

A LECTURE*
BY BARBARA SOLIS
GIVEN IN PHILADELPHIA
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* The lecture was followed by a short recital of Spanish music for the piano which included the pieces used for demonstration throughout the lecture.
The recital was given by *Barbara Solis*.



THE ARABIAN MELODIC INFLUENCE ON THE SOUND OF SPANISH MUSIC

INTRODUCTION

That the Arabian musical sciences did influence Western European music is a fact even though there has been little if anything done to demonstrate the extent and acceptance of the Arabian Musical Legacy to Europe. And that Spain was the gateway for the Arabian Musical Legacy to Europe is also a fact about which little has been done. ¹

One of three major influences of the Arabian Musical Legacy to Europe was that of instruments. The Arabian trumpet, for example, was adopted by the Europeans during the Middle Ages. Because of the Arabian trumpet, European composers were able to employ a special device in their music called a fanfare. The word fanfare itself, comes from the Arabic plural "anfar" and means a "flourish of trumpets" ².

Two very early European reed instruments, the shawm and the dulcaina originated from Arabic instruments, the zamr and the al-surnay. The dulcaina is still played in Spain today. ³ The Arabian qanun evolved to become the European canon.

Both the hydraulic and pneumatic organs were constructed by the Arabs between the 9th and 12th centuries. Interest in the organ revived during the Middle Ages and it became an important instrument for such great European Baroque composers as Bach, Buxtehude and Handel.

The entire family of bowed stringed instruments was introduced to Europe by the Arabs. The strings later became the "heart" of the European classical symphony orchestra whose masters of composition were Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

A second major influence of the Arabian Musical Legacy to Europe was that of gloss or ornamentation. Up until the introduction of gloss, European Gregorian melody or plainchant as it was sometimes called, consisted of notes of equal value. Through the Arabian contact, plainchant could be ornamented and the European theoretical procedure came to be known as discant.

Compound gloss was also introduced to Europe by the Arabs and in time, it evolved to become an important part of the foundation of the Western European harmonic system.

A third major influence of the Arabian Musical Legacy to Europe was that of mensural music. Mensural, meaning organized or measured music, was alien to pure Arabic music up until about the 4th century when the Arabs came into contact with Greek theories.

With the Arabic domination of Spain, mensural music began to be taught at the University of Cordoba and other music schools throughout al-Andaluz. Students and scholars who came to Spain to visit and to study, carried these theories back with them to Europe and they later came to be known in Europe as organum. Mensural music and gloss were two of the greatest innovations of 12th century European music and both were of Arabic origin.

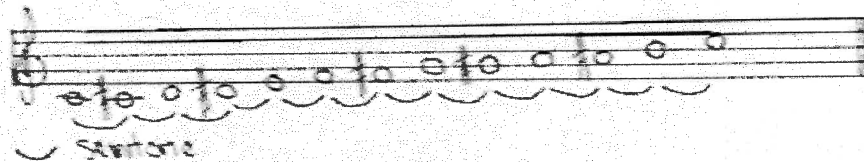
Part of the Arabian Musical Legacy to Europe included a very special legacy to Spain called the muwashshah. The muwashshah was the new creation of a pure Arabic poetic form which reflected the genius of the Arab poets who in turn, had come into contact with and been influenced by the astonishing beauty and wealth of Spain. ⁴

Having had such a rich musical legacy bequeathed to Europe and Spain the question then is why has there been so little done to demonstrate its extent and acceptance. Part of the problem is the Arabian music itself and part of the problem is the European attitude towards Arabic music.

The problems of course are many. But one problem, for example, is the Arabian Scale. It is not tempered, that is to say, it is not based on an equal semitone system. The Arabian scale consists of 24 quarter tones to the interval of an octave and therefore sounds out of tune to European ears.

However, the same problem exists for the Arabic listener. The European scale is tempered, that is to say, it is based on an equal semitone system and has in fact, 12 semitones to the interval of an octave. Consequently, because all European music and European instruments are tuned to this equidistant semitone system, it sounds out of tune to Arabian ears.

Fig. 1 Equidistant Semitone System



The major difference is attitude. In the words of the great Ikhwan al-Safa (10th century), "it is not a question of the Arabs being right and all other peoples wrong, it is a matter of adopting the habit of listening in order to appreciate and accept the aesthetic differences of one another's culture." ⁵

THE ARABIAN MELODIC INFLUENCE ON THE SOUND OF SPANISH MUSIC

As a professional performer and teacher of many years, one of the questions I have most often been asked about Spanish music is why it sounds the way it does. It is as if once one has crossed the Pyrennees, the music and the dance changes and is vastly different from that of the rest of Europe.

The purpose of this afternoon's lecture will be to try in part to answer that question. In order to do so, we shall look at one of the rich legacies left to Spain by the Arabs, that of music and taking but one element, although there are many, that of melody, we shall trace a brief history of it and explore some of the specific characteristics which may provide clues for the Arabian melodic influence on the sound of Spanish music.

One of three major influences on Spanish music has been its rich Arabian legacy. This is not surprising since in 710 A.D., the Berbers first landed in Spain. Some 9 centuries later, the last remnants of this exotic culture departed from the Iberian Peninsula. But for 7 of those 9 centuries, the Arabs dominated two-thirds of Spain. Every aspect of its culture was enhanced and in keeping with the invaders policies, nothing was suppressed or destroyed, rather, the elements of both cultures were assimilated and integrated. Music in particular, benefitted greatly from two major events.

The first event was the bringing of various musical treatises to Spain. Among these were the writings of the great Arabic theorist al-Farabi. The second event was the coming to Cordoba of the famous Arabic musician, Ziryab. It was Ziryab who added a 5th string to the lute which later evolved to become the Spanish guitar.

The Spanish guitar had a profound influence on Spanish keyboard music and also on European keyboard music, especially the Spanish sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti. It was Ziryab who also brought with him to Spain, certain oriental influences which in turn were to influence the sound of Spanish music, particularly those passages relating to the Ancient Music of Andalusia or cante jondo.

