**Film Music in Egypt**

Discussions of Egyptian film often focus on a ‘Golden Age,’ framed roughly by the establishment of Misr Studios in 1935 and the end of the presidency of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1970), during which filmmaking was under state supervision (Shafik 2007a). Scholars have tended to emphasize the ‘serious’ cinema of the period, reflecting Western preoccupations with ‘Third Cinema’ (the Argentinian cinematic movement of the 1960s with an overtly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist agenda). Popular cinema has tended to be defined in terms of the presence of comedic song and dance numbers. The result has been a categorical separation of ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ cinema. The consequences for the study of sound and music in Egyptian film have been significant. Popular cinema – with its songs, dances, and musical comedy routines - has suffered from neglect until relatively recently (see Armbrust 2000, Shafik 2007b, Van Eynde 2011 and 2015, Bracco 2019b, El Khachab 2019, Hasso 2020 and Youssef 2020), while in ‘serious’ cinema, soundtracks (referred to in Egypt as ‘*musiqa taswiriyya*’ – literally ‘pictorialized music’) are scarcely noticed. Despite some signs of change (see Elsaket 2019 and El Khachab 2021), it continues to be implicitly understood that the seriousness of such films lies elsewhere. On both sides of the imagined divide, music is largely ignored.

The picture from the point of view of Egyptian scholarship and film criticism is a little more nuanced. Egyptian film critics may, for their part, have often assigned greater importance to films in which music was placed in a ‘realistic’ setting rather than in staged song and dance (Arasoughly 1996). But they have also reflected for a long time, and richly, on *musiqa taswiriyya*. The names of film composers such as Andrea Ryder, Fouad al-Zahiri and Ali Ismail are known amongst those who care about film in Egypt, and their soundtracks are undoubtedly of remarkable quality (see Tumum 2019). It is also recognized that song (and dance) feature in serious and critically successful social dramas as well as in light-hearted romantic comedies, and that Egyptian filmmakers have worked with sophisticated understandings of music, with cosmopolitan composers and with musically intelligent audiences.

This suggests the need to move beyond a simplistic dichotomization of ‘serious’ and ‘popular,’ marked by the presence or absence of song and dance numbers. It also suggests the desirability of considering ‘the film musical’ – a hazy category at best in the Egyptian context, as we will see – within the broader field of ‘film music and sound.’ Literary critic Sabry Hafez in surely correct when he calls for a rejection of the value-laden taxonomies that have dominated the study of ‘Egyptian film’ and, perhaps, a rejection of the national frame as well (see Hafez 2006).

Approached in broader critical perspective then, and dispensing with such value-laden taxonomies, sound in Egyptian film potentially constitutes a rich field of knowledge. Film soundtracks may tell us important things about the history of Egyptian music, reflecting over time the changing status in Egypt of Arab musical heritage – in particular, the *wasla* suite (the centuries-old musical tradition bringing together songs and instrumental numbers based on the same mode/*maqam*), the *muwashshahat* song form (central to the *wasla*) and the accompanying *takht* ensemble (traditionally comprising instruments such as lute/*‘ud,* violin, zither/*qanun,* and tambourine/*riqq*). They may have something to tell us, too, about globalized musical fashions (tangos, foxtrots, rock, pop and jazz) and, in the ways in which they represent – and attribute meaning to – the sounds of trains, bicycles, cars, bells, horns, calls to prayer, street cries, telephones and so forth, about the soundscapes of everyday life in Egypt (Fahmy 2019). Sound in Egyptian film, then, merits reflection on both musical and social-historical grounds.

It is helpful to understand, too, that the history of film in Egypt took place against a background of occupation and revolution. The Muhammad Ali dynasty ruled Egypt for the Ottoman Turks as viceroys (the so-called ‘Khedivate’, lasting between 1867-1914), but one that enjoyed a great deal of independence. Under Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II (1842-1918), efforts were made to reintegrate Egypt both culturally and politically. Subsequent British efforts to exert control over Egypt sparked resistance with the Urabi revolt of 1882 and a constitutionalist movement (the ‘Wafd’) intended to restrain the monarchy and limit British influence. The ‘Free Officers Movement’ swept away both the monarchy and the remaining structures of the British protectorate during the revolution of 23 July 1952. The Suez war (Israel, France and Britain’s attempted invasion in 1956) finally put an end to colonial ambitions in the region, cementing Gamal Abdel Nasser’s charismatic leadership of Egypt. Egypt’s defeat by Israel in 1967 signaled a turning point for the Nasserite revolution. A questioning of state socialism and pan-Arabism followed, which Anwar Sadat, Egypt’s third president (from 1970 until his assassination in 1981), answered with the initiation of the ‘Infitah’ (‘Opening’) of the Egyptian economy, peace with Israel and internal political liberalization. His successor, Hosni Mubarak, presided over a period of worsening political and economic conditions, which lead to the protests in Tahrir Square and his deposition in 2011. These events will be referred to frequently in the account that follows.

Early Egyptian Cinema.

