

Script: “Electro Chaabi Music: Liberating or Just Trendy?”

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The aim of this audio documentary is to highlight the controversy that has been caused by the recent boom and popularity of the electro-Chaabi music in Egypt: whether it liberates people from the many restrictions they face in their lives or it is just trendy and short termed. This documentary presents the two sides of the issue at stake.

*Music: Fade-in Saken Fe Hayy El Saydah by Mohamed Abdel Mottaleb*

Wondering what this is?

*Music: Fade-out Saken Fe Hayy El Saydah by Mohamed Abdel Mottaleb*

This is actually how Chaabi music all started in Egypt. It was called a “*Mawal*.”

*Music: Fade-in Ya Azz El Habayeb by Karem Mahmoud*

It then evolved in what was called the “Adawiyya era” in the 1970s up to the 90s.

*Music: Fad-in Zahma Ya dunia Zahma*

Chaabi music was being produced by the working class. It was to voice out their struggles and problems in life. And as you can hear, the language used was very dynamic yet simple.

*Music: Fade-out Zahma ya donia zahma*

Now, one wonders how this Chaabi music was produced back then.

*Shahir Nakhlah (SHN): “They they, they used to sit together, come up with an idea, (aa) a couple of words, a couple of phrases and then someone came up with (a) the melody, and we go into the studio all together the whole band and the singer and everybody, and record the song, make a couple of rehearsal, rehearsals and record the song, and it took one hour to have a full production ready.” (:26)*

Shahir Nakhlah is a live sound engineer who has been working in the industry of music technology for about 30 years now. It seems that the production process was not very exhaustive; it was rather simple.

*SHN: “No, it didn’t cost lots of money; it was a group of people doing some project together. And this is actually how it started. It was not the kind of production where you need a big producer to stand, to spend a big amount of money to pay for high standard musicians, high-tech recording studios and so on.” (00:30)*

But is this what we call Chaabi music nowadays?

*Music: Fade-in Dalla’ Banat by Oka we Ortega*

Definitely not...

*Music: Dalla’ Banat by Oka we Ortega*

This is what we, the young generation, know as Chaabi music, the electro chaabi music or what is locally known as the “*Mahraganat songs.*”

Generally speaking, almost all Egyptians of different age groups and across all socioeconomic classes, listen to this electro Chaabi music, unlike in the past century it was only for and by the working class.

*Music: Fade-out Dalla' Banat by Oka we Ortega*

What has happened that caused such a wide boom and a huge popularity of the Chaabi music?

*SHN: "The, the Chaabi took another (aa) track, in, in the production side and in even in , even in the vocabulary used in teh songs and the type of music used (aa)... it is going towards the electronic music production more than the old acoustic (aa) live instruments." (:29)*

Based on what Nakhlah said: to produce an electro Chaabi music now, all you need is a laptop, a microphone, a sound card that costs less than a thousand pounds. With these simple equipment you are ready to produce a full album at your home.

*Music: Fade-in DJ Mix by Amr Hahha*

But producers of electro Chaabi might have a different say on this matter.

*Karim Omar Hassan (KH): "It is actually, it is very hard to produce a song while in you, you are sitting in a room." (:05)*

That was Karim Omar Hassan, a producer of electro Chaabi music. Hassan has been in the industry for 6 years now. He argues that producing a song nowadays is technically challenging; it demands lots of skill, even though one can still produce it at home.

*KH: "Many instruments have been added... they have been used, have been using western, western instruments too and syntheses. That's why they sometimes called electro Chaabi. It also uses ethnic instruments like Rabab and Tabla." (:17)*

*Nat. Sounds of Rebaba and Arabic Drums*

But, the question now is: what could drive a political science student at the American University in Cairo to work in the industry of Chaabi music and to be that committed?