The Arabian melodic influence on the sound of Spanish music was not so much a form of construction as it was a scheme of decoration. This scheme of decoration may be likened to that of mudejar or mudejan architecture in which certain Christian elements, such as the Cross, were adorned with certain Arabic elements, such as plants, leaves or tendrils.⁶ And because this scheme of decoration possessed specific characteristics, its adornment affected the sound but did not necessarily alter the form or construction of the music with which it came into contact. Before exploring some of the specific characteristics, let us look at a brief history of Arabian melody.

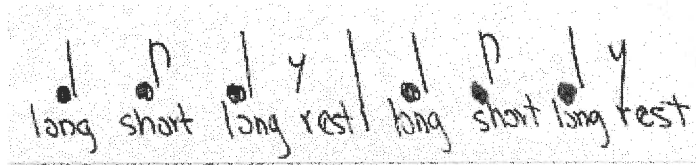
HISTORY OF ARABIAN MELODY

Arabian melody had its roots in a primitive song form called the *huda* or *hide*. Known as the Caravan Song, the *huda* was really more of a chant which consisted of the monotonous repetition of one tone and was sung to the camels as they made their long night journeys across the darkened desert. It was thought that by chanting the *huda* to the animals, this would alleviate the heavy burdens the animals had to carry.

The origin of the *huda* has been traced to Mudar ibn Nizar ibn Ma'add.⁷ Its primitive meter was based on the ancient Arabic poetic form of the *rajaz* which consisted of short, rhyming lines such as,

"ye hedia, ye hedia .
ye yeda, ye yeda." ⁸

Fig. 2 Rajaz Meter

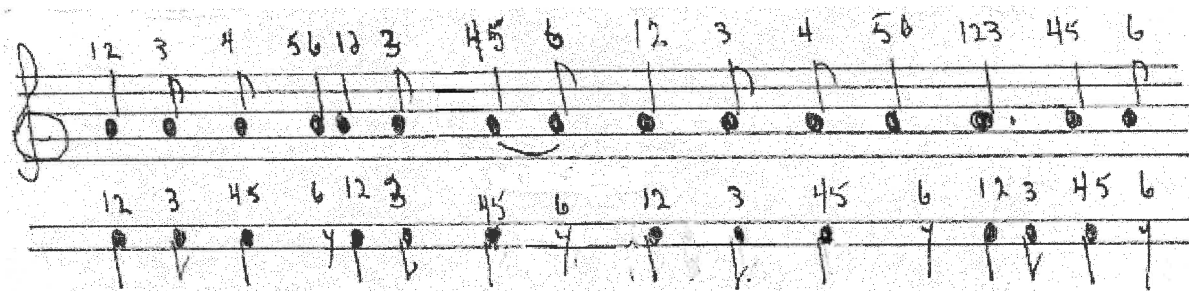


The beat of the *huda* corresponded to the lifting and lowering of the camel's feet. The *huda* did not have a melody or organized rhythm.

From the *huda* came the *nasb* which was really an improved *huda*. Like the *huda*, its meter was also based on the ancient Arabic poetic form of the *rajaz*. The *nasb* dates back to the 6th century and Pre-Islamic poets have connected the *nasb* with the encircling of the Sacrificial Stone dedicated to the goddess Al-Lat by young virgin maidens. The encircling took the form of a dance accompanied by the *nasb*.⁹ The *nasb* did not have a melody or organized rhythm and its beat corresponded to the steps of the dance.

Following the *nasb* in the history of Arabian melody came the *ghina murtajal*. The early *ghina* maintained the simple *rajaz* meter but it was soon discovered that this meter lent itself to improvisation. It was about this time that the *qadib* was introduced. The *qadib* was a sort of wand or stick which was hit on the ground for the purposes of keeping the improvised chant in time with the *rajaz* meter.

Fig. 3 Improvised Chant (top) and Rajaz Meter (bottom)



The *ghina murtajal* also did not have a rhythm, that is to say an organized occurrence to the flow of the tones and its chant-like melody savoured strongly of Paganism.¹⁰

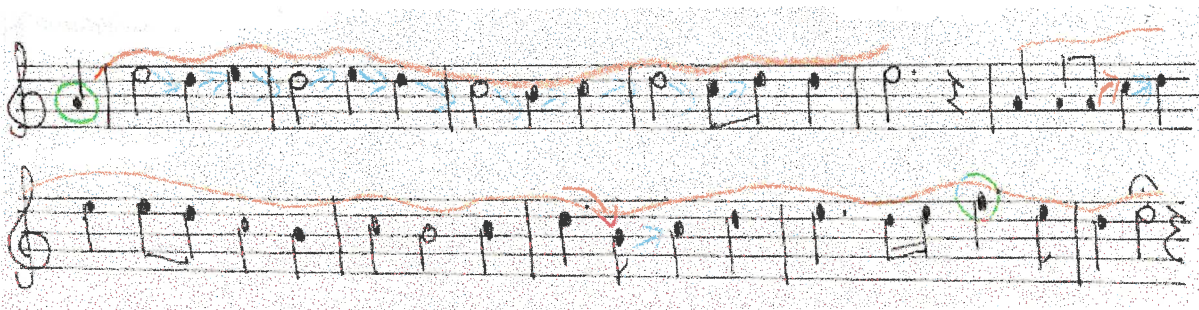
It was interesting to note that in some of the older Andalusian villages of Spain which I visited on my travels, where pure flamenco is still practiced, a stick or cane was hit on the ground for the same purposes, to keep the untrained singers and guitar players in time with the beat. It was thought that the *qadib* was introduced to Spain about the 8th century by the Arabs.

THE SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ARABIAN MELODY WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED THE SOUND OF SPANISH MUSIC

A distinguishing characteristic of Arabian melody which has profoundly influenced the sound of Spanish music is the melodic line itself. The melodic line has 4 outstanding qualities which distinguish it as a specific characteristic.

