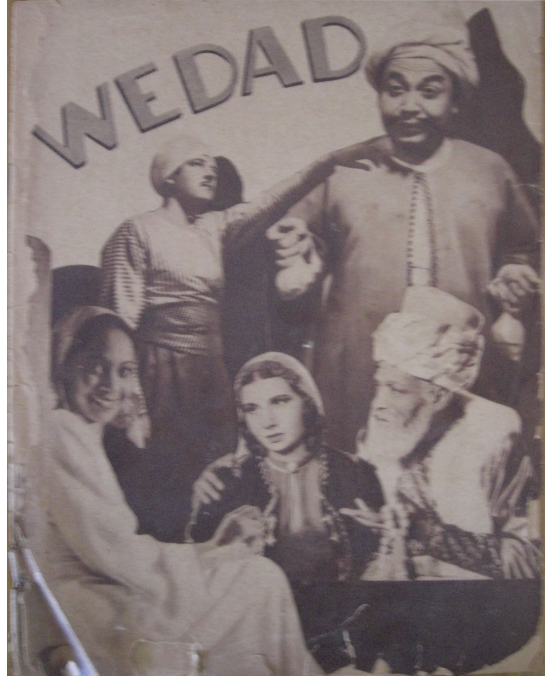


Figure 3.12. Still from the end of *Al-Warda' al-Baiḍa* (1933)



Figure 3.13. Still of Layla Murād from the opening credits of *Yahya al-Ḥubb* (1938)



Figure 3.14. Cover of the press book for *Yom Sa'īd* (1940) (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)



Figure 3.15. Photo of Faten Hamama from the press book for *Yom Sa'īd* (1940) (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)



Figure 3.16. Announcement for a screening of *The Love Parade* (1929), starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald, at Cinema Olympia in Alexandria (*Rūz al-Yūsuf* December 17, 1931, p. 23)

إدارة مسرحية
بتاريخ الوردية للقد يتعد ١٠

سينما أولمبيا الوطني باسكندرية

إدارة مسرحية
تليغون رقم ٤٤٠

المحيرة من جميع العائلات المصرية
عز الأعلام الموسيقية الناطقة

موريس شفايه وجانيت مكدونالد في رواية **مظاهرة الحب**
أوبرت لارنتس لويسن أخرجتها شركة برامونت — عز عز عز بين
لموريس شفايه وموريس شفايه هو عز عز لهذا القلم — جميع مر لا هذا
الكوكب الباريس التمد تظهر فيه يظهر جديد فنعجب باتساماته النوعة
واتساماته الغازية واتساماته العازمة واتساماته البهجة واتساماته الخوة وقد
اشتركت مع العانة الحناء والمئة الرشقة حانيت مكدونالد ذات الصوت
الرخيم الذي رفعها بين عشية وضحاها الى مصاف أعظم كواكب السينما الناطقة
في هذا القلم يعني موريس أنقى جديدة وضعا المثلث خصيصاً له تذكر منها
«أحبك يا باريس» و «أكراما للملكة» و «مظاهرة الحب» و «لا أحد
يستعمله إلا أن». فهذا القلم فضل موضوعه الجديد واتقان الخراجيه وجمال
مناظره ووضوح صوته الذي بلغ حد الكمال في التناء والموسيقى سيوسع بكل
تأكيد دائرة السينما الناطقة بمظاهرة الحب — هو القلم الذي جعل موريس شفايه
أحب كواكب السينما

كل يوم أحد حقة الساعة ١٠ صباحاً وكل خميس وجمعه وسبت واحد واثنين
حقة الساعة ٣ وكل يوم خميس حقة الساعة ٣ خاصة الطلبة توزع قديها هذا اليرسية

Figure 3.17. Stills from the performance of “Sahirtu minu al-layyāli” in *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935) prominently showing the radio microphone and the reactions of listeners back in Cairo.



Figure 3.18. Nagāt `Alī from the press book for *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)



Figure 3.19. Abdel Wahhab at the piano, with Elham Hussayn, performing “Al-ṣabā wa al-gamāl” from the press book for *Yom Sa`īd* (1940) (courtesy of Walter Armbrust)



Figure 3.20. Early French and English tangos (Collier et al 1996, 69, 85)



Chapter 4. Commercialism and the Diversification of the Genre

It has been found that the scenario that is presented in simple environments, such as workers and peasants, has very limited success. The cinema, in fact, is essentially based on the sets. However, the masses that constitute the overwhelming majority of the audience, do not like to find the miserable settings in which they live every day. Instead, the common people dream of seeing the environments that they sometimes read of in the stories of the novels. We will beautifully present them with intense and well-constructed drama, with an engaging plot, [but] these people will not like our film if they recognize the decor and ambiance of their daily lives. – Film director Aḥmad Badrakhān in his 1936 book *al-Sīnimā / The Cinema* (quoted in Farid 1973, 42)

[The] slavish imitation of American film by our filmmakers. Producers, writers and directors compete in the adaptation of American film for the Egyptian screen. And very often, this adaptation [is] too hasty and too superficial [thus/and so] loses any artistic value (the photographer Aḥmad Khorshīd in “The Crisis of Egyptian Cinema”, *Akḥbār al-Sīnimā* Sept 1953, p. 12)

By the end of the 1930s, a critical debate had arisen regarding the future of Egyptian cinema. On the one hand, director Aḥmad Badrakhān [Fig. 4.1] encouraged filmmakers to produce escapist commercial films. He felt that realism was unsuitable for feature films and that middle-class audiences would prefer films that depicted a world they only read about in novels (Farid 1973, 42). This attitude towards the purpose of cinema is quite different from that of the early proponents of drama in Egypt. The kind of scenarios that Badrakhān suggested are more reminiscent of those that grew out of the Greek New Comedy tradition, in which plots often revolved around a romantic couple who must overcome obstacles created by situations and people in order to reach their happy ending.

On the other hand, the belief in the value of dramatic presentations as educational tools was carried on by filmmakers such as Kemāl Selīm (1913-1945) [Fig. 4.2] and resulted in the creation of what has come to be called Egyptian “social realism” (Shafik 1998, 130). Similar in intent to the Italian movement of “neo-realism,” Egyptian social realist films sought to present the reality of life in Egypt and to comment on injustice. Selīm is often cited as the founder of this movement and his 1939 film *al-`Azīmah / Determination* as its first example. As early as 1934, he addressed the issue of commercialization in an article entitled “Advertising and Cinema,” in which he argued against the trend towards films that excited the vile instincts of the people with financial gain as the goal, and called for a cinema that would awaken the social consciousness of the masses (Farīd 1973, 42). He was apparently not averse to providing his audience with some musical entertainment since *al-`Azīmah* contained songs composed by Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī.

Egyptian film critics, led by Samīr Farīd, have tended to favor social realism and as a result have discounted the importance of musical film. Samīr Farīd has argued that because of the prevalence of the Western model, early Egyptian film was only superficially Egyptian and that the content was Western (quoted in Armbrust 1996, 112). This assessment overlooks the ways in which Western musical, narrative, and cinematic elements were adapted by Egyptian

composers and filmmakers. If these films were merely imitations of the Hollywood model, they would have included songs that resembled those of the American popular music tradition, and the stories told in the films would have reflected the values of the West rather than continuing to struggle with issues of local concern.

This chapter focuses on the development of plot variations in Egyptian singing films that combined narrative and presentational devices borrowed from the West with local comic traditions and melodrama. The borrowed Western elements included increasing evidence of Hollywood and, as a result, New Comedy, as a model for plot syntax, as well as elaborate production numbers and their accompanying filmic techniques. In addition, I continue to examine the ways in which Egyptian composers incorporated Western music into the composition of their film songs. As in the previous chapter, the discussion will focus on one star composer and singer, Farid al-Atrash (1915-1974), whose films exemplify the type of films popular in the period and whose music displays the integration of elements appropriated from the West, as well as from other Arab cultures. Farid's films may have followed the Hollywood tendency to value entertainment over education, but they also celebrated Arab culture in the stories and even in the musical numbers. The Hollywood model was much more

apparent in the form of his films, while the content remained both Egyptian and more broadly Arab.

The Cinema of War Profiteers

The increasingly commercial nature of Egyptian film in the 1940s cannot be denied but the question remains as to the cause of this trend. The answer is primarily economic and appears to relate to the role played by Egypt in World War II. Samīr Farīd has called the period of the late 1940s “the cinema of war profiteers” (Farid 1973, 42). Armbrust has proposed that several factors contributed to the expansion of the Egyptian cinema industry following World War II. To begin with, the war interrupted distribution of foreign films, resulting in decreased competition as well as a hole in the market to be filled by local productions. In addition:

Allegedly vast fortunes were made by hoarding scarce commodities and selling them on the black market, and then this illicit money was laundered during and just after the war through financing films. Allegations of money laundering went together with withering criticism of the aesthetic qualities of the films: they were made by people with no experience in cinema, people interested in quick profit. (Armbrust 2000, 306)

In the 1950s, Landau suggested that these quick profits caused the film industry to become more commercialized, “attaching more importance to quantity than quality” (Landau 1958, 180). There is evidence for these claims in the sometimes-low production values of the films in this period. A final possible

cause may be found in the work of Dyer on entertainment and utopia (Dyer 1993). Following Dyer, it can be suggested that this new type of Egyptian musical film appealed to a local audience that was more interested in escaping the inadequacies of a society dominated by the British and led by decadent puppet royalty than in being educated in how to improve it. The freedom promised by the leaders of the 1919 revolution had not yet been achieved and a jaded public may have lost its taste for moralistic melodrama. Hopes for political self-determination in the region were raised by the formation of the Arab League in 1945 but fell in 1948, when the Arab world failed to prevent the occupation of Palestine.

The Diversification of the Genre

The emphasis on quantity noted by Landau and others is evidenced by an abundance of films with which we can examine the development of plot variations within the genre of the Egyptian film musical. Some of these variations resemble those characteristic of Hollywood musicals while others do not have direct American equivalents. More often, Egyptian singing films display a combination of narrative elements and are thus difficult to categorize as belonging to one subgenre or another. They are, instead, stylistic hybrids that do

not directly imitate Hollywood models but instead combine some of their narrative tendencies with a continuing taste for melodrama.

Casting singers as performers has always been a useful device for facilitating song. Adding the narrative element of a theatrical production with its built-in happy conclusion has made the backstage or “show” musical perhaps the most popular version of the film musical in Hollywood and beyond. The plots of these films are centered on a theatrical or cinematic production, with its success as a goal that drives the narrative. As noted by Feuer, the Warner Bros musicals of the early 1930s, such as *42nd Street* (1933) and *Footlight Parade* (1933), “place a premium on cooperation and group participation in the success of the final show.” The artistic community must come together to overcome some obstacle, which may come in the form of a temperamental star or outside forces that are working to undermine the production (Feuer 1993, 17). Both Feuer and Altman have noted the common practice of linking the success of the romantic couple to the success of the show, usually with them as the stars (Feuer 1993, 80; Altman 1987, 211). Many Egyptian musicals in this period featured the star as a performer, but this was often merely a device for facilitating performance. Those that stayed closest to the model were the films starring Farid al-Atrash, which featured grand finales in which his character is united with his leading lady.

A related plot type is that of the revue film, in which the thinnest of possible plots ties together a string of musical and comedic performances. A key difference from the show musical is that the plots are much less goal-oriented. Some films, such as *The Hollywood Revue of 1929*, dispensed with a plot altogether and simply presented a cinematic version of a stage revue. This theatrical tradition grew out of earlier variety performance formats, such as vaudeville and the minstrel show. These types of films were particularly popular in the United States during World War II, including *Ziegfeld Follies* (1945), and the lower-budget *Stage Door Canteen* (1944), which did include a rudimentary plot. Many of Farid's films exhibit this precedence of performance over plot as well as incorporating cameo appearances by singers in the finales. The 1949 film *Ghazal al-Bināt / The Flirtation of Girls*, described by Armbrust as "nothing more or less than a showcase for stars" (Armbrust 2000, 295), is full of luminaries from the Egyptian stage and screen, from the pioneers Naguīb al-Riḥānī and Yūsuf Wahbi to favorites of the forties Layla Murād and Anwar Wagdi. Director Wagdi even made a place for Abdel Wahhab to make an appearance.

Comedy became a more prominent component of Egyptian musical films in the 1940s, taking a variety of forms, some of which determined the primary structure of the film and others that were apparent in secondary plotlines and comic characters. The most common structural form utilized was situational

romantic comedy, which features misunderstandings between the romantic couple and is related to the New Comedy tradition. Other forms of comedy may have been based more on the local tradition of musical narrative performance. A fondness for farce was evident in the tenth-century shadow plays discussed in chapter 2, and farce was featured in some films. In addition, secondary characters often provided comedy based on caricature or physical humor. These characters were usually played by well-known comedians, such as Naguīb al-Rīḥānī, Bishāra Wākīm (1890-1949), and Ismā`īl Yassin (1915-1972), who developed their personas on the stages of theaters and nightclubs. Finally, Egyptian audiences were still fond of the comedic potential of word play. It was, perhaps, only the romantic comedy that was borrowed from the West.

Two other popular types of Hollywood musical plot scenarios (see chapter 1) were less frequently utilized by Egyptian filmmakers. The Hollywood variety of the fairy tale musical descended from the European comic operetta tradition, which drew upon Western stories of charming princes and lovely ladies, updated with sexually charged depictions of the lovers.¹ Egyptians had inherited their own fanciful tales, which were sometimes utilized in their musical films.² A genie is one of the main forces that drives the narrative of *`Afrīta Hānem / The Genie*

¹ The announcement for a 1931 showing of *The Love Parade* (1929) included in chapter 3 documents the exposure of this model to the Egyptian people.

² See “Majnūn Layla” in chapter 3.

Lady (1949), but the film is also a show musical with its associated emphasis on the success of the theatrical production.

The most commonly cited example of the American “folk” musical from this period is *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944). The centrality of family apparent in this film was evident in Egyptian musicals, such as *Fāṭma* (1947), but the cultural references and musical styles that resonated with the audience differed greatly. Altman has noted the melodramatic tendencies of this sub-genre, including the common presence of some evil threat to the couple’s, and the community’s, well being (Altman 1987, 289). Family was equally, if not more, important in Egyptian musicals and the evil threat was sometimes the West itself. In addition, the fact that the characters singing in the film were amateurs freed them from the stigma of professionalism.

Melodrama was not as central to the structure of film musicals produced in Egypt in the 1940s as in the previous and following decades, but the fact that it often formed a component of the plot is a key difference from Hollywood films of the period. The inclusion of this element shows that the plots of Egyptian musicals were more than the “slavish imitation of American film” complained of by the photographer Aḥmad Khorshīd (see epigraph to this chapter). Instead the plots combine narrative elements borrowed from both Hollywood films and

European literature to present content that adhered to Egyptian values and appealed to Egyptian taste.

All of these plot types have one thing in common – they were all designed to facilitate musical performance. As in America, it was the songs and dances that attracted the audiences. We also need to consider the other functions performed by songs in these films, including personal expression, intertextual references to a growing body of musical film, and narrative functions that reflected cultural issues of the time, such as the status of musicians and nationalist concerns. In the early films of Mohammed Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum, care was taken to integrate the songs into the plot. By the 1940s, the entertainment function was becoming more prominent and films served, in part, as advertisements for the growing number of singers and dancers who took to the screen, while their reputations drew audiences to the cinemas. Umm Kulthum made three more films in this period but it was Layla Murād who was the bigger film star. Her popularity grew with a series of films she made with her then husband, Anwar Wagdi (1904-1955).

New stars appeared as well, including the singers Şabāḥ (b. 1927) and Moḥammad Fawzī (1918-1966). Most significant was the rise of several dancers as stars in their own right, including Taḥīa Carioca (1915-1999) and Sāmīa Gamāl (1924-1994). This trend is indicative of how filmmakers were seeking to

satisfy their audiences' desires rather than trying to elevate their minds. Abdel Wahhab starred in only three more films in the 1940s, although he continued to compose songs for musical films and to contribute to the style of musical film song. Space does not allow an in-depth discussion of all these stars but some of them will be mentioned in connection with the star who best personifies this period. The films of Farid al-Atrash exemplify the type of lighter films proposed by Badrakhān; their success suggests that he was right about what Egyptian audiences wanted.

The Rise of the Druze "Prince"

Samīr Farīd marks the beginning of the commercial period as 1945. I would place it on March 24, 1941, with the premiere of *Intiṣār al-Shabāb/ The Triumph of Youth*, the film that introduced the Syrian Druze singer, composer, and `ūd player, Farid al-Atrash (c.1915-1974),³ as well as his sister, the singer Asmahan (1918-1944) [Fig. 4.3]. These stars were more glamorous in appearance than many seen on the Egyptian screen to that point. In contrast to the more conservative look of Abdel Wahhab, Farid looked more like a Hollywood movie idol, with slicked back hair and a greater variety in costuming, from chic dinner jackets to traditional Arab clothing. Asmahan was a green-eyed

³ An alternate, and perhaps more accurate, date for his birth is 1910.

beauty who could have passed for a European. The production numbers were also more lavish, featuring multiple performers and camera techniques adopted from Hollywood practice. The music in the film is both more Western in vocal style and arrangement than the songs sung in the early films of Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum, and more broadly Eastern in its use of musical forms and styles.

Farid al-Atrash and Asmahan (born “Amāl al-Atrash”) were born into a Syrian Druze⁴ family that rose to prominence in the nineteenth century and included the revolutionary Sultan al-Atrash (1891-1982), who led a war against the French from 1925 to 1927. According to information gathered from the al-Atrash family by Sherifa Zuhur, Farid and Asmahan’s mother, `Alīyā’ al-Mundhir, fled the conflicted zone of southern Syria in the early 1920s with her three surviving children,⁵ and sought refuge at her family’s ancestral home in Beirut. The conflict followed them to Lebanon and when their identity was discovered, they moved on to Egypt, arriving in Cairo around 1923 or 1924 (Zuhur 2000, 38). In Cairo, `Alīya’ enrolled her two sons, Fū’ād and Farid, and eventually Amāl

⁴ A religious sect that originated in eleventh-century Egypt, the beliefs of the Druze (*Durūz*) combine Muslim *Ismā`īlī* Shi`ism with concepts adopted from a variety of mystical and philosophical traditions and call themselves *Muwaḥḥidūn* “Unitarians”) (Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition, Brill Online. <http://brillonline.nl.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu>. accessed July 2, 2011.)

⁵ Two other siblings, ‘Anwar and Widād, died in early childhood. The third surviving child was Fū’ād (Zuhur 2000, 34).

(Asmahan), in a French Catholic school, under false names to protect their identity. While there, sources report that Farid participated in the school's choir (*al-Sīnimā*, June 6, 1946, p. 15; Asmar 1998). This was an important event in his musical education. Unlike Abdel Wahhab, Farid was exposed to Christian liturgical choral music at an early age. Thus, it is likely that Western harmony and compositional structure were not as foreign to him.

This is not to say that Farid lacked an Arabic musical education. His mother `Alīyā' was an accomplished singer and `ūd player who supported the family by performing in the cafes of Cairo. She was his first teacher of Arabic music and taught him both Levantine songs and the fundamentals of playing the `ūd. It is often said that Farid's singing style reflected this early female instruction, resulting in his characteristic "crying" voice (see Fig. 1.1). It has also been suggested that his vocal timbre was affected by his training in the French school choir (Asmar 1998). It may be a combination of the two, but in any case, Farid's singing style was certainly different from that of Abdel Wahhab: his was a sweeter voice with a broader range of pitch over which he had amazing control. Unlike Abdel Wahhab, Farid was also willing to adjust the timbre of his voice to suit his more Western compositions, adopting at times what might be referred to as a "bel canto" ("beautiful singing") style.

Farid's musical education continued at Ma'had al-Musīqa al-`Arabīa / The Academy of Arabic Music, which grew out of The Oriental Music Club, where Abdel Wahhab had studied. A 1946 article in the Egyptian periodical *al-Sīnimā* reported that at the academy, Farid studied `ūd with Riyāḍ al-Sunbāfī and was recognized for the beauty of his voice as well as his compositional skills. The article goes on to claim that he was “discovered” while accompanying his sister, Asmahan, at the *ṣālaḥ* (music hall) of Mary Mansour, and was hired as an `ūd player at the famous *Ṣālaḥ Badī'a*. Farid was then hired by the Egyptian State Radio Broadcast Station after being heard by the director, the composer and pianist Medḥat `Aṣṣim (1909-1989). When he performed some of his own compositions the response was obviously favorable, as they raised his fee from one to four Egyptian pounds (*al- Sīnimā*, June 6, 1946, p.15). These events are difficult to date but we do know that the government radio station was inaugurated in 1934, making this year the earliest possible period for Farid's employment there.

Medḥat `Aṣṣim also claimed the discovery of Asmahan, as did Moḥammad al-Qaṣabjī, who, on a visit to the al-Atrash home, is said to have overheard her either imitating the Hollywood soprano Jeanette MacDonald or singing a song he had written for Umm Kulthum (Zuhur 2000, 45). True or not, this anecdote illustrates the perception that Asmahan was capable of singing in

both Western classical and Egyptian styles. It is most likely, however, that it was the composer Dāwūd Ḥusni (1870-1937), another visitor to the al-Atrash household, who first encouraged the young Amal to sing and may have given her the stage name “Asmahan.” According to Zuhur, al-Qaṣabjī, as well as Zakarīyya Aḥmad, taught both Farid and Asmahan, providing them with the basics of maqām theory and Egyptian vocal style (Zuhur 2000, 45-46).

By the end of the 1930s, the siblings were established performing and recording artists. Farid traveled to Europe in 1939 to make recordings on state-of-the-art equipment (Ḥasanayn 1996, 66). That same year, Asmahan was asked by Abdel Wahhab to record the “Majnūn Layla” opera segment for his film *Yom Sa`īd*. In 1940, Farid and Asmahan were approached by the producer Gabriel Telhami, of the Nile Film Company, to star in a film to be directed by Badrakhān. Farid would provide the songs, with lyrics by Aḥmad Rāmī. The resulting film, *Intiṣār al-Shabāb*, incorporated more comedy and more spectacle than earlier Egyptian musicals, as well as aspects of the Hollywood show musical plot structure that would continue to dominate Farid’s films until after the 1952 revolution. It also featured two musical stars rather than one. Farid would continue to share the spotlight in his films with other singers, dancers, and comedians.

The semi-autobiographical plot of *Intiṣār al-Shabāb* centers on siblings Waḥīd (Farid) and Nādīa (Asmahan), who leave unidentified troubles behind in Syria for a new life in Egypt. Upon arrival they meet a comic trio of performers, the “Nuts,” who help them find jobs in the entertainment industry. Nādīa is reluctant to sing in public, but Waḥīd tells her to “forget about old traditions.” As the film progresses, both are provided with romantic storylines: one that follows the Hollywood model of romantic comedy and another that addresses Arab ambivalence towards entertainers. Waḥīd falls for the sister of a sleazy impresario played by Estephan Rosti (1891-1964), a cinematic pioneer who would go on to play comic roles in many of Farid’s films. The obstacle to their love is a misunderstanding that Nādīa is not his sister but instead his wife. Mistaken identity of this kind has long been a common convention in Western romantic comedy. Nādīa is wooed and wed by a rich young man, Moḥī, played by Anwar Wagdi. When his mother discovers that Nādīa is a professional entertainer she threatens to disown him. Nādīa then decides to leave him rather than have him suffer. In true musical comedy fashion, both of these storylines are happily resolved at the end of the film.

A secondary plotline concerns the exploits of the hapless “Nuts,” who are appropriately named “Walnut” (Lāṭīf Amīn), “Almond” (Fū’ād Shāfiq), and “Filbert” (Ḥassan Fayīq), and are even given their own musical numbers. At first it may

appear that the inclusion of these comic characters is an imitation of Hollywood films, which often featured musical comedy acts, such as The Ritz Brothers, in secondary roles or cameo appearances. However, acts such as this one would have been employed in the music halls where Farid got his start, as well as in the Franco-Arab revues of the early twentieth century. Other comic characters include the Levantine club owner played by Bishāra Wākīm, who specialized in the role of the stereotypical foreigner, a character type that appeared as early as the tenth-century shadow plays (*khayāl al-zill*). The kind of comic word play that has long been popular in Egypt is also featured, in the form of a hard-of-hearing film executive who mistakes Waḥīd's name for that of the actor himself (Farid).

Twelve musical numbers, all credited to Farid and listed in Table 4.1, appear in the film. That the *taqtūqah* is the most frequently utilized genre reflects the lighter nature of the film. I have chosen to classify the four songs above as *taqāṭīq* because of their lighter subject matter and repetitive structure. There are, however, some stylistic and functional differences among them. “Yā bid`a al-ward” (“How beautiful are the roses”) is the earliest production number I have encountered in an Egyptian film. Like the much more elaborate musical sequences choreographed by Busby Berkeley for Hollywood films, it includes an overhead shot in which women are viewed as components in a geometrical pattern [Fig. 4.4]. The *taqtūqah*, “Īdī fī īdak” (“My hand in your hand”) is actually a

diegetic number, sung by Waḥīd and Nādīa while on a pastoral outing with Moḥī.

It might also be described as a *nashīd*, or simply as a song in the theatrical tradition of Darwīsh, complete with the slow steady beat, simple melody and refrains common in his songs, and lyrics that celebrate the Nile.