The Lumière Brothers’ first *cinématographe* presentation took place in Paris in December 1895. It arrived at the Café Turani in Alexandria ten days later, in January 1896. Dates continue to be disputed (for discussion of early Egyptian cinema history see, amongst others, Armbrust 1996, Farrugia 2002, Shafik 2007a, Vitalis 2000). But Lumière Brothers shows quickly became an established form of entertainment for elite Egyptians and foreign Egyptian residents in Alexandria and Cairo. Other non-Egyptian companies soon joined them (including Pathé and Irpanora), catering primarily for their own communities in British-occupied Egypt. It was an Italian company (the Società Italiana di Cinema di Alessandria, SITCIA), established in 1917, that made the first concerted effort to address a broader Egyptian public. SITCIA was not a success, however. Neither the (non-Egyptian) actors nor the storylines of its short films connected with local audiences. The company went bankrupt a year later.

A former employee of the company, Alvesi Orfanelli, bought the equipment and launched his own. Learning from SITCIA’s mistakes, his films (such as *Madame Loretta* of 1919) made use of Egyptian actors and theatrical expertise. Mohammed Bayyumi established the first Egyptian-owned studio, Studio Amon, in 1923. His ‘Master Barsum’ short films portrayed the adventures of a Chaplin-esque drifter on Cairo’s streets, scrounging a meal and getting arrested, for instance, in *Barsum Yabhath ‘an Wadhifa* (Barsum Searches for a Job, 1925; see YouTube examples below). Such films, though ‘silent’ and involving slapstick visual humor, are full of references to sound, which draw the twenty-first century viewer’s attention to the house bands, the sound effects machines and the phonographs that would have accompanied them – about which, unfortunately, little is known. The last years of the decade saw important silent-film productions made by Egyptian companies, such as Aziza Amir’s *Layla* (1927), the Lama Brothers’ *Qubla fis-Sahra* (A Kiss in the Desert, 1928) and Mohammed Karim’s *Zaynab* (1930). Women in the theatrical world, such as Aziza Amir and Assia Dagher, played a conspicuous role in writing, directing and acting in these early films (Farrugia 2002).

*Awlad al-Dhawat* (The Children of the Aristocrats), directed by Yusuf Wahbi, and *Unshudat al-Fuad* (The Song of the Heart), directed by Mario Volpi and Istefan Rosti, can both lay claim to being the first Egyptian sound film in 1932. ‘Sound’ primarily involved spoken dialogue, but it also involved song (as in Mohammed Karim’s hit musical *al-Warda al-Bayda,* ‘The White Rose’, 1933, discussed in more detail below) and, further, it involved musical score to accompany views and establish moods. Behija Hafiz quickly made a reputation in this field, contributing to the importance in these early films of a local-sounding soundscape. A typical example of her multifaceted work is *Layla Bint al-Sahra* (‘Layla, Daughter of the Sahara’, 1937), which she directed and acted in, and for which she made costumes and composed music. Hollywood soon took the lead in the technology race, however, setting industry standards across the world and locking other countries, like Egypt, into long-lasting distribution and subsidiary arrangements. This ensured the long life of “Hollywood on the Nile” (Vitalis 2000).

Contrasts in the handling of incidental music could already be seen**.** Willy Rozier’s bi-lingual (French and Arabic) *Yacout* (1934), for instance, contains scenes of *baladi* (working-class) life in Cairo that are rich in authentic portrayals of street cries, the call-to-prayer, and *muwashshahat*-singing in cafes, supplied by notable vocalist Sayyid Shata and his accompanying *takht* ensemble. Such scenes alternate with depictions of society life in Paris and Cairo, marked by a lively big-band jazz soundtrack (composed by Jean Latove among others) – a site of alienation for the protagonist, played by Naguib al-Rihani. The incidental music does more than passively set a scene, then. It drives the characters and the action. Mohammed Abd al-Wahab (1902-1991), a musical pioneer and persistent innovator, dubbed *musiqar al-agyal* – ‘the Musician of the Generations’ – made his debut in locally-produced musicals, such as *Dumu‘ al-Hubb* (Tears of Love, 1935)**.** These by contrastused recordings of western orchestral music to establish passing scenes or moods. The song sequences, on the other hand, were lengthy exercises in Abd al-Wahab’s extravagant compositions, blending Egyptian art music with jazz, Latin and Western elements, and showcasing his powerful voice. Anything that might detract from this was kept to a minimum.

The First Golden Age

Studio Misr was established as the national film company in 1935, by Talaat Harb, Director of the National Bank. This brought together European-trained Egyptian talent in state-of-the-art facilities, including a cinema on Imad al-Din Street in Cairo in which to display its products. The circumstances were favorable. Trade protectionism in the interwar period put US film corporations on the back foot. By the end of World War II, many of Egypt’s foreign residents – who had constituted the larger part of the audience for English-language films – had left, even if much of the foreign talent – choreographers, cinematographers, composers - stayed on (Shafik 2007a). Censorship by the British authorities and protests by local producers imposed further limitations. Hollywood, still in command of the constantly changing technologies, may have continued to dominate cinema in Egypt, but the Arabic-language sector was clearly growing significantly. Studio Misr struggled, nonetheless. Demand and receipts were not sufficiently high to keep the studio in full-time use and it soon had to resort to renting out its facilities (Vitalis 2000, Armbrust 1996). It closed in 1948.