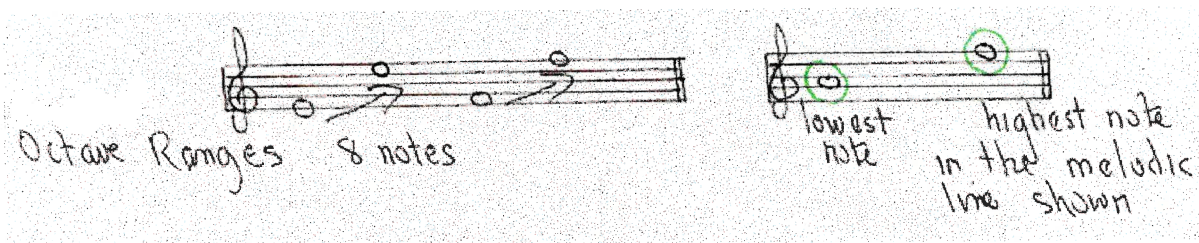
Firstly, it exhibits a sinuous, undulating, provocative quality which tends to make its aspect rather more serpentine as compared to the European melodic line which tends to be horizontal, wavy, arched or angled.

Fig. 6 Arabian Melodic Line (see Legend on page 9 for symbology)



Secondly, the range of the Arabian melodic line is narrow; that is to say that the total distance between the lowest, and highest note of the line does not exceed the interval of an octave or 8 notes.

Fig. 7 Range (see Legend on page 9 for symbology)



Thirdly, its movement is nearly always by step or by small leap.

Fig. 8 Movement of the Melodic Line by Step (see Legend on page 9 for symbology)

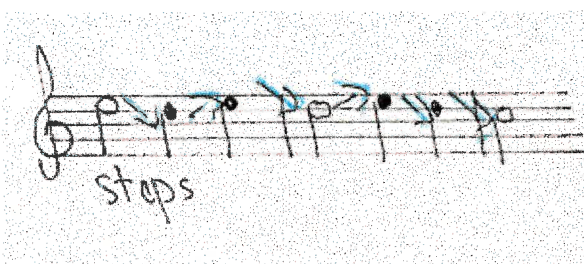
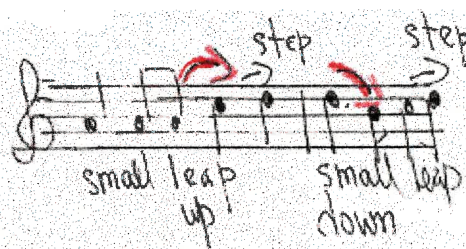
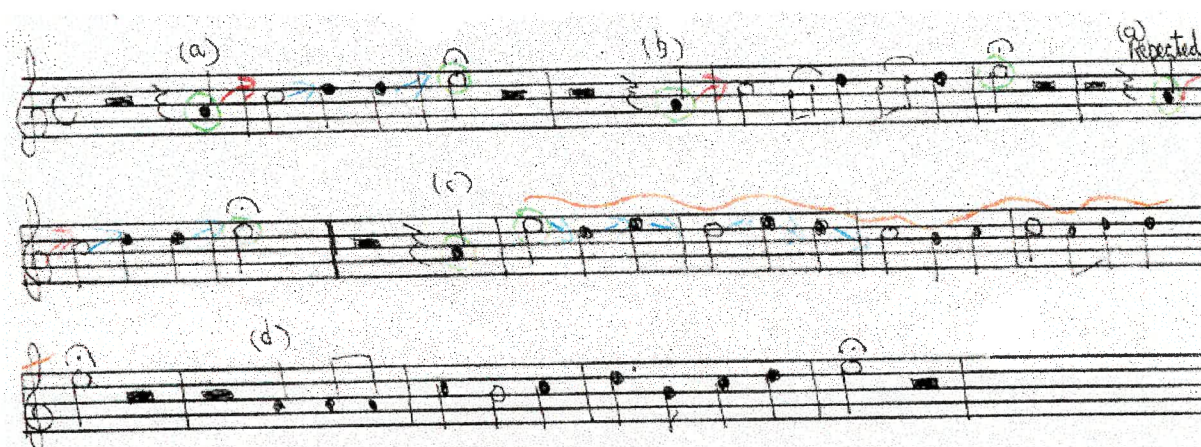


Fig. 9 Movement of the Melodic Line by Leap (see Legend on page 9 for symbology)



Fourthly, the Arabian melodic line is characterized by the special way in which it is phrased or expressed. The following example of a melodic line is from an old Egyptian Prayer.

Fig. 10 Egyptian Prayer (see Legend on page 9 for symbology)¹⁵



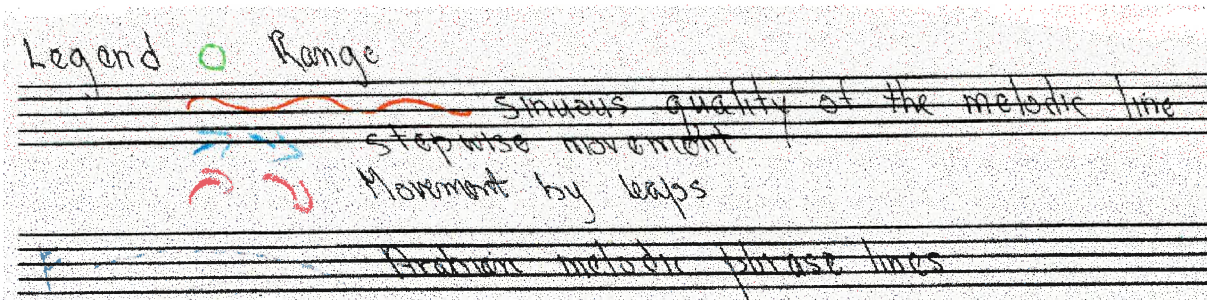
In this example at (c) the sinuous, undulating, provocative quality of the line may be observed. The range also at (a), (b) and (c) does not exceed 5 notes, the lowest note being the lah or "A" and the highest note being the mi or "E". In all 3 phrases, the movement is either by small leap or step with the exception of the two notes which open phrase (c). The 4th characteristic will be discussed in a moment.

In the second example (Fig. 11) which comes from Espana by Isaac Albeniz, although the line ascends somewhat at an angle, it is broken by a sinuous-like quality near the top and as it begins its descent, reflects the influence of the Arabian melodic line. Like the Arabian melodic line, its range does not exceed the octave which is in fact, 7 notes and its movement also corresponds to the Arabian melodic line proceeding after the opening two notes by step to the top of the line. At the top of the line, there is a small leap downward, a step upward and the line begins its descent by step.