Table 4.1: Songs in *Intiṣār al-Shabāb*

TITLE	GENRE / CHARACTER	FUNCTION
Ṣūnī al-khudūd fī shabāb `an damū`a al-`ayn (Protect the cheeks of your youth from tears)	<i>mawwāl</i> / Waḥīd	INFORMAL PERFORMANCE
Yā layyālī al-bishari (Oh nights of good tidings)	<i>mūnūlūg</i> / Nādīa	PERSONAL EXPRESSION
Yā bid`a al-ward (How beautiful are the roses)	<i>taqtūqah</i> / Nādīa	FORMAL PERFORMANCE
Aḥnā talāta (We are three)	<i>taqtūqah</i> / The “Nuts”	FORMAL PERFORMANCE
Al-Shams ghābit `anwārḥā (The sun is set)	<i>dīalūg</i> / Waḥīd & Nādīa	FORMAL PERFORMANCE
Īdī fī īdak (My hand in your hand)	<i>taqtūqah</i> / Nādīa, Waḥīd & ensemble	GROUP EXPRESSION
Galā, galā (Abracadabra)	<i>taqtūqah</i> / The “Nuts”	INFORMAL PERFORMANCE
Ṣadūk `anī al-`adā (Enemies kept you from me)	<i>mawwāl</i> / Waḥīd	INFORMAL PERFORMANCE
Wiḥayātik ti`ūlī al-ḥaq (For my sake tell me the truth)	<i>mūnūlūg</i> / Waḥīd	PERSONAL EXPRESSION / DIALOGUE
Al-ḥubb `az wa hanā (Love is happiness and joy)	<i>tango</i> / Waḥīd	FORMAL PERFORMANCE
Yālī hawāk shāghil bālī (You whose love has occupied my mind)	<i>mūnūlūg</i> / Nādīa	PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Yā layl al-layl (Oh night of nights)	<i>operetta</i> / Waḥīd, Nādīa, the “Nuts,” & ensemble	FORMAL PERFORMANCE
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Most significant is the inclusion of two *ṭaqāṭīq* performed by the “Nuts.” The style of these two songs clearly descends from the Franco-Arab revue. They also sing a little ditty as part of their plan to distract the landlady from asking for the rent by coming to her at night as “ghosts” and predicting that a husband is coming for her. When she asks when he is coming, Almond replies “Al-dīk bīḡdan kū kū kū kū fī-al-fagariyya” (“When the rooster crows at dawn”). This is a direct quote from Darwīsh’s *ṭaqṭūqah* “Al ḥelwa dī” (“This beautiful one”) that was featured in his 1918 operetta *Wa Laū / Even If*, thus connecting them as well to Egyptian musical theater.

The two *mawāwīl* (see chapter 2) featured in the film display different styles, illustrating a practice of musical borrowing from other Arab musical cultures that would continue to be featured in Farid’s film performances. The first, “Ṣūnī al-khudūd fī shabāb `an damū`a al-`ayn” (“Protect the cheeks of your youth from tears”) is an urban Egyptian style *mawwāl* that allowed Farid to show off his voice in a spontaneous response to a *nay* (end-blown reed flute) player in the street. The second is included as an audition for the impresario Ṭaha. Farid sang this *mawwāl*, “Ṣadūk `anī al-`adā” (“Enemies kept you from me”), in the style of his native Syria. According to Syrian musician Faisal Zedan, the main differences

between the two performances are his pronunciation (Syrian rather than Egyptian in this case with a bit of bedouin as well), and his use of “uff” rather than “ya layālī” in the opening improvisation). Zedan also noted that the use of *maqām* is basically the same between the two styles (Faisal Zedan, personal communication). Farid continued to employ Levantine musical forms and styles in his performances. This practice illustrates that the composers of Egyptian film songs were not only borrowing from the West, but also from traditions closer to home.

Western musical forms and styles are also in evidence in the songs of Farid’s first feature film and would continue to be incorporated into his songs. Like Abdel Wahhab, Farid often borrowed forms from the music of Latin America, and *Intiṣār al-Shabāb* features the first of his film tangos. “Al-ḥubb `az wa hanā” (“Love is happiness and joy”) functions not only as a formal performance that represents the growing success of Waḥīd as a musician, but also as a communication with his sister via the radio. As in “Sahirtu” (see chapter 3), the performance is mediated and reaches out over a distance, perhaps in imitation of the earlier song. It is possible that Farid was inspired to include this tango by Abdel Wahhab’s performance in *Damū`a al-Ḥubb* (1935), but it differs from Abdel Wahhab’s early tangos in an increased attention to the stylistic details of the Argentine song form. While the arrangement of Abdel Wahhab’s early tangos is

primarily monophonic, the accompaniment to “Al-ḥubb `az wa hanā” features chords played by the accordion for both the instrumental and vocal portions of the tango. It only drops out for the middle Arabic-style section.⁶ Like Abdel Wahhab, Farid composed his tango in a mode that sounds a lot like Western E minor, but it is likely that he conceived of it as being in *maqām Nahawānd* on E. The use of harmony complicates the assessment of the modal character of the piece but the modulation from *Nahawānd* to *Bayātī* on the fifth degree of the scale is a common one in Arabic modal practice.

The tango portion of the song begins with an eight-measure introduction featuring a clarinet, accompanied by a number of stringed instruments and an accordion. The main body of the tango encompasses fourteen measures. The first two hemistiches (half-lines) are neatly distributed over two measures each; the line is then repeated. The accordion extends the lines with interludes that are melodically compatible with tango style. The hemistiches of the second line receive one measure each and are punctuated with syncopated accompanimental bursts that are stylistically consistent with tango style.⁷ The tango ends with a repeat of the first half of the first line and a slight variation on

⁶ See the transcription of Farid’s song “Yā zahratān fī khayyālī” [Ex. 4.1] for examples of the use of harmony in the arrangement of his songs.

⁷ Syncopation of this kind forms part of a complex of accompanimental practices known as “yeites” (“tricks” or “licks”) commonly employed by Argentine tango musicians.

its melody, followed by the *sol-do* cadence that is one of the clearest melodic markers of tango style. This first presentation of the tango is followed by a change to Arabic rhythm and intonation (see Table 4.2). From a clear 4/4 meter with the accent on 1, the pulse changes to the Arabic ‘*tqa` Waḥda*, with two repetitions of the pattern being used for each hemistiche, and the mode shifts to *maqām Bayātī* on B. Farid then returns to the last two lines of the tango before repeating it entirely. The resulting composition is not entirely tango, and not entirely Eastern either. In the tango section, Farid followed some of the norms of tango song style but not all: the modal shift from minor to major is missing and the tango is a bit short.

Table 4.2: The structure of “Al-hubb `az wa hanā”

<p>0:00 Tango <i>Nahawānd</i> on E</p>	<p>0:50 Arabic section in <i>‘iqa Waḥdah</i> <i>Bayātī</i> on B [fifth degree]</p>	<p>1:24-2:10 Tango <i>Nahawānd</i> on E</p>
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Intiṣār al-Shabāb ends with the mini-operetta “Yā layl al-layl” (“Oh night of nights”),⁸ which comprises the last half hour of the film. It is a costume piece in which Farid and Asmahan play young lovers who overcome the obstacle to their

⁸ Sherifa Zuhur gives the title as “Ughiniyyat al-ghurub wa ughiniyyat al-sharq” (“Songs of the West and Songs of the East”) (Zuhur 2000, 93) but she may be confusing it with another Farid finale, entitled “Operette al-Sharq wa al-Gharb” (“Operetta of the East and the West”) featured in *Aḥibbak Inta* (1949).

love: a jealous old rich man played by Lāṭīf Amīn (Walnut). The fairy tale quality of the piece could have been inspired by the comic operettas made popular on the screen by stars such as Jeanette MacDonald with screen partners Maurice Chevalier and Nelson Eddy. This usage of operetta as a structure, however, is different from that evident in *Wedād* (1936), in which all the songs were composed in an Arabic style. Abu Shadi has described the brief operettas often featured in Farid's films as Middle Eastern in style, "interspersed with either Egyptian, Lebanese or Syrian folk dances" (Abu Shadi 1996, 97). I would add that these numbers also incorporate Western musical styles and follow a linear plan of construction similar to that employed by Abdel Wahhab in many of his film songs. Some purists may object to Farid's liberal use of Western styles, but the music critic al-Najmī has recognized Farid as having been able to compose in an Eastern style while also contributing to the renewal (*tajdīd*) and development (*taṭwīr*) of Egyptian music through the beneficial application of European music (al-Najmī 1972, 45).

The stylistic progression of the piece is laid out in Table 4.3. The performance begins with an orchestral rendition of the main theme of the operetta – a waltz that is first heard under the opening credits of the film. We also see an orchestra in a pit, led by a conductor – another nod to the European tradition. The vocal rendition of the melody that follows includes an example of

the style of singing Asmahan may have learned from listening to Jeanette MacDonald, featuring the use of her high head voice and a vocal timbre that is more operatic than Arabic. This is not only an stylistic imitation of European operetta, but also its interpretation by Hollywood.⁹ A change in style back to the East is signaled by the prominence of the *qānūn* in the accompaniment.

Instrumentation continues to play a role in distinguishing the stylistic sections.

TABLE 4.3: Stylistic structure of “Yā layl al-layl”

<u>Style of section</u>	<u>Sung by</u>
Waltz	Nadia & chorus
Recitative (accompanied by qānūn)	Waḥīd
Waltz (reprise)	All
Rumba	Nādīa & chorus
Waltz (reprise)	All
<i>Mūnūlūg</i>	Waḥīd
Waltz (reprise)	All
<i>Mūnūlūg</i> (instrumental interlude on oboe leads to second part of section)	Waḥīd
<i>Dīalūg</i>	Waḥīd & Nādīa
Brass fanfare followed by recitative	Nādīa
<i>Mūnūlūg</i>	Waḥīd
Recitative	Walnut/Handal
Chorus (several stylistic changes within this section, including a different waltz melody)	Waḥīd & chorus
INTERMISSION [the action carries backstage]	--
Opening chorus	Chorus
<i>Mūnūlūg</i>	Nādīa
Instrumental for flamenco & Egyptian dancers	Orchestra
<i>Mūnūlūg</i>	Waḥīd
<i>Mūnūlūg</i>	Nādīa
Waltz (reprise)	All

⁹ Imitations of Western style such as these might be referred to as exhibiting “lawn gharbī,” or “Western color” (see Racy 1982).

Asmahan and the chorus then sing to a habenera rhythm, marked by what sounds like claves or wood blocks, before a return to the waltz and another change in style to a *mūnūlūg*, sung by Farid, which features modulations to several *maqamāt*. In the final section of this *mūnūlūg*, the timbral color changes again with an oboe solo that is highlighted by a shot of the orchestra, lending a slightly Orientalist flavor to an Eastern melody. The action of the operetta continues with an Egyptian-style duet, or *dīālūg*,¹⁰ between Farid and Asmahan, along with a recitative sung by Lātīf Amīn. The Act One finale of the operetta displays several stylistic changes, including another waltz melody and a brief recitative. It concludes with a cadence in E-flat major / *'Ajam* on E-flat.

The break between acts provides an opportunity for the resolution of the romantic plotlines. These resolutions are quickly followed by the opening chorus of the second act. Once again, the concept is familiar from the European operetta tradition, but the simple folksy melody and steady beat of the chorus are more reminiscent of the work of Darwīsh than of the operetta composers Sigmund Romberg or Franz Lehár. Asmahan then sings an Eastern *mūnūlūg* before being reunited with her lover. The wedding celebration features some unusual entertainment in the form of a male flamenco dancer flanked by two

¹⁰ See chapter 2 for a discussion of the Egyptian *dīālūg* song form.

Near-Eastern-style dancers (*rāqṣāt sharqīā*). Rather than trying to find the logic in this bit of exotica, it is instead important to remember that spectacle need not be logical.¹¹ The operetta closes with a reprise of the opening waltz and another opportunity for Asmahan to display her vocal range, ending on the D above High C.

In this first Farid film, we can see a shift not only in style, but also in message. A much greater emphasis on entertainment is evident, along with the acceptance of the female entertainer. Both of these aspects can be linked to the Hollywood model in which entertainment is celebrated. Conflict over the status of entertainers is present in American musical film as far back as *The Jazz Singer* (1927) but the performers were usually accepted in the end.¹² Egyptian filmmakers continued to grapple with this issue in the musical films of the 1940s and 50s. The increased presence of female singers and dancers in the films of this period complicates the issue with that of gender, including attitudes towards the *ʿawālim* (singers) and *ghāziyyah* (dancers) who had been entertaining the Egyptian elite for centuries. The acceptance of Nādīa as a respectable woman on the stage suggests that Egyptian attitudes towards female performers were

¹¹ In 1866, *The Black Crook* combined an existing melodrama with state-of-the-art special effects and a corps of one hundred scantily-clad ballerinas to create what many consider to be the first hit Broadway show.

¹² An early exception is director Rouben Mamoulian's first film, *Applause* (1929), which depicts the seedy life of an aging burlesque queen who tries to protect her illegitimate daughter from the shameful life she has led.

changing in the 1940s. Figure 4.5 is a montage of covers from the magazine *al-Sīnimā* that illustrates the popularity of female dancers in 1945 and 1946. Umm Kulthum and Abdel Wahhab appear only once each, while dancers were featured in more than half of the covers.¹³ This subject deserves a study of its own. Karin van Nieuwkerk (1995) has explored the status of female singers and dancers in Egypt but a major study of how this manifested in film has yet to be undertaken.

The Development of a Diverse Genre and the Tension Between Form and Content

The harshest criticism of genre cinema in general is that genres have usually affirmed the status quo and its existing values, and have resisted any innovation or change. More often than not, these values express dominant mores and ideology. They provide easy formulaic answers to difficult questions in order to please their audiences. The exceptions are far and few in the history of cinema. (Abu Shadi 1996, 85)

Criticism of Egyptian cinema in this period often focuses on a lack of originality. The musical films I have studied do exhibit imitation of Hollywood in their form but the contents of the plots were adapted to reflect a local cultural perspective. The fact that the directors of these films were often also involved in both writing and producing them meant that they had more creative control than most Hollywood directors of the time, but they also had to answer to governmental censors and to respond to the interests of their Arab audience.

¹³ This, and other periodicals of the period, featured Hollywood stars as well, which provides us with evidence of the continuing popularity of American films.

Abdel Wahhab continued to produce his own films and by the latter part of the decade Farid had begun producing his own as well. These filmmakers had to contend with some governmental censorship, which “often served the private aims of the king and his ministers” (Landau 1958, 166).¹⁴

At the center of almost every story told in the films surveyed in this chapter is the romantic couple. Misunderstandings and villains may briefly part the lovers but, more often than in the 1930s, they were reunited in the end. Secondary characters, such as the “Nuts,” provided comic content, including physical gags and wordplay. The amount of comedy included in Abdel Wahhab’s films increased, perhaps in response to market demands, but Umm Kulthum’s films remained steadfastly serious, with only a minimal amount of humor. The convention of casting singers as performers continued to be popular and the plot structure of the “show” musical became a more common model. The lighter character of many of the films produced in Egypt in the 1940s suggests that Hollywood films were indeed becoming a more prevalent model, but the continuing presence of melodrama, even in some of the lightest films, is a significant difference. Hollywood had largely dispensed with melodrama in

¹⁴ The palace and the British Embassy originally instated censorship rules in 1914 to prohibit depicting the situation of the peasants and workers as well as to forbid criticism of foreigners, government officials and the monarchy. (Thorval 1975, 34-35) Censorship increased during World War II and the 1948 Palestine War.

musicals since the early 1930s and replaced it with backstage 'show' musicals and romantic comedy.

Casting a singer as a performer easily facilitates the integration of the requisite songs into a film musical, but in a society that had long looked on professional performers with suspicion, the issue of their status was not easily avoided. One way to avoid the stigma was to present the star as an amateur. Feuer has noted the Hollywood concern with this issue and suggests that amateur entertainers "can't exploit us because they *are* us" (Feuer 1993, 13). Similarly, in the Arab world, amateur performers enjoy a higher status than professional ones. Lois Ibsen al-Faruqi has suggested that the amateur "seems to float above the controversy over music and its respectability" (al-Faruqi 1980, 67). Being featured as an amateur or as a slave who was compelled to perform by her master allowed Umm Kulthum to maintain her dignified persona. Abdel Wahhab was cast either as an amateur or as a serious musician whose goal was not the music hall or the nightclub but instead the premiere of his masterwork at the Opera House.

Despite the stigma, Farid was almost always cast as a professional musician and his films display a preference for the "show" musical. This could be read as an imitation of Hollywood and evidence of its greater presence as a source for models of how to construct a successful musical film. The narrative

goal of putting on a successful show that is central to this sub-genre of the show musical was present in Farid's very first film, *Intiṣār al-Shabāb* (1941), but the community effort – basic to Hollywood versions – was not emphasized. The community aspect of the show musical structure was much more in evidence in later Farid films that were written and directed by Henry Barakat (1912-1997). Best known for his later, more serious, socially conscious films, such as *Do`ā al-Karawān / The Nightingale's Prayer* (1959), Barakat was adept at directing a variety of film styles, including musicals. The first film he created for Farid, *Ḥabīb al-`Omar / Love of My Life* (1947), displays a knowledge of the structure of Hollywood show musicals, in particular three films directed by Busby Berkeley and starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland.¹⁵ This is evident not only in the structure of the plot, but also in the visual presentation of the production number at the end of the film [Fig. 4.6]. Barakat may not have had Berkeley's budget, but he clearly shared a love of spectacle.

The difference from the Hollywood model is in the details of the story's content. The standard scenario for the Rooney / Garland films cast him as an ambitious young man who is seduced by the promise of fame and fortune and strays from the path of honor, thus threatening the success of the artistic community. She is the moral compass that reminds him of what is right and

¹⁵ The three films were *Babes in Arms* (1939), *Strike Up the Band* (1940), and *Babes on Broadway* (1941).

brings him back into the group. In the end he is rewarded for doing the right thing with the success he has been seeking.

Ḥabīb al-`Omar begins much like the Hollywood model, with a group of performers seeking their big break. Disgusted with the ignorant provincial audience of Manṣūra, their hometown, Mamdūḥ (Farid) and his band decide to break their piggy bank and head off to Cairo in search of fame and fortune. The destination might be different,¹⁶ but, as in the Hollywood model, a professional goal has been set. A communal effort will be needed to achieve it and to overcome the obstacles they encounter along the way. We are also introduced to an ensemble of comic secondary characters, from the members of the band to a sweet old shaykh, a sleazy nightclub owner and a vain actor. Most prominent is the comedian Ismā`īl Yassin, who often played Farid's best friend. His scenes with Farid revealed the singer to be not only willing, but also able to perform comedy. In contrast, Abdel Wahhab occasionally became playful, such as in his bathtub performance of "al-Mayya terwī al-`aṭishān" ("Water quenches the thirsty") in *Roṣaṣa f-il-Qalb / A Bullet in the Heart* (1944), but usually left the comedy to those who specialized in it.

¹⁶ New York and Hollywood were where performers hoped to get their big break in Hollywood films. Cairo, with both stage and screen industries, was a one-stop destination.

Ḥabīb al-`Omar differed from Hollywood practice in its treatment of the female member of the community, played by the dancer and actress Sāmīa Gamāl (1924-1994)¹⁷ [Fig. 4.7]. It is she, rather than the male character, who behaves shamefully, albeit for a noble cause. She is rejected by Mamdūḥ when he discovers she is performing in a cabaret. The audience is encouraged to agree with this condemnation through the seedy mise-en-scene of the club, where bored dancers in ill-fitting costumes shuffle across the stage while men leer at them. However, her willingness to sacrifice her artistic integrity turns out to be crucial to the success of the community. She uses the money she makes as a dancer to secretly finance Mamdūḥ's nightclub; when this is revealed she returns to him. Her appearance at his opening completes the success of the group.

Barakat created two more show musicals for Farid, both of which also displayed local content in their plots. The plot of *'Afrīta Hānem* (1949) combined a backstage scenario with a storyline inspired by *A Thousand and One Nights*. *Mā Ta'ūlsh le Ḥad/ Don't Tell Anyone* (1952) stayed closer to Hollywood narrative models, focusing on a theatrical production complicated by the infatuation of a talented young singer (Nūsa), played by Nūr al-Hodá (1924-

¹⁷ Sāmīa was a frequent co-star to Farid, appearing in six pictures with him. Theirs was a popular onscreen match that could be compared to that of Rooney and Garland or Astaire and Rogers.

1998), for her famous co-star. The cast of characters even included a harried dance director, played by `Abd al-Salām al-Nablusī, whose neurotic personality is reminiscent of Frank McHugh in *Footlight Parade* (1933). Conflict was also created by a generational clash over acceptable types of music that was apparent in American film as far back as *The Jazz Singer* (1927). Early in the film, we encounter Nūsa at school where she is rehearsing a *mūwhashshaḥ*. Her father would prefer that she stick to more traditional types of singing such as this and warns her of the dangers of popular music. Like Jackie's father in *The Jazz Singer*, he is a highly respected performer of traditional music. The authority of this character was surely reinforced by the audience's knowledge that the actor playing the part was the son of the great *dawr* composer Moḥammad `Uthmān (1855-1900). Feuer has labeled this plot type as the "opera vs. swing narrative" (Feuer 1993, 54). As in the Hollywood model she examines, popular music is victorious in this Egyptian film. In addition, in both of these films, the success of the romantic couple is linked to the success of the show.

These four Farid films appear to support the criticism of imitation and are probably the closest to the Hollywood model in form and content. Other stars may have followed Farid's lead, but the icons Mohammed Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum continued to be featured in more high-minded productions. Abdel Wahhab sometimes played an aspiring composer / musician in his films but the

director Karīm did not utilize the show plot structure. Umm Kulthum starred in one film in which the production of an opera is the goal. The climax of *Aida* (1942) is the successful production of an Egyptian version of Verdi's opera or, more properly, Ghislanzoni's libretto, with music composed by Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī and Moḥammad al-Qaṣabji to words written by Aḥmad Rāmī. It turned out that Badrakhān was correct in assessing the depth of audience tastes. Danielson describes the film as one of Umm Kulthum's few failures. Egyptian audiences did not respond well to its originally released version, with its lengthy operatic finale and lack of romantic resolution. It seems that they wanted more entertainment and less art, and so a revamped version was released nine months later with new songs by Zakarīyya Aḥmad and Bayram al-Tūnisi (Danielson 1997, 108-109). Both these performers stopped starring in films by the end of the 1940s. Umm Kulthum continued to appear in legendary live concerts, while Abdel Wahhab focused on composing music and producing films.

A common alternative to the show musical was to build the story around a performer, but without the show as a goal. Romance often took precedence and, in keeping with the suspicion towards musicians prevalent in this time and place, the involvement of the lead character in show business was sometimes an obstacle rather than a goal. Some such films were uncomplicated romances, mixed with a generous amount of comedy, provided by an assortment of comic

sidemen. Others were more serious films that incorporated a fair amount of melodrama, including threats to life and freedom.

On the lighter side were films in which comedy prevailed. The types of comedy varied from structural narrative devices such as mistaken identity to the kinds of caricature and word play that had long been popular in Egyptian narrative performance. Mistaken identity figured prominently in the plots of several of Farid's films. This has been a common device in the Western narrative tradition since as early as Plautus' second-century BCE *Menachmi*, and William Shakespeare's sixteenth-century *The Comedy of Errors*. The device was not unknown in the Egyptian narrative tradition, as 'Abū Zayd of the *Sīrat Banī Hilāl* uses disguise as a defensive tool. The borrowing may also have occurred earlier and been absorbed into the modern theatrical tradition. Ya`qūb Şannū' may have borrowed it from the West for use in his c.1870 musical farce (see chapter 2), in which an Egyptian prince disguises himself as a woman to make a fool of a European prince. The same device creates romantic conflict in *Shahir al-'Asil / The Honeymoon* (1945) [Fig. 4.8] when Farid's character confuses two masked girls at a party. This film also featured Ḥassan Fāyīq (1898-1980) as a comical manager who claims to have invented Farid and the tenor Moḥammad al-Bakkār (1913-1959) [Fig. 4.9]. Al-Bakkār's vain opera singer is another caricature, in this

case borrowed from the West.¹⁸ *Akher Kedba / The Last Lie* (1950) is structured around the comic consequences of lying. Ismāʿīl Yassin played a double role as “Rabbit” and his aunt, whom he impersonates in order to save Samīr (Farid) from a lawsuit, resulting in another example of comedic mistaken identity.

In other films comedy was tempered with touches of melodrama. *Bolbol Effendi* (1948), written and directed by Ḥussayn Fawzī, is primarily a romantic comedy in which Ṣabāḥ (b. 1927) played the dual roles of the sweet Baṭṭa and the spoiled star Kawākib, resulting in both comic and dramatic identity confusion. This light-hearted film turns more serious with the suicide of the adulterous and thieving Kawākib. This difference in content from the Hollywood model may have been a necessary adaptation designed to satisfy Arab morality and to appeal to a continuing taste for melodrama. Director and writer Badrakhān similarly used a dual role and mistaken identity for comedic and dramatic purposes in *ʿAyza Itgowaz / I Want to Get Married* (1952). In this case the story is happily resolved. There is, however, a serious motivation for Nūr (Nūr al-Hodá) to get married – she is seeking the respectability that all the money she earns as a star cannot buy. In both these films we can see a continuing concern for the morality of female performers.

¹⁸ This Lebanese singer went on to play an Arab caricature in the Broadway musical *Fanny*, from 1954 to 1956. He was also an orchestra conductor and made recordings of “Oriental” music for the American market.

Some musical films of this period were more serious in nature, ranging from romantic drama to full-blown melodrama. Farid's second film, *Ahlām al-Shabāb / Dreams of Youth* (1942) [Fig. 4.10], was written and directed by Kemāl Selīm. The plot incorporates some comedy, including an opening sequence in which Farid crashes through a window. Things turn more serious when the shameful secret of his profession as a nightclub performer is revealed to the respectable family of his love interest, played by Madīḥa Yūsūrī (b.1921). The cause of this revelation is the jealous dancer Bahīa, played by Taḥīa Carioca¹⁹ (1919-1999), who is comically humiliated during a dance to Johann Strauss's "Tales from the Vienna Woods" (1868). Taḥīa's role in this film is one that she would continue to play throughout her career. Though sometimes redeemed by the end of the film, she was, as Edward Said described her, often cast as "the other woman, a counter to the virtuous, domestically acceptable, and much less interesting female lead" (Said 2000, 350). We have already seen this theme of redemption through sacrifice in *Ḥabīb al-'Omar* (1947). It would continue to be featured in Egyptian musicals in the next decade and beyond.

There is one more film worth mentioning that displays fairly equal parts of comedy and drama within a framework that was patterned on another kind of

¹⁹ A fellow alumna of Ṣālaṭ Bad'īa, Taḥīa took her stage name from a dance performed by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in their first film together, *Flying Down to Rio* (1933).