The work of Abd al-Wahab serves as an entry point to any discussion of Studio Misr. *Dumu’ al-Hubb* (1935), mentioned in passing above, was the first of many films for that studio. Its glamorous sets, suave couture and modern-sounding music encapsulated *efendiyya* (Egyptian bourgeoisie) aspirations in these years. But it reprised many of the themes of his first film, *al-Warda al-Bayda* (1933; see YouTube examples), made earlier in Paris, and directed by Muhammad Karim. This depicted the rise of the young ‘Galal Efendi,’ son of an aristocratic family down on its luck, forced to seek work amongst the nouveau-riche as a rent-collector. He falls in love with his new boss’s daughter (‘Ragaa’), whose affections are also sought by a Galal’s villainous rival ‘Shafiq’. Shafiq exposes the scandalous affair and Galal is fired. Despondently walking the streets of Cairo, he sees a poster advertising a concert in the Ezbekiyya Gardens by (a fictional) ‘Mahmud Atiyya’ and is inspired to imagine a life as a professional singer – this, after all, is his passion and skill. Under portraits of the iconic classical singers of earlier generations, Abduh al-Hamuli, Salama al-Higazi and Sayyid Darwish, he gathers and rehearses his band. His fortunes rise rapidly, Ragaa’s father is forced to relent, and the lovers are united. The music and the narrative surrounding the music position Abd al-Wahab’s character as ‘modern yet authentic’ (Armbrust 1996, 98), the driving aspiration of Egypt’s rising middle-classes. The *al-Warda al-Bayda* format – allowing for variations and differing outcomes, happy or sad - was a durable one and established the model for his Studio Misr musicals. Abd al-Wahab continued to produce them until 1946.

Studio Misr also courted his rival, Umm Kulthum. Umm Kulthum (1904 -1975) known as ‘Kawkab al-Sharq’ – the ‘Star of the East’ – dominated recorded music and radio in Egypt from the middle years of the twentieth century onwards, becoming a vocal icon across the Arab world. Her first musical, *Widad* (Widad, 1936; see YouTube examples below), directed by Fritz Kramp, struck out in a different direction from Abd al-Wahab’s. It was based on a script by Ahmed Rami, based in turn on a story of Umm Kulthum’s own invention about the undying love of the slave girl Widad for her master, set in thirteenth-century Egypt. A specially composed score was supplied by Pino Tinto (likely ‘Benno Bardi’, or Benno Poswiansky, bandmaster, music scholar and entrepreneur, a Jewish refugee in Cairo between 1933 and 1939). Tinto’s soundtrack lacesthe film’s battles, palace dance sequences, boat journeys and street scenes with rich orchestral sounds in the European orientalist tradition; musical motifs connect the narrative. Riyad al-Sunbati’s song compositions are, by contrast, in a restrained Egyptian neo-classical idiom - modern renditions of the ‘tradition’ (*turath*) that Umm Kulthum championed in opposition to what was perceived as Abd al-Wahab’s experimental modernism. ‘Tradition’ included representations of folk music, too. The film famously contains the song ‘Ala Balad al-Mahbub’(‘To The Beloved’s Country’)*,* accompanying a journey by boat up the Nile, as though sung in rural style by boatmen – possibly an existing tune artfully repurposed by al-Sunbati.*Widad* portrayed a young woman struggling for respectability and self-determination under difficult circumstances (see YouTube examples below). Umm Kulthum followed up quickly with *Nashid al-Amal* (The Anthem of Hope, 1937) and *Dananir* (1940) on the same theme, and with comparable glamour and sophistication. Traditional song forms, or modern compositions in traditional forms (for example *qasida*), started to give way in these films to freshly composed songs (*ughniyat*) in a longer format with refrains, suitable for extended film sequences (Danielson 1997, 88). From a musical perspective, this period is habitually thought of in terms of the Umm Kulthum/Abd al-Wahab rivalry. A younger generation of singing stars including Layla Murad, Farid al-Atrash and Asmahan would soon enter the fray.

But other important developments were taking place. Dancers of *raqs sharqi* (‘eastern dance’) performed in a variety of genres, either as guests in filler scenes or in starring roles as protagonists. *Raqs baladi* (‘popular dance’) had long been a feature of Egyptian recreational life, but its more formal cousin *raqs sharqi* became a celebrated artform, due to stylistic developments in the early twentieth century popularized by live performances at Badia Masabni’s casino.One of Masabni’s protegees, Tahiyya Carioca, would establish the role of the dancer-actor in film. Her films made the dancer the central character, often shown engaged in the struggle to make her art understood as modern and respectable. In *Li‘bat al-Sitt* (The Lady’s Game, 1946), for instance, this was expressed by a growing repertoire of camera-oriented dance moves, extravagant costumes and musical styles, ranging from traditional to Latin. Innovative dancer Samia Gamal began a mutually beneficial collaboration with singer-composer and actoral-Atrash, starring in hit comedies such as *Habib al Umr* (Love of my Life, 1947) and *Afrita Hanim* (Lady Genie, 1949). Together, they continued the tradition of singers accompanied by dance; as proponents of an appealing Arab and Western syncretism, they were a distinctly successful duo.

Horror films, such as Yusuf Wahbi’s *Safir Guhannam* (Hell’s Ambassador, 1946), and comedies, such as Naguib al-Rihani’s *Salama fi Khayr* (Salama is Fine, 1936), used *musiqa taswiriyya* to systematically underline the special effects, build up the atmosphere and add to the fun. *Safir Guhannam*, for instance, with music by Ibrahim Haggag, quotes from Wagner’s ‘Ride of the Valkyries’ at the end, as Wahbi’s ‘Mephistopheles’ character flies around the room. *Salama fi Khayr*, with music by Mohammad Hassan al-Shuga‘i and Abdel Hamid Abd al-Rahman, includes a street scene in which the hero tries to dodge bicycles, convinced they are after his bag of money. Thescore matches comedy orchestral sounds to the swirl of traffic on the street, and the protagonists increasingly desperate efforts to keep his money safe – a virtuosic exercise in extended soundtrack ‘mickeymousing’.