Fig. 11 *Espana* (see Legend below for symbology)



Legend of symbology for figures 6 to 11



The idea of the special phrasing which is the 4th outstanding characteristic of the Arabian melodic line, may be illustrated if one thinks of seaweed being pushed and pulled gently by the current under the water. The movement is not rigid and is unpredictable, guided by the current.

In the interpolation of such a phrase, it is important to think of the Arabian singer who may slide the voice towards the higher note of the range and hold the sound for an instant, as if pulling the note out. This nuance in Spanish music is known as the "flexible" and is one of the most difficult for the majority of Western European musicians (North America included) to interpret since the Western structure of phrasing is more rigid, whereas Arabian music is totally improvisational in its melodic content. The flexible will not always occur at the same point, that is to say it will not always be the highest note of the range which will receive the flexible. It is therefore essential to have listened to Arabian music in order to become familiar with this particular quality. Ultimately it is an aesthetic difference with respect to the interpretation.

Fig. 12 *The Flexible*



THE UNISON

A further specific characteristic of the Arabian melodic line which has greatly influenced the sound of Spanish music was that of the unison. Unison first appeared in the Pre-islamic song form of psalming. As previously mentioned, the singer varied and embroidered the melody while the instrumentalist played the same melody at the unison at a distance of an interval of an octave (8 notes), unadorned.

The unison could appear at the unison of one octave or at a distance of two octaves. Example (a) shows the unison at the octave while example (b) shows the influence of the unison at the distance of two octaves.

Fig. 13 *Rapsodia Espanola by Isaac Albeniz - The Unison*

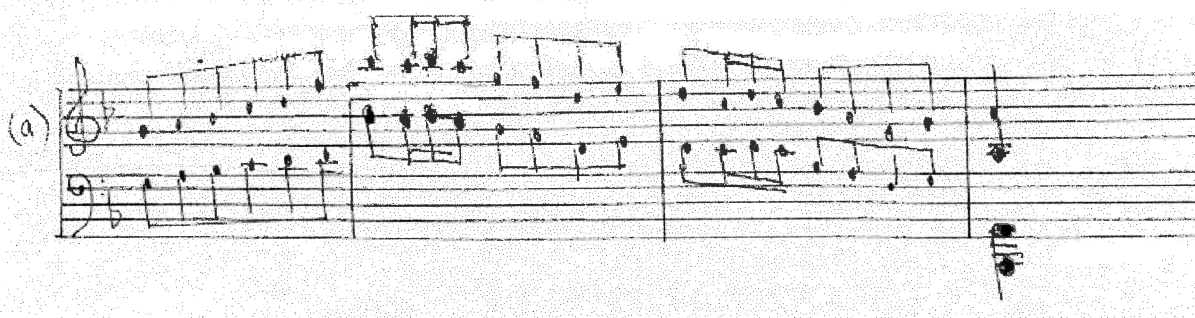
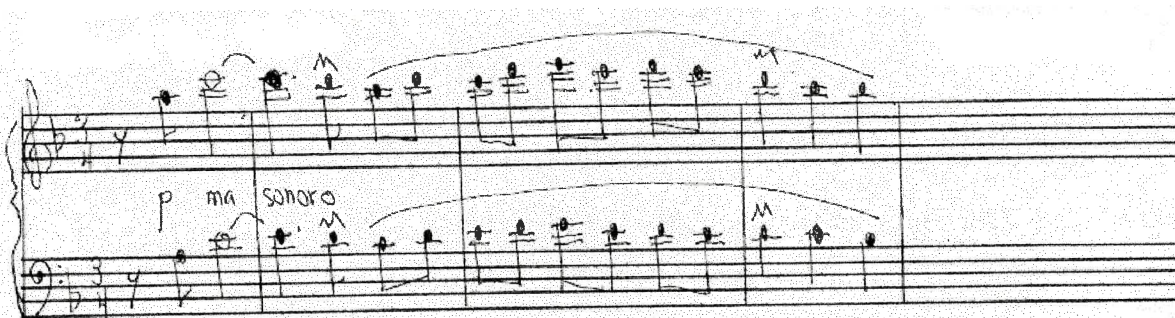


Fig. 14 *Espana by Isaac Albeniz - Unison at Two Octaves*

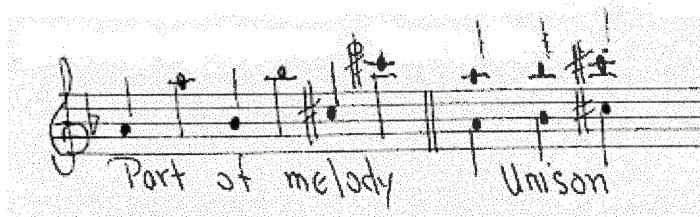


The unison in Arabian melody was a unique quality which set the sound of Spanish music apart from the music of Western Europe.

THE OCTAVE

Yet another characteristic of Arabian melody which influenced the sound of Spanish music was that of the interval of the octave. The importance of the octave as part of Arabian melody and at the unison continued from Pre-islamic times until Abbasid period when it took on its new role of gloss or ornamentation.

Fig. 15 The Octave



While European theorists categorized the octave as a unison, it was not regarded as such by Arabic theorists. Rather, they considered the interval of the octave to be the total distance or fullest extension between its lowest note, the sajah and its highest note, the siyyah.¹⁶ The octave was also considered to be the most important distance between two melody notes and this prominence continued as well for the octave from Pre-islamic times up until the Abbasid period. The octave gave a particular colour to the melodic line and in Spanish music it tends to give a dance-like quality associated with the leap to the line. Here are two examples of the octave as part of the melodic line in Spanish music.

Fig. 16 Seguidillas by Isaac Albeniz - The Octave in Melody



Fig. 17 Spanish Dance #4 by Granados - The Octave in Melody



THE INTERVAL OF THE FIFTH

Another interval found in Arabian melody that has greatly influenced the sound of Spanish music was the 5th. It also, like the octave, played a prominent role in the Arabian melodic line from Preislamic times until the Abbasid period, when it too, took on the new role of gloss. The interval of the 5th had an exotic quality which imbued the sound of Spanish music with mystery and intoxication.

Fig. 18 The Egyptian Prayer - The Melodic Range Outlined in Interval of the Fifth

Note how the range in the open bar is outlined in a 5th and at (c) the line opens with a 5th.