Hollywood musical. *Yasmine* (1950), written, directed, and co-starring Anwar Wagdi, was the film debut of the child star Fayrouz [Fig. 4.11], Egypt's answer to Shirley Temple. Like Shirley, Fayrouz was a precocious child who could both sing and dance. The scenarios of her films were similar as well, usually featuring her as an orphan who endures hardship with pluck and charms all who meet her. In *Yasmine* she is taken in and raised by an itinerant musician (Wagdi) to whom she brings joy and success. Dramatic conflict comes from the threat of their separation. During the Great Depression Shirley's films depicted a world in which the destitute could find happiness. It may be that the hope provided by this type of star and the type of films she starred in were similarly appealing to an increasingly diverse Egyptian audience that was seeking hope for a better life.

Perhaps the most significant difference from the narrative norms of the Hollywood musical was the continued prevalence of melodrama as a dominating structure. Even Farid made a couple of films during this period that were of a more serious nature. In one of these, *Mā 'Adurish / I Can't* (1946), it is his ambition to be a musician that leads to his estrangement from his family and it is, once again, a dancer (Taḥiā Carioca) who redeems herself through sacrifice and brings the family back together.²⁰ Farid's sister, Asmahan, starred in the musical melodrama *Gharām wa Intiqām / Love and Revenge* (1944). Her status as

²⁰ The other film was *Gamāl wa Dalāl / Gamal and Dalal* (1945).

musician is not the source of dramatic conflict here but instead her mission to avenge the death of her husband. The tragic ending of the film was necessitated by the death of Asmahan herself.²¹ Her director and co-star Yūsuf Wahbi was well known for melodrama but also provided some comic relief in the person of Bishāra Wākīm.

Umm Kulthum made three more films in the 1940s, two of which were primarily melodramas. *Sallāma* (1945) [Fig. 4.12] is the sad tale of yet another singing slave girl doomed to mournfully wander her village after the loss of her great love. Her final film was *Fāṭma* (1947), in which she played not a performer, but a nurse who is pursued by a rich man and lured into an unofficial marriage before being abandoned and left with a bastard child. The virtuous poor are lionized in this film when Fāṭma stands up in court and forces the rich man to make her an honest woman. Both films contained a moral: *Sallāma* warned of the fate that may befall someone who becomes obsessed with song, while *Fāṭma* conveyed a social message in the tradition of Egyptian realism. Moralistic musicals of this sort would become common after the 1952 revolution.

Abdel Wahhab starred in only three more films, the first of which was the lightest. *Mamnū`a al-Ḥubb / Forbidden to Love* (1942) [Fig. 4.13] was an

²¹ Asmahan was killed in a car crash that same year. While conspiracy theories suggesting she was murdered by a jealous Umm Kulthum or the French government are still popular, it was most likely an accident.

adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in which the feuding families are reconciled by the union of their children. While this film was in the lighter vein of his two previous films, the final two were more serious in nature. For his 1944 offering Karīm chose to adapt a 1926 play by the distinguished Egyptian playwright Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987). In *Roṣaṣa f-il-Qalb* (1944) Abdel Wahhab did not play the honorable young man but instead a playboy civil servant who falls for a gold-digger who is pursuing his best friend. Karīm did provide some comic relief and, unlike Umm Kulthum, Abdel Wahhab participated in some of these bits, including climbing into a cabinet to hide from unwanted guests and singing in the bathtub. The final film in which Abdel Wahhab was the star was *Lestu Malākā / I Am Not an Angel* (1946), in which he played a lawyer who falls in love with a blind girl. Overall, the difference from Umm Kulthum's films was that Abdel Wahhab was more artistically flexible. This is apparent not only in the plots, but also in the music featured in the films.

This examination of the plots of the films featuring just a few of the stars of this period both supports accusations of imitation and illustrates how the imitated forms were filled with local content. The Hollywood musical was clearly a more dominant model than in the previous period, especially for the films starring Farid al-Atrash. The content, however, was customized to appeal to local moral views and sense of humor. The issue of the status of musicians was often less easily

resolved than in the American musical, and female dancers had an even more difficult time. Taḥīa and Sāmīa did not live the carefree lives of Ginger Rogers' characters and usually only received redemption through some sort of self-sacrifice. Even the humor was local in nature, some of it based on traditions that were popular in Egypt long before Napoleon's invasion. Comedy was more prevalent, even in the films of Umm Kulthum and Abdel Wahhab. Abu Shadi has noted that "second-and third-billing comedy stars were the mainstay of musical and dance films as well as melodramas, in which they provided much-needed comic relief to the general gloom" (Abu Shadi 1996, 93). The continuing popularity of melodrama is a significant difference from Hollywood not often noted by critics of this period. Its use varied from secondary storylines to the dominating narrative structure of the film. Melodrama would return as a popular plot type for musical films in the early post-revolution period, usually in the service of spreading the message of the new regime. This suggests that though Hollywood had become the more dominant model for narrative structure, European narrative models were still popular in this period.

Song Function: Hollywood Forms and Arabic Content

As in all musicals, the primary function of the songs featured in Egyptian singing films was to entertain the audience by showing off the talents of

performers. The songs might have been written specifically for a film or a plot might have been created as a setting for pre-existing compositions. The most famous example of the latter in the American tradition would be *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). An Egyptian example would be the 1947 Farid film *Ḥabīb al-`Omar*, which was built around a title song that was already famous. The question then becomes how to integrate these necessary elements into the plot of the film.

Egyptian musical films produced during the 1940s integrated songs to a varying degree but, in contrast to the first decade of production, screenwriters were more interested in creating stories that served the songs. These unintegrated films are the ones most criticized by Egyptian film critics such as Tawfīq Ṣalāḥ, who called this type of film “a collage of songs and dances” that he felt wasn’t proper cinema (quoted in Armbrust 2000, 292). A famous example is *Ghazal al-Bināt* (1949), written and directed by Anwar Wagdi (see chapter 1). Abu Shadi has also criticized the films created by Wagdi in which “the plot is naïve, loose, and full of coincidences, which allows songs and dances to be inserted at will” (Abu Shadi 1996, 101). The result is a film such as *Ghazal al-Bināt* that functioned primarily as a vehicle for Abdel Wahhab’s compositions and Layla Murād’s singing. This is most apparent in the final number, when Ustāz Ḥamām (Naguīb al-Riḥānī) finds himself at the house of Yūsuf Wahbi, where Abdel Wahhab is rehearsing in an impossibly large room. This narrative setup

facilitates his performance of the now-iconic “`Āshiq al-rūḥ” (“The lover of the soul”), which concludes the film with a grand example of the magnificence of Egyptian music. This extra narrative function was amplified in the original version of the film with a portrait of King Fārūq hanging over a large ensemble of musicians.²²

On the other end of the spectrum was *Sallāma* (1945), in which writer and director Togo Mizrahi (1901-1986) utilized the operetta structure of Umm Kulthum’s earlier historical films *Wedād* (1936) and *Danānīr* (1940). The integrated nature of the songs is apparent from the opening *muwashshah*.²³ sung by the glamorous singing slave Jamīla, which seduces Sallāma with the power of its beauty as well as setting the scene. The poetry was written in eighth-century Baghdad, by the Abbasid poet `Ābbas Ibn al-Āḥnaf, providing us with both the time and the place of the action. The most integrated sequence in the film occurs when Sallāma first performs at the house of Ibn Sahīr. The *mūnūlūg* “Sallām Allah” (“Greetings to God”) is clearly an extension of the dialogue, as Sallāma responds to overheard comments about her rural origins. Danielson has described the texts that al-Tūnisi wrote for Umm Kulthum as resembling “bits of

²² The film was re-edited after the 1952 revolution that forced Fārūq’s abdication and shots of the portrait were removed.

²³ I have been unable to identify the singer shown in the film. The voice sounds like Umm Kulthum and it may have been an actress lip-synching.

conversation, artistically constructed” (Danielson 1997, 102). This style of lyric-writing may have facilitated the integration of the songs into the plots of her films.

Sallāma’s recitation of a portion of the Sūrat Ibrāhīm (Chapter 14)²⁴ from the Qur’an enables the pious `Abd al-Raḥman al-Qass to hear her beautiful voice without guilt and shows him that she is still a virtuous woman. This aspect of the plot is reflective of the continuing debate over the status of music and is reminiscent of the reaction of Jakie’s father to his recitation of the “Kol Nidre”²⁵ in *The Jazz Singer* (1927). In both cases the characters are redeemed by their performances of a religious genre. Also like Jakie, Sallāma is not willing to give up her dream of becoming a famous singer. The cultural difference lies in the tragedy of that decision for Sallāma. Nevertheless, the importance of the entertainment function is evident in the variety of musical genres employed for the composition of its songs. Danielson has noted that in this film “Umm Kulthum was able to display her wide-ranging skills in all these genres, while portraying an entertaining but virtuous daughter of the Arabs” (Danielson 1997, 107).

As was evident as early as “Sahirtu” (*al-Warda’ al-Baīda*, 1933), formal performances might seem at first to be the least likely to serve the story, but even

²⁴ This chapter of the Qur’an promises rewards for believers but focuses more on the suffering in store for non-believers, particularly those who have ignored the word of God brought to them by his messengers.

²⁵ This Aramaic oath is chanted at the beginning of every Yom Kippur evening service. It begins the process of atonement with a renouncement of personal vows and a request for forgiveness.

these often have semantic functions. The early films of Farid al-Atrash provide numerous examples of entertaining formal performances that also function within the story world and beyond it. Within the “show” musical plot structure grand finales such as “Yā layl al-layl” (*Intiṣār al-Shabāb*, 1941), “Ḥabīb al-`Omar” (*Ḥabīb al-`Omar* (1947), and “al-Operette al-rābī`a” (“Operetta of the spring,” *`Afrīta Hānem*, 1949) symbolize the achievement of the goal that drives the narrative. “Ḥabīb al-`Omar” also functions like “Il-ḥubb `az wa hanā” (*Intiṣār al-Shabāb*, 1941) as a mediated performance that communicates through the radio to another character.

Multiple uses of a song within a film became more common in this period, perhaps another imitation of Hollywood and Western musical theater practice. The title song “Ḥabīb al-`Omar” is first heard under the opening credits of the film, a placement that both capitalizes on the established success of the number and provides a theme that will be returned to in the finale. This type of usage highlighted the hit song and created a sense of anticipation for its full performance.²⁶ The reprise of “Dāīmun ma`ak” (“Always with you”) at the end of *Ta`āla Sallim / Say Hello* (1951) [Fig. 4.14] is yet another example of the fulfillment of a professional goal: Farid first sings the number as an aspiring

²⁶ Thematicization of songs in this way was common in Hollywood as well, including overtures heard under the opening credits that introduced many of the film’s songs in the tradition of Broadway musical practice.

singer who crashes the performance of a famous dancer; at the end of the film he performs it with her as an equal. The multiple use of “Sā`a bi`orb il-ḥabīb” (“An hour with my darling”) (*Shahir al-`Asil*, 1945) is more subtle. The song is first performed by Farid in a nightclub. It then returns in instrumental form, both diegetically and in the underscore, as a love theme for the romantic leads.²⁷

Another narrative function is when a performance comments on the theme of the film, as is the case with “Al-kidb” (“Lying”) from *Akher Kedba* (1950), a comic music hall number featuring Ismā`īl Yassin and a chorus of girls in short skirts. This song comments on the theme of lying that is central to plot of the film in which a series of lies lead to dramatic and comic complications.

The most interesting use of formal performance in this period is a variation on the “ode to entertainment” that functions in a broader cultural context to celebrate Arab musical culture. Issues of national and regional identity were being debated amongst intellectuals such as Taha Hussein and political leaders such as `Abd al-Raḥman Ḥassan `Azzām. In 1918, at a peace conference in Paris, the Egyptian nationalist Sa`ad Zaghlūl had expressed the Egyptian isolationism of the time, saying “Our problem is an Egyptian problem and not an Arab problem” (quoted in Chejne 1957, 253). In the early 1920s, `Azzām, who

²⁷ This is the earliest use of a song in the underscore that I have encountered in an Egyptian film. It was a common practice in Hollywood musicals and became more common in Egyptian films in the 1950s.

later became the Secretary-General of the Arab League, tried to persuade Zaghlūl to embrace the idea of pan-Arabism. Zaghlūl's response was to ask, "If you add one zero to another zero, then you add another zero, what will be the sum?" (quoted in Chejne 1957, 257). This was a sobering comment on the weakness of the movement at that time. The 1920s was also a period during which the idea of "Pharaonism" was popular amongst nationalist thinkers. Followers of this line of thought stressed the unique history of Egypt and a connection to its ancient glory. The Pharaonic movement (*al-naz`ah al-firawāniyah*) may have been fueled by national pride engendered by discoveries being made by Western Egyptologists, especially the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb by Howard Carter in November of 1922. By the 1940s a broader pan-Arab movement had gained popularity in Egypt, illustrated by the involvement of Egyptian political leaders in the establishment of the Arab League in 1945. The failure of the 1948 Palestine war weakened the pan-Arab movement and led even `Azzām to state, "We are Egyptians first, Arabs second, and Muslims third" (quoted in Chejne 1957, 260).

This quest for a sense of national Egyptian and regional Arab identity is musically reflected in Egyptian singing films of the 1940s and early 50s. Farid was particularly fond of finales that celebrated Arab culture, and although he was born a Syrian, these numbers often championed Egypt as the greatest of Arab

nations. The first was “Ghanā’ al-`Arab” (“Songs of the Arab”) (*Bolbol Effendi*, 1948). The concept was further developed by director Badrakhān in *Aḥibbak Inta // I Love You* (1949). “Operette al-Sharq wa al-Gharb” (“Operetta of the East and the West”) is a musical debate between proponents of Eastern and Western music. Eastern music is described as sad but expressive, beautiful, and full of pride, while Western music is praised for the happiness it invokes but criticized for its lack of depth. It is decided in the end that a merging of the two is the best solution. In “Bousāṭ al-rīḥ” or “Magic Carpet” (*Akher Kedba*, 1950), Farid, Sāmīa Gamāl and Ismā`īl Yassin ride the carpet to travel to Syria / Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia, before returning to Egypt, the country that they declare the best. The finale from *Mā Ta`ūlsh le Ḥad* (1952) also utilizes a variety of Western and Eastern forms but is more of an entertaining musical kaleidoscope than a cultural statement. Finally, “Hāghanī yā dunyā” (“I will sing oh world”) is a reflexive novelty number that appears fairly early in *Bolbol Effendi* (1948). It celebrates modern Egyptian music through direct audio quotation of Umm Kulthum, Abdel Wahhab and Asmahan. Sabaḥ, as Baṭṭa, announces the iconic singers and then “imitates” them (she was lip-synching to their actual voices).

In contrast, songs may be more integrated into the diegesis, or story world, of the film. Most common is probably the solo personal expression, which in Egyptian film takes the form of a *mūnūlūg*; the lyrical content is usually

romantic. Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum favored this type of song, which facilitated both emotional and musical expression, but even Farid's lighter show-oriented films included them. One example is "Yā sā'ah bi-al-waqet igrī" ("Oh watch hurry the time") sung by Nūsa (Nūr al-Hodá) in *Mā Ta'ūlsh le Ḥad* (1952), in which she expresses her anticipation of the arrival of Waḥīd (Farid).

Expressions may also be communal and involve an ensemble of characters who are central to the story or even strangers passing by. This is true of "Yālla tawakilnā `ala Allah" ("Come on! We rely on God") from *Ḥabīb al-`Omar* (1947). In this number Mamdūḥ (Farid) and company express their hopes for success on the road to Cairo. The simple, repetitive style of the song and its group spirit are reminiscent both of Darwīsh's operettas and Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland's musical films. The song may function in a way inspired by the West, but the music is Eastern.

Another kind of integrated diegetic song that was featured in Egyptian singing films is one that is sung directly to another character, or two characters sing together in a duet or *dīalūg*. Courting songs fall into this category, as do other songs that advance the plot by replacing dialogue. In "Ana `āref" ("I know") (*Akher Kedba*, 1950) Samīr (Farid) begs Samīhā (Sāmīa) not to leave him, declaring that he has told his "last lie." The two films featuring Farid and Nūr al-Hodá include duets that replace the dialogue: in "Mā laksh ḥa" ("You don't have

the right”) (*Mā Ta’ūlsh le Ḥad*, 1952) Nūsa scolds Waḥīd that he doesn’t have the right to love her when he loves another and he protests that he doesn’t love her at all; they argue again in “Khalīnī ‘ukhrug min henā” (“Why did I come here”) (*‘Ayza Itgowaz*, 1952), perhaps seeking to repeat the success of the earlier number. One more type of diegetic song is one that reveals something about the character. These often are placed early in the film and introduce us to the main character(s) through song. This was a common practice in American theatrical and film musicals;²⁸ *Bolbol Effendi* (1948) features introductory songs for both of the lead characters.

Before leaving the discussion of the function of music, the development of the underscore in this period needs to be considered. Many films did not list anyone in charge of the underscore and so it is often impossible to inquire into the logic of its construction. There were a few musical arrangers who were given some credit and may have been in charge of the overall musical plan of the film: Aziz Sadeq was often credited as conductor, or director of the musical ensemble (*raīs al-firqa al-mūsīqā*); and Moḥammad Ḥassan al-Shogā`i was listed in the credits of *Gharām wa Intiqām* (1944) as in charge of “*al-mūsīqa al-tuṣwīrā*” (“pictorial music”), a designation that suggests he was in charge of providing music to go with the images of the film rather than arranging songs. Overall, the

²⁸ Classic Hollywood examples include the “If I Only Had ...” songs sung by the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).

use of underscore during this period was still fairly unsophisticated. Filmmakers did understand that it was a part of sound film and it was provided in all the films, but original scores were not the norm and wouldn't become common until after the revolution.

Adding to the perception that the musical films of this period were hasty and sloppy productions was the practice of constructing scores from recordings of Western classical and popular music. Excerpts from famous Western classical works usually functioned in imitation of the original scores of Hollywood films, providing an atmosphere for scenes and amplifying the emotions of the situation. One example of this usage is a scene from *'Afrīta Hānem* (1949) in which Aṣfour (Farid) and Boqo (Ismā'īl Yassin) enter a cave and find a magic lamp. The use of Edvard Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King," from *Peer Gynt* (1875), adds a spooky air to the sequence in anticipation of a supernatural encounter with a genie. Unfortunately, the mood is broken by the abrupt cutting of the recording that highlights the patchwork nature of the score. In *Aida* (1942), the use of music from Verdi's opera serves a more general purpose of referencing the work that inspired the title of the film and the theme of the Egyptian opera that it featured.

Western popular music continued to symbolize modern decadence. A particularly marked usage can be found in *Fātma* (1947): when Fātma's

common-law husband Fathī pulls up to a house where he will meet his mistress, we hear the jazzy strains of “The Darktown Strutters Ball” (Shelton Brooks, 1917) [Fig. 4.15] emanating from inside. In this case the music amplifies the immorality of the locale and sets it in contrast to the homey nobility of Fātma’s home neighborhood, which is accompanied by communal Egyptian music. The negative associations attached to Western popular music complicate our understanding of why it was used as part of Egyptian compositions. In particular, the continued popularity of Latin genres, including tango, rumba, and samba, with their associated sexual implications, seems to contradict the condemnation implicit in the usage of jazz in *Fātma* (1947). The answer may lie in the sanitization of these genres that occurred in their marketing to an international audience. Descriptions of the samba and the rumba in “Operette al-Sharq wa al-Gharb” (*Aḥibbak Inta*, 1949) reference charm and art and the coming together of lovers, while tangos are described as songs of love and pleasure. When tango is the main organizing structure of song, it tends to lend an air of elegant sadness, providing an emotional outlet for the character as well as compositional variety for the composer.

The functions of music in Egyptian movie musicals during the 1940s were closer to Hollywood norms than in the 1930s. The differences lie not in the borrowed functions but in the contents of the songs themselves as well as how

these contents resonated with the Egyptian, and larger Arab, audience. The songs were primarily designed to entertain a local Eastern audience while their secondary function of serving the plots of the films followed Western practice. It could be said that Western structures were being utilized as settings for Eastern music. This combination of East and West can also be heard within the music itself, which continued to borrow from foreign sources for both artistic and commercial reasons.

The Continuing Mix of Styles in Egyptian Film Music

Like the narrative structures described above, the songs featured in Egyptian singing films during the 1940s and early 1950s were structured utilizing both Eastern and Western elements. The ways in which these elements were integrated into a composition varied depending on the composer and the type of number. Abdel Wahhab continued his modernization of Egyptian music with songs that utilized various musical styles for the purpose of advancing Egyptian music. His additive linearity approach could be seen as apparent in Farid's compositions as well, but many of Farid's finales were more obviously modular presentations of various Eastern and Western styles that were not anchored in one particular type of composition.

Three methods of integrating foreign elements continued to be utilized in the film songs of this period: arrangement, form, and quotation/paraphrase. The arrangement of Egyptian popular songs had evolved in both instrumentation and use of harmony. Larger ensembles, often referred to as a *firqa* (“band”) or orchestra, included the traditional instruments of the *takht* (see chapter 1), sometimes in multiples, which added volume to the sound, along with Western instruments that provided timbral color appropriate to the style of the composition. Even the more conservative songs of Umm Kulthum were accompanied by such ensembles. Abdel Wahhab added both grandeur and a touch of the exotic in the instrumentation of “`Ashiq al-rūḥ” (*Ghazal al-Bināt*, 1949) with rows of brasses and balalaikas, as well as a banjo-mandolin. The flavor of Western popular music was often provided by reed instruments such as the accordion and clarinet for tango, while the saxophone supplied the appropriate timbre for more jazzy arrangements.

Foreign musical styles were incorporated in formal ways. Most commonly it was the rhythm, particularly of Latin styles, that was adopted, while the melodic structure was often altered to fit local musical expectations of intonation and melodic progression. This formal type of integration is most evident in the grand finales of Farid’s films. In his mini-operettas “Yā layl al-layl” (*Intiṣār al-Shabāb*, 1941) and “Operette al-rabī`a” (*`Afrīta Hānem*, 1949) he utilized the Western

operatic structures of recitative, aria, duet, and chorus, but often filled them with local melodic content.²⁹ Waltz time was the most commonly borrowed European rhythmic mode in Farid's finales and often accompanied its associated dance.

Rhythm and instrumentation also signaled changes in style in Farid's longer modular pieces. While the operettas tended towards the use of waltz time and lush orchestration, other numbers were parades through various styles with an apparent preference for the music of Latin America. As evidence in a debate over the merits of "Eastern" and "Western" music, "Operette al-Sharq wa al-Gharb" (*Aḥibbak Inta*, 1949) offered up samba, rumba, tango, and Mexican music, along with a sort of dance hall can-can and a waltz, as appealing Western styles, while the music of Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon represent the East. The styles included in the finale of *Mā Ta'ūlsh le Ḥad* (1952) [Fig. 4.16] carry no rhetorical message but are instead an accompaniment for spectacle. Two of Farid's finales in this period, "Ghanā' al-'Arab" (*Bolbol Effendi*, 1948), and "Bousāṭ al-rīḥ" ("Magic Carpet") (*Akher Kedba*, 1950) featured only Arab styles, proving that musical variety could be provided without resorting to imitation of the West.

In contrast to production numbers that progressed through various styles in a linear fashion, other compositions by both Farid and Abdel Wahhab were

²⁹ In the excerpt from the opera portion of *Aida* (al-Qaṣabji and al-Sunbāṭī, 1942) that survived the re-editing of the film, we hear these structures as well.

dominated by one foreign style. A popular compositional choice for Farid and Abdel Wahhab was the tango. Farid included a tango-inspired song in his very first film and continued to incorporate tango into his compositions to varying degrees. In the case of “Yā zahratan fī khayyālī” (*Ḥabīb al-‘Omar*, 1947), the majority of the performance is taken up by the repetition of a two-part tango, which is interrupted by a *mawwāl* improvisational section (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Sectional and Modal structure in “Yā zahratan fī khayyālī”

<p>0:00 Tango [AB,AB,A] • <i>Nahawānd</i> on F [F minor] • `Ajam on F [F major]</p>	<p>3:06 Mawwāl • <i>Rāst</i> on F</p>	<p>4:19-6:30 Tango [AB,A] • <i>Nahawānd</i> on F [F minor] • `Ajam on F [F major]</p>
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“Yā zahratan fī khayyālī” displays all the tango elements found in Abdel Wahhab’s composition “Sahirtu” (*Damū`a al-Ḥubb*, 1935), as well as several others (see Table 4.5). Unlike Abdel Wahhab, Farid modulates between clearly demarcated sections, each of which is sixteen measures long (see Ex. 4.1). While it is tempting to call these modes F minor and F major, it is more likely that Farid, like Abdel Wahhab before him, chose to compose this tango-inspired song in Arabic modes (*Nahawānd* on F and `Ajam on F) that were compatible with the Western ones. The increased use of harmony in the accompaniment of Farid’s tangos complicates the identification of the modal character of the songs. Farid’s

melodic choices were surely limited by the harmonic structure imposed on the tango portion of this song, suggesting that his sense of mode was closer to Western major and minor than Abdel Wahhab's. This kind of modulation between sections is common in Argentine tango songs and its placement in "Yā zahratan fī khayyālī" (m. 20) is consistent with that tradition. Farid's compositional choice stands in contrast to the placement of the modulation in Abdel Wahhab's first film tango (see chapter 3), which does not follow the conventions of tango song composition. The intonation becomes more Arabic in the *mawwāl* improvisatory section of the song, which Farid set in *maqām Rāst* on F. The placement of this section is similar to the construction of "Sahirtu" and it takes up about the same amount of the performance. In addition, the modulation happens from a repeat of the minor / *Nahawānd* section of the tango to *Rāst* on the same tonic (F). This modulation is not an unusual choice for an Arabic composer and thus supports the identification of the mode as *Nahawānd*, perhaps in an inflected form, like the 'modally inflected *Rās'* that Abdel Wahhab utilized for his 'major' section in "Sahirtu." The modes used by both composers appear to be hybrid forms themselves designed to accommodate the modal tendencies of Argentine tango and the conventions of the Arabic modal system.

Example 4.1. Transcription of the tango portion of “Yā zahratan fi khayyālī” (*Habīb al-`Omar*, 1947).

Yā zahratan fi khayyālī

words: Salah Gawdat
music: Farid al-Atrash

cadenza

Voice

F minor [*Nahāwand* on F]

Ya zah-ra-tan fi kha-

ccomp.