Another act to cross over from stage to screen was that of the *munulugist* (monologue artists), who specialized in light-hearted sung skits of observational comedy and social satire. Artists such as Ismail Yassine, Suad Makkawi and Thurayya Hilmi teamed up with theater composers and lyricists, including Izzat Al-Gahely and Ibrahim Kamil Rifaat, to produce lively numbers such as ‘Amma Anta Gari’(‘How Bold You Are!’) and ‘al-Shafra’ (‘The Cipher’). By the early 1960s, the direct satire of the *munulug* had fallen into decline, but the comedic song as a genre would continue. Multi-talented composer Munir Murad contributed a substantial number of comedic compositions well into the Golden Age, notably Abd al-Halim Hafiz showcases such as ‘Qadi al-Bilaj’ (‘The Beach Judge’) in *Abi Fawq Al-Shagara* (My Father Is Up the Tree, 1969) (see YouTube examples).

The 1950s

In 1952, the ‘Free Officers Revolution’ ushered in the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser and a non-aligned socialist revolution that touched all aspects of Egyptian culture, economy and foreign policy. Its effect on Egyptian cinema continues to be debated. The new authorities passed laws in 1956 restricting imports and requiring cinemas show a quota of Egyptian-made films. The Egyptian cinema industry itself was nationalized in 1960. Revolutionary themes were pervasive, whether in social realism or in the popular romances, comedies and musicals which Gordon (2002) labels ‘revolutionary melodramas.’ The film schools and academies meanwhile, continued to produce high-quality graduates and build on the achievements of the immediate past. Some writers (e.g., Vitalis 2000) have stressed the new authorities’ failure to invest properly in the Egyptian film industry, noting comparatively low productivity and Hollywood’s continued influence. Others (e.g., Gordon 2002) have underlined the quality and vitality of Egyptian cinema during this period, seen, very much, as an extension of the Golden Age.

The revolutionary period produced some remarkable soundtracks, which have continued to be celebrated in Egypt. Three individuals stood out: Andrea Ryder (1908-1971), Fouad al-Zahiri (1916-1988) and Ali Ismail (1922-1974). They shared a mastery of advanced compositional techniques and orchestration, and of the conventions of the Hollywood soundtrack - defined in these years by the symphonic orchestral sound of composers such as Erich von Korngold and Max Steiner – which they extended with reference to Egyptian song and folk music. Their talents were prominently on display in extended opening credits scenes (referred to as ‘*titr*’ in Egypt), which concentrated the themes, motifs and sounds of the entire soundtrack, as in an operatic overture. They also experimented with novel ways of integrating film score and on-screen action.

Of the three, Andrea Ryder work is particularly distinctive, including celebrated scores for *Du‘aa al-Karawan* (The Nightingale’s Prayer, 1959; see YouTube examples), *al-Liss wa-l-Kilab* (The Thief and the Dogs, 1962) and *Ghurub wa Shuruq* (Sunset and Sunrise, 1970), amongst others (see Tumum 2019). The latter, a dark political thriller, has perhaps the shortest but most dramatic title sequence. It features, from the outset, astringent atonal counterpoint, complex rhythmic motifs and a romantic whole tone theme that we later recognize being played on the piano, on screen, by the heroine (played by Suad Hosni). The famous piano melody, echoing throughout the film, communicates her boredom, her yearning for freedom, and the tortured route this would take.

The prolificFouad al-Zahiri’s credits include films such as *Sira’ fi-l-Wadi* (Struggle in the Valley, sometimes translated as ‘Blazing Sun,’ 1956) and *al-Zawga at-Thaniya* (The Second Wife, 1967; see YouTube examples below), both social-realist studies of peasant struggle against landlords and corrupt authority. *Sira’ fi-l-Wadi*’s title music integrates studio-recorded Egyptian folk music and an orchestral score, which quickly turns into an intricate kind of concerto for two ‘*ud*s. They also include *Al-Qahira 30*, (Cairo 30, 1966), which reveals al-Zahiri’s penchant for musical humor and satire, including cameos by a young Abd al-Wahab performing on radio, and a self-parodying scene of Ottoman nostalgia starring Behija Hafiz (see above). Throughout his career, al-Zahiri would find other novel ways of blending Egyptian sounds with the motifs and formulae of the classic Hollywood film score (al-Din 2020).