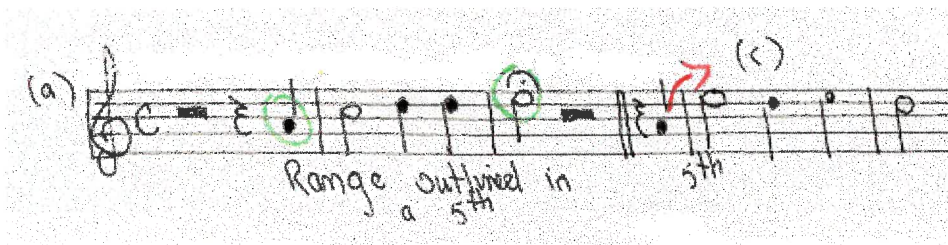


Fig. 19 Espana by Isaac Albeniz - Interval of the Fifth

A multi-staff musical score for guitar. The top two staves are the right hand (treble and bass clefs) and the bottom staff is the left hand (treble clef). The score is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat. Red brackets and arrows highlight several instances of the interval of a fifth. Labels include "Bar 1", "Bar 5", "Bar 17", and "Melodic 5th".

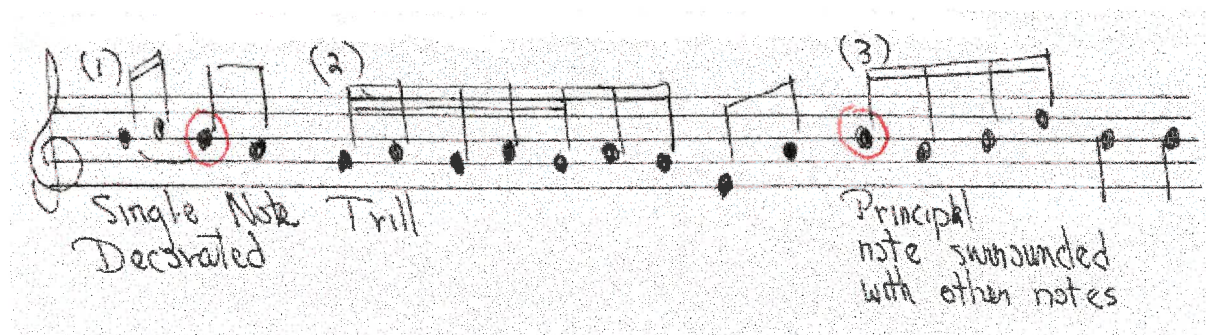
Note the influences of the 5th at the opening bar and again at Bar 5 where the guitar falseta begins, the whole section is wreathed in 5ths. Again, in the L.H. the guitar interlude at Bar 17 opens with a 5th and the entire section except for the last bar begins with a 5th at every bar. The piece ends with a 5th.

GLOSS OR ORNAMENTATION IN THE ARABIAN MELODIC LINE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE SOUND OF SPANISH MUSIC

A most outstanding characteristic of Arabian melody was its rich ornamentation. Known as gloss, it was introduced in the Pre-Islamic period and was called *zawa'id*.¹⁷ The figuration or decoration of the period was accomplished in 3 ways:

1. by ornamenting a single note,
2. by a trill which is the fast or slow alternation between two notes,
3. by a turn which was the surrounding of the principal note with other notes in an arabesque-like figure.¹⁸

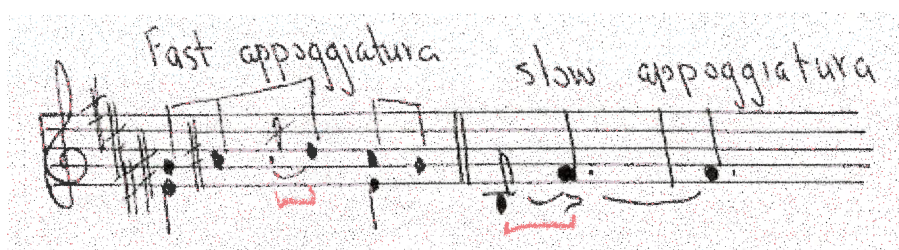
Fig. 20 The 3 figurations of the Pre-Islamic Period as found in an old Tuareg Love Song which is of Berber origin.¹⁹



Gloss in the Umayyad Period (661-750 A.D.)

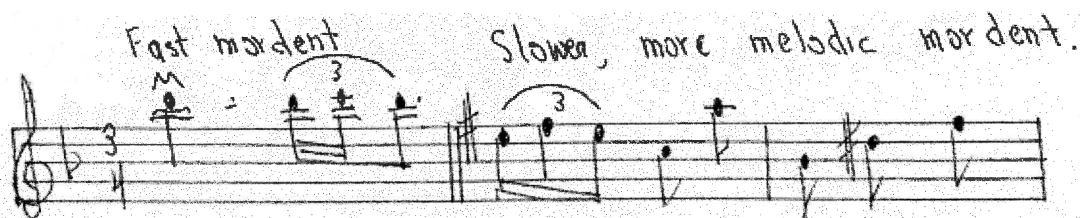
In the Umayyad Period two more forms of gloss were introduced and as a result of their influence, became an exceedingly prominent feature of Spanish music. These two decorations were the *appoggiatura* and the *mordent*. The *appoggiatura* was a little grace-like note which was attached to the principle note and could be played very close to it (quick) or a little distance from it (slower). Depending upon the speed of its execution the *appoggiatura* took on an ornamental or melodic quality and also altered the mood or character of the melodic line.

Fig. 21 The Appoggiatura



The *mordent* was a three-note figure which, like the *appoggiatura*, could be played fast or slow. In these forms, it too, was ornamental or melodic in quality and affected the mood and character of the line.

