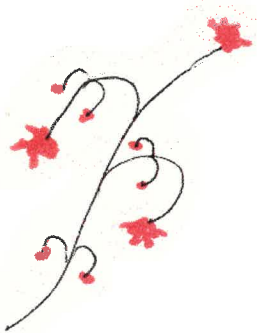


La
MÚSICA
de los
ARABES



en
ESPAÑA

ZIRYAB

For Arabic Culture 2101
Prof. Obeid

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"Oftentimes, man only appreciates the blessings of this world and the next through beautiful music, for it induces us to generosity of character in the performance of kindness and observing ties of kinship, defending of one's honour and the overcoming of faults."

from the Idg al-farid.

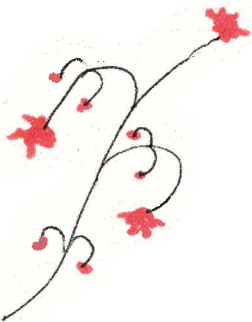


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When a scion of the House of Umayyads first set foot in Al-Andalú^z, the Arabs brought no musical art with them. They held the same social prejudices against the musicians in Spain as those in Arabia and imposed their religious laws on them. They regarded the work of a musician to be “immoral, dishonest, fit only for slaves and the more infamous sect of society.”[1]

Books about songs or laments could not be sold. The purchase of a slave, if it was discovered that she could sing, was declared invalid. One could not rent or buy a house if the playing of music was intended.[2]

Infractions of the law were zealously punished and included the public destruction of hidden instruments. But in the end, the musical art of Al-Andalú^z conquered all the prejudices and a Khalifate was established at Córdoba that was to become the marvel of the Middle Ages.[3] While the rest of Europe was plunged into barbaric ignorance and strife, Al-Andalú^z held high the torch of future greatness.[4] General culture embraced music and reached a zenith wherein both music and musicians received attention.

The monarch who was most responsible for furthering music in Al-Andalú^z was Abdu'r-Rahman II. Through the great interest of this Khalif in music, the schools of Mecca and Al-Medina were allowed to be represented in Spain. In a special part of his palace he set aside a section for women singers among whom were 3 famous ladies from the Medina school known as the Medinians.[5]

Another famous singer was Kalam - a Basque maiden who had been sent to Medina as a child. Exquisite, elegant and finely courteous, she displayed a perfection of song and was well-learned in literary and historical works. She was also an eminent reciter of Arabic verse.[6] But the fame of all other singers was obscured by the arrival at the Cordoban court of the distinguished musician and singer, Ziryab.[7]

Ziryab was the nickname given to the musician known as Abu'l Hasan 'Ali ibn Nafi'. It was given to him on account of his extremely dark complexion, clarity of speech and sweetness of character. [8] He was the most famous musician among the Western Arabs of Al-Andalú^z.

In Baghdad, he had been a pupil of Ishak Al-Mausili, whose songs he quickly learned without his master's cognizance.[9] Because of his intellect, his facility to learn and his fine voice, he reached even greater heights than his master.[10] It was well known how the master's compositions taxed the most excellent abilities of outsiders, however great musicians they were, but Ishak had not realized the full extent of Ziryab's talents until the latter was presented one day to the Khalif Harun al-Rashid.[11]

Having mentioned Ziryab to Harun, as “one of his advanced pupils”, [12] Ishak went on to explain how his pupil had been able to adopt some of his own unusual modifications, which he hastily added were “his discoveries”. [13] Ishak also spoke of the clear and emotional melodies he heard from Ziryab and, of course, Harun asked to hear from this exceptional pupil immediately. [14]

Graceful and charming of manner when the Khalif questioned him, Ziryab was then asked about his skill. The musician answered: "I can sing what the other singers know, but most of my repertory is made up of numbers suitable only for performance before a Khalif, Your Majesty. If Your Majesty permit, I will sing for you what human ears never even heard." [15] His remarkable personality and musical talents so impressed the Khalif that he predicted him to be the "coming master". [16]

At his first audition he also refused to play on the lute of his master and used his own, which he pointed out was of a different structure. [17] Quickly capturing Harun's fancy, he aroused the jealousy of Ishak who insisted that he leave Baghdad immediately, since he absolutely would not tolerate a rival. The alternative offered was prison. It would have been folly for Ziryab to defy such an eminent person, and so the young minstrel emigrated to North Africa, where he soon rose to fame. [18]

During his service of the Aghlabid sultan near Tunis, he made the mistake of singing a song of Antara one day. It begins, "If my mother were as black as a crow..." The sultan was so furious at this verse that he had him soundly whipped and banished him. [19]