Ryder’s protégé Ali Ismail’s credits include the films of novelist Naguib Mahfouz’s *Cairo Trilogy* (starting with *Bayn al-Qasrayn* [Palace Walk], 1964; see YouTube examples below) and *al-Ard* (The Land, 1969), another peasant struggle epic (al-Din 2019). Ali Ismail’s training as a saxophonist and jazz big band leader (much of it in the Egyptian military) are constantly in evidence, as is his orientation to the popular song repertory. The motifs in *Bayn al-Qasrayn*, for example, are all hewn from the Sayyid Darwish song, ‘Zuruni Kull Sana’(‘Visit Me Each Year’)*.*

Revolutionary cultural programming makes it hard to distinguish ‘serious’ and ‘light’ cinema; the same directors, composers and actors tended to work across the spectrum. Musicals and dance films were no exception. Star vocalist Abd al-Halim Hafiz (1929-1977) took up the mantle of Abd al-Wahab, but his musicals had a serious side, drawing on Egyptian literature and touching on revolutionary themes. His first, *Lahn al-Wafa* (Song of Faithfulness, 1955; see YouTube examples below), reprises and updates Mohammed Abd al-Wahab’s *al-Warda al-Bayda* (see above). It depicts a young musician – similarly detached from his family - who falls out with his adopted father over love for one of his father’s students (played by Shadia); his adopted father wanders off in despair; Abd al-Halim and Shadia between them continue work on, and eventually restage, their musical mentor’s modern orchestral masterpiece. The event results – just as professional success does for ‘Ustaz Galal’ in *al-Warda al-Bayda* – in public recognition and a melodramatic reconciliation of the lovers and father figure (see YouTube examples below). Another 15 film musicals followed, with similar, if gently varying, revolutionary sensibilities, and with a similar emphasis on music and on the musician as agents driving the narrative, rather than merely illustrating or reflecting it.

In *Maw’id Gharam* (Appointment with Love, 1956), for instance, Abd al-Halim plays an idle young man (‘Samir’) whose life gains focus when he falls in love with ‘Nawal’ (an earnest young journalist, played by Fatin Hamama), who exhorts him to take himself more seriously. ‘Samir’ embarks on a musical career, which tears the lovers apart; ‘Nawal’ falls ill, and gradually responds to the affections of ‘Dr. Kamal,’ a stiffly respectable figure played by Imad Hamdi. Two musical numbers at the heart of the film, ‘Bayni wa Baynak Eih?’ (‘What Is There Between Us?’) and ‘Law Kunt Yawm Ansak’ (‘If The Day Were to Come When I Forget You’) dramatize the rise of ‘Samir’s career and the disintegration of the relationship between ‘Samir’ and ‘Nawal.’ The first is a lively foxtrot, composed by Kamal al-Tawil, showing ‘Samir’ performing in front of appreciative audiences and critics. The second is a pained monologue, composed by Mohammed al-Mougi, another member of the team who served Abd al-Halim throughout his film career. In this we see ‘Samir’ in Beirut, performing on television at the height of his career, but clearly haunted by the emotional cost of his career success; ‘Nawal’ is seen, meanwhile, watching at home in Cairo, trapped in her wheelchair, tears running down her cheeks. The labor was often divided between al-Tawil and al-Mougi in this way, but other composers added to the mix. Ali Ismail, a noted bandleader, supplied jazzy scores for many of his musicals, such as *Ma‘budat al-Gamahir* (The Peoples' Idol, 1963), for instance, as well as for dance spectaculars like *Gharam fi al****-*** *Karnak* (Love in Karnak, 1967).

Dance played a central part in Egyptian film in the 1950s. It often appeared in sequences referred to as *isti’rad ghina’i* (sung showcases), staged shows within the film put on by the ambitious protagonists. These were playful, complex and intertextual. One such showcase*, ‘Abtal al-Gharam’* (‘Heroes of Love’) in the romantic comedy *Anisa Mama* (Miss Mum, 1950), for example, brought together the talents of composer-singer Mohamed Fawzi, Lebanese singer Sabah and former *munulugist* (monologue singer) Yassine. This performance affectionately mocks Abd al-Wahab’s classic operetta *Majnun Layla* (1939). In fact, such sequences frequently made passing references to popular songs and the film industry itself, as when Fairuz al-Saghira sang a section of Layla Murad’s 1949 hit song ‘Itmakhtari Ya Khayl’ (‘Amble On, Horse’), in *Ghazl al-Banat* (The Flirtation of Girls, 1949). An Arab nationalist message was occasionally reflected in the set design in such sequences, incorporating folk repertoires and dances from other Arabic-speaking countries, for example, as in the ‘Busat Al-Rih’ (‘The Flying Carpet’) sequence in *Akhir Kidhba* (The Last Lie, 1950). This kind of playfulness and intertextuality was consistently on display in the films made for the Reda (Dance) Troupe, led by Mahmud Reda, such as *Agazit Nus al-Sana* (Summer Holiday, 1962) and *Gharam fi al-Karnak*. Ali Ismail provided music sensitive to the Arabic and European influences within Reda’s pioneering choreographies.