Fig. 22 The Mordent



During the Umayyad Period, gloss came to be highly regarded as a science of the art of festooning and decorating the Arabian melodic line.²⁰

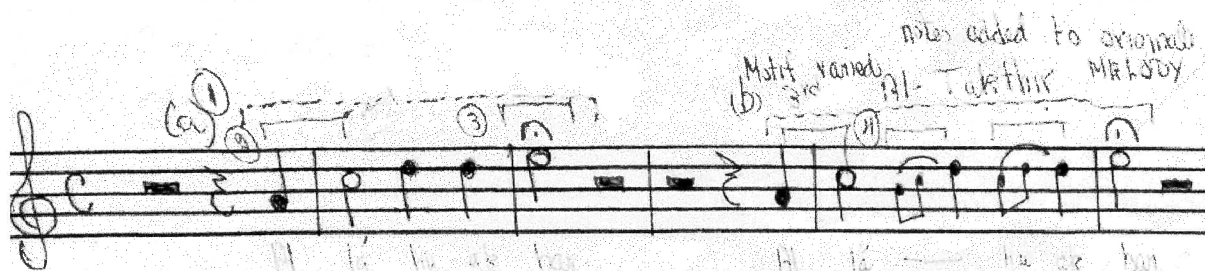
Gloss in the Abbasid Period (750 - 1258 A.D.)

In the Abbasid Period which followed, the great Arabic theorist al-Farabi (d.950) introduced and codified 14 more types of gloss. Just as the specific characteristics of the Arabian melodic line adorned but did not necessarily alter the form or construction of Spanish melody so al-Farabi's gloss was to the Arabian melodic line. While the gloss enriched and embellished the melodic line and made it more abundant and elegant, it did not change the original construction of it. For al-Farabi, melody consisted of two things, the melody note and the melody note embellished.²¹

Al-Takthir

One form of al-Farabi's gloss was called al-takthir.²² Al-takthir means to increase or to add to. This was accomplished by increasing the number of notes to the original melodic line. The following excerpt provides an example of al-takthir in Arabian music. At (a) the original line is shown. At (b) the use of al-takthir is illustrated. One observes that the number of notes has been increased from 5 to 9.

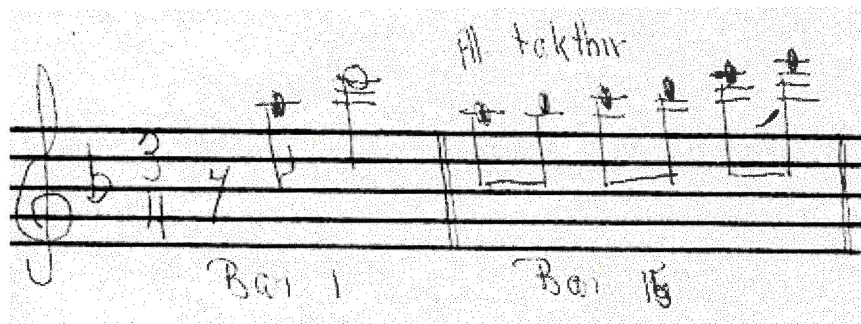
Fig. 23 Arabian Prayer



Influences of al-takthir can be found in Spanish music as well. In the following example it can be seen that the opening melodic line comprises 2 notes. At bar 9 the number of notes has been

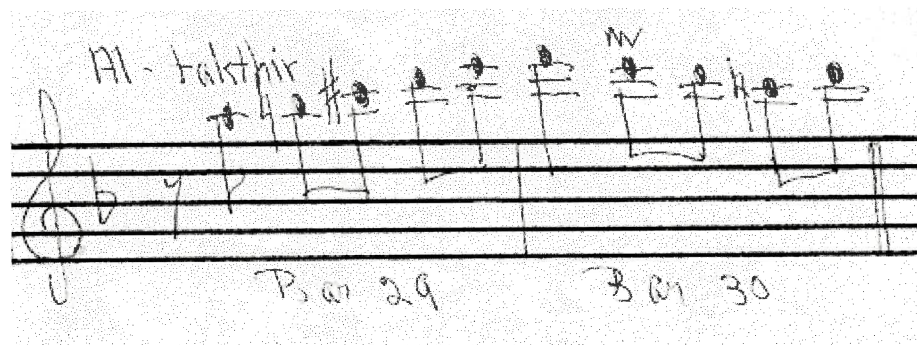
increased from 2 to 5 and with the addition of a small leap upward, characteristic of the Arabian melodic line, the range has also been increased from 5 to 7.

Fig. 24 *Espana by Isaac Albeniz - Al-takthir Increased*



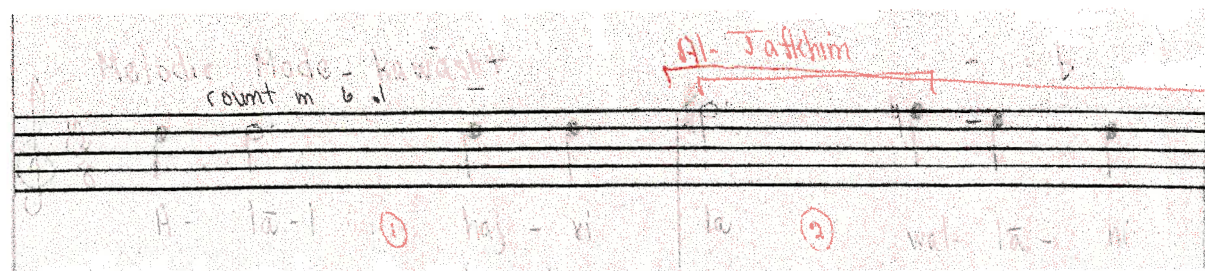
In the next example note the changes to the entire opening melodic line. An upward scalar-like passage would indicate the influence of al-takthir. In addition, there is one note decorated by a mordent which also adds to the passage. The line has been richly embellished by the influence of Arabian gloss.

