

*From: **Lost History, The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers, and Artists***

By: Michael Hamilton Morgan

Page: 240-243

Within the song of civilizations, always resonating in the background is another song of love for God. Many of the thinkers who also plumb the stars and spin out the numbers of the source code of the universe will extend those theories and studies to music, which they see as a branch of philosophy and directly related to mathematics. Many of the giants of Muslim mathematics, philosophy, and even medicine will also add complexity and formal structure to the song of civilizations. The scholars Al Kindi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd will delve deeply into musical theory and will begin to use a form of musical notation based on letters of the alphabet. Ziryab, the ninth-century Baghdad musician driven by jealousy to the Umayyad court in Cordoba, will create the world's first music conservatory there, even as he cooks, designs clothes, and creates new hair styles.

Another high theorist of music is ibn al-Farabi, a ninth-century Persian who gravitates to a court in Syria. Al-Farabi will write five treatises on music, including the following observation to his theories:

The man and the animal, under the impulsion of their instincts, emit sounds that express their emotions, as they can be the one of joy or fear. The human voice expresses greater variety — sadness, tenderness, rage. These sounds, in the diversity of their notes, cause in the person that listens to them, such shades of feelings or passions, raising to him, controlling to him or tranquilizing to him.

Al-Farabi will write about pitch and diatonic tuning — staying within a key or scale — and microtones or neutral intervals.

Theologian-philosopher al-Ghazali, the 12th-century thinker who will begin to lead a final retreat from rationalist Islam into a more heartfelt and mystical orientation, will see a direct linkage between mystical faith and mystical music. He writes:

It is not possible to enter the human heart without passing by the antechamber of the ears. The musical, measured subjects emphasize what there is in the heart and reveal their beauties and defects.

These theories will over time be translated and gradually make their way northward to Europe from al-Andalus and Sicily, brought by the crusaders or by other means of transfer, though often with a time lag of centuries.

According to historian H.G. Farmer, one key transmission from Muslims to Europeans is Arab-Muslim musical notation. He states that although few European music historians will consider that the notation "do re mi fa so la ti" started other than in 11th-century Italy, compelling evidence exists that Italians were simply using earlier Arabic notation from the ninth and tenth centuries. In his book *Historical Facts for the Arabian Musical Influence*, he gives the following comparison of the Italian and Arabic notations:

Arabic alphabet:	Mi	Fa	Sad	La	Sin	Dal	Ra
Italian notes:	Mi	Fa	Sol	La	Si	Do	Re

Another musical form will find its roots in seventh-century Arabian poetry. One of the greatest early poets of Mecca, Umar ibn Abi Rabi'ah al-Makhzumi, will contribute to a poetic form called the *ghazel* literally a love poem. He will write poems about his affairs with noble women pilgrims visiting Mecca.

Something gallant will also begin to evolve in the laboratory of early Arab poetry: the idea of courtly love. The Arabian poet seen as the forefather of later European chivalric love is Jamil, a seventh-century poet of the city of Medina. He writes about lovers who become martyrs to their love, dying for the highest emotion in earthly life.

One of the last eighth-century Umayyad rulers in Damascus, al-Walid ibn Yazid, will write amusing love poems and odes about drinking.

In medieval al-Andalus and Sicily, the Muslim poetic and musical forms will begin to spin off in several directions that will echo around the world. An Andalusian musical form called al-muwashahat — strophic songs with a refrain — will spread throughout the Arab world and spawn a hybrid form called *zajal*, an early type of troubadour song, which will also resound north of the Pyrenees. Ninth-century Muslim wandering poet-singers will sing of chaste love for a woman. Whether this woman is an earthly symbol of the divine, or divine in her own right, is forgotten.

In the 13th century, Christian King Alfonso the Wise of Castile and Leon will sponsor the creation of more than 400 sacred Christian songs, a good 300 of which are in form and content replications of the Muslim *muwashahat*.

Other Christians north of Spain will start to sing similar song-poems several centuries later, initially devoted to the Virgin Mary, but eventually dedicated to any deserving fair lady. These singers will be known as *troubadours* in France and *trovatori* in Italy, their names possibly derived from the Arabic word *tarab*, meaning "ecstasy," as in the ecstasy of love. The concept of singing a poem to a loved one will explode into European culture, generating a new genre of music, the love song, which will prove eternal. With it will come a new awareness of the value of women and the concept of chivalry and honor will begin to lay the seeds for a more humane and enlightened European society.

Some of this musical transmission will come from travelers on both sides of the Pyrenees, among them Charlemagne, according to some sources, who spends seven full years in Spain during his military campaigns.

Other music historians will argue that the many Muslim women taken prisoner in various military campaigns in northern Spain and transported to Christian Europe will also serve as musical messengers. These hundreds of women, captured in the fall of places like Balbastro and trained since childhood in the musical forms of the Andalusian home and street, will be taken all over France and also to Italy by Pope Alexander's armies.

According to 21st-century music historian Dr. Rabah Saoud, not only Muslim musical theory and forms will go north, but from the eighth and ninth centuries musical instruments also will spread into northern Christian Spain, France, and Italy by Muslim minstrels and entertainers. The Muslim oud will spawn the European lute and later the guitar and mandolin. The Arabic *ghaita* will evolve into the Scottish *bagpipe* and Spanish and Portuguese *gaita*. The Muslim *qanun* will give birth to the English *harp* and the German *zither*. The Persian *kamancha* and Arab *rabab* will morph into the fiddle. The Muslim *zurna*, a woodwind instrument, will lead to the *oboe*. The Persian *santur*, an early form of the hammered dulcimer, will give rise to European keyboard instruments.

And even as the Muslim musical contribution echoes through Europe, it will keep evolving in Spain. The song of love and civilizations will be transformed but not erased by the Catholic reconquest and fall of Granada. Many Spanish Muslims, faced with expulsion, conversion, or death, will disappear into the shadows of their

suddenly unfriendly homeland. Some will join the gypsies, who are given a certain freedom to wander and remain apart. And these hybrid gypsy-Moors will create a form of music called flamenco, which 20th-century Cuban novelist Gabriel Cabrera Infante will say is a derivative of an Arabic *xeim*, *fellah mengu*, which means "country vagabonds."

And the Western Muslim musical form with the stamp of the long dead *Ziryab* will not be confined to Spain, Portugal, and Europe. It will accompany the Spanish conquistadors and colonists as they head west to the Americas, spawning genres such as the samba of Brazil, the *jarabe* of Mexico, *la cueca* of Chile, *elgato* of Argentina and Uruguay, and *la guajira* of Cuba.

Musicologists will even claim to find echoes of the Muslim song of divine love in the American blues, created by slaves and their descendants, whose forebears had been Muslims in Africa.