

**FOLK MUSIC OF THE  
MEDITERRANEAN**

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MEDITERRANEAN**

*Selected by Henry Cowell*

*Syria Palestine Egypt Libya Tunis Morocco Spain*  
*Turkey Serbia Greece Albania Italy Sardinia France Spain*



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**Folk Music of the Mediterranean**

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# FOLK MUSIC OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

## Introduction and Notes by HENRY COWELL

The Mediterranean area has divulged more of the secrets of ancient music than any other region in the world. The oldest known musical instruments have been excavated in Chaldea, Ur, Samaria, Phoenicia and other East Mediterranean regions, while the paintings and writings of ancient Egypt give us the earliest comments on musical culture. Many diversified instruments were used -- harp-like and mandolin-like plucked instruments, flute-like and oboe-like blown instruments; and there were drums, cymbals, rattles and other percussion devices. This culture lasted for several thousand years, and penetrated into Greece and Asia Minor, where it mixed with music brought in from Persia and India, and with the singing traditions of the Jews and Arabs. The Greeks, retaining much from Egypt and Persia, added scientific tuning and classification of many modes from many places, and its increased musical culture spread to Rome on one side and Byzantium on the other. Western European musical culture is for the most part a development of Christian music in Italy. The music of the "Orthodox" Catholic churches of Greece, Russia and other eastern European countries is based more largely on the Byzantine (Turkish) wing of Greek music, and has influenced such composers as Rimsky-Korsokov, Stravinsky and Bartok. The early mixture now usually called Arabic music, sometime after being codified by Byzantine scholars in the "dark" ages, spread through all the Mediterranean countries (as well as through all the Islamic cultures farther east). It became the basis of a diversity of folk styles through admixture with existing primitive music. It penetrated some of the more definite cultures, such as the Andalusian of Spain, and was carried back to the North African seaports, where aspects of it still exist in purer form than may now be found in Andalucia.



None of the ancient Mediterranean cultivated music is still performed in its original manner. Egyptian, Jewish and ancient Greek music disappeared, and show up as sporadic influences rather than as an unbroken chain. The Irish harp is an almost exact replica of the ancient Egyptian harp, but the Irish do not play on it any music known to be related to Egypt. The "traditional" cantorial style of the synagogue preserves the Hebrew language but not the Jewish musical scale. It uses the same scales as those in Islamic music, via Byzantine nomenclature. European and American cultivated music uses major, minor and other Greek modes in entirely new ways.

The folk music and even the somewhat primitive music still performed in the Mediterranean countries preserve far more than modern cultivated music the stylistic elements of the old Mediterranean cultures. Differences in ways of singing are hard to describe in words, but will be quite apparent on hearing these recordings. There are yodeling glottal trills from Persia, "graces" (mordants) and four-note trills Arabic-Egyptian in origin, Turkish tonal interruption (a refined bleat), and Jewish vibrant emotional outpouring, all to be found in the Syrian recording in this collection, for example. The Berbers preserve old Arabic vocal style. Central African singing styles, related to old Egypt, are brought north again by Negroes in Morocco. The straight-shooting voices of Italy and France (the same vocal unyieldingness is found in North Spain and Rumania) is thought to be a South European manner predating the Moorish conquest of Spain and the crusades. The shrill fifes of France and Italy, however, are almost identical with those dug up in Asia Minor, said to be over 7000 years old. Ancient China, India, Persia and Egypt all had instruments like guitars. The oboe-like (double-reed) instruments heard in the Algerian and Libyan records are related to bagpipes, whose origin is said to be in India.

The Mediterranean crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe, through its ancient musical cultures and cross-fertilization of them, has cradled the various strong cultures of the last 2000 years -- the Christian (resulting in the church music of Gregory, Palestrina, Bach, etc., and secular opera, chamber and symphonic works from Mozart to Schoenberg), the Jewish and the Islamic. Mediterranean folk music still preserves old elements of these earlier musical cultures, and adds new elements (such as chords, picked up by ear) derived from them.

A'Wach Ritual Photo by George Philcox



Band 1 -- SYRIA: LASBET MA YEOUD EZZAMANE. On this cut is heard a tenor who preserves many Near East vocal traditions. The expressive outpouring of the voice is Hebraic; there are graces (mordants) and trills from old Egypt, "bleats" (of greatest delicacy) characteristic of old Armenia and Asia Minor in general, yodelling glottal trills in a minor third of Persian culture, and on the very first note a swell, in and out, a part of Muezzuen Moslem incantation. The accompanying interludes are provided by an oud (lute), kanun (cembalum) and later on a rebab (bowed strings).

Band 2 -- PALESTINE: A call to Prayer in Arabic, with baritone soloist. The singing style is outpouring and expressive, and with less ornamentation than the secular styles, along the first five notes of the minor scale, and sometimes down to the lowered 7th and back. Such calls are made traditionally with voice alone, but in this cut, which was taken from a broadcast originating from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Jerusalem, typical Near Eastern instruments play the interludes.

