

Melody in Arabic Music

Part 1

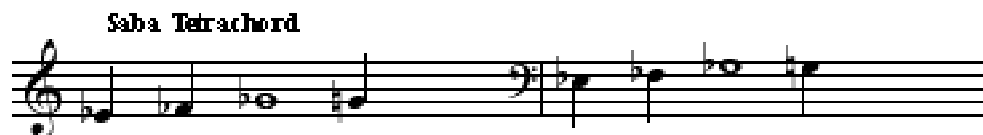
Lesson To Accompany Salaam America by Craig Thomas Naylor

Melody in Arabic music is treated in many ways. Two of the primary ways will be covered in this lesson since they are the techniques used in *Salaam America*.

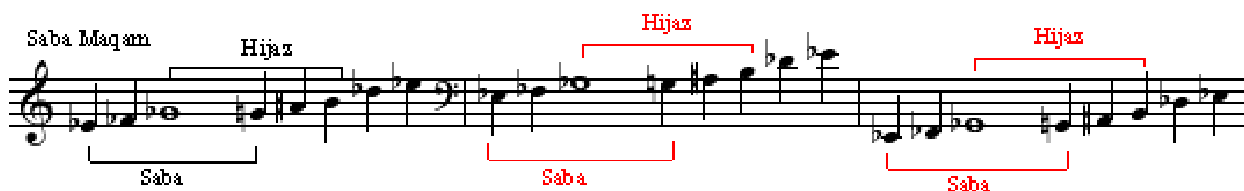
The first, which we have already explored, is the gradual revealing of a maqam (scale) in a seemingly timeless manner. This type of music is generally improvised. The first part of *Salaam America* evokes this type. The cadenza in measure 135 is also in this structure.

The second treatment of melody is with composed songs that, just like songs in the Western world, have a recognizable shape and sound. This is done when the rhythms (wazn) are added and there is a recognizable beat.

Arabic maqams are created very differently from western scales. Arabic maqams are assembled from small three or four note sets, called Ajna(s) in Arabic. In the West, we call them trichords and tetrachords. The bottom set generally determines the name of the maqam. For example, the Saba tetrachord looks like this:



On top of (or superimposed on an interior note) is added another tetrachord - usually a different note set. The maqam used in the beginning of *Salaam America* is assembled with the *hijaz* tetrachord superimposed on *saba*.



The *saba* maqam is often associated with lamenting, with tragedy (Touma, p. 44). *Saba* is also used in the Coptic (Egyptian Christianity) hymnody for the Prayer of Reconciliation.

Notice that the third note of the maqam is highlighted as a whole note. This note, called the “dominant” is the reference and pivot note of the scale. It is the one emphasized in improvisations and descending from the dominant to the starting note is the cadence pattern that is associated with this scale.

Explore this scale a little more in your improvisation. This time, add the emphasis on the dominant. And, when you are concluding a phrase, descend to the first note.