Films were also an important vehicle for the stage comedians and satirists of the period. The comedy duo Fouad al-Muhandis and Shwikar were not trained singers – indeed, they were not known, at all, for their musical abilities - but their film songs were nonetheless extremely popular, e.g., ‘Albi Ya Ghawi Khamas Qarraat’ (‘I’ve Got a Sweetheart in All Five Continents’) in *Mutarda Gharamiyya* (A Love Chase, 1968). What Al-Muhandis lacked in vocal skills he compensated for with charisma, making his tongue-in-cheek satire often the most memorable parts of films, for example, the mockery of international diplomacy in ‘Ana Wad Khatir’ (‘I’m All That’) in *Ganab Al-Safir* (His Excellency, 1966). Similarly,Thulathi Adwaa’ al-Masrah (The Footlights Trio), a trio of stand-up comics, performed many of their skits through song - for example, the existentialist, even blasphemous complaint about the injustice of ever having been born,‘Law Kanu Sa’aluna’ (‘If We’d Been Asked’), in the film *Talatin Yawm Fil Sign* (30 Days in Prison, 1966). In many ways, such performances continued the tradition of theatrical monologue singing. Film was sometimes simply an adjunct to ongoing stage, concert or radio careers; talents and energies flowed across these spaces and were seldom confined to one. To add to the complexity of defining ‘film musicals’ in the 1950s and 1960s, established singer-actors such as Shadia, who often starred alongside Abd al-Halim Hafiz, extended their careers in serious film dramas involving very little singing or none at all (e.g., *Midaq Alley* and *Miramar*, film versions of Naguib Mahfouz’s famous novels published in 1947 and 1967).

After the Revolution: 1970 to 2000

President Sadat, who came to power in 1970, dismantled Nasser’s command economy, leaving Egyptian film to find its own way. Defeat in the 1967 war against Israel had crushed the country’s morale. Television began to dominate, and to syphon off talent. Cassettes and videos also played a role in shifting entertainment away from the cinema and towards the home. A turbulent economy and a long-standing failure to invest in the industry took their toll, creating new rifts between an Egyptian *auteur* cinema directed towards international audiences and local pot-boilers. By any criteria, the ‘Golden Age’ had ended.

Egyptian *auteur* cinema was dominated by Youssef Chahine (1926-2008). His early films work within the musical conventions of ‘Golden Age’ cinema but contain some striking twists indicative of his later experimentalism, including in his handling of sound. *Bab al-Hadid* (Cairo Station, 1958), for example, contains a scene where Hind Rustum (as ‘Hannuma’, a drinks seller on the train) dances playfully along to Egypt’s first rock’n’roll band, Mike and the Jets. Chahine, playing the disabled and predatory newspaper vendor anti-hero, dances along on the platform as the travelers’ clapping intensifies and the situation in the carriage spins out of control. A reflexive and experimental attitude towards song and dance routines is consistently on display in his later films, as, for example, in *Awdit al-Ibn al-Dal* (The Return of the Prodigal Son, 1976) starring Magda al-Roumi, with music by Abou Zeid Hassan and songs by Baligh Hamdi, Kamal al-Tawil and Sayyed Mekawy, and in his autobiographical Alexandria Trilogy (*Iskindiriyya …Lih?* [Alexandria… Why?*,* 1978], with music and sound by Fouad al-Zahiri; *Haduta Masriyya* [An Egyptian Story, 1982]; and *Iskindiriyya Kaman wu Kaman* [Alexandria Again and Forever, 1989]).

If budgets were increasingly constrained and lavishly orchestrated film scores were a thing of the past, Egyptian film composers responded to the new conditions creatively. Pioneering electric guitarist Omar Khurshid introduced a rock idiom to Egyptian film soundtracks (e.g., *Laylat il-abd ‘ala Fatma* [The Night of Fatma's Arrest, 1984]). Mudi al-Imam’s soundtracks used keyboards and synthesizers to create distinctively angular soundtracks for dark, satirical comedies (e.g., Adel Imam’s *al-Irhab wa-l-Kabab* [Terrorism and Kebab, 1992]) and off-beat thrillers (e.g., Atef al-Tayyib’s *Al-Hurub* [The Escape, 1988]). Omar Khairat’s soundtracks by contrast featured, equally recognizably, an orchestral sound comprising soaring strings, romantic piano melodies and a soft-rock beat (*Khalli Ballak min A‘lak* [Take Care of Your Mind,1985]; *Al-Irhabi* [The Terrorist, 1994]). His soundtrack ‘classics’ have continued to be performed in orchestral concerts at Cairo’s Opera and elsewhere. Hani Shenouda’s soundtracks (*Al-Harrif* [The Street Player], 1984; *Shams iz-Zanati*, 1991) typically draw on the soundscapes of Egyptian and Mediterranean popular song. Meanwhile, Intissar Abd al-Fattah’s striking soundtrack to *Al-Tawq wa-l-Iswara* (The Collar and the Bracelet, 1986), a grim peasant melodrama, evoked rural Egyptian folk melodies and incorporated traditional instruments such as the *ney* (flute).

The larger studios of the 1990s enabled a more tightly engineered studio sound. Yasir Abd al-Rahman’s soundtracks for political dramas and thrillers (*Nasser 56*, 1996, see YouTube examples below;) follow the conventions of Hollywood blockbuster soundtracks of the John Williams era while adding Egyptian and other non-western instruments and sounds (‘*ud,* panpipes, *qanun*).

Rageh Daoud’s soundtrack to one of the most celebrated social-realist comedies of the decade, Daoud Abd El Sayed’s *al-Kit Kat* (1991; see YouTube examples below), features his ‘Passacaglia for Lute, String Orchestra and Organ.’ This punctuates the story of a blind man whose hashish smoking, singing and chaotic life entertain the neighborhood but reduce both him and his son to penury. Sayed Mekawy provided the diegetic songs for the film’s ‘Kit Kat club,’ the hero’s hashish den, which are accompanied sparsely in traditional style on the *‘ud.* The film is nostalgic for the *tarab* (musical enchantment) of ‘the old days’ represented by Mekawy’s songs, but the passacaglia emphasizes the underlying tragedy.