The musician then crossed the Mediterranean into Al-Andalúz where the sultan 'Abd al-Rahman II (822-52) took him into his service. [20] So anxious was the sultan to have him that he rode out to meet Ziryab as he was enroute to Córdoba. Great respect was paid to him and he was feted for months at the palace. Eventually, he was given a splendid mansion and about 40,000 pieces of gold annually. [21]

Ziryab soon eclipsed all other musicians in Al-Andalúz. He was deeply versed in every branch of art connected with music and had such a prodigious memory that he knew by memory around 10,000 songs. Like many other musicians Ziryab believed that the jinn taught him his songs at night. [22] Thus inspired, he then called his two favourite singers, Ghazzalan and Hinda and they would commit the songs to memory. [23]

Ziryab's accomplishments included literature, astronomy and geography. His social contacts were most delicate and courteous. He had all the qualities necessary for a gentleman of the court, qualities that others of his station did not possess. [24] His social conduct was accepted as a model and he was responsible for many innovations that lasted through the following centuries and can still be found in Spain, most especially *Andalucía*, even today.

Before Ziryab's arrival it was the fashion in Spain for men and women to wear their hair parted in the middle, falling on both sides, covering the eyebrows. Ziryab introduced the ideas of uncovered foreheads, hair trimmed level over the eyebrows and slanting towards the ears. [25] Ziryab set the fashion in clothes as well. He brought out the innovative idea of changing both fabric and colour for the main seasons. Thus the clothing for summer was of lighter fabric and paler colours, while the clothing for winter was of a heavier weight and darker or sombre of colour. Henna or hair colouring was another innovation by Ziryab. The use of crystal tableware also originated with this musician. Coupled with his creative abilities in the kitchen, his dinners became the fashion in Al-Andalúz [26] and his special recipe for a cake known as Zlabia was much sought after.

It is not known when this great musician died because the date of his death was not recorded.

When Ziryab settled himself and his family at Córdoba in 822 A.D., he established the first School of Music in Spain. At the School, Ziryab introduced the Old Arabian System which had been cast by Ibn Misjah (d. 715) and re-cast by Ziryab's old teacher, Ishak Al-Mausili. The theoretical system of music revolved around the tuning of the lute (known as *accordatura*) in intervals of 4ths among other things. Prior to Ziryab's arrival in Córdoba a very early system of octave *accordatura* was in use.[27] Ziryab also introduced the idea of using the note-name "C" as the starting point for basic learning (much as we do today when teaching beginning pupils the piano).

The teaching of music was a problem, too since it consisted of one method only. The pupils learned to sing by the practical example of the professors. Ziryab changed all this and brought in his own curriculum which was divided into 3 parts. In Part I the rhythm, meter and words of a song were taught to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Part II was devoted to the melody which was studied and practiced until it was mastered in its simple state. Finally, in Part III of the course, the gloss or adornment of the melody was learned.[28]

Ziryab had a rather unique way of auditioning prospective pupils. Al-Maqqari writes:

“Whenever a youth came to him for the purpose of taking vocal lessons, he made him sit down on the round cushion called the *miswara* and bade him exert the full power of his voice. If the youth's voice was weak he was made to tie his turban around his waist. If he could not open his mouth full, the master bade him put a piece of wood inside his mouth which he was to keep there day and night until the jaws were well expanded. At that he was to cry out at the top of his voice *ya hajjam*. If the young man could utter these words clearly and sonorously and in a powerful voice, he was admitted into the class and the master spared no trouble or fatigue to make him an accomplished singer.”[29]

The fame of Ziryab's School of Music at Córdoba was so great that his novel teaching style was followed in Sevilla, Tolédo, Valéncia and Granáda.[30]

During the 9th century, the reform of the lute was realized with the addition of a 5th string to the 4 strings the instrument already had. A new type of flute had been introduced in the second half of the 8th century by a court musician called *Zalzal*, replacing the Persian lute. This “perfect lute”, the *ud al-shabbut*, was still mounted with 4 strings, with the neck and fingerboard broadening out to the body of the instrument. To this, Ziryab added the 5th string, as well as made other improvements while he was at the court of Harun (786-809).[31]

Ziryab's instrument remained almost equal in size and was constructed of the same wood as the lute in general use. It was, however, heavier by one-third. The strings of Ziryab's lute, although of silk, were made differently from those of the perfect lute. His 2nd, 3rd and 4th strings were woven from the entrails of a young lion, which the musician claimed to be “far superior to those of any other animal in point of strength, depth of tone and clearness of sound.”[32]