Band 3 -- EGYPT: NOUR JANINI. From South Egypt toward the Sudan comes a rollicking, rhythmical song accompanied by clapping sticks. The solo tenor is answered by a men's chorus. The style is Negroid. The accent-punctuated, metrically strict singing is for dancing: 3/4 time, with two 8th notes, before the bar-line, then two 8ths, and a quarter note, on the sticks. The voices ramble about, covering over an octave in range in a 7th-tone scale which seems to come to rest now a major, now a minor keynote.

Band 4 -- LIBYA: GOUNRI OUELD EDDOUNANE. A double reed instrument (oboe-like) is partly muted by being played inside a calabash gourd. The mouthpiece sticks out of one opening and there are others on either side to admit the player's hands. The scale consists of E, F, G, with sometimes an excursion down to a lower B. A tenor joins the tune with many flourishes. Girls come in singing together but not very precisely. The music is in Berber style.

Band 5 -- TUNIS: HAOULI DANCE. A popular-style dance with background of a high drum in accented 8th notes and an oboe melody decorated with tonal arabesques. In front there is a voluptuous-toned woman who sings the same words over and over for rhythmic emphasis, and then continues a melody line, in which she is answered by a group of men. The tones are from G down to D, with sometimes graces of A down to the G, and C up to the D. The singers are Negroes. The subject - love.

Band 6 -- ALGERIA: OULED NAIL DANCE. The "Ouled Nail" dances of North Africa are world-famous. The present cut was recorded in Gardhaia in a native cafe while the dances were in progress. Gardhaia is not in the territory of the Ouled Nail dance, but the girls have come to dance in the cafe to earn money for their dowries, which often takes them to

distant places. One hears the cries and comments of the group as the dance evidently becomes more and more exciting. The music is instrumental-drumming in 8th notes, often irregularly accented and highly syncopated, but basically in 6/8 meter, accompanying a loud, overly-nasal oboe. The scale is normally based on D, and goes up six notes of the major scale, with sometimes a dip down to a C natural. In one spot, however, alternating tones about a minor third apart slither up in a slow glissando, produced by the player lifting his head gradually.

Band 7 -- MOROCCO: A'WACH RITUAL. A ceremonial dance of the High Atlas, which varies slightly from village to village. About 15 drummers are seated near a huge fire at which they repeatedly heat their tambor to raise the pitch. About sixty women dance in a circle around them, in a design sometimes snake-like sometimes star-shaped. The dance is repeated many times during the night; sometimes two girls dance solemnly in the center of the circle. The general pattern is as follows:

While the drummers "warm up" with cascades of beats, a woman tries a melody. The other women may not respond to the first theme, if so she tries another. When the choir takes it up, the song is considered "mature" (Until the song is "matured" the women cover their mouths with their hands lest a djinn enter.) Then starts a measured 4/4 rhythm and the dancing begins. After irregular sections of odd-numbered beats, the rhythm changes to 6/8 and gradually accelerates till the lead drummer rises and twirls his drum aloft. Then there is a shout, a roll of drums and silence. The musical scales consist of the first five notes, sometimes of major, sometimes of minor.

Band 8 -- SPAIN: BAILE DEL CARBONERO. The flamenco gypsies of Southern Spain have a guitar style of their own, with bars, broken chords, and fingered melodies. The chord of E major is tonic, the main contrasting chord is F major, which acts in place of a dominant, and next to this is the chord of G major, which proceeds to F, and the F to an E chord, all with much rapid decoration. This cut begins in that style and there is soon added the percussive sound of a tap dancer. The singers (a man and a woman) finally come in with an old folk tune, the original version of "The Four Insurgent Generals", which became popularized during the Spanish Civil War.

Band 9 -- TURKEY: HEDJASKIAR GAZEL MATTEMSE EYER. The folk music of Turkey combines elements of Byzantine culture, picked up by ear, with those of Islam and Iran. The vocal style is full of graces, with long melismas. The melody is tetracordal - that is, there are two tonal centers a fourth apart, in this case A and the D above. The whole scale is A, Bflat, C#, D, E, F, G#, D. The style is that of vocal rhythm, slow and improves - optional, rather than one of metrical rhythm. The subject is love. Accompaniment is played on the oud (lute).



Band 10 -- SERBIA: KAPETAN CIZMIC. This is typical dance music -- a tambouritza orchestra, with men's chorus. The tambour is, traditionally, a drum-head (skin stretched over a frame) with plucked strings laid over it like a banjo. The Serbian tambouritza is a whole orchestra of such instruments, from a granddad the size of a double bass to a tiny treble half the size of a violin. They are between a banjo and a mandolin in sound. The chorus sings rhythmically for the dance, and there is spoken "calling" of the dance-forms, as in our square dancing.