*KH: "I wanted to make a music that is just for us." (:05)*

*Music: Fade-in Demo Production by Karim Omar Hassan*

*KH: "because I found this music as an icon for us, just ourselves." (:05)*

Unlike what Hassan thinks, here is what Nakhlah says about electro-Chaabi music:

*SHN: "I myself don't consider this as music..." (:04)*

Why?

*SHN: "at all. This is not music creation; it's (a)." (:04)*

It's amateur work!

*SHN: "Yeah, it's amateur work" (:02)*

Nakhlah argues that the Mahraganat songs are neither iconic nor authentic because producers depend heavily on electronically manipulating the voice of the singers. He adds that the wide use of this technique is a total distortion to the whole genre of Chaabi music.

*Music: Fade-in Farttakah by Etehad El Qemmah*

Nakhlah then concludes that this music is only trendy and will vanish very soon because it does not regenerate itself. It is only repetitive. Yet, there is another kind of Chaabi music that Nakhlah listens to. he calls it "the real Chaabi music."

*Music: Fade-in Nefse ya A'alam by Abdel Basset Hammoudah*

*SHN: "Abdel Basset Hammoudah is the mayor, el omdah, of the Chaabi music, Shaa'ban Abdel Reheem is a Chaabi performer. Those are the real Chaabi performances." (:12)*

On the other hand, here is why people listen to the electro Chaabi music.

*Rana Gabr (RG): "I love Chaabi music, I'm personally excited about it. I listen to them because they, they're fun." (00:08)*

*Music: DJ Mix by Yehia El Tonnisee*

Rana Gabr is an economics Junior at AUC. She was also the organizer of the “Sha3aby Festival” that was recently held in the university by the student club called “Musicana.”

Rana believes that the Chaabi music is persistent and is not going to vanish any time soon:

*RG: “Because Chaabi is the peak now; everybody listens to it.” (:03)*

Gabr sees the impact of electro-Chaabi music in the society to be very thorough, and not superficial at all.

*RG: “Every class in Egypt listens to Chaabi, even here at AUC.” (:05)*

*Music: DJ Mix by Yehia El Tonnisee*

*RG: “It created some sort of relation between classes.” (:04)*

Gabr also thinks that the current popularity and prevalence of electro Chaabi music among almost all socioeconomic classes is a sign that these classes are becoming more accepting to each other.

*RG: “I don’t see it as a decline as much as people that are very miserable in their lives are trying to have fun.” (:07)*

And in response to Helmy Bakr, an Egyptian music critic who calls electro Chaabi music a “societal decline” to the general music taste of the population, Hassan defends by saying:

*KH: "It gave freedom to people to sing whatever they like." (:04)*

Speaking of freedom, Gabr believes that the people of the working class produce such music as a way to liberate themselves from the burdens and difficulties of their own lives.

*RG: "It's made for the working class. Whether you listen to it or not does not make a difference for the working class because they listen to it, they can relate to it, love it because they also have fun." (:15)*

Yet, she argues that having meaningful lyrics is not a necessary condition for the success of such music.

*Music: DJ Mix by Yehia El Tonnisee*

Hassan agrees with this too. He says that we don't have to benefit from listening to electro-Chaabi songs.

*KH: "No one actually benefits someone. And you don't actually listen to music so that you can benefit something." (:04)*

*Music: Fade-out DJ Mix by Yehia El Tonnisee*

*KH: "You don't really expect something out of this music. It's just a music." (:04)*

*Fade-in Nat. Sound of The Chaabi Festival at AUC.*

Tickets were sold out. The Chaabi festival recently held at AUC was packed up with people, mostly teenagers and school kids. With this huge number of attendees, with this huge popularity of the genre, it doesn't seem to be ending very soon, as some critics claim. It is suggested, instead, that the impact of such music is rather deep in the Egyptian society than to be "just trendy." While this controversy is growing, the electro-Chaabi music is yet spreading and flourishing.

*Music: Fade-in DJ Mix Amr Hahha.*

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