Khairy Bishara’s *Ice Cream fi Glim* (Ice Cream in Glim, 1992; see YouTube examples below) weaves Hussein al-Imam’s keyboard-dominated score together with the Abd al-Halim Hafiz and Elvis classics that feature in a downbeat story of a delivery boy (played by then rising popstarAmr Diab), obsessed with the popular culture of the past yet searching consciously throughout the film for his ‘own sound.’ The late 1990s saw a number of emerging and established malepop stars in films depicting the struggles of young working-class men, with inventive soundtracks combining past and present, for instance Mohammad Fouad in*Isharit Murur* (Traffic Light, 1996). The soundtracks of the 1990s increasingly reflected the self-questioning and pessimistic tone of public life during President Mubarak’s latter years.

From 2000 to 2020

Popular cinema in the twenty-first century has tended to feature mostly comedies and action-adventure films, again with song and dance. Many film-makers have adapted existing musical film formats to new song genres, notably *mahraganat*, a street music which blends *sha‘bi* (Egyptian urban popular) song, Arab pop, electronics, rap and hip-hop (see, e.g., Ahmed al-Badri’s *Gumhurriyat Imbaba* [The Republic of Imbaba, 2015]). Rising stars in the commercial pop world have continued to find major success crossing into comedies, as did Tamer Hosni in *Al-Badla* (The Suit, 2018). Comedian and rapper Ahmed Mekky broke fresh ground using rap for satire and youth empowerment in his films, such as *H. Dabbour* (2008) and *Tir Inta* (You Fly, 2009; see YouTube examples below). Pop singers may lend their singles to a film even if they never feature on screen, e.g., Mohamed Hamaki’s ‘Wahda Wahda’ (‘Go Easy’) in *Ga‘alatni Mugriman* (She Made Me a Criminal, 2006). In other films, *sha‘bi* singers such as Ahmad Sheba or Hakim have guest starred and performed a hit song, which was then associated with the film and boosted its commercial success. Whilst much has changed in the industry, established models of crossover between song and cinema have remained

Ammar al-Sharei’s Abd al-Halim Hafiz biopic soundtrack (*Halim*, 2006) stands out for his cleverly engineered recreations of Abd al-Halim’s film-musical classics. Egyptian cinema has frequently commented on or described the iconic quality of Abd al-Halim’s voice in everyday Egyptian soundscapes, most memorably in *Zawgat Ragul Muhim* (The Wife of an Important Man, 1988), which explores his place in the intimate and political subjectivities of Egyptian women.

Other films have kept contemporary popular culture at an arm’s length (e.g., Tamer Karawan’s subdued piano score to Mohammed Khan’s romantic and social drama *Fi* *Shaqit Masr al-Gadida* [In the Heliopolis Flat, 2007]). It is hard, however, to identify a single distinct trajectory in Egyptian cinema soundtracks in the years leading up to, and following, the 2011 Revolution (which saw extended street protests in and around Tahrir Square in Cairo culminate in the abdication of President Hosni Mubarak). There has, however, been a clear bias towards *sha‘bi* songs since 2011, given that Sobky and similar production houses have dominated the scene. Television soap operas (*musalsalat*) have continued to dominate the media landscape, drawing in the film music composers of an earlier generation (such as Mudi al-Imam and Rageh Daoud), as well as producing new talent (such as Khalid Hammad).

Classic film soundtracks are, by definition, a thing of the past, but they are kept alive in Egypt on radio and television series which dedicate episodes to them. Some have had a large following, e.g., Ammar al-Sharei’s radio series *Ghawwaas Fi Bahr al-Nagham* [*‘*Diver in the Sea of Melodies*’*], which was recorded in the late 1980s but which went on for some 20 years; or Esaad Younes’ variety show *Sahibat al-Sa‘ada* (‘Her Excellency’), which began in 2014. Egyptians and others in the Arab world also hear and enjoy these soundtracks, increasingly, on channels such as Rotana, online through YouTube and streaming services such as Netflix and Watchit.com.

Bibliography

Arasoughly, Alia. 1996. *Screens of Life: Critical Film writing from the Arab world.* St-Hyacinthe, Quebec: World Heritage Press.

al-Din, Inas Galal. 2019. *Ali Ismail: Musiqar ‘Alami bi Mathaq Misri* [Ali Ismail: World Musician with an Egyptian Flavour]. Cairo: Yastarun.

al-Din, Inas Galal. 2020. *Fouad al-Dhahiri: Hina Teskununa al-Musiqa* [Fouad al-Dhahiri: When Music Dwells In Us]. Cairo: Yastarun.

Armbrust, Walter. 1996. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Armbrust, Walter. 2000. ‘Farid Shauqi: Tough Guy, Family Man, Cinema Star,’ In *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, eds. Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb. London: Saqi, 199-226.

Bracco, Carolina. 2019a. ‘The Creation of the Femme Fatale in Egyptian Cinema.’ *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 15: 307-29.

Bracco, Carolina. 2019b. ‘The Changing Portrayal of Dancers in Egyptian Films.’ *Anthropology of the Middle East* 14: 6-22.

El Khachab, Chihab. 2019. ’The Sobky Recipe and the Struggle over ‘The Popular’ in Egypt.’ *Arab Studies Journal* 27(1): 34-61.