Fig. 25 *Espana by Isaac Albeniz - Al-takthir Embellished*



Another ornamentation which made early Arabian melody more abundant was called al-tafkhim. Al-tafkhim was accomplished by: (a) the sounding of the fundamental note in the melody as well as its flattened or sharpened counterpart within the same line; and (b) playing the adjacent note before or after the fundamental note, an octave above or below it.²³

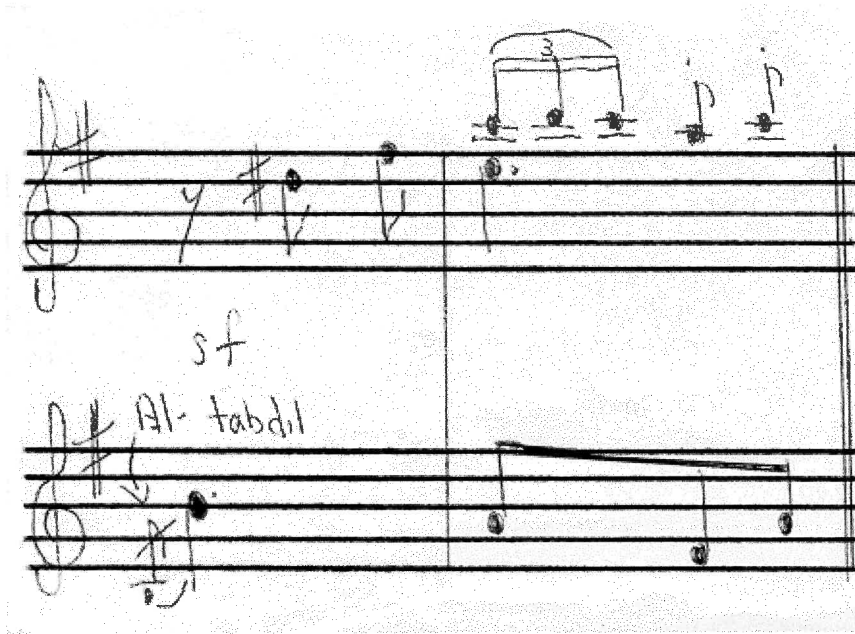
Fig. 26 *Al-tafkhim*



Al-Tabdil

A form of ornamentation introduced by al-Farabi which so greatly influenced the sound of Spanish music was called al-tabdil. Al-tabdil was accomplished in two ways. The first manner was to precede the original note with the same sound an octave (that is to say 8 notes) or a 5th above or below it. See figure 27.²⁴

Fig. 27 Malaguena by Albeniz - Al-tabdil



In Espana, at bar 9, the principle note in the left hand unison is preceded by a note of the same sound an octave below it, thus providing the line with some enrichment to the melody. In this form the octave took the form of melodic gloss.

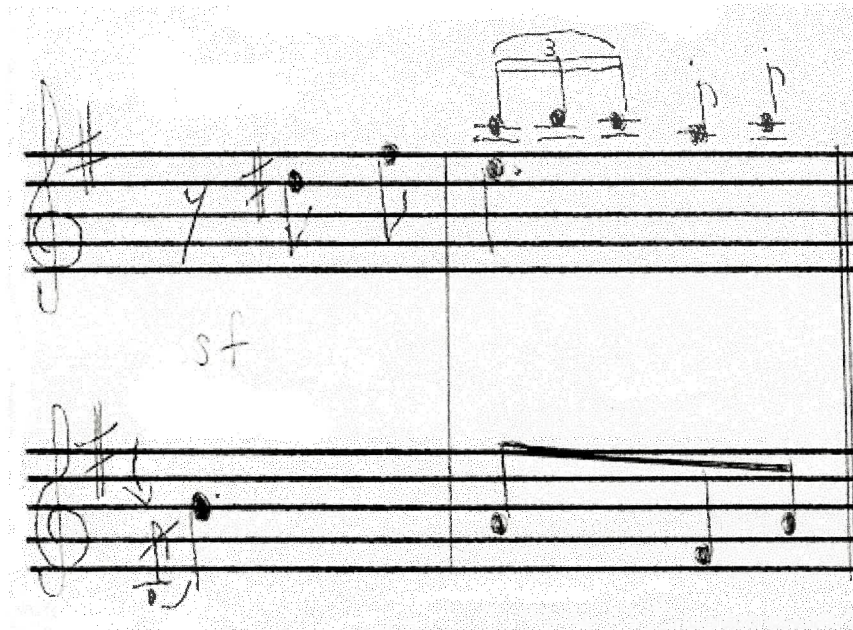
Fig. 28 Espana by Albeniz - Al-tabdil as Melodic Gloss



You will recall the importance of the octave as part of the Arabian melodic line and as part of the unison from the Pre-islamic period up until the Abbasid period when it took on its new role of

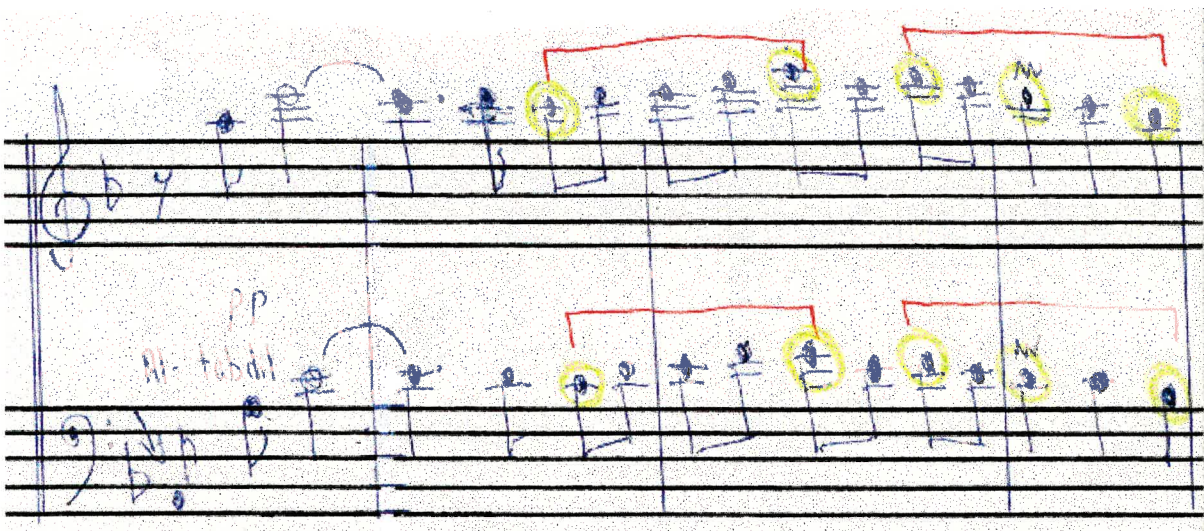
gloss. In its second role as gloss, the octave took the form of the appoggiatura. Like the appoggiatura of the Umayyad period it was either ornamental or melodic in quality as we have just seen in the above figure 28 and the quality affected the character or mood. Figure 29 shows the octave in its gloss form as an ornamental appoggiatura.