Band 11 -- GREECE: BEYOGLOU MANE. A northern Greek love song, with introduction and interlude using the favorite single reed wind instrument and plucked strings. The tenor's voice pours forth in the Persian-Arabic-Hebraic style typical of the Eastern Mediterranean, but although it is fluid and there are graces, it is much less florid than Turkish or Syrian singing. Vestiges of the ancient Greek, chromatic tetracords, very rare in folk music outside of Greece and Albania, are found in this song. The key tones are D and the A above; slipping down to the A are C, B, Bflat, A; and slipping down to the D are F, E, Eflat, D. The B and Bflat, and the E and Eflat are not necessarily used one after the other - either one or the other may be employed in a single phrase.

Band 12 -- ALBANIA: KABA ME VIOLI. Albania, as the only predominantly Moslem country of Europe, has preserved older forms of music of the Arabic culture almost lost in Arabia. This record maintains a ground tone, down toward which all melodies gravitate by means of tiny slides of pitch. One cannot say the scale or mode -- the third note slithers from major down through minor enroute to the keynote, and the 6th note of the scale is halfway raised, so that one cannot say whether it is major or minor. This is an instrumental record with an oud (lute) accompanying two violins, which are used in completely Oriental style in imitation of the Persian bowed rebab. Of late years the violin, played between the knees, cello style, has gone entirely Eastern in countries from Albania to India, playing traditional music with absolute accuracy.

Band 13 -- ITALY: DORMI E RIPOSA. An Italian folk song with the south Italian typical waverless voice production, with accordion. It is called "Sleep and Rest", but the energetic vocal stridency belies the title. The final tonic note of the singer is held through sounding of the dominant as well as the tonic chords.

The melody is sounded along the first five notes of the scale, with the fourth sharped -- the Lydian mode. The accordion accompaniment (which would have been on bagpipes originally) uses only two chords -- tonic and dominant ninth, the latter with a "normal" fourth degree of the scale clashing with the singer's modal tone.

Band 14 -- ITALY: TARANTELLA DI LI MAFIUSI. Fife, tambourine and guitar. A tarantella of the outlaws, sicilian style. The fife (fischialetto) plays a shrill dance tune about a quarter-tone above the picked-up-by-ear chords of the guitar. Major scale with tonic and dominant harmonies. It is sprightly, with a set mosaic of square-cornered measure sections in rondó-dance form. No one seems to mind a little matter of fife and guitar being out of tune with each other.

Band 15 -- SARDINIA: BARCA MIA. The island of Sardinia, a cross-roads since ancient times, has been particularly subjected to influences from Italy, Spain and France. In the present record the guitarist plays European chords in a rather timid Spanish style. The tenor sings an old modal melody, not originally intended for chorus, which does not fit particularly well, and sounds strange because some triads contain F sharp, and some F natural, and there is little sense of dominant to tonic. Many triads come with roots a whole tone apart. On first hearing it, it would appear that the guitarist does not know how to find the right chords. This is not the case, however. Such harmonization is traditional in this island.

Band 16 -- FRANCE: WINE DANCE ENTRANCE. In common with Spain and Italy, the Mediterranean district of France has a long tradition of fife and drum-playing. The fife is rather shrill; the same player operates the drum. The basic rhythmic figure, in 3/4, is 2 eighth notes before the bar-line, 2 eighths and a quarter-note after the bar-line. The main melodic figure consists of G, E on the two eighths before the bar, and half notes alternating on D, and C after the bar. There is some variation however, as the complete dance (of which this record gives only the "entrance") is in four parts: 1. entrance; 2. Wine Dance; 3. Circle Dance; and 4. Finale, which is a recapitulation of the entrance music.

Band 17 -- SPAIN: JOTA NAVARRA. The music of Spain is not always of oriental origin. One of the most widely spread dances is the Jota, a rapid 3/4 with the plusing strings moving always from tonic to dominant, and back again, in European style; and the various melodies of the Jota are always built on this chord plan. Typical of nearly all their tunes is the interval of the augmented fourth, from the 7th down to the 4th note of the major scale -- an interval prohibited in early Spanish church music, but especially characteristic of its secular dance. This record is of such a Jota from Navarre, sung by a full throated woman in chest tones, accompanied on mandolin.



Records selected by Henry Cowell  
Editor - Harold Courlander  
Production Director - Moses Asch

#### SOURCE MATERIAL

Syria: Col. 72X(29640) H. Courlander coll.  
Palestine: DM 203, July 7, 1947; rec. for the Hebrew  
U., dept. of Anthropology, Jer.  
Folkways Records coll.  
Egypt: Baidaphon B 094134 H. Cowell coll.  
Libya: Disque "Gramophone" K4203-25-214020  
M. Asch coll.

Tunis: Juana coll.  
Morocco: Juana coll.  
Spain: Vi 32773A M. Asch coll.  
Turkey: Col. 40039F(22625) Harry Smith coll.  
Serbia: Col. 23022-F(105898) H. Cowell coll.  
Greece: Odeon A19026 GAi434 H. Cowell coll.  
Albania: Balkan Record 519B  
Italy: Col. 14750F(113365) M. Asch coll.  
Italy: Vi. 78714A M. Asch coll.  
Sardinia: Odeon GO 199904 Van Dam coll.  
Spain: Odeon 203723(129754) A. Plenn coll.

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