5

ya - li r'a-i-tu-ha fi fu - 'a - di Ya zah-ra-tan fi kha-

5

9

ya - li r'a-i-tu-ha fi fu - 'a - di Ga-nat 'a-lay - ha lay-

9

13

ya - li wa az-ba-lat - ha ay - a - di Wa sha-gha-lat-hal 'ay-

13

17

un - - - - - fa mat - a sah - rul ga - fun Ya gha -

17

The image shows a musical score for the tango portion of the song "Yā zahratan fi khayyālī". It features a voice line and a piano accompaniment (ccomp.) line. The key signature is F minor, and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into systems, with measure numbers 5, 9, 13, and 17 indicated. The lyrics are in Arabic and are written below the voice line. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a more melodic upper line. The piece ends with a cadenza.

Yā zahratan fī khayyālī

F major [Agam on F]

20 ra-mi ku-lu shay-'i da min-ni fa na-zay-tu hub-bi min 'al-bi wa ru-hi Ya gha-

24 ra-mi ku-lu sha-'i da min-ni fa na-zay-tu hub-bi min 'al-bi wa ru-hi Wa wa-

28 hab-tu 'om-ri 'aw-ta-ri wa lah-ni wa ta-gha-nay-tu fa da-way-tu ga-ru-hi A-na

F minor [Nahāwand on F]

32 ti-rum fi ru-ban fan-ni ya-ghan-ni lil ti-yur lil zu-hur fil ghu-sun

Table 4.5: Comparison of Tango Elements in “Sahirtu” and “Yā zahratan fī khayyālī”

“Sahirtu” (1935)	“Yā zahratan fī khayyālī” (1947)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accordion (in place of the bandoneón) •Strong pulse on each quarter note (“<i>marcato</i>”) •<i>Sol</i> up to <i>do</i> cadence •Modal shift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accordion (in place of the bandoneón) •Strong pulse on each quarter note (“<i>marcato</i>”) •<i>Sol</i> up to <i>do</i> cadence •Modal shift •Symmetrical setting of text •Tango-style interludes between phrases •Syncopated, or “síncopa” accompaniment •“bel canto” vocal color

In addition, Farid set the text much more symmetrically. Argentine tango performance practice is also evident in the accompaniment, which was likely arranged by an unknown arranger rather than Farid himself. In the A section, the ensemble provides brief instrumental interludes between the phrases that are reminiscent of tango-style accompaniment in their melodic tendencies and overlapping placement with the melody, with the first one occurring at m. 5. The instrumental part of the B section features a type of syncopation in the first eight measures (mm. 20-27) that is a standard element in the accompanimental vocabulary of tango musicians. Finally, Farid’s vocal color in this song is much closer to that of the Argentine tango singer Carlos Gardel than Abdel Wahhab.

Farid composed one more song (see Table 4.6) during this period in which the tango is a prevalent style element but is less dominant than in “Yā zahratan fī khayyālī.” “Yā ḥabbībī ṭāl ghīābak” (“Oh my darling, long away”) (*ʿAfrīta Hānem*, 1949) begins as a tango before moving into an unpulsed improvisational section. The tango rhythm then returns to accompany new melodic material before a retard and a repetition of the tango. The song ends with a fast tempo section in the Arabic *ʿīqā` Maqsum*.

Table 4.6: Structure of “Yā ḥabbībī ṭāl ghīābak”

Tango	Arabic un-pulsed	Arabic tango pulse	Tango	Arabic <i>ʿīqā` Maqsum</i>
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This use of the tango as a repeating element is even more apparent in Abdel Wahhab’s composition “Aḥibu mahmā ashūf minu” (“I love her no matter what she does to me”) (*Roṣāṣa fī-il-Qalb*, 1944). Here the tango functions as a refrain between verses that present new text and melodic material (see Table 4.7). This type of structure was common in Egyptian film songs, including those composed by Farid and the songs written by Zakarīyyā Aḥmad for Umm Kulthum’s films. The model may have been the Ottoman *peşrev* (known in Arabic as *bāshraf*), which also alternates new material with a refrain. This genre was popular in Egypt throughout the twentieth century and continues to form part of

the repertoire for Egyptian musicians in the twenty-first century. Thus it is possible that Abdel Wahhab was utilizing a compositional structure borrowed from the Ottomans combined with stylistic content adopted from Western popular musical culture.

Table 4.7: Structure of “Aḥibu mahmā ashūf minu”

Tango	Verse 1	Tango	Verse 2	Tango	Verse 3	Tango
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This mix of West and East is also apparent in the instrumentation of the arrangement, which includes a piano and piano accordion along with a *qānūn*. The string section features several violins, a cello, a double bass and a Western-style violin soloist who plays a Gypsy-inspired interlude along with the accordion. The strings sometimes follow the melody of the vocal in Arabic style but in the instrumental passages they support the harmony of the Western keyboard instruments. It is significant to note that while this Abdel Wahhab tango incorporates more harmony than in his early compositions, it is largely confined to the instrumental interludes. Tango is clearly just one of the stylistic sources drawn upon in this composition, and yet couples are seen dancing to the music doing what might be loosely described as the tango.

Abdel Wahhab’s final tango composed in this period, “Maḥish amal fī al-dunyā dī” (“I have no hope in this life”), sung by Layla Murād in *Ghazal al-Bināt*

(1949), features a similar use of the tango as a element (see Table 4.8) that acts as a refrain for the presentation of varying material. He also included a samba section, perhaps in response to the popularity of this Latin style that is evident in Farid's frequent usage of it in his finales. Also like the presentation of "Aḥibu mahmā ashūf minu," partner dancing reinforces the perception that, although only brief sections are actually in tango style, the entire song is meant to be a tango.

Table 4.8: Structure of "Malīsh amal fī al-dunyā dī"

INTRO	VERSE 1	TANGO	VERSE 2	T	SAMBA	UN- PULSED	TANGO
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When Egyptian composers incorporated Latin American styles such as tango, rumba, and samba into their compositions, it was often in the form a rhythmic ostinato that was borrowed for a section of a song. This is true of Farid's song "Sā`a bi'orb il-ḥabīb" featured in *Shahir al-`Asil* (1945). In this composition he utilized a variation on the habanera rhythm for the refrain. He also featured a contrasting section in waltz time. This European meter is also central to "Layyālī al-uns fī Fiyanna" ("Nights in Vienna"), which includes solos for `ūd and Hawaiian guitar that create an eclectic timbre.³⁰

³⁰ Farid composed this song for Asmahan's second and final film *Gharām wa Intiqām* (1944) and it is often cited as an example of her ability to sing in Western

The use of Western music in this period also increasingly took the form of quotation and, more significantly, paraphrase. Two of the songs Abdel Wahhab composed for *Mamnū`a il-Ḥubb* (1942) feature melodies by Italian composers. For “Yāllī nawayt tishghlīnī” (“You who intended to make me involved”), he paraphrased the melody of “La donna è mobile” from Giuseppe Verdi’s *Rigoletto* (1851) for use as a repeating section. Example 4.2 compares the melody of this section with the first eight measures of the vocal melody of “La donna è mobile” (transposed into the key of F major). The opening phrases of the two examples [4.2a and 4.2b] are similar not only in shape, but also in the intervallic relationship of the pitches. Abdel Wahhab then repeats the first phrase before moving on to his paraphrase of the second phrase, which is even closer to the melody of the original. Abdel Wahhab’s melody concludes with a *mi-re-do* cadence that is common in Arabic music.

This paraphrase of Verdi’s aria is much like Abdel Wahhab’s use of tango and the intonational treatment of the melody is similar as well. Rather than the major mode in which Verdi composed his melody, Abdel Wahhab used the same kind of variation on *maqām Rāst* (with raised third and seventh degrees) that he used in composing the tango portion of “Sahirtu” (*Damū`a al-Ḥubb*, 1935) (see

classical style. It seems that many are confusing this song with her use of her upper register in “Yā layl al-layl” (*Intiṣār al-Shabāb*, 1941).

Example 4.2. Comparison of “Yālī nawayt tishghlīnī” (Abdel Wahhab) and “La donna è mobile” (Verdi).

a. The opening vocal section of “Yālī nawayt tishghlīnī”.

VOCAL

The musical notation consists of three staves in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 4/4 time signature. It contains the first eight measures of the melody. The second staff continues the melody from measure 9 to 16. The third staff shows the final measure (measure 17) ending with a double bar line.

b. The first eight measures of the vocal melody of “La donna è mobile” transposed into the key of F major (the original was composed in B major).

VOCAL

The musical notation is a single staff in 3/8 time, key of F major. It contains the first eight measures of the melody, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 3/8 time signature. The melody is characterized by its rhythmic pattern and melodic contour.

chapter 3). In addition, as noted by Racy, the cadential patterns of the composition and his ornamentation are Egyptian in style (Racy 1982, 397).

Mamnū`a il-Ḥubb (1942) also contains another song inspired by an Italian composition. “Ruddī alayya” (“Answer me”) briefly quotes the popular Neapolitan song “O sole mio.”³¹ In both cases, these European melodies, like the form of the tango, are elements within compositions in which the intonation and melodic

³¹ 1898, words: Giovanni Capurro; melody: Eduardo di Capua.

tendencies are primarily Egyptian. Even when imitating European composers to the point that their melodies are recognizable, Abdel Wahhab was still adapting them to suit his own compositional design.

Not all musical borrowing was from the West. Farid in particular often included various Arabic styles in his production numbers and featured a style of *mawwāl* that was native to his Syrian homeland rather than his adopted country of Egypt. Amongst these was a Syrian-style *mawwāl* he composed for his sister to perform in *Gharām wa Intiqām* (1944). The performance begins with a Levantine *dabka* folk dance performed by peasants, followed by Asmahan's rendition of "Yā dayratī" ("Oh my village"), which was composed by Farid to poetry written by his uncle Zayd al-Atrash. Farid's practice of featuring other Arabic styles illustrates that, as Western as his films might appear, their music was still firmly rooted in the East.

Western musical practice had a significant impact on Egyptian film song during this period but this did not result in direct imitation. None of these Egyptian songs sounds like a Western one with Arabic words; instead, many display the adaptation of Western arrangement, form, and melodies. The sound was fuller as ensembles expanded to provide grandeur. Foreign forms were adapted in the service of both art and entertainment. Even quotations of famous Western pieces were often transformed to suit local intonational and melodic conventions. The

resulting music was a blend of styles designed to appeal to a cosmopolitan Arab audience that was increasingly aware of the music of the West.

Conclusion

The films and the songs they featured in this second period of Egyptian musical film production illustrate a preference for entertainment over art, one that was encouraged by Badrakhān and condemned by Khorshīd in the epigraphs to this chapter. Hollywood had provided models for how to construct an entertaining musical, and by the end of the 1940s the dominance of the American film industry engendered some opposition, especially after America supported the creation of Israel at the cost of the Palestinians. On February 29, 1948, Yūsuf Wahbi led a protest against the screening of a Hollywood film entitled *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940), which had been dubbed into Arabic. He continued his attack on Hollywood in the May 25, 1948 issue of the periodical *Dunya al-Fann*, where he called on Egyptians to boycott American films, claiming that “Every piaster paid for American films goes straight to the Jews.” As suggested by Robert Vitalis, Wahbi may have been motivated as much by financial concerns as by outrage, but he was savvy enough to focus his argument on an issue of growing concern for Egyptians (Vitalis 2000, 277). According to a report in the June 20, 1948 *Palestine Post*, this opposition extended to banning the films of Danny

Kaye and Mickey Rooney in Egypt because they had donated to Zionist causes (Landau 1958, 166).³²

Other critics of the trend towards a more commercial cinema included the pioneer director Moḥammad Karīm. In the November 1952 issue of *al-Kawāḳib*, he complained that the films produced during and after World War II all “went round and round the same circle of coarse comedy” and expressed his wish “that songs would not be the main feature in all our films.” He went on to report that “sadly, some papers are more interested in Hollywood than in the Egyptian cinema” (quoted in Awad & Hamouda 2007, 378).

Despite accusations that Egyptian filmmakers had gone too far in imitating the West, the films discussed in this chapter illustrate the ways in which they adapted Western plot structures and filled them with local content. The songs featured often functioned in similar ways to those in Hollywood musicals but also resonated with the Egyptian, and wider Arabic, audience through the use of Arabic musical styles and intertextual references. The songs themselves were modern hybrids that capitalized on the popularity of Western styles without abandoning Arabic musical traditions. Western instrumental arrangement, genres, and famous pieces more often functioned as compositional enhancements rather than central organizing elements. Even in the case of the

³² The *Palestine Post*, later to become the *Jerusalem Post*, may not have been totally unbiased in their reporting.

tango, the form was Egyptianized and never was the sole structural element in a composition. The revolution that occurred in Egypt in July of 1952 would change the nature of the Egyptian musical. The light-hearted musicals of the 1940s would go out of fashion in favor of high-minded socially conscious films. As declared by the comedian Ḥassan Fāyīq in a December 1951 *al-Kawākib* article entitled “Art Will Take the Lead,” “we have had enough of ‘enthusiastic’ songs with repeated words and imitated rhymes. What we need now is living songs emerging from the spirit of the people” (quoted in Awad & Hamouda 2007, 375).

Figure 4.1. Aḥmad Badrakhān
(al-hakawati Arabic Cultural Trust, http://www.al-hakawati.net/arabic/music_Art/theater44.asp . accessed June 24, 2011).



Figure 4.2. Kemāl Selīm from the press book for *Aḥlām al-Shabāb* (1942)
(Courtesy of Walter Armbrust).



Figure 4.3. Farid al-Atrash and his sister Asmahan.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asmahan>).



Figure 4.4. Still from the opening shot of “Yā bid`a al-ward”, *Intiṣar al-Shabāb* (1941).



Figure 4.5. Covers of the magazine *al-Sīnimā* from 1945 and 1946 [from left to right and top to bottom] Umm Kulthum, Bahīga Ḥāfīz, Layla Murād, **Sāmīa Gamāl**, Layla Murād, Mohammad Abdel Wahhab, Moḥammed `Abd al-Ṭalb & **Sāmīa Gamāl**, **Taḥīa Carioca**, Moḥammed `Amīn, **Taḥīa Carioca**, Moḥammed `Amīn, **Taḥīa Carioca**, `Abd al-Salām al-Nablusī & **Biba `az al-Dīn**, **Sāmīa Gamāl**, **Sāmīa Gamāl**, **Taḥīa Carioca** [dancers are highlighted in bold].



Figure 4.6. Still from *Habbīb al-`Omar* (1947) showing the visual composition of the finale.



Figure 4.7. Sāmīa Gamāl
(*al- Sīnimā* September 24, 1945, p.2)





Figure 4.8. Advertisement for *Shahir al-'Asil* (1945) (*al-Sīnimā*, October 4, 1945, p.21).

Figure 4.9. Moḥammad al-Bakkār album cover (Mohammed El-Bakkar: The Man ... The Myth ... The Legend?, <http://www.el-bakkar.com/carpet.html>, accessed June 24, 2011).



Figure 4.10. From the pressbook for *Aḥlām al-Shabāb* (1942); from top to bottom and left to right: Moḥammad Kamāl al-Miṣrī, Ḥassan Fāyīq, Madīḥa Yūsri, Taḥīa Carioca, and Farid al-Atrash (Courtesy of Walter Armbrust).



Figure 4.11. Stills from *Yasmine* (1950) depicting Anwar Wagdi and Fayrouz as itinerant musicians; and of Fayrouz in *Dahab* (1953).



Figure 4.12. From the press book for *Sallāma* (1945)
(Courtesy of Mahmoud Qassim).

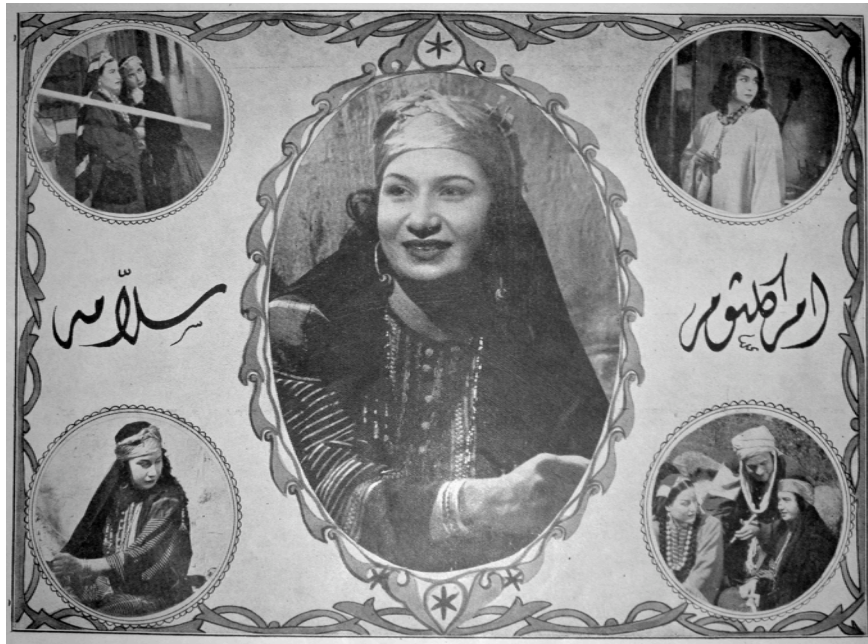


Figure 4.13. Cover of the press book for *Mamnū`a al-Ḥubb* (1942)
(Courtesy of Walter Armbrust).



Figure 4.14. Cover of a lyric booklet for *Ta`āla Sallim* (1951)
(Courtesy of Walter Armbrust).

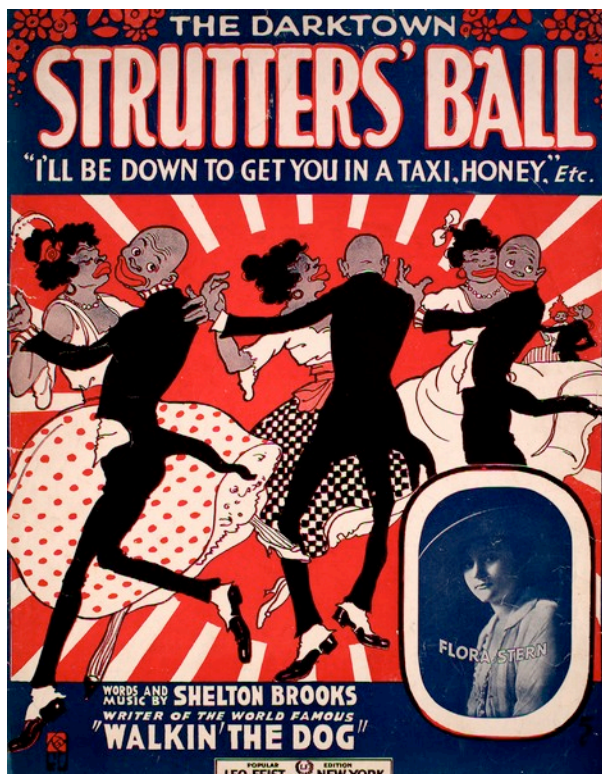


Figure 4.15. The cover of the sheet music for "The Darktown Strutters Ball"
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Darktown_Strutters%27_Ball_cover.jpg).

Figure 4.16. Stills from the finale of *Mā Ta'ūlsh le Ḥad* (1952) depicting stylistic progression.



Chapter 5. Singing Films With a Purpose

In 1919, we Egyptian artists did our best. I believe today's artists, after half a century of continuous progress, have better tools than ours and are more capable of serving our country ... Or do we want people to say that the "national spirit" of artists in 1919 was stronger and that their belief in their cause was greater? (Ḥassan Fāyīq, quoted in Awad and Hamouda 2007, 375)¹

It is a fact that the cinema in Egypt is currently undergoing a crisis that threatens to take with it this emerging industry. Is it the fault of our filmmakers? Is it because the tastes of the spectators are very diverse and contradictory? Is it because of the excessive severity of our censorship? Is it finally due to the organized competition of foreign film? ("The Crisis of Egyptian Cinema," *Akḥbār al-Sīnimā*, September 1953, pp.12-13)

Forces from both within and without the film industry changed the approach to making movies in Egypt in the 1950s. Concerns were raised by filmmakers and critics about the quality and purpose of Egyptian cinema as well as the waning of profits. Even before the 1952 revolution that brought independence to Egypt after centuries of foreign domination, some, such as film actor Ḥassan Fāyīq, were calling for a return to the artistic ideals that had inspired Sayyīd Darwīsh to compose nationalist songs and satiric operettas. The change in the types of films produced in the early years of Egyptian independence was thus the result of artistic, financial, and political forces. Singers were valued, perhaps more than they had ever been, for their ability to

¹Art Will Take the Lead" by Ḥassan Fāyīq in *al-Kawākib*, Issue 25, December 1951.

move the masses with their voices. New stars appeared and established ones adjusted their styles to suit a new era. Gone, for the most part, were the lavish backstage musicals of the 1940s, replaced by moralistic melodramas that sought to realistically depict Egyptian life and educate the masses in what it took to become a modern Egyptian.

Powerful patrons, such as Khedive Ismā`īl, had long supported the presentational arts in Egypt. By the time of the establishment of the Egyptian film industry, patronage more often came from private sources, such as the banker Ṭal`at Ḥarb, and customers who attended the cinema. The decade of the 1940s was the most commercial decade up to that point, with capital that came from sometimes-dubious sources and films that catered to a wider and less discriminating audience. Following the July Revolution, Egyptian political leaders, such as Moḥammad Naguīb (1901-1984) and Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), took a serious interest in the cinema as a tool for educating the masses. Film with a purpose (“al-film al-hādaf”) became a more prevalent model for makers of musical films.

Patronage of the arts was a key element in the Free Officers’ national development program and cinema was an important component (Gordon 2002, 11). On August 18, 1952, Naguīb issued a statement “lauding the cinema as an important instrument of education and acculturation” (Gordon 2002, 53). The

interest of the new leaders of Egypt in the cinema is also evident in the press coverage of Nasser, including a piece on his meeting with the American film director Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959) regarding the filming of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) (*Ahl al-Fann* October 11, 1954, p.46) [Fig. 5.1]. This meeting suggests that, despite concerns over the dominance of American films in the market, Hollywood was not rejected altogether.

Government involvement in the film industry gradually increased with the establishing of the Arts Agency (Maṣlahat al-Funūn) in 1955, the Foundation to Assist Cinema (Mu'assasat D'am al-Sīnimā) in 1957, and the Higher Institute of Cinema (al-Ma`had al-`Ālī li-Sīnimā) in 1959. This period of subsidization and education was followed by the nationalization of the industry in 1962. Prior to nationalization, the government was encouraging but not dictating film industry policy. It is thus likely that the kinds of films being produced were as much reactions to market conditions as they were to political pressure.

Calls for change in the industry came from the private sector as well. "The Crisis of Egyptian Cinema," an article in the September 1953 issue of *Akhbār al-Sīnimā / Ciné Nouvelle*, presented opinions from a number of prominent individuals. It began by stating that the Egyptian film industry was undergoing a crisis and speculated as to the causes (see the epigraph to this chapter). Film director Aḥmad Badrakhān suggested that the crisis was largely an economic

one in which attendance was poor because many could not afford the luxury of going to the cinema to see the same stars in low budget, hastily produced films. Photographer Aḥmad Khorshīd agreed that the crisis was economic, and also bemoaned the hastily made films he felt were slavish imitations of American productions. Khorshīd also called for the adoption of the methods of the Italian Neo-Realist school in order to provide the public with an honest picture of Egyptian life. Author Naguib Mahfouz talked of money as well, blaming producers for being more concerned with profits than with the quality of the subject matter. Director of Censorship ‘Anwar Ḥabīb blamed the economy as well as the overabundance of films featuring the same stars. Finally, film director Zakī Ṭelemat felt it was the old problem of an imbalance in the functioning of the law of supply and demand (*Akhbār al-Sīnimā*, September 1953, 12).

Major changes were occurring in Egyptian society as well. Following the July Revolution of 1952, the Revolutionary Council, led by Naguīb and Nasser, began to implement a plan of reform for the newly independent country. The first priority was the evacuation of British troops. This was followed by land reform that was designed to return much of the arable land of Egypt from the hands of a few wealthy landowners to the people at large, with the hope that they would correct the economic imbalance and improve the lives of the *fellaḥīn* (peasants, farmers). According to Naguīb, other improvements in the quality of life of the

Egyptian masses included the building of schools, hospitals, and low-cost housing, as well as the installation of wells, toilets, and electricity in rural villages. The cities got public toilets and gardens. The people of Egypt were called upon to be active participants in the creation of a newly independent Egypt with the motto of “Unity, Discipline, and Work” (Naguīb 1955, 185).

It thus appears that changes in the Egyptian film industry began to occur in reaction both to market concerns and the mission of the new regime. We can also see in the comments above a return to a sense of dramatic presentations as an educational tool and a recommitment to quality. This chapter examines the ways in which these changes were implemented in the early years of Egyptian independence, from 1952 to 1962. Discussions of the functions of cinematic genre and song illustrate how, in this period, the songs more often served the stories, and how those stories in turn served a larger moral purpose. This trend reflects a return to the use of musically enhanced narrative as a means of education that was evident in early Egyptian musical theater. Along with this change in focus came a more conservative use of foreign music and an emphasis on the Egyptian musical tradition. As in the two previous chapters, one star, Abdel Halim Hafiz (1929-1977), is featured as representative of the period. Comparisons with Mohammed Abdel Wahhab and Farid al-Atrash provide a rich context for understanding this singer and the period during which his star rose.

The Dark Nightingale as the Voice of the Revolution

Known as “the voice of the revolution” (“*ṣawt al-thawra*”) for his dedication to the Nasser regime and as “the dark nightingale” (“*al-`andalīb al-`āsmar*”) for a complexion that clearly marked him as a native Egyptian, Abdel Halim Hafiz is probably best remembered for the way in which the sentimental songs he sang touched the hearts of the Egyptian people. His popularity has been compared to that of Elvis Presley (1935-1977); his talent at interpretation was similar to that possessed by Frank Sinatra (1915-1998); and his ability to move his audience with the strong emotions of his songs is reminiscent of Judy Garland (1922-1969).

