

PRODUCED AND ANNOTATED BY AFIF BULOS

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 8451

# Melodies & Rhythms of Arabic Music



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE



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Instruments: Qanoun, 'Oud, Buzq, Mizmar,  
Nay and Percussion

**SIDE I**

1. Traditional Taqsim on the Qanoun
2. Taqsim on the 'Oud-Andalusian Style
3. Taqsim on the Nay
4. Taqsim on the Buzq
5. Ensemble and Percussion  
Interplay Between the Instruments
6. Percussion on the Rig of some popular  
rhythmical modes (patterns)
7. The Mizmar leading the ensemble in a group of  
folk tunes
8. Folk Tunes of Lebanon-Ensemble  
Ala Dalona, Layya, Ya Ghzayyd

**SIDE II**

1. Taqsim on the Qanoun
2. Taqsim on the 'Oud
3. Lebanese Melodies on the Nay
4. Melodies without words played by  
the Mizmar and Nay with preambles by  
the Buzq, Qanoun and 'Oud
5. Percussion solos on the tablah
6. The Mizmar leading the Ensemble in a group of  
folk tunes

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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# Melodies & Rhythms of Arabic Music

During the halcyon days of the Arab civilization in the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, Arabic music reached a high degree of development and sophistication and played a substantial role in the social, religious and military aspects of life. Concerts of instrumental and vocal music were frequently given in the mansions of the rich and the palaces of the nobility, whose patronage of musicians could be compared to the patronage accorded to musicians by the aristocracy of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Such concerts were also given in the houses of famous singers and musicians. In the tenth century in Damascus, for instance, Azza al-Mailaa, the Um Kulthum of her day, held regular concerts of vocal as well as instrumental music in her house at which the strictest propriety was observed.

Nowadays, however, instrumental concerts are hardly, if ever given. Instrumental music is used principally to accompany a singer or a dancer. And although in the prelude and interlude to a vocal work, the 'oud and the qanoun appear in solo passages, their role remains subordinated to the singer, and they are not heard long enough for listeners to savour their sounds. Nor are there significant recordings of instrumental music available.

The aim of this album is to fill this gap so as to give the listener a chance to become acquainted with the beautiful sounds of the main Arabic instruments, namely:

The 'oud, the qanoun, the buzq, and the nay.

The first three are string instruments and the last is a reed instrument. But the 'oud is the most important and the most widely played.

## The 'OUD

The 'oud from which the lute is descended, is an almond-shaped instrument with a bulging back and a thin wooded sound board, a shortish neck, and a frontal stringhold and lateral pegs to which the double five strings are attached. The strings, which are plucked with a quill, are tuned as follows, starting with the highest: C - G - D - A - G.

## The QANOUN

The qanoun is a flat trapezoid instrument about 10 cms deep, the longer side being about 82 cms in length. In its present shape the qanoun goes back to the tenth century. The famous philosopher and musician, Al Farabi, who lived during that period is credited with its construction in its present shape. As a rule there are 26 truple strings—made of gut or nylon—which are plucked with a plectrum made of horn. The player places it on his lap when he performs, sitting on a chair or on a cushion on the floor.

## The BUZQ

The buzq—not to be confused with the Greek buzouki—is really a long lute with a small pear-shaped body and a very long neck. It has only two wire strings which are plucked with a plectron made of tortoise shell. The quality of the sound is bright and metallic, and in the hands of a versatile performer is very attractive.

## The NAY

The nay, also known as qasbah, is a reed instrument cut from simple cane. The standard size is 90 cms long and about 1.5 cms wide, with two to six finger holes at the lower end. The player holds it almost vertically when he plays. The nay, which is an ancient instrument, comes in various sizes, depend-



ing on the mode in which the music is composed.

Other reed instruments are the *mijwiz* and the *mizmar*, but these are used mainly for playing folk music. The *mijwiz* is a double reed, one reed playing a drone and the other the melody. The *mizmar* has a sunny penetrating sound. In the folk selections in this album both these instruments can be heard.

## TAQSIM

*Taqsim* is a stylized improvisation, played always on a solo instrument. It could be compared to a cadenza, or to the improvisations which virtuoso organists play at the end of a recital on themes suggested by members of the audience.

Each of the four main instruments are heard in this *taqsim* form in different modes (scales) in some of which quarter tones are employed.

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## Other Records by Dr. Afif A. Bulos

- 8815 Love Songs of Lebanon. In Arabic. Oud, etc.
  - 8816 Afif Bulos Sings Songs of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.
  - 8818 Classical Arabic Music, Afif Bulos.
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Dr. Afif A. Bulos

Dr. Afif A. Bulos is at present a Visiting Fellow at Princeton University, on a Fulbright grant, doing research in American Literature and writing a novel. Normally he is Professor of English at Beirut University College, and this happens to be his sabbatical year. Dr. Bulos has a Diploma from the Royal College of Music and a Ph.D. from Harvard University, and is the author of *Handbook of Arabic Music* published in Beirut, and being considered for republication in this country.

In Beirut part of his spare time was occupied in writing musical criticism, choral conducting, and giving lectures on Arabic music, illustrated by some of the leading instrumentalists in Lebanon and by himself as a singer. He is particularly interested in classical Arabic music in which he has done a great deal of research.

Dr. Afif A. Bulos has been decorated with the Order of the Cedars (1974) by the Lebanese Government, and with the M.B.E. Medal by the British Government. He received the latter decoration in a ceremony at Buckingham Palace, a year ago.

In the past year he has lectured on Arabic music at several campuses in the United States, including New York University, Princeton University, The University of Minnesota, the University of Utah, and The University of Michigan.