The addition of the 5th string corresponded to Ziryab's personal doctrine of ethos which concerned the theory of relations between Sound, the Cosmos and Humankind. For him, each of the strings represented a humour in the body. The first string, the colour of yellow, was symbolic of the spleen. The second string, red in colour, was connected with the blood. The third string, which was white, represented the phlegm and the 4th string, black, was attributed to the temper of a person. Ziryab felt that the 4 humours did not constitute the whole human personality and was therefore incomplete without the Soul. So he added a string in order to represent it.[33]

Since the Soul is in the center of a person, the string was placed in the center of the other 4 strings. And as the Soul resides in the blood, it would also be the tincture of red. The name given to the 5th string by Ziryab, was the Hadd.[34]

Modification of the lute's shape was carried out by Ziryab to the base and the neck of the lute. The base was made a little more smooth and levelled out in its contour. The neck was extended. This re-shaping was partly responsible for its added weight, the shape having to correspond to the weight. This type of lute is still used in Morocco today.[35]

A third and final innovation Ziryab was responsible for during his time in Al-Andalúz was the further development of a concert program form known as the Nawba. The Nawba is a series of songs and instrumental pieces grouped into distinct movements. They follow a pre-established order and are all written in the same mode although the rhythms are different. The nawba does not exceed 5 pieces. It begins with an introduction, which is a musical prelude executed in unison by all the members of the orchestra but does not adhere to a strict rhythm. The rhythm is free.

The prelude is followed by an instrumental piece composed on a rhythm in 2/4 time called a Touchyah. The touchyah is immediately followed by a muhwashah or zajel. Each succeeding movement accelerates to the finale.[36]

The atmosphere in which the concert program was to be heard had some interesting innovations introduced to it. First of all, it was of the utmost importance to listen to a concert program in a comfortable posture, reclining on cushions being the most favoured. Then there was the matter of the orchestra. This was to be made up of lutes, violins, violas and the rebab. The job of the percussion instruments was to carry the beat and under no circumstances were these instruments to express any kind of dynamics.

One was permitted to comment on passages that were particularly pleasing but no criticisms were allowed. There was to be no specific time or duration for a concert program, it could last for several hours. Above all, nothing was to be hurried. As one listened to the music, almonds and raisins or dates were passed with a sugared tea made from special herbs. Only in this manner could the music be more agreeable, delicious and become as a sedative to create images and liberate the passions.[37]

The Ziryab family in Al-Andalúz carried on the musical reputation of its founder, the illustrious Abu'l Hasan 'Ali ibn Nafi'. Ziryab had 6 sons and 2 daughters, all of whom sang and practised the art of music.[38] The Blackbird's innovations became a part of the hispano-arabic tradition,

which continues to stand as a musical monument to this great musician and marks an important point in the cultural and musical history of Spain.



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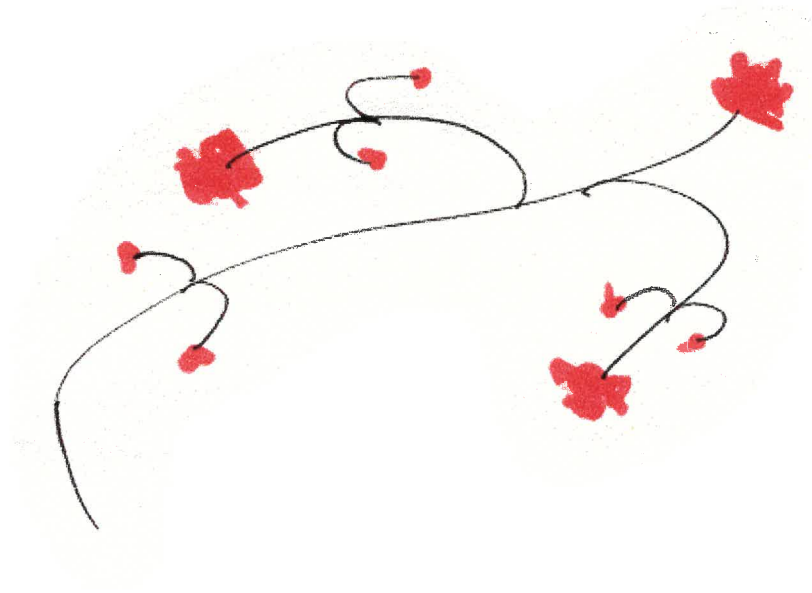
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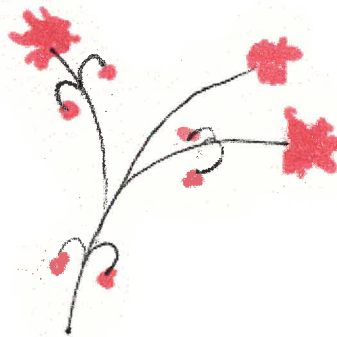
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