The term most often associated with Abdel Halim is *al-`ātifiyah* (sentimentality). As pointed out by Martin Stokes, this descriptor is significantly different from the one commonly applied to Abdel Wahhab. The senior artist was routinely described in the press of the time as a *muṭrib*: a performer who is capable of creating a state of *ṭarab*, or musical ecstasy, in his audience. This ability requires an understanding of the Arabic modal system and performance practice, which is reflected in performances that exhibit a proper intonational and melodic treatment of the *maqām*, as well as appropriate timbre (see Racy 2003). Abdel Halim is sometimes referred to as a *muṭrib*, but the label appears to be an honorary title of respect, and the meaning the more generic one of “singer.”

There is clearly a sense that Abdel Halim's sentimental style is considered less serious than that of Abdel Wahhab. Al-Najmī has pointed out that Abdel Halim's singing style was not strictly classical by Arabic standards and that he was not comfortable singing traditional genres such as *muwashshaḥ*, *dawr*, and *mawwāl*. Al-Najmī also expressed his concern about this foreignness and his feeling that made it difficult for Abdel Halim to produce "pure music" ("al-musīqa al-baḥṭa") (al-Najmī 1972, 63). Racy has suggested that, after World War II, "the singing styles of many film stars became further removed from the traditional ṭarab stream" (Racy 2003, 70). Most likely this trend was a product of the gradual globalization of popular music styles enabled by mass media, including film.

A maudlin fascination with Abdel Halim's own personal suffering seems to have been another aspect of his appeal [Fig. 5.2]. Ḥasanayn pointed out that Abdel Halim was not the typical star of the period. He was "the simple skinny boy with a thin face," who was scrawny compared to other male stars of the period, such as Anwar Wagdi (Ḥasanayn 1995, 129). Reports on the state of Abdel Halim's health can be found as early as an October 1954 article that declared he was "Forbidden to Sing!" because of a throat infection, though he valiantly tried to leave his sickbed (*Ahl al-Fann*, October, 1954, 10). Aspects of his personal life, such as health troubles and his early job as a music teacher, were often

incorporated into his films, thus blurring the line between his on- and off-screen personas.

Abdel Halim's suffering began early with the loss of his mother at the time of his birth in the Nile delta town of Ḥalawāt, on June 21, 1929. His father died a few months later. He was raised in Zagāzig, the capital of the Sharqiyah governorate of the Nile Delta, first by his aunt and uncle, and then in a local orphanage. It was while living there that he contracted bilharzia, a parasitic condition that resulted in his characteristically delicate physical condition and eventually caused his death at the age of 47. During this time, legend has it that Abdel Wahhab was performing nearby and that a frail young Abdel Halim climbed a tree to get a look at his idol. He fell out of the tree and ended up in the hospital where he consoled himself by listening to the voice Abdel Wahhab, and many other Egyptian singing stars, on the radio (Ḥasanayn 1995, 15-16).

Like Abdel Wahhab, Abdel Halim studied Qur'anic recitation. He also learned to play several instruments at the orphanage (Asmar and Hood 2001, 299). In 1945, at the age of 16, he moved to Cairo with his brother Ismā'īl, where they both enrolled in the Higher Institute for Theater Music (al-Ma`had al-`Ālī lil-Mūsīqa al-Masraḥīa). Founded in 1944, this short-lived institution was dedicated to the belief expressed by then Minister of Education Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Ḥifnī

(1896-1973) in a 1949 speech² that “the evolution of al-mūsīka al-‘arabiyyah will primarily occur in the domain of the musical theatre: both opera and operette” (quoted in El-Shawan 1980, 100). Al-Ḥifnī went on to state the goal of producing “a mature generation of vocalists and instrumentalists who could contribute to the evolution of the musical theater” (ibid.).

It seems that at this point Abdel Halim identified more as an instrumentalist, as it was his brother Ismā‘īl who enrolled in the voice department while Abdel Halim enrolled in the instrumental department. His early training in instrumental music may explain why he enrolled in this department, where he focused on piano, clarinet, and oboe (Ḥasanayn 1995, 19). His classmates included two composers: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl (1922-2003) [Fig. 5.3] and Moḥammad al-Mūgī (1923-1995) [Fig. 5.4], who would go on to compose the majority of Abdel Halim’s film songs. Ḥasanayn has suggested that it was al-Mūgī who introduced Abdel Halim to sentimental song (al-‘ughnayya al-`ātifiyya) with his composition, “Ṣafīni marrah” (“Clear the air”), which became an early hit for the singer (Ḥasanayn 1995, 70).

After graduation from the Institute in June of 1948, Abdel Halim had hoped to travel to Italy to continue his music studies, but he was turned down for

² This speech was given on the first anniversary of the Institute and is quoted in *al-Mūsīqa wa al-Masrah* (al-Ḥifnī 1949).

inclusion in this musical mission; he then took a job teaching music at a girl's school in the small city of Ṭanṭā, fifty-nine miles north of Cairo. He commuted to Cairo for a year and a half to work in the ensemble of his friend Aḥmad Fū'ād Ḥassan (1926-1993). Abdel Halim hoped to move back to Cairo but instead ended up back in Zagāzig singing Abdel Wahhab songs at weddings (Ḥasanayn 1995, 19). In the next decade the young singer finally found success when he was asked by his friends al-Ṭawīl and Fū'ād al-Zahīri (1916-1988) to re-record "Arūḥ li-mīn wa ashtikī" ("To whom do I complain"), a song they had written and arranged for the singer Nādīa Fahmī (Ḥasanayn 1995, 26). Abdel Halim's recording was heard by the head of the state radio station, Ḥāfiz `Abd' al-Wahhāb, who agreed to allow him to audition. He soon was collaborating with Nādīa Fahmī and singing for King Fārūq. In early 1952, Abdel Halim finally had the chance to perform for his idol [Fig. 5.5], for whom he sang and played the `ūd. Abdel Wahhab made no offer at this time to promote Abdel Halim, but he did promise to stay in touch (Asmar and Hood 2001, 300).

Abdel Wahhab may not have been overly impressed with the young singer, but a change in the political situation was advantageous for Abdel Halim and led to him being dubbed "the voice of the revolution." It was in July of 1952 that a small group of military men, known as the Free Officers ("al-zubbāṭ al-`āḥrār"), managed to accomplish what had not been possible in 1919: a definitive

break with Great Britain and the deposing of a decadent monarch. In August of that year, Abdel Halim famously failed to impress in Alexandria. The audience did not like his new songs and called for him to sing old familiar ones. He responded by refusing to sing at all (Ḥasanayn 1995, 29). Things turned around for him in November, when Nasser told Abdel Halim that he was “a son of this era” and spoke to him about the role he envisioned for art in the building of a new society (Ḥasanayn 1995, 94). The following summer, Nasser asked him to sing at a prestigious concert commemorating the anniversary of the revolution. The revered actor, director, and producer Yusuf Wahbi introduced him, announcing “the birth of a new singer” (Ḥasanayn 1995, 94). It may have been at this concert that he sang his first political song “Thowretnā al-Maṣriya” (“Our Egyptian revolution”; music: Ra’ūf Zahni, words: Māmūn al-Shināwī).³ Abdel Halim’s films did not feature overtly political songs but he did go on to record and perform them in concert. Considering the often-close association of his characters with his personal life, this must have had some effect on the perception of his on-screen persona.

Abdel Halim’s star continued to rise in 1954 and his voice on the radio caught the attention of Abdel Wahhab. This time it was the master muṭrib who

³ Because, like Umm Kulthum, Abdel Halim sang songs composed by a number of composers the name of the composer, and sometimes the lyricist, will be included with the translation of the title of the song.

sought a meeting with his young admirer. Abdel Halim sang three of the master's compositions and Abdel Wahhab complimented him on his interpretation of the songs, which he felt was more than mere imitation. Abdel Wahhab was impressed enough to offer Abdel Halim a contract to star in two films, at 400LE (Egyptian pounds) each, as well as to make a number of records for 45LE each (Ḥasanayn 1995, 34).

The year of the contract is unclear but it does appear that, sometime in 1954, Abdel Halim tried to get out of the contract so that he could accept other movie offers. This enraged Abdel Wahhab, who threatened legal action (Ḥasanayn 1995, 35). Evidence found in the Egyptian periodical *Ahl al-Fann* supports reports that tension existed between the young singer and the musical icon in late 1954. In an article entitled, "I am not the pupil of Abdel Wahhab," Abdel Halim diplomatically declared, "all artists of this era are from the school of Abdel Wahhab," but also stressed his own achievements as a musician and singer (*Ahl al-Fann* November 22, 1954, 39). A piece in the December issue sought to dispel rumors of a rift between the young star and the master musician with an announcement from Abdel Wahhab that Abdel Halim would star in a film to be directed by Barakāt (*Ahl al-Fann* December 1954, 45). This film was *Ayām wa Layāli / Days and Nights*, which premiered in late 1955. It was preceded by

three other films, beginning with his first screen appearance in *Laḥn al-Wafā'* / *Melody of Loyalty* (1955).

A Revolutionary Model for Musical Film

Laḥn al-Wafā' was the first of Abdel Halim's films to premiere but not the first to be filmed. He had previously filmed a featured role in *Ayāmnā al-Ḥelwa* / *Our Happy Days* (1955) [Fig. 5.6], co-starring with Omar Sharif (b. 1932), who got the girl (his then wife Faten Hamama), and Aḥmad Ramzī (b. 1930), a muscular young man who was to become a frequent co-star in Abdel Halim's films of the fifties, perhaps because he provided the brawn that Abdel Halim lacked.

Ayāmnā al-Ḥelwa premiered on March 7, 1955, but it was on March 1 that Egyptian audiences got their first look at Abdel Halim on screen in *Laḥn al-Wafā'*. The plot created by screenplay writer Moḥammad Muṣṭafá Sāmī and director Ibrāhīm 'Amāra facilitated the performance of the sentimental songs for which Abdel Halim was already famous, as well as incorporating melodramatic elements that were popular with the audiences of the time. This prevalence of melodrama in the plots of Abdel Halim's films was both a change from the more light-hearted backstage musicals of Farid al-Atrash and a revisiting of narrative tendencies common in the early films of Abdel Wahhab. The melodrama favored

here is a particularly moralistic variety. In *Laḥn al-Wafā'*, as in many of his films, Abdel Halim's character is faced with a moral dilemma when the man who raised him after he was orphaned (like Abdel Halim himself) falls in love with the young man's secret sweetheart (played by Shādīa). He sacrifices his love for the happiness of his adopted father, resulting in a state of torment and misery (*nakad*). Through his suffering he remains loyal to his uncle, culminating in the premiere of the older man's masterwork, which earns him both artistic success and love.

The use of melodrama to move the masses was nothing new. Frank Rahill has proposed that it is "an almost perfect instrument for propaganda" and that during the nineteenth century, "this instrument was pressed into the service of innumerable crusades" (Rahill 1967, xvi). This aspect of the dramatic form gave it a purpose that appealed to early Arab adopters of Western-style drama. Satire had been the chosen political genre of the court and its popularity lasted at least as long as the theatrical boom of 1920s Egypt and the political operettas of Darwīsh. Satire, however, required an educated audience, while melodrama was a much more effective tool for reaching a wider audience, the majority of whom had not had the benefit of extensive education.

It would be overly simplistic to categorize Abdel Halim as merely a tool of the propaganda machine. By the time his first film premiered he had already

declared his independence from Abdel Wahhab, and the persona he presented was surely created to appeal to the new market as well as to Nasser. None of the songs featured in *Lahn al-Wafā'* are overtly political, but they are the musical manifestation of the model of the ideal post-revolution Egyptian man that Abdel Halim represented in his films. This was a type of man who was loyal to his friends and honorable in his dealings with others. He was hardworking and goal-oriented as well as ambitious, but also sought to contribute something to society. Perhaps the most significant difference from Farid's characters of the 1940s was that the young men played by Abdel Halim were educated – his characters were usually students, teachers, or educated professionals. The physical appearance of Abdel Halim's characters was also part of his persona. In contrast to Abdel Wahhab's elegant "miṣrī effendī," and Farid's nightclub dandy, Abdel Halim was usually dressed in collegiate sportswear or conservative suits. He did don a tuxedo occasionally for a formal performance but his iconic look was more casual.

"Lā talumnī" ("Don't blame me;" Kamāl al-Ṭawīl) introduced Abdel Halim as a cinematic singing star. Galāl (Abdel Halim) enters the "music testing room" to prepare for his audition for acceptance into the "King Fuad Academy of Music." He is well dressed in a Western suit, complete with pocket square. The room is furnished with a grand piano, which he casually approaches and begins to play

with obvious ease [Fig. 5.7]. Once the song begins we move into the unrealistic world of the musical number with shots of silhouetted musicians playing a combination of Western and Arabic instruments, visual representations of the hybrid nature of musical accompaniment in this period. The number also served the plot of the film, in which Galāl is an aspiring composer seeking to follow in the footsteps of his stepfather, `Allām (Ḥussayn Rīyāḍ), an esteemed composer and musician. This focus on a chain of transmission, or *isnād*, was not new to Egyptian musical film: it was apparent in the sequence from *al-Warda' al-Baīḍa* (1933) that connected Abdel Wahhab to al-Hamūlī, al-Ḥijāzī, and Darwīsh (see chapter 2). Stokes has suggested that because Abdel Halim's character was also named Galāl, *Laḥn al-Wafā'* is actually a remake of the earlier film (Stokes 2008, 313). The plots of the two films are, however, quite different, but it is plausible that the use of the same name is a reference that would have been meaningful to an Egyptian audience. Another significant reference to *isnād* is a jibe directed at the stepfather by an associate of a spoiled diva. She tries to tell `Allām how to recompose his song and, when he resists, the associate taunts him by saying, "Who do you think you are, Sayyīd Darwīsh?" These references connect Abdel Halim to the same chain of transmission as Abdel Wahhab, thus establishing him as a significant musical presence in Egyptian cinema.

This concern for establishing the musical authority of the characters reflected the continuing problem of status for musicians in post-revolution Egypt. As in the debut films of Abdel Wahhab and Farid al-Atrash, music is legitimized by its performance in a prestigious venue. In this case, the title song, “Laḥn al-wafā’”, is featured throughout the film, first in an instrumental version accompanying the opening credits and then as a theme in the underscore. We also hear brief passages played by `Allām as he is composing it. It is presented as a serious composition, and its completion by Galāl is both a major accomplishment and a symbol of the loyalty (“wafā”) mentioned in its title. Artistic weight may have been added in the minds of the audience by the fact that the actual composer of the song was the revered Riyāḍ al-Sunbātī.

All the songs in the film serve the plot in some way. Other integrated performances include two duets. The first of these, “Aḥtār khayālī” (“My imagination wanders;” al-Ṭawīl) is the closest thing that I have encountered in Egyptian cinema to a Hollywood style ‘dual-focus’ number (Altman 1987). This kind of number generally comes early in a musical play or film, introducing us to the romantic couple and allowing them to express their newfound love. In the second duet, “Ta`ālā a`ullak” (“I must tell you”), composed by Munīr Murād (1922-1981),⁴ the couple playfully express their love for each other. Two more songs,

⁴ He was the brother of singer and actress Layla Murād.

“Ala ‘ad al-shūq” (“See the longing;” al-Ṭawīl) and “Aḥan alayk” (“I yearn for you;” al-Mūgī), are the kind of soulful expressions of intense emotion for which Abdel Halim had already become known. Shādīa gets one solo number, “Shabakt ‘albī,” (“You captured my heart;” al-Ṭawīl), which is integrated into the plot as an audition for `Allām.

The style of the songs in *Laḥn al-Wafā’* also differs in significant ways from those featured in the films of Abdel Wahhab and Farid. Abdel Halim did not write the music he sang. In this respect, as a sophisticated interpreter of other people’s compositions, he was more like Umm Kulthum. Abdel Halim was, however, an accomplished instrumentalist who is often seen in his films accompanying himself on the piano. The prevalence of this and other Western instruments in the arrangements of his songs is perhaps the most significant stylistic development. Rather than borrowing the forms of Western music, the foreign elements are more often instrumentation and the use of harmony. The centrality of the piano in Abdel Halim’s presentation of songs is evident from the very first musical number featuring him that was seen by Egyptian audiences. “Lā talumnī”, composed by al-Ṭawīl, begins with Abdel Halim playing a slow chordal introduction on the piano. A quick duple-time pulse comes in and he is soon joined by an ensemble that includes mandolins, saxophones, violins, riqqs, and a set of maracas [Fig. 5.7 and 5.8].

The song that follows is a light and lively one in which each of the brief verses has its own modal character (see Table 5.1). The verses consist of a melody (ten measures in duple time) that is repeated to set both the first and second lines of the text. These lines are followed by a brief refrain of “lā talumnī,” first by a chorus and then by Abdel Halim, ending with an instrumental interlude. These last three elements are the same for each verse but the melody that sets the text is different. This tendency to present new material in each verse and to come back to the familiarity of a refrain is evident in earlier examples of Egyptian film songs, such as “Ghannī lī shwayá” (*Sallāma*, 1945; Zakariyyā Aḥmad) and “Il-ward gamīl” (“The rose is beautiful”) (*Fāṭma* 1947; Zakariyyā Aḥmad) and differs from the common Western practice of repeating the same melodic material for each verse. This makes “Lā talumnī”, the first of many examples from this period that display the presence of Western elements not in the form of the song but instead in its arrangement.

Table 5.1 Structure of “Lā talumnī”

INSTRUMENTAL INTRO.	VERSE 1 A A B	VERSE 2 C C B	VERSE 3 D D B
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As in “Lā talumnī”, the adoption of Western elements in “Laḥn al-wafā” is more apparent in the arrangement than in the structure. Once again new melodic

material alternates with a refrain. There is a section during which the meter changes from duple to triple time. This meter was not unknown in the Arab world,⁵ but the balletic dancing that is featured in this section suggests that this compositional choice was inspired by Western musical practice. What is much more striking is the symphonic introduction to the number, which utilizes a huge ensemble that includes a variety of Western and Eastern instruments: from strings, saxophones, trumpets, oboe, and French horn to qānūns that are featured later in the song [Fig. 5.9]. The percussion section includes both congas and riqqs, and the ensemble is rounded out by a chorus that flanks the featured performers. The resulting visual and sonic impact is similar to that created by Anwar Wagdi and Abdel Wahhab for “`Āshiq al-rūḥ” (*Ghazal al-Bināt*, 1949) – the mise-en-scene and the musical arrangement lend an air of dignified grandeur that was likely intended imitate the presentation of Western art music and to thus impart some of its prestige to Egyptian music.

This first feature starring Abdel Halim Hafiz illustrates a number of trends evident in the musical films produced in Egypt during the early period of independence. It was intended to deliver a message about loyalty transmitted by a plot that incorporated a healthy dose of melodrama. It also addressed the

⁵ The Ottoman *samā`ī* form, which is still popular amongst Egyptian musicians, generally includes a section in triple time. This meter was also popular with other twentieth century Egyptian composers, such as Zakariyyā Aḥmad, who employed in the composition of “Il-ward gamīl” (*Fāṭma* 1947).

social issue of the status of musicians and suggested that they could legitimize their vocation by dedicating themselves to the composition of serious music and performing it in a prestigious venue. The compositions tended to be less foreign in form but sometimes more Western in their arrangement. Formal performance was still a common way of integrating the songs, but they were often more connected to the plot, and diegetic personal expressions in song, especially in the films of Abdel Halim, became a more popular technique. These trends reflected a conscious effort to produce more serious musical films that promoted a new political and moral climate. The resulting films could be described as *al-aflām al-ghannā'aya al-hādifa* (singing films with a purpose).

Art in the Service of a New Egyptian Society

Films such as *Laḥn al-Wafā'* (1955) are illustrative of a gradual shift in this early period of Egyptian independence from the lavish backstage musicals made popular by Farid al-Atrash in the 1940s to a preference for social realism. Inspired by the Italian neorealist school of the early post-World War II era, and perhaps by the socialist realism being produced in the Soviet Union, Egyptian filmmakers sought to create more realistic characters who grappled with the social issues of the day. In the press book for *Ayām wa Layāli* (1955), for example, producers Abdel Wahhab and Barakāt expressed their hope that their

project would serve the awakening of a renaissance in Egyptian culture and that they had chosen the “daring new talent” of Abdel Halim to help them achieve that goal [Fig. 5.10].

The resulting films were not strictly realist. Like the Italian neorealist films, they included scenes shot on location, showing a more realistic picture of Egyptian life, but the locations were still often glamorous on-set creations, especially for formal performances. Unlike the Italian films, the lead roles were always played by professionals and the primary purpose of the films was still to effectively present their musical talent. It is probably in the area of subject matter that the Egyptian musicals of the 1950s were most realistic in focus. This type of realism has been identified by Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment as “rhetorical realism.” In this type of cinematic storytelling, “an argument is presented to convince the audience of the truth of the film’s proposition” (Hallam and Marshment 2000, 101). The central characters often have to overcome some sort of adversity that involves social injustice or issues of ethics and morality (ibid., 111). These were the kind of “real plays of struggle” called for by Ḥassan Fāyīq just a few months before the July Revolution of 1952 (quoted in Awad and Hamouda 2007, 375).⁶

⁶ *Al-Kawākib*, Issue 25, December 1951.

This focus in film on the problems of Egyptian society requires us to consider the historical events of the period and their relationship to the content of the films produced. Abdel Halim's first films appeared in 1955, a year in which cultural and economic relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union were intensifying. While the idea of promoting a socialist agenda through film may have appealed to the Egyptians, the communist rejection of religion was problematic for them. In 1957, Nasser ordered the suspension of the film *Мать / The Mother* (1955)⁷ from an Egyptian festival of Soviet films for this very reason (Dawisha 1975, 432).

On July 26, 1956, the anniversary of the abdication of King Fārūq, Nasser declared the nationalization of the Suez Canal. This led to an Israeli invasion of the Sinai and Gaza on August 29, beginning a military conflict that continued until late December. It was in late October of that year that Farid's most patriotic film, *Wadd`at Ḥubbak / Farewell to Your Love*, premiered. Directed by Youssef Chahine, its plot is a variation on the "show" musical, in which a community of soldiers in an army hospital come together to put on a show not for their own financial gain but instead to raise the morale of the troops. "Troop show" musicals such as this were common in Hollywood during World War II. It is

⁷ Directed by Mark Donskoy, this was the second Soviet film based on Maxim Gorky's 1907 social realist novel. The 1926 silent film, directed by Vsevolod Pudovkin, is the more famous screen adaptation.

possible that Chahine, who studied acting at the Pasadena Playhouse in California in the late 1940s, had encountered this plot type and recognized its patriotic potential.⁸ *Wadd`at Ḥubbak*, however, differs from the Hollywood model in its sad ending, in which the terminally ill Aḥmad (Farid) drops dead after singing a farewell song (“Wadd`at ḥubbak”) to the troops [Fig. 5.11]. This was a striking departure from Farid’s carefree pre-revolution persona and symbolically suggested that he was willing to die for his adopted country.

The musical films of the early post-revolution period, while usually not overtly patriotic, more often than not included some sort of social message. The issues addressed included those of continuing concern, such as the status of musicians, class divisions, and the dangers of sexual liberality. As in the previous period of Egyptian film production, one way of addressing cultural concerns about music was to cast a singer as an amateur who only sang to express his emotions or entertain his friends. His amateur status freed him from the stigma associated with professional musicians. In *Ayāmnā al-Ḥelwa* (1955), Abdel Halim played not a professional musician but instead a student who sings “Al-Ḥelwa ḥayātī” (“The beautiful one is life;” al-Ṭawīl) as informal after-dinner entertainment at a modest gathering of friends. Later in the film, `Alī (Abdel Halim) sings “Leh tashtughul bālak” (“Why trouble your mind;” al-Mūgī) to cheer up an invalid Hods

⁸ The screenplay is credited to al-Sayyīd Badlr.

(Faten Hamama). The remaining songs featured in the film take the form of personal emotional expressions. Similarly, in *Bināt al-Yom / Girls of Today* (1957), Abdel Halim was cast as an architect who sings only for the pleasure of friends and family, including the impromptu “composition” and performance of one of his most famous songs: “Ahwāk” (“I love you;” Mohammed Abdel Wahhab).

As was evident in *Laḥn al-Wafā'* (1955), another way that a musician could legitimize his art was to dedicate himself to serious, refined music (“al-mūsīqa al-rafaī'a”) and present it in a prestigious venue. His music thus became a cultural asset rather than a shameful distraction, an art form that Egyptians could proudly claim as their heritage. This message was perhaps most strongly expressed in *Daḥīla* (1956). When Abdel Halim's love interest comes down with tuberculosis, he sacrifices his artistic morals and plays for a dancer in a seedy nightclub. Guilt over being the cause of his artistic compromise drives his sweetheart to suicide, which inspires him to rededicate himself to serious composition, culminating in the performance of “Illī inshaghalt `alayh” (“She who kept me worried;” al-Ṭawīl).

Where musicians performed was almost as important as what they performed. The cinematic depiction of Moḥammad `Alī Street, a Cairo neighborhood long associated with popular performers, varied from a creative

community to a shameful place to come from. In all cases, it was a place that the musician must leave behind for more prestigious venues. In *Shari`a al-Hubb / Street of Love* (1958), Man`im (Abdel Halim) is sent to music school by his colleagues in a neighborhood band. Unable to find employment as a musician, he takes a job as a music teacher in order to pay them back for his education. With the help of his mentor, who turns out not be a humble musician but a great maestro in hiding after murdering his philandering upper-class wife, he is able to realize his dream of becoming a serious artist.

The transition from the street to the stage was more difficult for female singers. In the Farid feature *Izzay Ansāk / How Can I Forget You* (1956), Zanūba (Ṣabāḥ) begins her career as a wedding singer from Moḥammad `Alī Street who performs with her dancing sister. An ambitious young woman, she manages to get hired as a featured singer in Farid's upcoming theatrical production. She is not easily accepted into higher-class society, where she is ridiculed for not having an appropriate dress for Farid's birthday party. Later in the film she is drugged and taken advantage of by a cruel and decadent rich man, played by Rushdī Abāza. He calls her an *`āllimah*, which, by this point, had become a pejorative term that meant as much prostitute as singer. Her disgrace is cleansed by a near-death experience and she is reunited with Farid for the finale.