El Khachab, Chihab. 2021. *Making Film in Egypt: How Labor, Technology, and Mediation Shape the Industry*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

Elsaket, Ifdal. 2019. ’Sound and Desire: Race, Gender, and Insult in Egypt’s First Talkie.’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51(2): 203-32.

Fahmy, Ziad. 2020. *Street Sounds: Listening in Everyday Life in Modern Egypt*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Farrugia, Marisa. 2002. *The Plight of Women in Egyptian Cinema (1940s-1960s).* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leeds.

Gordon, Joel. 2002. *Revolutionary Melodrama: Popular Film and Civic Identity in Nasser’s Egypt.* Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center.

Hafez, Sabry. 2006. ’The Quest for / Obsession with the National in Arabic Cinema.’ In *Theorising National Cinema*, eds. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen. London: British Film Institute, 226-53.

Hasso, Frances S. 2020. ‘“I have Ambition”: Muhammad Ramadan’s Proletarian Masculinities in Postrevolutionary Egyptian Cinema.’ *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 52(2): 197-214.

Shafik, Viola. 2007a. *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.

Shafik, Viola. 2007b. *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class and Nation*. Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press

Stokes, Martin. 2010. ‘Listening to Abd al-Halim Hafiz.’ In *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, ed. Mark Slobin. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 309-36.

Tumum, Rasha. 2019. *Andrea Ryder: Mubdi‘ Musiqa al-Film* [Andrea Ryder: Innovator in Film Music]. Cairo: Luxor African Film Festival.

Van Eynde, Koen. 2011. ‘Mohamed ‘el-Limby’ Saad and the Popularization of a Masculine Code.’ *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 4(1).

Van Eynde, Koen. 2015. *Men in the Picture: Representations of Men and Masculinities in Egyptian Cinema since 1952*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

Vitalis, Bob. 2000. ‘ “American Ambassador in Technicolor and Cinemascope:” Hollywood and Revolution on the Nile.’ In *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond,* ed. Walter Armbrust. Berkeley: University of California Press, 269-91.

Youssef, Islam. 2020. ‘“Why Are You Talking Like That, Sir?”: Il-Limbi, Phonology and Class in Contemporary Egypt.’ Arabica, 67(2-3): 260-77.

Filmography [corrected fully in separate document, I have not checked the below]

*Al-Irhab wa-l-Kabab,* dir. Adel Imam. 1992. Egypt. 115 mins. Original music by Mudi al-Imam.

*Al-Kit Kat* , dir Daoud Abd El Sayed. 1991. Egypt. 128 mins. Original music by Rageh Daoud.

*Bab al-Hadid*, dir. Youssef Chahine. 1958. Egypt. 73 mins. Original music by Fouad al-Zahiri

*Bayn al-Qasrayn*, dir. Hassan al-Imam. 1964. Egypt. 128 mins.. Original music by Ali Ismail.

*Dumu‘ al-Hubb*, dir. Muhammad Karim. 1935. Egypt. 135 minutes. Original music by Mohammed Abd al-Wahab.

*Ghurub wa Shuruq*, dir. Kamal al-Shaikh. 1970. Egypt. 122 minutes. Original music by Andreas Ryder.

*Lahn al-Wafa*, dir. Ibrahim Imara. 1955. Egypt. 180 minutes. Original music by Mohammed Mougi, Husen Genid, Kamal al-Tawil, Munir Murad, Riyad al-Sunbati and Muhammed al-Sharif.

*Layla Bint al-Sahra*, dir. Behija Hafiz. 1937. Egypt. Original music by Behija Hafiz.

*Ma’wid Gharam*, dir. Henri Barakat. 1956. 137 minutes. Original music by Mohammed Mougi. Mohammed al-Sharif and Kamal al-Tawil.

*Sira fi-l-Wadi*. dir. Youssef Chahine. 1956. Egypt. 105 minutes. Original music by Fouad al-Zahiri.

*Widad*, dir. Fritz Kramp. 1935. Egypt. 99 minutes. Original music by Pino Tinto and Riyad al-Sunbati.

*Yacout*, dir. Willy Rozler. 1934. Egypt/France. 120 mins. Original music by Sayyid Shata and Jean Latove.

YouTube Examples

*Abi Fawq Al-Shagara أبي فوق الشجره*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBdG\_Btm3SM

*Al-Warda Al-Bayda الوردة البيضاء*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtBuPo4EAw4>

*Al-Zawga al-Thaniya* الزوجة الثانية

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LciDCwb4I0>

*Barsum Yabhath ‘an Wazifa* برسوم يبحث عن وظيفة

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivHn7V66cp8>

*Bayn Al-Qasrayn* بين القصرين

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X4O1AugiWA>

*Du‘aa al-Karawan* دعاء الكروان

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1mldRdh1X0>

*Ice Cream Fi Glim آيس كريم في جليم*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vt-rQtl8U4>

*Kit Kat الكيت كات*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_NeJ1Qyenw>

*Lahn al-Wafaa لحن الوفاء*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VGj0522wZ8>

*Nasser 56* ناصر 56

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UE3n1G-Sln8>

*Tir Inta طير انت*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F99kzZwKsKs>

*Widad وداد*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbFxmDQTo4E>

*Yacout ياقوت*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v==nVN9t9J73e8>

Yara Salahiddeen and Martin Stokes

5713/6474