

## Sha'bi Music in Egypt...Master or Disaster

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For us Egyptians, music is as important as food and water; we listen to music all the time.

Art has always been a reflection of the society. Many things in Egypt have been affected by the drawbacks in economy, politics and finance; so what's a better way than to see how these drawbacks have affected the Egyptian society, through our Sha'bi songs.

*MUSIC: "Bet Haty Bosa Ya Bet" By Osama Ghali*

That was just a glimpse of how many modern Sha'bi songs are like, which tells a lot about the Egyptian society nowadays. But hold on...let's not get a hold of ourselves.

*Mahallawy: "Sha'bi music is the poor people music...is the low class music...but now it's the common music"*

Wael El Mahallawy, An AUC assistant professor in the arts department and director of institute of music technology, addresses the idea that even though "Sha'bi music is the lower class music it's the common music".

*Mayar: Because the gap between Egypt's rich and poor has grown, and the majority of the people are lower class and struggling to survive, the music has become very descriptive to the problems they face, and also extremely popular with the people. The language has changed to become lower standard, for example, my parents find the everyday words I use with my friends to be very improper, whereas we find them perfectly acceptable. I remember one time I was in the car with my driver and he wanted me to listen to a Sha'bi song that was 'fresh in the market', you can only imagine his surprise when he realized that I not only knew the song but enjoyed it a lot.*

That was Mayar Ibrahim, an AUC alumna, who even though falls in the middle-high class of the society, enjoys Sha'bi music as do many of her friends.

Back to the point that Dr. Mahallawy was talking about, the Egyptian society has transformed dramatically. During the 1970's Egypt was something else, it was a land full of opportunity and prosperity, Egyptians were more relaxed and if I can say more proper. Dr.Saed Sadek, an AUC political sociology professor, talks about the Golden Era of Egyptian music.

*Sadek: The older ones are unforgettable, Mohamed Abdel Moteleb, Saken fy hay el sayeda w habibi saken fel Hussein (I live in hay el sayeda, and my lover lives in Hussein00)*

*MUSIC: "Saken Fy Hay El Sayeda" By: Mohamed Abd el moteleb*

*Sadek: The lyrics continue up till today, even the performance they had presence*

*MUSIC: "Saken Fy Hay El Sayeda" By: Mohamed Abd el moteleb*

*Mahallawy: The music is a mirror for the people, ok, but by time it affects the society if you have not organized music, not structured music, it's like anybody can just work as music composer, if you have computer, if you have software, you can make something like collage, editing, get some loops*

*Sadek: Sound technology, voice technology, allowed many singers to appear, even if they have no talent. I can play with your voice and you can become like Edith Piaff*

*MUSIC: No regrets By: Edith Piaff*

*Sadek: Those guys are maybe sitting in a toilet, they're singing, and they record, and play with technology, and voila, mass production of nonsense and they add special lyrics to appeal to the consumers. Egyptians today are more frustrated, their language is more vulgar, than in the past. If you look at the Egyptian media today, the general discourse is vulgar. Why Bassem Youssef and others are taken to court or jail, you'll find everyone, even religious channels are very vulgar.*

The production of cassette tapes and boom boxes during the 1970's paved the way for self production; this cassette culture gave birth to punk music in England, Rai music in Algeria and Sha'bi music in Egypt. With the death of Gamal Abd El Nasser the Egyptian doors were open to the west and cassette tapes and boom boxes were present in many Egyptian houses.

*MUSIC: "El Sah Edah Emboo" By Ahmed Adaweya*

Sha'bi music started to appear on YouTube in 2007 and it rooted in the slums...but why is it such a big deal?

*SADEK "Music is very important in our lives, it releases stress, tension in life, it changes mood, it breaks the monotony of life..."*

*MUSIC: (overlay) "Darbouka" By: Unknown*

*SADEK "it makes you tolerate what's happening, it makes you reflect especially if the lyrics relate to emotional issues, family issues, friendship, economic conditions, difficulties in living in this country. For example if you remember the popular singer Ahmed Adaweya's-Zahma ya donya Zahma"*

*MUSIC:"Zahma ya donya Zahma" By: Ahmed Adaweya*

That was a song talking about how crowded the streets of Cairo were; the infamous bad traffic in Egypt only piles on top of other frustrating issues such as the lack of social equality, economical stability and many other problems that the Egyptian society suffers from.

*MUSIC: "Ah Ya Donya" By: Sonya*

*SADEK: "It puts you in a blues mood, and sometimes even relive you from what's happening "you're not alone" "you're not the only suffering" "You listen to my story, I'll tell you all about it." (23:00)*

*"It fills a need in society and people want it because it reflects among, it mellows what is going on in the country, but that's as far as it goes." (23:26)*

*Mayar: Even though Sha'bi music is the lower class, we cannot deny that it has become very popular amongst the Egyptian streets, even for the middle and high classes. The music has a certain feel that appeals to the people, and that alone says a lot about the Egyptian culture and how it has changed over the past 30 years. Personally, when I attend weddings or parties, my friends and I all go crazy when a Sha'bi song comes on. It has a flavor, the western music doesn't have. It's usually the segment of the night we all wait for, to sing and belly dance to.*

As does everything, Sha'bi music has its pros and cons. Because of its catchy rhythm and upbeat feel Egyptians resort to it for a good time and as a way to express themselves, when nothing else seems doable. Egyptians, in general, tend to find the fun in every situation and are known to make jokes even during their hardest times. Thus, Sha'bi music has become their way to get their voices out in the streets and heard. Yes, the language has become very vulgar and that has changed the overall standard of the Egyptian society, but you cannot take it away from the people, they may have no money, no shelter, and live with no hope, but to take away their voice and the way they express themselves will be their death.

Credits: I would like to thank my interviewees, Dr. Sadek, Dr. Fahmy, Dr. Mahallawy and Mayar Ibrahim. Music in this documentary is as follows...Haty Bosa Ya Bet, No Regrets by Edith Piaff, Hay El Sayeda by Mohamed Abd El Moteleb, Darbouka by unknown artist, El Sah Edah Embo, Zahma ya donya by Ahmed Adaweya.

(To Be continued)