In general, Abdel Halim's characters were not so different from those portrayed by Abdel Wahhab in his early films. Both stars portrayed characters who earned their success through dedication to their goal. It is by their acts and not by the amount of money they possess that these characters are judged. The difference lies in the ability of the characters played by Abdel Halim to learn from their experiences. This is evident in the 1957 film *al-Wisāda al-Khāliya / The Empty Pillow*, which was based on a novel by Iḥsan `Abd al-Quddūs (1919-1990), an author known for social commentary, and directed by Ṣalāḥ `Abū Sayf (1915-1996), one of the leading members of the Egyptian social realism movement. Beginning as an idle young man who is more interested in love than his studies, Ṣalāḥ (Abdel Halim) matures into a successful businessman who gives up his childish obsession with his first love and realizes the value of his wife. Such lessons were lacking from Farid's pre-revolution films, in which entertainment took precedence over education. Abdel Wahhab generally played morally upright characters in his films, but those around him often succumbed to the moral dangers associated with the adoption of European cultural practices.

Perhaps because of a loosening of censorship on the subject, sex was dealt with much more frankly in the films of this period than in the previous two decades and sexual liberation was another cause for concern. Abdel Halim showed how a proper young Egyptian man should behave. He didn't even kiss

his co-star until 1957 (*al-Wisāda al-Khāliya*). In *Bināt al-Yom* (1957), the girls were given a lesson on how to remain proper Egyptian ladies in a time when they were increasingly exposed to the sexual liberation of the West. In this film, as in many of the period, sex was treated as a cause of shame. When Khālid (Aḥmad Ramzī) seduces Buthayna, a girl who has already been corrupted by her ambition to be what she thinks is a modern girl, the dishonor drives them into exile. The scene of Buthayna's deflowering is actually quite discreet. Director Barakāt never showed them kissing and only implied sex by depicting them entering and later emerging from the bedroom. Similarly, in *Izzay Ansāk* (1956), Badrakhān only showed Ramzī carrying Zanūba into the bedroom and her stumbling out in the morning. In this case the shame is primarily on him. It is vanity and not sexual promiscuity that has led her to the mistake of trusting this rich playboy, who has drugged her and taken her against her will. Commentary on sex could still sometimes be comical, as when comedian `Abd al-Salām al-Nablūsī mistakenly gets into bed with the ingénue's mother in *Inta Ḥabbībī / You Are My Darling* (1957). This kind of bedroom farce treatment of sex was more common in Farid's earlier films, such as *Akher Kedba* (1950).

Shafik has suggested that the reasons for melodrama's persistence in Egypt include "viewer needs and expectations" but that its popularity is also "rooted in the very universal and most importantly, class-related nature of this

genre” (Shafik 2007, 250). Lila Abu-Lughod has also written about the popularity of melodrama in modern Egypt, particularly in the form of television serials (Abu-Lughod 2000; 2004), which, like the musical melodramas of the 1950s, owe more to the French tradition than to Hollywood. Melodrama was also a popular Hollywood form in the 1950s but it was of a different variety. American psychological melodramas, often referred to as “woman’s films,” were usually expressions of mental crises caused by complications of modern life, and they provided models of how not to act rather than moral guidelines.

As noted in chapter 2, the perceived value of European dramatic forms as tools of education may have played a role in the popularity of melodrama in Egypt. In the Egyptian musical films of the 1930s, melodrama was primarily used to evoke emotion for the purpose of entertainment. The continuing popularity of the genre is evident even in the romantic comedies and backstage musicals starring Farid al-Atrash, which often incorporated melodramatic plot lines. After Egyptian independence in 1952, its popularity swelled again and it was often combined with social realism as a tool of mass education. In its infancy, melodrama had served the cause of an earlier July revolution in France and it provided a highly effective vehicle for conveying the message of the Egyptian one.

The musicals from the early post-revolution period exhibit a return to melodrama as the main organizing structure, with a stronger emphasis on the message to be conveyed. Even Farid's films became more melodramatic in this period. Just before the revolution, he appeared in two romantic comedies: *Mā Ta'ūlsh le Ḥad* (2/21/52), directed by Barakāt and 'Ayza Itgowaz (8/8/52), directed by Badrakhān. In December of 1952, a decidedly different Farid film premiered. As is evident in his later statement regarding *Ayām wa Layāli* (1955), Barakāt dedicated himself to serving the new society with his films. He had yet to discover the "daring new talent" of Abdel Halim and created *Laḥn al-Khalūd/ Immortal Song* (12/15/52) for Farid. This was Farid's first moralistic melodrama, in which his character ultimately chooses the faithful orphan over the frivolous society girl. His next several films continued the melodramatic strain, including two that were actually based on French melodramas. The first of these, *Risālat Gharām / Love Letter* (1954), was adapted from the same Alphonse Karr novel, *Sous les tilleuls / Under the Linden Trees* (1832), as the 1935 Abdel Wahhab film *Damū`a al-Ḥubb*. Barakāt did, however, give the Farid version a bittersweet happy ending that featured the wedding of his dead love's daughter rather than him weeping while wandering through a graveyard (as Abdel Wahhab did in the earlier film).

Badrakhān also departed from the escapist musicals he had directed before the revolution and adapted Alexandre Dumas' *La dame aux camélias* (1848) for Farid as *`Ahed al-Hawa / Promise of Love* (1955).⁹ This source is referenced in the film with the use of the prelude to Giuseppe Verdi's version of the story (*La Traviata*, 1853) as the music accompanying the opening credits. Shafik has proposed that in this retelling of Dumas' story the "ethical content of the narration is adapted and reformulated according to the moral code of Arab-Islamic culture and is furnished with an indirect critique of Western lifestyle" (Shafik 1998, 126). It is Waḥīd's (Farid) traditional family in the country who maintain the preferred moral code, while the Western lifestyle lived by Amāl (Mariam Fakhr al-Dīn) and her friends is presented as a "potential moral danger" (Shafik 1998, 125). Although Amāl repents and it is revealed that she only succumbed to this life in order to support her family, she still must die for her transgressions and she does so in Waḥīd's arms.

As in the previous periods of Egyptian cinema, even films that were primarily romantic comedies and/or backstage musicals contained some melodramatic elements. This resulted in a layering of genres within a single film that was also evident in the films of the 1940s. Even lighter films such as *Izzay Ansāk* (1956), which is structured more like a backstage musical, address darker

⁹ Hassan listed two more adaptations of this novel: *Layla* (1942) and *Sallim `Ala al-Ḥabīb / Greetings to the Loved One* (1958) (Hassan 1995, 119).

issues than was common in Hollywood versions of the genre. The film from this period that most closely resembles the pre-revolution formula for Farid's films is *Inta Ḥabbībī* (1957). Directed by the self-professed lover of Hollywood musicals, Youssef Chahine, it is all romantic comedy but its viewpoint on arranged marriage is one that was in line with local traditions, with a couple who originally resist the marriage ending up falling in love. Abdel Halim was not always serious either and not above falling in the Nile for a laugh, as he did in *Ayām wa Layālī* (1955). However, when he starred in a full-fledged comedy, *Fatī Aḥlāmī / Boy of My Dreams* (1957), the audience was not receptive; Gordon has described this adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) as Abdel Halim's "only box office disappointment" (Gordon 2004, 312). He could be playful and charming but it appears that Egyptian audiences were disappointed if they didn't see him suffer.

The foreign stories that were often borrowed along with their respective genres were utilized to create not carbon copies of the original but new unique forms that spoke to an Egyptian and wider Arabic audience. The male-dominated nature of Egyptian culture is evident in the way in which borrowed female-centered stories became centered on the man instead. While we might expect an adaptation of *La dame aux camélias* to focus on the female character, *Ahed al-Hawa* (1955) is much more about the equivalent of the Armand character than

Marguerite. Similarly, the “Prince Charming” (“Fāris al-aḥlām”) number in *Laḥn Ḥubbī / Melody of My Love* (1953) is a version of the Cinderella story in which Prince Charming (Farid) is the star.

The need for adaptation was surely a painful lesson for the producers of *Fati Aḥlāmī* (1957), as the morality of the characters in Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* was quite different from that of the average Arab. Shakespeare was more successfully utilized. In particular, there are two instances in which *The Taming of the Shrew* appears to have provided material. When Farid spans a spoiled Yasmine (Shādīa) in *Inta Habbībī* (1957), it is reminiscent of Petruchio’s efforts of tame Kate. In *Mālīsh Ghīrak / I Have No One But You* (1958), an older sister resists marriage, which in turn delays the marriage of a younger sibling. Another plot line in the same film revolves around the misidentification of a secret admirer, a common device in the Western narrative tradition, perhaps borrowed from the 1940 film *The Shop Around the Corner* or from its musical remake, *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949). In addition, “The sculptor” (“Ṣāni’ tamāsīl”) number from *Izzay Ansāk* (1956) depicts a sculptor whose creation comes to life. While the source may have been the myth included by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* or Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1762 “lyric scene,” it is just as likely that the idea was taken from the George Bernard Shaw play, *Pygmalion* (1913), perhaps through the 1938 film version.

Mahmūd Qāssim has reported that Egyptian filmmakers turned their attention toward Hollywood in the second half of the 1940s, when they began producing remakes of specific American films; while a variety of genres were mined for material, musicals were particularly popular (Qāssim 1999, 241-243). During a period when profits took precedence over quality, the reasons were probably more financial than artistic. One of Abdel Halim's early films, *Layālī al-Ḥubb / Nights of Love* (1955), was loosely based on a 1951 British Ealing Studios satire, *The Man in the White Suit*. Satire having gone out of fashion in Egypt, the film was transformed into a musical romantic comedy in which the protagonist is not humiliated but instead gets the girl. The choice to adapt this film may have been to provide Abdel Halim with another opportunity to play an enterprising young man upon whom Egyptian men could model themselves.

The behind-the-scenes look at Egyptian filmmaking featured in the Farid film, *Shāta' al-Ḥubb / Shore of Love* (1961), suggests that it may have been an even looser remake of the most famous of Hollywood musicals, *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). This connection might not be enough to call it a remake, but the way in which the romantic couple meets is similar to the meeting in the Hollywood film. In *Singin' in the Rain*, Don jumps off a streetcar into Kathy's car; in *Shāta' al-Ḥubb*, Layla falls off a ladder into Mamdūh's car when he hits the ladder after falling asleep at the wheel. Even if not taken directly from *Singin' in the Rain*, this

kind of “meet cute,” in which the romantic leads meet in some unlikely comic way, was a common Hollywood convention. Its use in this film illustrates that in 1961 American films were still a major creative source for Egyptian filmmakers. Admiration for the American film industry was earlier expressed in *Izzay Ansāk* (1956) when the rich playboy Rushdī promises the ambitious young Zanūba that he will produce a film for her in Cinemascope with an American director.¹⁰

Song Function: Musically Enhancing the Message

While filmmakers may have sought to inspire social change by educating the masses with their films, the primary function of the songs remained that of entertainment, and films continued to be designed to provide opportunities for performers to display their talents. Songs were sometimes hits before their inclusion in a film. One example is the song “Tūba” (“Never again,” Abdel Wahhab),¹¹ which Abdel Halim premiered six months before the film, *Ayām wa Layālī* (1955), and which became “the song of the season” (Ḥasanayn 1995, 37). This power of music to entertain also served to engage the audience in the films, to bring them into the theaters, and to keep their attention while the message of

¹⁰ In that same year, Egyptian filmmakers produced their first film in Cinemascope: *Dalīla* (1956); it was directed by the innovator Moḥammad Karīm, and featured the hottest young musical star, Abdel Halim Hafiz.

¹¹ Ḥasanayn reports that this was the very first song that Abdel Wahhab wrote for Abdel Halim.

the film was being relayed. Egyptian film critic Sāmī al-Salāmūnī has suggested that the capability (*qudra*) and attractiveness (*gāzibiyya*) of Abdel Halim's voice greatly increased the impact of the message of Egyptian song, making it better able to convey meaning than any "raging political speech" ("maqāl siyāsa ṣākhīb") (quoted in Ḥasanayn 1995, 97).

The plots that conveyed the messages of the films were in turn structured to serve the featured songs. In Abdel Halim's films, songs were often presented as diegetic personal expressions. These include what Gordon has referred to as the "dark night of the soul number" (Gordon 2007, 216), which often replaced the lavish finale as the final song of the film. The earliest example is "Eih zanbī eih" ("What is my crime," Abdel Wahhab) from *Ayām wa Layālī* (1955). Having nobly taken the blame for a crime committed by his debauched stepbrother, Yeḥīā (Abdel Halim) bemoans the resulting loss of his true love. Another example is "Zalamu" ("They were unfair"), from *Bināt al-Yom* (1957), in which Khālid (Abdel Halim) dreams of the girl that he thinks he can't have.

The first song sung by Abdel Halim in *Ayām wa Layālī* (1955) illustrates another major function of song in musical theater and film: to woo the girl. After falling in love with her at first sight, Yeḥīā returns to serenade the girl he has admired from afar, telling her "I am yours forever" ("Ana lak `ala tūl;" Abdel Wahhab). The visual setting reinforces the perception that this is a serenade in a

European sense, with the Nile standing in for the canals of Venice and the balcony of Sāmīa's (Imān) houseboat symbolizing what balconies have symbolized since at least as far back as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Fig. 5.12). Later in the film he wins back her attention from his stepbrother in a charming performance of the Latin-flavored "Shaghalūnī" ("She hooked me;" Abdel Wahhab) at a party [Fig. 5.13]. In contrast, the lady (Faten Hamama) is resistant to his charms in *Maw'id Gharām/ A Date* (1956) and he seeks to win her over in "Ṣadfat" ("Coincidence"). The dynamic of this number is not unlike that evident in the early Abdel Wahhab number "Yā wābūr 'ullī" in *Yaḥya al-Ḥubb* (1938), in which he tries to win over a resistant Layla Murād. It is also reminiscent of the way in which Fred Astaire often won over Ginger Rogers through dance, such as in "Isn't This a Lovely Day" (Irving Berlin) from *Top Hat* (1935).

As in the Astaire and Rogers number, there may be two talents on display in one musical performance. The performance of romantic duets in Egyptian musical film goes back as far as the collaborations of Abdel Wahhab and Nagāt `Alī in *Damū'a al-Ḥubb* (1935). "Yā salām `ala ḥubbī wa ḥubbak" ("Oh how beautiful is your love and mine"), from *Inta Ḥabbībī* (1957), is a comic turn on the romantic wooing duet, in which the reluctant couple of Farid and Shādīa speak the words of love while expressing their distaste for each other physically.

Another take on the romantic duet is present in Abdel Halim's first screened film. In "Aḥṭār khayālī" (al-Ṭawīl) from *Laḥn al-Wafā'* (1955), Galāl (Abdel Halim) and Sihām (Shādīa) express their burgeoning love for each other from separate balconies, much like Irene Dunne and Allan Jones did in "I Have the Room Above Her"¹² from the 1936 film version of *Show Boat*.

While duets were not uncommon in these films, the focus was usually on the male star. A female singing star such as Shādīa or Ṣabāḥ might be given a solo number, but the bulk of the performances featured the man. The woman's role was more often to respond in some way to his performance, to act as a surrogate for the cinematic audience. In her study of the Hollywood musical, Feuer has suggested that a dominant impulse in musical film is "the desire to capture on celluloid the quality of live entertainment" (Feuer 1993, 2). The makers of musical films often seek to bridge the gap between performer and audience created by the medium. This is commonly done by depicting an audience within the film. As proposed by Feuer in her discussion of *The Barkleys of Broadway*, the "internal audience" is "the celluloid embodiment of the film audience's subjectivity" (Feuer 1993, 27). While depicting large audiences in the theater could evoke the feeling of attending a performance, mediated listening of

¹² Words: Oscar Hammerstein, music: Jerome Kern.

the sort featured in the Egyptian films of the 1950s created the more intimate feeling that the star was singing just for you.

Performances in the films of this period, as in the earlier periods discussed in this study, were sometimes mediated through an onscreen microphone and over the radio airwaves. Stokes' article on Abdel Halim and the microphone (Stokes 2009) mentions two such instances in the film *Maw'id Gharām* (1956). In both cases the most significant audience member is his invalid love interest, Nawāl (Faten Hamama). She is not only our surrogate – her presence also ties these formal performances more closely to the plot of the film than is the case in many of Farid's musicals of the previous period. During the first number, "Bayni wa baynak eih" ("What is there between us;" al-Ṭawīl), Nawāl listens from her hospital bed as Samīr (Abdel Halim) performs for an elite audience. Coming off stage he receives two significant pieces of news: that talent scouts present at the performance want to offer him an engagement in Lebanon, and that Nawāl's doctor is in love with her. We can see from her face as she listens that she is still in love with him, but Samīr cannot see her and chooses to focus on his career in order to forget her.

In the presentation of "Low kunti yom 'ansāk" ("If I ever forget you;" al-Mūgī) Barakāt used both crosscutting and flashback to show that the connection between Nawāl and Samīr is still strong at this point in the film. We see Nawāl at

home in a wheelchair, listening to the radio, followed by a flashback of her and Dr. Kamāl. Samīr then rises from out of the stage, much as Abdel Wahhab did in “Sahirtu” (*Damū`a al-Ḥubb*, 1935) and begins to sing. Abdel Wahhab’s audience in the earlier number was much more general, however, and depicted the wide-ranging power of the Egyptian media. In “Low kunti yom ‘ansāk,” this power is focused on one individual. There is one more mediated song in the film that Stokes does not mention. It is the wooing song “Ḥalu wa kidāb” (“Sweet yet liar;” Maḥmūd al-Sharīf), in which Samīr continues the process of winning over Nawāl begun in “Ṣadfat” by singing to her over an intercom.

The prevalence of mediated listening in this period may have been a result of an increased emphasis on the integration of performances into the plot, in order to provide them with a purpose beyond the dubious one of entertainment. Egyptian Filmmakers may also have featured radio and audio technology to demonstrate that Egypt was a modern, technologically advanced society. Other examples include Abdel Halim’s impromptu performance of “Bāḥlam bīk” (“I dream of you;” Munīr Murād) for a wandering radio reporter in *Ḥakāyat Ḥubb / Love Story* (1959), which is not only heard by his love interest but also leads to his being ‘discovered.’ Farid’s films in the 1950s featured similar uses of this presentational convention. In *Quṣa Ḥubbī / The Story of My Love* (1955), a broken-hearted Amīra (Imān) listens to Farid sing “Sā’linī al-layl” (“The night asks

me”) while flashbacks show her memories of happier times with him. As the song ends she rushes out the door to go to him. The two mediated performances in *Min Agl Ḥubbī / For the Sake of My Love* (1959) are similar in purpose to those in *Maw`id Gharām* (1956). In this case it is Wahīd’s (Farid) invalid wife, who has insisted that he abandon her, who listens emotionally to his performances of “Ḥikayat gharāmī” (“The story of my love”) and “Ḥabbībī sahirnī” (“My darling made me sleepless”).

This period of Egyptian film production also exhibits an increase in the repeated use of songs within a film, either as themes in the underscore or as reprises. As in Hollywood musicals, instrumental renditions of song melodies were utilized in the score in relation to certain characters, as well as to bring to mind the situation in which they were first heard.¹³ Underscores were still unsophisticated when compared to Hollywood films but they were becoming more customized, and occasionally film credits included a listing for *al-mūsīqa al-tuṣwīrīa* (“pictorial music”). In *Laḥn al-Wafā’* (1955), the title song is not only featured throughout the film, but also carries semantic weight. “Ana lak `ala tūl” (*Ayām wa Layālī*, 1955) and “Ahwāk” (*Bināt al-Yom*, 1957) are two more examples of popular film songs featured as leitmotifs in the underscore, beginning with their use in the accompaniment of the opening credits and

¹³ This usage of song continues to be common even in non-musical, or ‘straight,’ films and was adopted from the nineteenth-century European operatic tradition.

continuing throughout the film. Songs may also be heard again in their original form, with the vocal. This use of the reprise is another common convention borrowed from Western musical theater and film. In a related repeated hearing, a recording of Fayza Aḥmad (1934-1983) singing “Asmar yā asmarānī” (“Dark one oh my dark one”) in *al-Wisāda al-Khāliya* (1957), aurally represents Ṣalāḥ’s (Abdel Halim) first love; and the breaking of the vinyl record he has been playing obsessively is the beginning of the breaking of his unhealthy emotional attachment.

Certain songs were utilized in these ways in Farid’s films as well. “Mīn y’arif” (“Who knows”) plays a central role in *Ahed al-Hawa* (1955), beginning as a melody provided by a beautiful stranger and continuing on to a grand formal performance of the resulting composition and its use as a theme representing the couple’s love. The 1956 Farid vehicle, *Izzay Ansāk*, makes multiple use of four of its six songs: “Eih fāydit ‘albī” (“What’s the use of my heart”) is featured in the underscore; “Zanūba” is first sung by Zanūba (Ṣabāḥ) when she is still a wedding singer and its reprise accompanies her return to this low-class venue; her performance of a bit of “Aḥibbak yānni” (“I really love you”) earns her a place in Farid’s troupe and later wins over a snooty audience at his birthday party; finally the reprise of “Ṣāni’ tamāsīl” at the end of the film symbolizes the reunion of the couple and their resulting artistic success. In one case, a Western song is used

as a love theme. In *Shāta' al-Ḥubb* (1961), the Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein song “Hello Young Lovers” (*The King and I*, 1951) is heard as a theme for Farid and his love interest. Unlike earlier uses of Western popular music in the underscores of Egyptian musical films, the use of this American melody is not associated with decadent behavior.

American popular music, however, continued to be associated with the moral dangers of the West. Rock and roll played a similar semantic role to the one played by jazz in earlier films. In *Shāta' al-Ḥubb* (1961), Layla is encouraged by the morally dubious Sohayr to dance to rock music so that other men will admire her and Mamdūh (Farid) will appreciate her more. Layla, being a decent young woman, resists this indecent suggestion. In *al-Wisāda al-Khāliya* (1957), an incidental song entitled “Beautiful Rock” helps create the decadent atmosphere into which the immature Ṣalāḥ (Abdel Halim) has descended.

Perhaps because of its international popularity during this period, the Latin style that is heard most often in these films is mambo. Originating in Cuba, by the 1950s it had become a popular international dance music form. Similar to the use of rock, mambo usually represented a Western, often decadent, lifestyle. For example, it is one of the Western dangers that threaten “the girls of today” in *Bināt al-Yom* (1957). A bit of samba style provided by Abdel Wahhab in the rhythm and instrumentation of “Shaghalūnī” (*Ayām wa Layāli*, 1955) added a

more innocent celebratory atmosphere to the party scene, in which it is performed by Abdel Halim. Tango was less commonly used as a compositional element, but the songs that do incorporate it, such as “Eih fāydit ‘albī, continued to be presented in an elegant fashion: in this case, in a formal performance setting, complete with elegant dancers doing choreography that looks more balletic than Latin.

These functions of songs are much like those found in American movie musicals. Songs were not often used in Egyptian singing films to overtly express political messages but instead to support stories that promoted a vision for a newly independent Egypt. As noted by Jennifer Jenkins regarding the Hollywood ‘war musical’ of the 1940s, songs often promoted patriotism by expressing values that lay at the core of the nation they were fighting to preserve (Jenkins 2001, 321). “Laḥn al-Wafā” (*Laḥn al-Wafā*, 1955) functions in this way to recall the core value of loyalty that is central to the film’s plot. A striking exception to this more subtle use of song is “Aḥnā lihā” (“We are all for it”), which is featured as a ‘troop show’ number in *Wadd`at Ḥubbak* (1956). Composed by Farid in the style of the patriotic *nashīds* of Sayyīd Darwīsh, its lyrics (see translation below), by Abū al-Sa`ūd al-Abayāri, declare that they (Egyptians) are willing to give their lives, without payment, to protect Arab identity and its people. The effect is similar to that of George M. Cohan’s “Over There” (1917) in *Yankee Doodle*

Dandy (1942), a song that the fictional representation of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt proclaims “was just as powerful a weapon as any cannon, as any battleship.”

“Ahnā lihā” (“We are all for it”; words: Abū al-Sa`ūd al-Abayāri, music: Farid al-Atrash)

Arabism and its people
 We’re all for it, all for it, all for it
 We protect Arabism and its people
 We’re all for it, all for it, all for it

Dear Egypt is our mother
 We raise its flag up to the sky
 And our brothers and cousins are with us in spirit and blood
 We sacrifice our blood for Arabism
 The lion’s house, protector of all
 When our home calls us, we’re all for it
 We dedicate our lives for no price, we’re all for it, all for it, all for it

Oh world, look and be a witness
 We’ve become the strongest nation

Oh, world, tell the story and glorify the land of Arabism and pride

Oh, Egypt, go around and be happy
 You, land of the proud

When our home calls us, we’re all for it
 We dedicate our lives for no price, we’re all for it, all for it, all for it

When unity unified us and our armies became unified
 Our hearts swore to always fight and win when the battle day comes
 Gamal, the protector of the country, we’re all for it, all for it

When our home calls us, we’re all for it
 We dedicate our lives for no price, we’re all for it, all for it, all for it

Patriotism had been expressed somewhat less directly in many of the finales of Farid's early films. While his celebrations of Arab culture had included many other musical cultures, the focus in the early years of Egyptian independence was on national rather than regional pride. This is evident in the continuing reverence for past Egyptian composers, reflected in references to the chain of transmission (*isnād*). The chain connecting Abdel Halim to Abdel Wahhab and Darwīsh that was established in *Laḥn al-Wafā'* (1955) is carried even further back in *Layālī al-Ḥubb* (1955) when Aḥmad (Abdel Halim) is compared not only to Darwīsh but also to Salāma Ḥijāzī and `Abduh al-Ḥamūlī. The song that follows, "Yā saīdī 'omrak" ("Oh sir, at your command"), was written and arranged in an older style by the composer Maḥmūd al-Sharīf (1918-1990), with Abdel Halim playing the `ūd and choral responses that are reminiscent of *dawr* performance.

