

Medieval Hispano-Arabic Songs

by

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I. Introduction to Andalusian song forms

A. Muwassaha: sometimes lacks a refrain, has symmetrical *vueltas* (turns) that duplicate the rhyme-scheme of the refrain; High art.

1. Form: [AA] bbbaa (AA), cccaa (AA), etc.
2. Performed in small vocal and instrumental group (Arabic word for this variety musical ensemble is **takht**, literally dias or platform).

B. Zajal: colloquial diction, initial refrain, asymmetrical *vueltas* duplicates about half the rhymes of refrain. Popular music that some scholars say led to the muwassaha. Wandering minstrels took existing folk tunes added their own words, both Arabic and Romance.

1. Form: Aabbba (AA), ccca (AA), etc.
2. Performed antiphonal, call and response. Vocal soloist sings refrain alone, then the entire ensemble sings refrain. Soloist sings verse alone.

Regarding the muwassaha and zajal:

**Ahmad Al Tifasi (1184-1253), Tunisian writer, said, “the songs of the people of Andalus were, in ancient times, either in the style of the Christians, or in the style of the Arab camel drivers.”** Later he wrote, **“Ibn Bajja (d. 1139) combined the songs of the Christians with those of the East, thereby inventing a style found only in Andalus, toward which the temperament of its people inclined, so that they rejected all others.”** (Quoted in Lui and Monroe, 1989)

Some scholars argue that these arabic song forms came from the European forms. That the Moors were inspired by the proto-troubadour musicians.

C. Nawbas: surviving Andalusian song sequences, meant to be performed at certain times of the day.

II. The problem of Medieval Andalusian poetry, the muwassaha and the zajal

A. Meant for singing and live performance.

B. No traditional Arabic system of musical notation

1. Orally transmitted from teacher to student
2. Improvisation

C. Banished from Iberia by the Edict of Expulsion in 1492 (Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand)

III. The case for recreation of Medieval Andalusian musical performance from surviving Andalusian music

A. Andalus and North Africa politically, militarily, and culturally connected during the Almoravid (1091-1145), Almohad (1145-1230) periods, and into the independent Nasrid dynasty (1230-1492)

B. Numerous Medieval Arabic poets moved between the Iberian and North African.

1. Ibn al-Labbana (d. 1113) first in Abbadid court of Seville, later went to North Africa
2. Ibn Baqi (d. 1145 or 1150) from Cordoba or Toledo wrote poems honoring a several

members of a North African family

3. Abu Bakr ibn Auhr (b. 1113) from near Seville visited the Marrakesh court of Ya'qub ibn Yusuf al-Mansur. Died in Marrakesh, 1198.

**Al Tifasi (1184-1253) writing of a musician, Abu I-Husayn ibn al-Hasib of Murcia (ca. 1200):**  
“achieved [in the art of music], both in theory and in practice, what no one had achieved before him, and who composed a large book of music, in many volumes, so that the melody of every poem by a contemporary poet, heard [today] in Andalus and the Maghrib, was compose by him.”

C. Tuning of the modern North African ud follows the descriptions of ud tunings from medieval Arabic texts. Differs from the current Eastern ud tuning.

D. Contemporary performers of Moroccan melodies contain variations of medieval lyrics.

E. Modern nawbas are unchanged since the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

#### IV. Medieval writers on Andalusian music performance

A. Al Mansur (d. 1002)

B. Ahmad Al Tifasi (1184-1253)

#### V. Examples of modern recreations

A. Zajal: *Yahni-kum! Yahni-kum!*  
Ibn Quzman (c1086-1160)  
Iberian Garden, Vol. II, Altramar, Dorian Discovery, 1995

B. Muwashshah: *Adir la-na,*  
Al-Ama (d. 1126) or Ibn Baqi (d 1145 or 1150)  
*Ibid*

C. Muwashshah: *Ma li-l-muwallah*  
Ibn Zuhr (113-1198)  
Iberian Garden, Vol. I, Altramar, Dorian Discovery, 1995.

D. Nawba: *Rasd Ad-Dail & Rami Al-Maya*  
Musique Arabo-Andalouse, Atrium Musicae de Madrid, Dir. Gregoria Paniagua, Harmonia Mundi, 1977.

E. M'saddad (Nawba): *Convivencia*  
Jubilatores, 2001, Freetrader Music

#### References

Liu and Monroe, *Modern Philology*, Vol. 125, Ten Hispano-Arabic Strophic Songs in the Modern Oral Tradition, University of California Press, 1989.

Ribera, Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain, Being La Música de las Cantigas, translated and abridged by Hague and Leffingwell, Da Capo Press, New York, 1970. (Abridged replication of the first edition Sanford

University Press, Stanford, California, 1929).