Figure 29 *Malaguena by Isaac Albeniz - Octave as an Ornamental Appoggiatura*



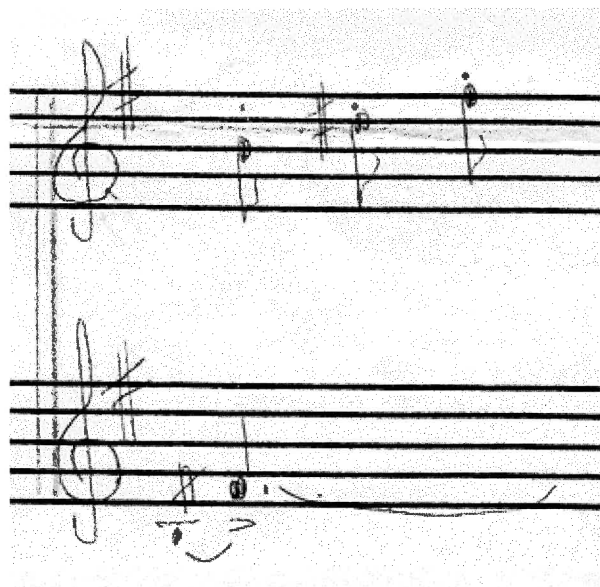
The second manner in which al-tabdil was accomplished was to replace a flattened melody note with a natural note. Thirdly, al-tabdil was accomplished through the additions of scalic motions ascending or descending between the two fundamental notes.²⁵

Fig. 30 *Malaguena by Isaac Albeniz - Scalic Motion*



Like the octave, the 5th played an important part in the Arabian melodic line from the Pre-islamic period up until the Abbasid period when it also took on the new role of gloss. Its new forms were that of al-tabdil gloss in which it either preceded the original melody note from above or below with a 5th or replaced the original note from above or below with a note of the 5th. Figure 31 shows the interval of the 5th in its appoggiatura form of al-tabdil.

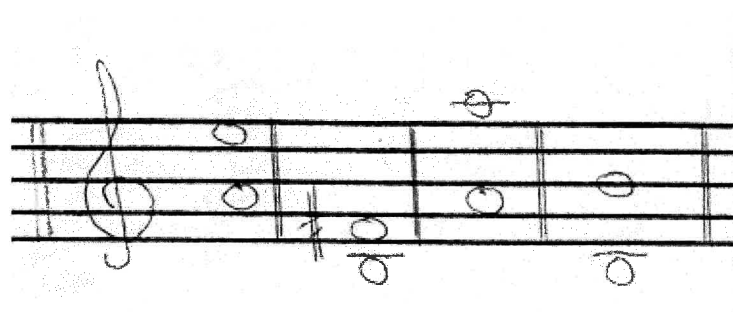
Fig. 31 Malaguena by Isaac Albeniz - Al-tabdil as an Appoggiatura



Al-Tarkib

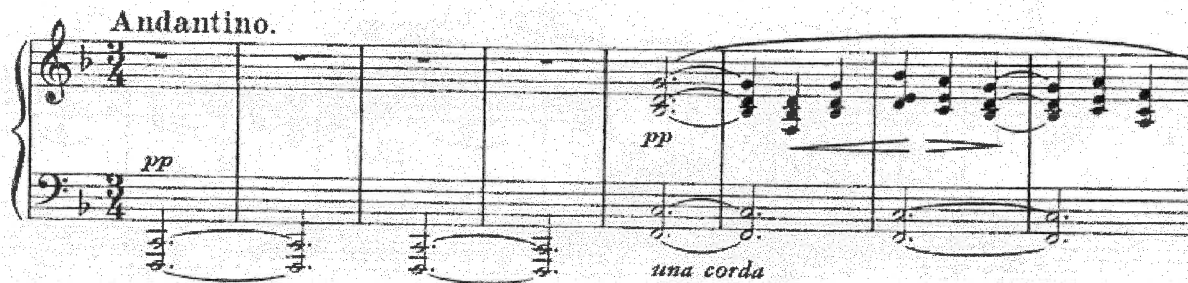
Both the interval of the 5th and octave took on yet another role, that of compound gloss or al-tarkib. In this form of gloss the two notes of either of the intervals are sounded simultaneously. See figure 32.²⁶

Fig. 32 Examples of al-tarkib



These intervals were later to play a major part in the foundation of the western harmonic system in their compound gloss form. Their influence abounds in Spanish music in both harmony and melody. Figure 33 shows an example of the influence of al-tarkib in Spanish music.

Fig. 33 Excerpt from Cordoba by Isaac Albeniz Shows the 5th as Compound Gloss



Timbral Ornamentation

Timbral ornamentation was another form of gloss which belonged to the later Abbasid period. This was a form of ornamentation used in the Arabian melodic line when it was necessary to describe human emotions such as passion, love, anger, grief, sadness, etc. Timbral ornamentation could only be sincerely expressed if the emotion to be described had already become a part of the soul's experience of the singer or player. It could not be manufactured.²⁷

Timbral ornamentation had a profound influence on the sound of Spanish music especially in those passages which related to cante jondo which reflected the deep song of the soul and also could not be manufactured. This ornamentation must be illustrated at the instrument as it is not possible to show it on the written page.

The Note of Pathos

The last type of gloss which also belonged to the Abbasid period to be discussed in this lecture is called the Note of Pathos. In this kind of gloss the melodic line begins at the lower end of the range and ascends to its highest note which is a note of intensity or note of pathos and then descends. The note of pathos may be decorated or not. Figures 34 and 35 show two types of notes of pathos, the first is not decorated, the second example shows a decorated note of pathos. The note of pathos was known to the Arabs 200 years before western European musicians and theorists began to make use of it in their music.²⁸

Fig. 34 Note of Pathos - Undecorated

Class *ped. ** *Note of intensity* *Pathos note*

cresc. *f* *sf*

*ped. ** *ped. **

Gypsy Mode

dim.

*ped. ** *ped. **

Fig. 35 Note of Pathos - Decorated

cresc. *f* *sf* *dim.*

*ped. ** *ped. **

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