Appreciation for the songs created for and by Egyptian film stars is also apparent. Songs made famous by their inclusion in films were sometimes referenced later, usually for some semantic reason that serves the plot. In *Mālīsh Ghīrak* (1958), Aḥmad (Farid) suggests a few words from "Yā zahratan fī khayyālī" (*Ḥabbīb al-'Omar*, 1948) as potential love poetry. Another example is several references to a popular Abdel Halim song. In *Shari'a al-Ḥubb* (1959), a group of schoolgirls express their wish that their new music teacher be either

Farid al-Atrash or Abdel Halim Hafiz, and one of them is inspired to sing a few lines of “Ahwāk” (*Bināt al-Yom*, 1957). Gordon has observed how this song has had a continuing life in the Egyptian imagination. He has noted its use in the 1987 social realist film *Zawjat Ragul Muhim / Wife of an Important Man* (Dir: Moḥammad Khan) and suggested that there “is no mistaking the symbolic utilization of ‘Abd al-Halim as a marker of lost innocence, common (rather than personal) aspirations, and Nasser-era ambitions to create a just, modern society” (Gordon 2004, 314-315). More recently, “Ahwāk” was used as a love theme in the Canadian film, *Cairo Times* (2009). Songs such as these have become, like their singers and composers, icons of Egyptian culture that continue evoke to national pride.

In this third decade of Egyptian film production, songs continued to function in many of the same ways as those in Hollywood films. Above all they were meant to entertain, but that power was utilized to bring audiences into the theaters and to keep their attention while the story of the films educated them on what it meant to be a citizen of the new Egypt. Formal performance was still a fairly common pretext for the presentation of a song, but these numbers more often served the stories as well, sometimes through the continuing trend of mediated performance. Many more songs were integrated into the stories as personal expressions. In addition, songs were more often incorporated into the

more sophisticated underscores of the period and were sometimes performed more than once during the course of a film. Finally, Egyptian patriotism was directly and indirectly expressed in the lyrics of songs. The resulting films exhibit a shift in the balance between story and song in favor of the story and thus a return to the use of musical drama as a tool of enlightenment rather than escape.

The Continued Use of Foreign Musical Forms

Whatever the narrative or political purpose of the songs, it was the beauty of the music and the voices of their performers that brought the audience to the theater. Abdel Halim did not compose his own songs, which were provided by both new and esteemed composers. His most frequent composers were his schoolmates, Kamāl al-Ṭawīl and Moḥammad al-Mūgī. Al-Ṭawīl tended to write the lighter numbers with catchy melodic hooks and a fair amount of repetition. Al-Mūgī provided darker and more complex compositions for both wrenching personal expression and grand formal performance. Munīr Murād (1922-1981) brought a bit of Western flavor to the style of his songs, such as “Bukra wa ba`adu” (“Tomorrow and after that”) from *Fati Aḥlāmī* (1957), a multi-section production number that incorporates jazz, flamenco, and samba. Like the plot of the film, the style of this song may have been too Western for the local

audience.¹⁴ Abdel Wahhab included some Western elements in the songs he wrote for Abdel Halim, including a Latin rhythm, carried by maracas, and jazzy saxophone in “Shaghalūnī” (*Ayām wa Layāli*, 1955). Abdel Halim’s films also featured songs by other established and respected composers, including Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, and Balīgh Ḥamdī (1932-1993).

The most characteristic feature of film songs in this period was a shift from the use of foreign forms in the composition of songs to the increasingly Westernized arrangement of songs. Rather than elaborate multi-part operettas, formal performances were more often presented as serious compositions with fewer stylistic shifts and more opportunities for virtuosic improvisation. This compositional tendency may have been in imitation of the grand long songs, such as “‘Ashiq al-rūḥ” (*Ghazal al-Bināt*, 1949), composed by Abdel Wahhab, and those performed by Umm Kulthum in concert. In the first half of the twentieth century, Egyptian composers developed a longer and more complex song form that came to be known as the *ughniyya* (“song”) or *ughniyya kabīra* (“big song”). The structure might vary from song to song but the genre was generally characterized by its length, the formality of its language, and its musical complexity. A preference for this kind of more serious composition is illustrative

¹⁴ An article on Murād included in the Egyptian State Information service website indicates that his compositional style made some of his songs “difficult to grasp by the Egyptian audience” (“Muneer Murad,” Egyptian Figures, Egyptian State Information Service website).

of the interest in legitimizing music and putting it into the service of Egyptian society that was expressed by the Nasser administration. These were songs that Egyptians could be proud of and which could represent them to the world as a culturally sophisticated society.

It was in the area of arrangement that Western elements were most evident in the songs of this period. The appropriation of Western orchestral arrangement techniques implied the importance, dignity, and legitimacy associated with Western classical music, while maintaining the structural character of Egyptian song style. The use of Western instruments in the arrangement of Egyptian film songs was not new, but the scale of usage became grander and the Western instruments more central. Simple choral harmony was sometimes added as well, particularly in introductions and final cadences, where it could amplify the sound without interfering with the intonation of the vocal performance. This focus on *tūzī`a* ("arrangement") was another way to continue the *taṭwīr*, or "development," of Egyptian music. These arrangements were likely often created by Western-trained arrangers and not the composers themselves. Though usually not credited, there is one name that does appear a number of times as a music arranger and composer of underscores. Stokes has reported that Andre Ryder was the leader of a jazz band and that he provided Abdel Wahhab with orchestrations (Stokes 2008, 314). I have been unable to gather

any more information on him, but his name suggests a foreign origin and his arrangements suggest Western musical training.

Perhaps the most Western of instruments that was featured in the arrangement of Egyptian film songs was the piano. In the early films of Abdel Wahhab, pianos were to be found in the homes of the decadent Westernized elite. In Farid's films of the 1940s and early 50s, they were part of the spectacle of his formal performances and, in *Akher Kedba* (1950) utilized for the composition of a song. Abdel Wahhab and Farid, however, were usually seen with an `ūd in their hands, rather than sitting at a piano. In contrast, Abdel Halim often played the piano in his films, and it is clear from the way in which these sequences were shot, showing his hands, that he was an accomplished pianist. In *Bināt al-Yom* (1957), it is a central piece of furniture in the modern home of his love interest. We are introduced to this home with the image of the youngest girl of the household practicing on it. While her sister complains, her father says he likes it. This kind of Westernization, perhaps because of its association with refined music, is acceptable. Later in the film, Khālid (Abdel Halim) uses that same piano to 'compose' "Ahwāk." It is also the compositional instrument of choice for Wahid (Farid) in *Ahed al-Hawa* (1955), and it is its malfunction that sends him to the piano shop where he encounters Amāl. Numerous white pianos are then featured in the grand premiere of the composition, "Mīn ya`rif," that she

inspired [Fig. 5.14]. Farid's film, *Mālīsh Ghīrak* (1958), is another in which the piano was presented as an appropriate instrument for a refined young lady, with Bāsima (Mariam Fakhr al-Dīn) seen playing it throughout the film.

Egyptians had clearly not heeded the advice of the European scholars in attendance at the 1932 Cairo Congress on Arabic music. The use of this tonally fixed Western instrument to play Arabic music had been strongly discouraged by the commission on instruments, led by the German organologist Curt Sachs (1881-1959). The Westerners on the committee felt that music was best played by instruments from within the musical tradition and that Western instruments could “disfigure the beauty of Arab music” (Racy 1991, 76).¹⁵ A heated debate ensued that carried over into a special plenary session. One Egyptian participant pleaded to the commission that it “fully condone the introduction of European instruments into Arab music, because such instruments possessed tremendously varied expressive means and depictive powers” (Racy 2003, 3). All the participants agreed that the fixed tuning of Western instruments such as the piano lacked the capacity to play the microtones that are essential elements of Arabic music. By the 1950s, it appears that those who felt that the piano was “an indispensable instrument of progress in Egyptian and, more generally, in Arab music” (Racy 1991, 77) were in the majority.

¹⁵ This is a quote translated by Racy from the 1933 publication of the proceedings.

Western stringed instruments in the form of violins, cellos, and contrabasses were already firmly established in the modern Egyptian musical tradition by this time and their intonational flexibility made their use less problematic. The guitar, a relative of the Arabic `ūd, was limited by its frets, and its use seems to have had Western connotations. In “Ana lak `ala tūl,” from *Ayām wa Layāli* (1955), Yeḥiā (Abdel Halim) uses it to serenade Sāmīa (Imān), along with a mandolin, another guitar, and an accordion played by his friends, lending a Neapolitan flavor to the performance (see Fig. 5.12). In *Dalīla* (1956), he accompanies himself and Shādīa on the guitar in the performance of “Aḥnā kunā fayn” (“Where were we”), a light duet in which the style alternates between East and West. Abdel Halim also played the oboe in this film, which was one of the instruments he had studied at the Higher Institute for Theater Music. His first instrument, the clarinet, is featured in *Shari`a al-Ḥubb* (1958), and it is his secret playing of it that impresses the members of the local band and inspires them to ask him to join them.

Western instruments may have been accepted, but a Western vocal tone was still frowned upon. Al-Najmī praised Abdel Wahhab for utilizing an appropriate tone of voice in his singing (al-Najmī 1972, 40). He was not so kind in an interview with Abdel Halim for the magazine *al-Kawākib*: Abdel Halim was

forced to defend the *lawn* (color or style) of his singing, which al-Najmī thought was “*khawāja*” (“Western / European”) (al-Najmī 1972, 48-51).

In contrast to this assessment of Abdel Halim, al-Najmī has expressed his opinion that Farid had contributed to the renewal (*tajdīd*) and development (*taṭwīr*) of Arabic music by benefiting from European music while still respecting Arab taste (al-Najmī 1972, 45). Farid’s film songs in this period following the revolution have less of a Western flavor in their melodic construction, but perhaps more, of a particularly classical variety, in the accompaniment. He did continue to use aspects of tango style in some his compositions, but the overall construction of these songs tended towards the, by then, established Egyptian model of inserting a *mawwāl* improvisation between tango-inspired sections, as in “*Sahirtu*” (*al-Warda’ al-Baiḍa*, 1935).

“*Eih fāydit ‘albī*” (“What’s the use of my heart”), from *Izzay Ansāk* (1956), resembles a tango song but varies from the Argentine model in its melodic and modal construction, as well as the intonation and ornamentation of Farid’s singing. The overall structure of “*Eih fāydit ‘albī*” is laid out in tables 5.2 and 5.3. As in Abdel Wahhab’s early film tango, “*Sahirtu*,” the majority of the performance features a pre-composed song that displays elements borrowed from tango song style. “*Eih fāydit ‘albī*” also incorporates an improvisational *mawwāl* section, thus illustrating the continuing importance of improvisation. At this point in time

Egyptian composers had utilized tango song style in the composition of their film songs for over twenty years and created a unique form of song that was inspired by the Argentine form but not an imitation of it.

Table 5.2: The structure of “Eih fāydit ‘albī”

TANGO <i>Nahawānd</i> on D [D harmonic minor]				MAWWĀL <i>Bayyātī</i> on A	T
INTRO	A	B	A		*

* see Table 5.3

Table 5.3: Further details of the structure of “Eih fāydit ‘albī”

TANGO INTRO [partial A – a a b]	mm. 1-15
TANGO A [a a b c]	mm. 16-37
TANGO B [d d d e f]	mm. 36-76
TANGO A [a a b c]	Repeat of mm. 16-36
MAWWĀL	
Partial TANGO B [f]	Repeat of mm. 69-76 with different lyrics and descent to the tonic in the accompaniment

Example 5.1 is a transcription of the instrumental introduction, along with sections A and B of the tango. The performance of these two sections is followed by a repeat of the A section, and the *mawwāl* improvisation. The performance ends with a repeat of the last eight measures of the B section, sung to different lyrics, and featuring a descent to the tonic in the final cadence of the accompaniment.

The instrumental introduction (mm. 1-15) presents a portion (a a b) of section A (a a b c) that is then presented in a vocal rendition. In section A (mm. 16-37), the musical phrases that accompany the first two lines of verse (A-a, mm. 16-19) are related by the use of melodic sequence and are cast in a mode resembling D harmonic minor, likely *maqām Nahawānd* on D. These lines are repeated before the presentation of the next three lines of text in sub-section A-b (mm. 23-19). The first two phrases of this subsection also feature the use of melodic sequence, along with an underlying harmonic progression that resembles a circle of fifths progression, a compositional convention that Farid may have been exposed to when singing in the French school choir as a child. The next line of text (mm. 27-29) stands alone melodically and returns to a minor feeling (*Nahawānd*). The A section concludes with setting the last two lines of text to four musical phrases each (A-c, mm. 30-37), and then the melody descends to the tonic in a manner consistent with Arabic compositional practice. The first of these final phrases returns to a major feeling while the concluding phrase modulates back to *Nahawānd*. Overall, this section displays a mixture of Western and Arabic melodic and modal practice.

The B section (mm. 36-76) is slow and stately, as is the group dance performed to it. Neither the dance nor most of the music in this section resemble tango. The emphasis on the fifth degree of the scale [A] instead suggests a

preparation for the modulation to *Bayyāfī* on A that will happen in the *mawwāl* section. The final eight measures (A-c, mm. 69-76) sound a bit more like a tango, especially in the syncopated accompaniment.

As is the case with many film songs of this period, it is the instrumental accompaniment of “Eih fāydit ‘albī” that more clearly borrows from Western musical practice. The instrumentation, familiar from other Farid tango-inspired songs, includes the accordion and clarinet, as well as strings. Also familiar are the ways in which the instruments are used, including overlapping instrumental interludes, syncopation, and the marking of each quarter note, as well as chordal accompaniment, and the familiar *sol* to *do* cadence, all of which are consistent with Argentine tango practice. The addition of a chorus provides a sort of classical dignity that was evident in many formal performances of film songs in this period. Even the *mawwāl* section is accompanied by a mixture of local and Western timbres, including the accordion playing a syncopated rhythmic ostinato, along with prominent *naī* and *qānūn* parts. After the *mawwāl*, Farid returns to the last few measures of section B (B-f, mm. 69-76), with a different set of lyrics. The piece then concludes not with the expected *sol*–*do* cadence, but instead with a descent to the tonic in the accompaniment. Overall, this song displays elements that characterize it as a post-revolution Farid tango-inspired song in its Arabic construction and Western arrangement.

Example 5.1 Transcription of the introduction and tango-inspired sections of “Eih fāydit ‘albī”

Eih fāydit ‘albī

words: Anwar ‘Abd Allah
music: Farid al-Atrash

instrumental intro a
accordion & clarinet - reeds - TANGO

MELODY

ACCOMP.

a
strings - CLASSICAL

3

7 b

11

Section A
soto vocal

15 a

Eih fāy - dit ‘al - bi low ma - kan - shi ha - wak wa iz - zay yi -

3

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of five systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-3) is an instrumental introduction for accordion & clarinet-reeds in a tango style, with a melody line and an accompaniment line. The second system (measures 4-6) features a classical string accompaniment. The third system (measures 7-10) continues the instrumental accompaniment. The fourth system (measures 11-14) shows the vocal melody line. The fifth system (measures 15-17) is a solo vocal section with lyrics: 'Eih fāy - dit ‘al - bi low ma - kan - shi ha - wak wa iz - zay yi -'. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, eighth notes, quarter notes, and triplets.

18 Eih fāydit 'albī

tha - na low ma - nan - shi ri - dak Eih - fāy - dit 'al - bi low ma - kan - shi ha -

21

wak wa iz - zay yi tha - na low ma - kan - shi ri - dak aw - ul ma

24

shuf - tak kunt - i tay fi ma - nam 'a - la tul 'a - rif - tak w'ish - ta - hayt il - gha -

27 Nahawānd on D

ram hay - if min hub - bak la - ya - kun ow - u - ham ra - ha a' - blak

31

in - ta wa fayn ta - min - i ya nur il - ayn - 'al - bi wa 'al - bak it - naysn

36 Eih fāydit 'albī

Section B
d instrumental

bi na - dun - ya ya hay - a - ti a - na.

39

44 chorus

Ah Ah

49

Ah

54 solo vocal

Leh Leh Leh

Eih faydit 'albī

59

ba-hin-ni i - layk _____ Leh _____

64

Leh _____ ba-dow-ar a - layk _____ ya ha-

69

ka - ya ya 'az - a - bak a - hu - wa ub - bak hat low ya - kun 'az - ab ya mu-

73

na - ya tal ghi - ya - bak Ah ya 'al - bak min 'awaw - tak wa il - ghi - yab

Alternate lyrics for mm. 69-76:
 Yā amālī ... yā khayyālī
 Inta mīn? Leh baḥibbak? Eih gara?
 Yā nasībī ... yā ḥabbībī
 Inta rūhī wa lā 'albī yā tara

See alternate final ending in
 the accompaniment below.

ra

In the case of “Mīn ya`rif” (“Who knows”) [Table 5.4], from *Ahed al-Hawa* (1955), Farid fused Latin rhythm and Arabic melodic line into a syncretic form that is more Arabic than Latin. At around nine minutes it is quite long for a film song that did not feature changes in the mise-en-scene to help keep the attention of the audience. It instead follows in the tradition of Abdel Wahhab’s “additive linearity” approach to song composition. The prominence of the piano in the accompaniment may seem to suggest that this song was inspired by the West but, as with many film songs from this period, it is in the melodic and modal construction that the Egyptian nature of the composition is apparent.

Table 5.4: Structure of “Mīn ya`rif”

INSTR.	VERSE	VERSE	VERSE	VERSE
INTRO.	1	2	3	4

The main theme is composed in the Arabic *maqām Kurd*, which is characterized by low second and third degrees. The instrumental responses that follow each line of verse are a common feature of Arabic vocal compositions, as is the brief refrain that occurs at the end of each verse. This melody is laid on top of a habanera rhythm. The overall structure of the song resembles that of mid-twentieth century Egyptian popular songs rather than Western ones. It begins with an instrumental introduction that sets the rhythm and states the main theme. This is followed by a vocal rendition of the same theme. Instrumental

interludes follow the first and second verses. The third verse is followed by a choral rendition of the main theme. The final verse is presented in an improvisational style, without rhythmic accompaniment, beginning with an ūd solo and ending with the refrain. The overall melodic construction of the composition reflects the arch-like shape common in Arabic musical presentations as it reaches a high point in the third verse and makes its way back down to the tonic by the end.

Like the stories and the function of the songs within them, the style of the songs featured in the musical films of the early Nasser era reflect a patriotic pride in Egyptian culture through their use of more Eastern forms in the construction of the songs. Western arrangement techniques of instrumentation and harmony added grandeur to the presentations of the songs but the structures tended to follow the norms of the Arabic musical tradition. Even the songs written by Farid that incorporated tango used it less as a central structural element and more as a stylistic detail. These were songs designed to sound more Egyptian in the most impressive possible way.

Conclusion

The nature of Egyptian musical film in this period of early independence was both regressive and progressive. There was a conscious rejection by

filmmakers of the frivolous musicals of the forties in favor of the more serious artistic model followed in the early days of the Egyptian film industry. This return to drama as an educational tool appears to have been fueled both by the artistic frustration of filmmakers and encouragement from media savvy politicians. Film was once again put into the service of society. Many of the resulting films, especially those starring Abdel Halim Hafiz, could be described as Egyptian musical rhetorical realism. In these films the reality lay in the situations in which the characters found themselves and the rhetoric that inspired these plot elements. The settings of these stories, in contrast, were often not so realistic, including the totally unrealistic conventions associated with the presentation of songs in musicals. This combination of the real and fantastical may seem an odd combination but it was not unheard of in the American musical theater and film tradition. Based on the Edna Ferber novel of the same name, the 1927 production of *Show Boat*, with a libretto by Oscar Hammerstein and music by Jerome Kern, dealt with the social issue of racial prejudice at a time when African Americans were still more often caricatured in American musicals than realistically portrayed. Hammerstein later dealt with this issue again in *South Pacific* (1949),¹⁶ most pointedly in the song "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught."

¹⁶ The music was by his frequent collaborator Richard Rodgers.

Hollywood remained largely escapist in its approach to musical film in the 1950s and often resorted to cinematic presentations of successful stage musicals, with few changes from the original productions. In contrast, the Egyptian musical film industry reinvented itself as an active participant in the building of a new Egypt. The songs and their singers would bring the audience into the movie theater and keep them entertained while the social message of the film was relayed. The way in which the songs were integrated into the plots became more sophisticated, with functions that served the stories and the messages they carried. Underscore construction also became more customized, with songs featured as leitmotifs and the semantic use of incidental music to represent the moral dangers of the West.

One message that was carried in the music itself was a renewed interest in local models for musical structure. This tendency was tempered by the increased use of Westernized arrangement in the presentation of the songs. Perhaps more than ever before, the message and the music were essentially Egyptian, but the continued use of Western narrative and musical elements suggests that Egyptian filmmakers and composers still saw the West as a model of modernity worthy of imitation.

Musical film production continued in Egypt throughout the 1960s but comedies became more popular amongst the general movie-going public. The

rise of the “social realism” school of filmmaking resulted in more serious films that tended not to include many, if any, musical performances. As in America, and elsewhere, the golden age of the musical ended in the early 1960s and the genre has not returned to its former glory.



Figure 5.1 Cecil B. DeMille and Gamal Abdel Nasser meeting to discuss the filming of *The Ten Commandments* (1956) (*Ahl al-Fann* November 11, 1954, p.46)

Figure 5.2. One of many pictures of Abdel Halim Hafiz in bed (Hasanayn 1995, 53)





Figure 5.3. Abdel Halim and Kamāl al-Ṭawīl (*Ahl al-Fann*, November 1954)

Figure 5.4 Moḥammad al-Mūgī
(Ḥasanayn 1995, 70)





Figure 5.5. Abdel Halim and Mohammed Abdel Wahhab (Ḥasanayn 1995, 128)

Figure 5.6. The cast of *Ayāmnā al-Ḥelwa* (1955) – from left right: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Aḥmad Ramzī, Faten Hamama, and Omar Sharif (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ayyamna-al-Helwa.jpg>. accessed August 16, 2011)



Figure 5.7 Abdel Halim Hafiz at the piano playing the introduction to “Lā talumnī” (still from *Lahn al-Wafā’*, 1952)



Figure 5.8. Silhouettes of saxophones (still from *Lahn al-Wafā’*, 1952)



Figure 5.9. Still from “Laḥn al-Wafā’” (*Laḥn al-Wafā’*, 1952) showing a large and varied accompanying ensemble.



Figure 5.10. Statement by Abdel Wahhab and Barakat from the press book for *Ayām wa Layālī* (1955) (Courtesy of Walter Armbrust).



فلم عبد الوهاب

ان كرامة الفنان وسعته الفنية يمتحانه دائماً على أنه
 يتجيب لفنه ، ويعمل له أولاً ، وقبل أي اعتبار...
 ولهذا أبيت أن أزل بعضي ، فمراً ، في سوره الاتجار السينما
 فابتعدت عن الاتجاج سنوات عديده... حتى أهدت بالاستقرار
 يعني الى صناعة السينما ، وهزتي عوامل فنية مختلفة ،
 رعتني كلها الى العودة للاتجاج...
 وأول هذه العوامل الفنية ، وأصلها ، هي أنني أعود
 الى الاتجاج متعادلاً مع المخرج الفنان " بركات " .. وفيما
 كنت في مع الوهبة المديح الوثابة عبد الحليم حافظ
 ... هرفليم " أيام وليالي " ...
 فاستجبت للنداء ، طمناً ، وأنا أبتغي التهم
 في الاتجاج بسوى الفن ، بتقدير سليم ، أتمهده به
 رسالتي الفنية خورصر في طبها الناضجة ..
 ولنت أتمد عن " أيام وليالي " بل سأترك
 للجماهير الحكم ، فليس كالمقبر كلما نصفاً عادلاً قوياً ..
 محمد عبد الوهاب

افلام بركات

كانت لفار علم غير سيهار ... جلست مع الموسيقار
 الفنان محمد عبد الوهاب ، نتبادك الحديث عن الفن
 ... وكما تشعب الحديث كشف عن حقيقة لا أفة ..
 عن تجاربه في الأفكار ، واتجاره في الأزار ،
 واتفاقات علمه الواسعة ...
 وأهسننا - عبد الوهاب وأنا - بهذا التجاربه الصعبة
 فاجتمنا وفي صدر كل منا كلمات تريد أن تطلب ..
 ثم همس عبد الوهاب : ما رأيك ؟ فقلت : مؤلف ..
 وكان تصافحنا ، سبانه تقاوتنا ... لهذا التقاوت
 التي سعت به ، لأنه أسبل لأزار رسالتنا الفنية
 بالصورة التي نؤمن بها ...
 وفيما " أيام ... وليالي " هو باكورة هذا التقاوت
 الفني ... الذي نؤمن أنه ضروري للتغلب على
 الأزمة التي تمر بها السينما ...
 ونرجو أن تكون قد وفقنا في هدفنا ...
 والجمت اللقار ..
 بركات

Figure 5.11 – A serious Farid preparing to sing his farewell finale in still from *Wadd`at Ḥubbak* (1956)



Figure 5.12. Still of Abdel Halim serenading Imān with “Ana lak `ala tūl” in *Ayām wa Layāli* (1955).



Figure 5.13. Yeḥia (Abdel Halim), his brother Faṭḥi (Kamāl Ḥussayn), and the girl they both love (Imān) from the press book for *Ayām wa Layāli* (Courtesy of Walter Armbrust)



Figure 5.14. Still from *Ahed al-Hawa* (1955) featuring numerous pianos in the performance of “Mīn ya`rif.”



Conclusion

The films discussed in this dissertation, and the music they feature, exemplify various aspects of the creative adaptation of cultural forms. They also continue to resonate with Egyptians as valued cultural objects. The films are regularly shown on television and widely available on DVDs and VCDs.¹ I also often heard the songs on the radio in taxicabs. It seems to be the songs for which these films formed the setting that people remember best. During one taxi ride an elderly driver and myself got so wrapped up in singing Umm Kulthum and Farid al-Atrash songs that we missed the turn to my house. My singing and *maqām* teacher, Ahmed Mohsen, knowing of my research interests, made a point of using film songs to illustrate the modes I was learning, and our lessons were often extended by informal discussions of the films and their stars. Egyptians also expressed to me their opinions on the stars featured in this study: Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum are still revered as serious artists and icons of Egyptian culture; Farid is made fun of for his over-the-top emotional delivery of songs, as exemplified in the cartoon featured in chapter 1 [Fig. 1.1]; Abdel Halim

¹ The Saudi company Rotana has bought the rights to many of these films and shows them on a satellite channel called “Rotana Zaman.” They have also produced high quality DVDs of some of the films with English and French subtitles. Some Egyptians I spoke with have expressed the concern that Rotana may be deleting portions of the films that they feel are morally reprehensible.

is sometimes criticized for being overly sentimental but admired for his patriotism and his battle against a life-long illness.

