

FOLK MUSIC OF THE MIDDLE EAST, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

General comments: In the Middle East, Music is a scholarly activity, and thus demanding respect. Thousands of books have been written on the subject by Arabic scholars, starting in the year 900. Yet in many societies music is not necessarily a good thing, as it is feared and loved. Some music is seen as lewd and/or frivolous, and thus to stay away from if you are religious. One exception to this attitude is that of the Sufi sect, a mystical movement in Islam, which considers Music as another way to get to know God.

There are two terms for Music in Persian: Musiqi, which means “music”, and Khandam, which means “to sing, recite, read.” Some sounds have more “musicness” to them, and Khandam has less objectionable music. This includes singing of the Koran, the Muslim holy book, which is always sung by a man, is non-metric (no regular rhythm), and has no instrumental accompaniment.

Being a musician is not necessarily a good thing. Good amateurs are higher in status than professionals, because they decide what to play and improvise instead of being told what to do.

Arabic Music characteristics:

- Melody only, no harmony, played almost at the same time
- Use of pitches and motifs which are then improvised upon
- Use of rhythm modes, like Indian music
- Use of different scale, with different size intervals
- Use of “florid” melismatic melodies, often without words
- Use of certain modes for certain moods and types of pieces

Arabic music influences Spanish Music, which in turn goes to Latin America.

Spanish Music characteristics:

- descending harmony
- alternation of 3 and 2 beats
- “florid” melismatic melodic lines, often without words
- insistence on one note

Examples of popular music in the Caribbean:

In Jamaica: Reggae

Product of Rock, Rhythm/Blues, American and African influences

In Latin America: Salsa

Product of Spanish and African influences

In Brazil: Samba

Product of Portuguese and African influences