The narrative musical films produced in Egypt between 1932 and 1962 exhibit a combination of elements appropriated from American film practice, the European literary tradition, and a wide variety of foreign musical sources. Thus, they cannot be labeled as imitations of the Hollywood form because this was not the only model for their construction. In addition, borrowed elements were often adapted for local use: the stories of French melodramas were altered to adhere to established Egyptian cultural values and to convey messages meant to enlighten a specific local, and larger regional, audience; and foreign musical styles, both Arabic and Western, were incorporated into compositions that are primarily Egyptian in character. It was in the area of song function that Egyptian filmmakers of this 'golden era' most closely imitated the American movie musical model. This fact suggests that comparative studies such as this one can reveal identifying characteristics of cultural forms that are evident in what has been retained when the forms are adapted. The adaptation of musical forms, such as the Argentine *tango canción* form, similarly reveals characteristics of the form that enable us to recognize its use as a compositional element while also displaying important aspects of local compositional and performance practice.

It is important to remember at the end of this study that Egyptian performers had been embellishing stories with songs for centuries before Napoleon's invasion in 1798. What the French brought was a new way of presenting musical narrative in a venue dedicated to its performance. The Egyptian musical plays inspired by exposure to European musical theater presented adapted and original stories, along with melodies of local origin. The introduction of mass media to Egypt provided Egyptian writers, musicians, and filmmakers with a wider audience for their work than ever before. It also widened their exposure beyond direct contact with Europe, to include recordings of popular music from the United States and Latin America, as well as films produced in Hollywood and aggressively marketed around the world by American distributors. The content of their work, however, continued to be constructed for local, and regional, audiences. Egyptian filmmakers and composers of film songs had not abandoned their native culture in favor of another but instead adapted aspects of European, North American, and Latin American culture in the service of the development (*taṭwīr*) of their society.

The preference for melodrama, and the incorporation of local comic conventions, along with narrative content that addresses issues that were important to the Egyptian public, clearly distinguish the Egyptian singing film from the Hollywood movie musical. The narrative sources for the melodrama

incorporated into Egyptian singing films were primarily French, including two film adaptations of Alphonse Karr's 1832 novel *Sous les tilleuls* (*Damū`a al-Hubb*, 1935; and *Risālat Gharām*, 1954), as well as a 1955 version of Alexandre Dumas' *La dame aux camélias* (*Ahed al-Hawa*). Nineteenth-century Arab playwrights, such as Salīm al-Naqqāsh, had recognized the power of melodrama to convey moral lessons. This use of the form is most evident early in the Nasser era, when it was combined with a type of 'realism' in films meant to educate the Egyptian public. The comedic elements of the plots, such as stereotypes of foreigners, and word play, were drawn from existing Egyptian dramatic traditions, rather than from foreign sources.

Musical films produced in India during the same period (1932-1962) also often incorporated melodrama as a central structural model. In the case of India, it has been suggested that, like Egyptian film, the source was French literature and drama, filtered through Parsi theater (Vasudevan 1989, 30). In contrast, the musicals of Hollywood's "golden era" (from the 1930s through the 1950s) more commonly utilized a model that can be traced back to the New Comedy tradition of Ancient Greece. This difference in common narrative structure suggests that definitions of the movie musical that focus on this aspect are restrictive in an international context. Further research is needed on the narrative tendencies of musical films throughout the world in order to identify the most popular narrative

models, as well as the indigenous and imported sources for these models. Wider studies of musical narrative performance, such as epic storytelling traditions and forms of musical drama on the stage, could also deepen our understanding of what kinds of stories are most commonly ornamented with musical performance, as well as how songs function within these performances.

The content of the stories told by the makers of Egyptian singing films deal with issues that were being debated by Egyptians during the three decades covered in this study. At the center of these debates was the problem of a modern Egyptian identity. Changing attitudes towards the ideal model of the modern Egyptian man are evident in the personas of Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Farid al-Atrash and Abdel Halim Hafiz. The characters portrayed by Abdel Wahhab in the 1930s and early 1940s were more conservative in their adoption of Western customs and maintained a strong connection to their Egyptian heritage. This conservative cosmopolitanism is visually evident in his signature combination of an elegant Western suit and an Egyptian *tarbush*. The characters portrayed by Farid in the 1940s were less concerned with the dangers of assimilating Western values, and his status as a musician was sometimes presented as unproblematic. The enduring image of Farid is of a nightclub dandy with slicked-back hair and a dinner jacket (see Fig. 1.1). The persona of Abdel Halim signaled a return to more conservative attitudes regarding proper behavior

for an Egyptian man. His customary collegiate sportswear represented the importance of education that is stressed in the plots of his films as well as the seriousness of his characters in comparison to Farid's frivolous entertainer image. It must be noted here that this study focuses primarily on male stars but that the evolving identity of the Egyptian woman is also evident in the films surveyed here, who were often portrayed as more vulnerable to the pitfalls of Westernization.

The writers and directors of Egyptian mid-twentieth-century musical films also represented Egyptian modernity by featuring technology appropriated from the West in mediated performances, such as "Sahirtu" (*Damū`a al-Ḥubb*, 1935). Cultural customs regarding marriage, and the status of individuals (especially musicians and women), however, conflicted with long-standing local values. This problem was addressed by constructing plots that resolved the dramatic tension caused by the contestation of these values. This could be done by the reinforcement of local customs regarding arranged marriage; the legitimization of professional musicians through their composition of "serious" music performed in a prestigious venue; or the redemption of a fallen female character through some kind of sacrifice.

The aspect that appears to be most promising in identifying the movie musical as a transcultural genre is the function of song. The primary function of

entertainment is evident not only in films produced in Hollywood and in Egypt but also in other musical film systems as well as other types of musical narrative performance. Other functions are secondary to this primary purpose and can also be seen as methods of integration.

In Egyptian and Hollywood films, formal performance has been a common way of integrating songs into the plots of musicals. Cast a singer as a singer and you have a reason for them to sing. These performances, however, often have functions beyond entertainment. The grand finales of Farid al-Atrash's films were designed to entertain but also functioned within the plots as the fulfillment of a professional goal. Yet another layer is added when the lyrics of the song are meant to convey a personal or patriotic message. They might be reaching out to a lost love via the media of the radio, as in "Sahirtu" (*Damū`a al-Ḥubb*, 1935), or "Low kunti yom 'ansāk" (*Maw`id Gharām*, 1956). The message may also have been directly or indirectly addressed to a larger Egyptian, or Arab, audience. Farid's celebrations of Arab musical culture are examples of such indirect address, while his performance of "Aḥnā Lehā" in *Wadd`at Ḥubbak* (1956) conveyed a patriotic message directly to the film audience.

Because of the status of musicians in Muslim society in the mid-twentieth century, the use of formal performance as a method of integration could be problematic. Less formal spontaneous performances by an amateur, such as

those found in the films of Abdel Halim Hafiz, were one way to avoid the stigma of being a professional performer. The coerced performance of a singing slave girl might also be excused, but when she enjoyed it too much, as in *Sallāma* (1945), it could bring about her downfall.

The prevalence of formal performance as a method of integration in the Egyptian singing film differs from the norms of Indian film, in which songs are more often integrated into the diegesis and the stars are less often cast as performers. As noted by William O. Beeman, classical Sanskrit theater made no separation between the arts of music, song, and dance. Because Indian audiences are used to the integration of song and dance in narrative performance, the “artificial ‘break’ which is felt in the West when an actor bursts into song is thus less apparent to the Indian viewer “ (Beeman 1988, 11). In addition, the musical is not considered a separate genre in Indian film. Since narrative performance in India is expected to incorporate song and dance, most Indian films feature some singing and dancing.

This difference in the norms of song integration in Egyptian and Indian films suggests that Egyptian singing films do more closely follow the conventions of the Hollywood musical. Another aspect of the entertainment function also links Egyptian and American musical film: the audiences of both bodies of film went to see their favorite singers perform on screen. The audiences for Indian films go to

see their favorite actors lip-synching to the voices of “playback singers.”² Thus, Egyptian singing films were vehicles for musical performers in a way that Indian films are not.

Songs that function within the story world (diegesis) as emotional expressions of some sort are less likely to evoke suspicion because they are not presented as performances. This kind of function can also be found in many forms of musically enhanced narrative performance. It is the more common method of integrating a song into an Indian film and also became more popular in Hollywood in the ‘integrated’ musicals of the late 1940s. Further study of the relationship between stories and the songs that enhance them could help us to understand why these narrative functions of songs have developed. When do we expect a character in a story to sing? Stephen Neale might suggest that in film it is part of the system of expectation related to the genre of the musical (Neale 2000a, 158). This only answers the “why” and not the “when.” Explorations of epic storytelling traditions, and various forms of musical theater, may reveal more similarities in the functions of songs in narrative performance throughout the world. Data gathered in such investigations could also support the argument that

² This convention of using the voice of another performer has been common practice in Indian film since the introduction of the technology that made it possible in the 1930s. The singers, such as Lata Mangeshkar (b. 1929), have become stars in their own rights. While not unknown in the Hollywood and Egyptian film industries, the practice is much less common and the singers are often uncredited.

Egyptian filmmakers were not just imitating these functions from the Hollywood tradition but that they may instead have recognized functions already in use in local narrative performance.

The final aspect of adaptation that has been examined in this study is the use of foreign musical concepts, forms, styles, and even particular works, in the composition of Egyptian film songs. These songs were not designed as imitations but instead were constructed in an effort to modernize Egyptian music through the infusion of foreign elements and to appeal to a cosmopolitan audience who had been exposed to a wide variety of music. The examples of the adaptation of the Argentine *tango canción* form featured in chapters 3, 4, and 5 reveal both characteristics of the borrowed form that enable us to identify its use, and elements of Egyptian musical practice that necessitated changes. In particular, rhythm, instrumentation, and the accompanimental *sol* to *do* cadence were the most prevalent markers of tango usage, while changes in intonation, use of mode, incorporation of improvisation, and overall structure marked the songs as primarily Egyptian in character. In addition, changes in the use of foreign musical elements are also evident in the songs discussed in this study. The use of European and Latin American elements in Abdel Wahhab's early songs was fairly conservative. Increasing Westernization may be perceived in Farid's songs from the 1940s, which more closely imitated the foreign forms he adapted for use

in his compositions. Following the 1952 revolution, the songs sung by Abdel Halim display more conservative uses of Western musical elements. These shifts in musical style parallel the negotiation of Egyptian identity that was depicted in the plots of the films over these three decades.

The musical hybridity evident in Egyptian film song can also be found in the songs featured in Indian films. Alison Arnold (1988, 1991), Peter Manuel (1988), Gregory Booth (2008), and Anna Morcom (2007) have all explored this phenomenon, which, as in Egyptian film songs, includes the use of large ensembles, often featuring Western instruments; limited use of harmony; the adaptation of foreign musical forms and styles; and even the quotation or paraphrase of Western musical pieces. In this case as well the goal of Indian composers was not to imitate Western music, but to enhance their own through the infusion of foreign elements. Indian music director Salil Chaudhuri has gone so far as to suggest that “national integration has happened more in films than in politics and that also with the influence of Western music” (Booth 2008, 263). This comment is reminiscent of Mohammed Abdel Wahhab’s quest to create a form of modern Egyptian music that would appeal not only to the *fellahīn* but also to the *misri effendi*, thus uniting Egypt through music. In both cases the intent is not imitation but instead selective appropriation for the purpose of enhancing their own music. Some of the selected elements, such as instrumentation and

harmony, may result in limitations on the use of local intonational and modal practices. Conversely, foreign forms and melodies may be transformed to adhere to the norms of the indigenous musical system.

Finally, I consider this work the first in a series of case studies on the movie musical as a transcultural genre. While extensive work has been done on Indian film there is still much to explore in musical film systems around the world. I plan to continue my research with a study of the Mexican musical “ranchero” film, as well as other musical films produced in Latin America. It is my hope to contribute to our understanding of the nature of the genre of the movie musical in an international context, as well as to explore what we can learn about musical forms and styles through an analysis of the process of hybridity.

Appendix A: List of Films Viewed

YEAR PREMIERE	TITLE	CREDITS
1933 12/4/33	<i>al-Warda' al-Baiḍa / The White Rose</i>	STARRING: Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahhab DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MELODY & MUSIC – Mohammed 'Abd al-Wahhab LYRICS: Aḥmad Rāmī
1935 2/27/35	<i>Malikat al-Masārah / The Queen of the Stage</i>	STARRING: Badī'a Maṣābnī DIR: Mario Volpi MUSIC: Farid Ghaṣan
1935 10/10/35	<i>al-Ghandūra / The Female Dandy</i>	STARRING: Munīra al-Muhdiyyah DIR – Mario Volpi
1935 12/23/35	<i>Damū'a al-Ḥubb / Tears of Love</i>	STARRING: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Nagāt `Alī DIR: Mohammed Karim MELODY & MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab
1936 2/1/36	<i>Wedād</i>	STARRING: Umm Kulthum DIR: Fritz Kramp (Aḥmad Badrakhān) MUSIC: Benno Bardi [underscore & arrangement]; Riyad al-Sunbati, Zakariyya Ahmed, Mohammed al-Qasabji
1937 1/11/37	<i>Nashīd al-'Amāl / Song of Hope</i>	STARRING: Umm Kulthum DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Riyād al-Sunbātī, Moḥammad al- Qaṣabjī [songs]; Aziz Sadeq ["music"]

1938 1/24/38	<i>Yahya al-Ḥubb / Long Live Love</i>	STARRING: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Layla Murād DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab [“melody and music”]; Aziz Sadeq [“director of orchestra”]
1940 1/15/40	<i>Yom Saʿīd / Happy Day</i>	STARRING: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Samīḥa, Elham Ḥussayn, Faten Hamama DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab [“melody & music”], Aziz Sadeq [“musical director”]
1940 9/29/40	<i>Danānīr</i>	STARRING: Umm Kulthum DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: SONGS - Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, Zakariyyā Aḥmad, Moḥammad al-Qaṣabjī [songs]; Moḥammad Ḥassan al-Shogā`i [underscore & music director]
1941 3/24/41	<i>Intiṣār al-Shabāb /Triumph of Youth</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Asmahan DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC[songs]: Farid al-Atrash
1942 2/1/42	<i>Mamnū`a al-Ḥubb / Forbidden to Love</i>	STARRING: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Sāmīa Gamāl DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab [songs]; Aziz Sadeq [director of music ensemble]
1942 11/16/42	<i>Aḥlām al-Shabāb / Dreams of Youth</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Taḥīa Carioca DIR: Kemāl Selīm MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]; Aziz Sadeq [director of music ensemble]
1942 11/28/42	<i>Aida</i>	STARRING: Umm Kulthum DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, Zakariyyā Aḥmad, Moḥammad al-Qaṣabjī [songs]; Moḥammad Ḥassan al-Shogā`i

		[underscore & arrangement]
1944 3/23/44	<i>Roṣasa f-il-Qalb / A Bullet in the Heart</i>	STARRING: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Rāqīa Ibrāhīm, Faten Hammama DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MUSIC: Mohammad Abdel Wahhab
1944 12/10/44	<i>Gharām wa Intiqām /Love & Revenge</i>	STARRING: Asmahan, Yūsuf Wahbi, Anwar Wagdi DIR: Yūsuf Wahbi MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]; Moḥammad Ḥassan al-Shogā`i
1945 4/9/45	<i>Sallāma</i>	STARRING: Umm Kulthum, Yeḥīa Shahīn DIR: Togo Mizrahi MUSIC: Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, Zakariyyā Aḥmad
1945 10/1/45	<i>Shahir al-`Asil / The Honeymoon</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Madīḥa Yūsūrī, Moḥammad al-Bakkār DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]; Aziz Sadeq
1945 11/19/45	<i>Gamāl wa Dalāl / Gamal and Dalal</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Layla Fawzī DIR: Estephan Rosti MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash
1945 12/31/45	<i>al-Ṣabr Tayeb / Be Patient</i>	STARRING: Taḥīa Carioca / Ibrāhīm Ḥamūda / Maḥmūd al-Malīgī DIR: Hussayn Fawzi
1946 1/28/46	<i>Mā `Adirish / I Can't</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Taḥīa Carioca DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash
1946 2/25/46	<i>Li`bet a- Siṭṭ / The Lady's Puppet</i>	STARRING: Naguīb al-Rīḥānī, Taḥīa Carioca DIR: Wali al-Dīn Sāmeḥ

1947 3/27/47	<i>Habīb al-`Omar / Love of My Life</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Sāmīa Gamāl, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash
1947 12/10/47	<i>Fāṭma</i>	STARRING: Umm Kulthum DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, Zakariyyā Aḥmad, Moḥammad al-Qaṣabjī; `Abd al-Ḥalīm Nuira
1948	<i>Lestu Malākā / I Am Not an Angel</i>	STARRING: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Nūr al-Hoda DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab <i>[print damaged due to a fire]</i>
1948 4/12/48	<i>Bolbol Effendi / Mr. Nightingale</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Ṣabāḥ DIR: Ḥussayn Fawzi MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1949 1/3/49	<i>Aḥibbak Inta / I Love You</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Sāmīa Gamāl, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]; Aziz Sadeq
1949 9/22/49	<i>Ghazal al-Bināt / The Flirtation of Girls</i>	STARRING: Layla Murād, Anwar Wagdi, Naguīb al-Rīḥānī, Mohammed Abdel Wahhab DIR: Anwar Wagdi MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab
1949 9/26/49	<i>Lahalibo</i>	STARRING: Ḥassan Fayīq, Naima Akef DIR: Ḥussayn Fawzi MUSIC: `Alī Farrāj
1949 11/28/49	<i>`Afrīta Hānem / The Genie Lady</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Sāmīa Gamāl, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash

1949	<i>Sībūnī 'Aghani / Let Me Sing</i>	STARRING: Ṣabāḥ, Sa`ad Abdel Wahhab, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Ḥussayn Fawzi MUSIC: Mohammed `Abd al-Wahhab
1950 10/11/50	<i>Yasmine</i>	STARRING: Fayrouz, Anwar Wagdi DIR: Anwar Wagdi
1950	<i>Akher Kedba / The Last Lie</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Sāmīa Gamāl, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1950 2/20/50	<i>Shāṭa al-Gharām / Shore of Love</i>	STARRING: Layla Murād, Ḥussayn Ṣadqī, Taḥīa Carioca DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: `Alī Farrāj, `Azit al-Jāhali
1951 9/3/51	<i>Ta`āla Sallim / Say Hello</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Sāmīa Gamāl, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Ḥelmi Rafla MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1952 2/21/52	<i>Mā Ta`ūlsh le Ḥad/ Don't Tell Anyone</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Nūr al-Hoda, Sāmīa Gamāl DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1952 8/8/52	<i>`Ayza Itgawaz / I Want to Get Married</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Nūr al-Hoda DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1952 12/15/52	<i>Laḥn al-Khalūd / Immortal Song</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Faten Hamama DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1953 3/23/53	<i>Dahab</i>	STARRING: Anwar Wagdi, Fayrouz, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Anwar Wagdi
1953 10/5/53	<i>Laḥn Ḥubbī / Melody of My Love</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Ṣabāḥ DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]

1954 1/11/54	<i>ʿAzīza</i>	STARRING: Naima Akef, Farīd Shawqī DIR – Ḥussayn Fawzi MUSIC: ʿAli Farrāj, Aḥmad Ṣabra, Maḥmūd al-Sharīf
1954 2/22/54	<i>Risālat Gharām / Love Letter</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Mariam Fakhr al-Dīn DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1954 3/1/54	<i>Struggle in the Valley</i>	STARRING: Omar Sharif, Faten Hamama DIR: Youssef Chahine MUSIC – Fūʿād al-Zahiri <i>[non-musical]</i>
1955 2/7/55	<i>ʿAhed al-Hawa / Promise of Love</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Mariam Fakhr al-Dīn DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash
1955 2/17/55	<i>Sigāra wa Kās / A Cigarette & a Glass</i>	STARRING: Sāmīa Gamāl DIR: Niazi Muṣṭafa
1955 3/1/55	<i>Laḥn al-Wafāʾ / The Melody of Loyalty</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz / Shādīa DIR: Ibrāhīm ʿAmāra MUSIC: Moḥammad al-Mūgī, Kamāl al- Ṭawīl [songs]
1955 3/7/55	<i>Ayāmnā al-Ḥelwa / Our Lovely Days</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Omar Sharif, Faten Hamama, Aḥmad Ramzī DIR: Ḥelmi Ḥalīm MUSIC: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Moḥammad al- Mūgī, Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, Maḥmūd al-Sharīf [songs]
1955 10/15/55	<i>Layālī al-Ḥubb / Nights of Love</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, ʿAmāl Farīd, Abdel al-Salām al-Nablusī DIR: Ḥelmi Rafla MUSIC: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī, Maḥmūd al-Sharīf, ʿAzit al-Gahli [songs]

1955 11/6/55	<i>Quṣa Ḥubbī / My Love Story</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Imān DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1955 12/5/55	<i>Ayām wa Layāli / Days & Nights</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Imān, Aḥmad Ramzī DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab
3/7/56	<i>Maw`id Gharām/ A Date</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Faten Hamama DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Moḥammad al-Mūgī, Kamāl al- Ṭawīl, Maḥmūd al-Sharīf [songs]; Andre Ryder
1956 4/30/56	<i>Izzay Ansāk / How Can I Forget You?</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Ṣabāḥ, Rushdi Abaza DIR: Aḥmad Badrakhān MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1956 10/15/56	<i>Dalīla</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Shādīa DIR: Moḥammad Karīm MUSIC: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Moḥammad al- Mūgī, Munīr Murād [songs]; Fū`ād al- Zāhiri
1956 10/29/56	<i>Wadd`at Ḥubbak / Farewell to Your Love</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Shādīa DIR: Youssef Chahine MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash
1956	<i>al-Mufattish al-`Āmm / The Inspector General</i>	STARRING: Taḥīa Carioca, Ismā`īl Yassin DIR: Helmi Rafla
1957 1/21/57	<i>Bināt al-Yom / Girls of Today</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Māgda, Aḥmad Ramzī DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC - Mohammed Abdel Wahhab
1957 4/29/57	<i>Inta Ḥabbībī / You are My Darling</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Shādīa DIR: Youssef Chahine MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]

1957 7/1/57	<i>Tamr Henna</i>	STARRING: Naima Akef, Aḥmad Ramzī, `Abd al-Salām al-Nablusī DIR: Ḥussayn Fawzi
1957 10/7/57	<i>al-Wisāda al-Khāliya / The Empty Pillow</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Lubna `Abd al-`Azīz, Aḥmad Ramzī DIR: Ṣalāḥ Abu Sayf MUSIC: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Moḥammad al- Mūgī, Munīr Murād [songs]; Fū`ād al- Zāhiri
1957 12/22/57	<i>Fati Aḥlāmī / Boy of My Dreams</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz / `Abd al- Salām al-Nablusi DIR: Ḥelmi Rafla SONGS - Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Moḥammad al- Mūgī, Munīr Murād, Baligh Ḥamdī [songs]; Fū`ād al-Zāhiri
1958 1/20/58	<i>Bab al-Hadīd / Cairo Station</i>	STARRING: Youssef Chahine, Hind Rostom DIR: Youssef Chahine
1958 2/1/58	<i>Mālīsh Ghīrak / I Have No One But You</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Mariam Fakhr al-Dīn DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]
1958 10/13/58	<i>Shari`a al-Ḥubb / Street of Love</i>	STARRING Abdel Halim Hafiz, Ṣabāḥ, `Abd al-Salām al-Nablusī DIR: `Az al-Dīn Zulfikār MUSIC: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Moḥammad al- Mūgī, Munīr Murād [songs]; Andre Ryder
1959 3/2/59	<i>Ḥassan wa Na`īma / Hassan & Naima</i>	STARRING: So`ad Ḥosni, Moḥram Fū`ād DIR: Henry Barakat
1959 4/6/59	<i>Ḥikāyat al-Ḥubb / Story of Love</i>	STARRING: Abdel Halim Hafiz, Mariam Fakhr al-Dīn, `Abd al-Salām al-Nablusī DIR: Ḥelmi Ḥalīm MUSIC: Kamāl al-Ṭawīl, Moḥammad al- Mūgī, Munīr Murād [songs]; Andre Ryder

1959 12/3/59	<i>Min Agl Ḥubbī / For the Sake of My Love</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Māgda, Layla Fawzi DIR: Kamāl al-Shaykh MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash [songs]; Andre Ryder [underscore]
1961 1/1/61	<i>Shāta' al-Ḥubb / Shore of Love</i>	STARRING: Farid al-Atrash, Samīra Aḥmad, Taḥīa Carioca DIR: Henry Barakat MUSIC: Farid al-Atrash
1990 8/20/90	<i>Iskandariyya Kamān wa Kamān / Alexandria...Again & Again</i>	STARRING: Youssef Chahine, `Amr `Abd al-Galīl DIR: Youssef Chahine

Appendix B: Number of Films Produced in Egypt from 1927 to 1963

Silent Films

1927-1928	3
1928-1929	4
1929-1930	2
1930-1931	3
1931-1932	2
	TOTAL 14

Sound Films Produced Before the First Film of Studio Misr

1931-1932	3
1932-1933	7
1933-1934	6
1934-1935	6
1935-1936	8
	TOTAL 30

From the Premiere of the First Film of Studio Misr

1935-1936	4
1936-1937	16
1937-1938	15
1938-1939	13
1939-1940	13
1940-1941	11
1941-1942	15
1942-1943	18
1943-1944	19
1944-1945	28
	TOTAL 152

Films After the War

1945-1946	52
1946-1947	59
1947-1948	51
1948-1949	47
1949-1950	42
1950-1951	48
1951-1952	60
	TOTAL 359

Films After the Revolution

1952-1953	63
1953-1954	62
1954-1955	61
1955-1956	41
1956-1957	35
1957-1958	47
1958-1959	60
1959-1960	57
1960-1961	59
1961-1962	45
1962-1963	46
	TOTAL 576

TOTAL SOUND FILMS 1931-1963: 1,117

(Hassan 1995, 228-36)

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