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The Arab Avant-Garde: Music, Politics, Modernity edited by Thomas Burkhalter, Kay Dickinson, and Benjamin J. Habert

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discussion of the authors’ methodology. I have the impression that rather than spending time interviewing or questioning a large number of archivists working with music materials, they took much of their material from printed sources on archival theory and practice.

Would I recommend this book? A music librarian with no archival experience or training would find many of the topics discussed very useful. However, reading this book will not give him or her specific strategies for dealing with music materials. Likewise, trained archivists with no musical experience who suddenly find themselves confronted with music materials will not find much useful information. We must continue to wait for a more informative book that discusses best practices specifically for treating music materials in archives.

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*The Arab Avant-Garde* fills an important gap in research about music in the Middle East. While many books have been written about “classical” Middle-Eastern styles, and a handful have been written about the popular music of the region, almost none have explored the idea that a musical Arab avant-garde exists. While the subtitle “Music, Politics, Modernity” might make it comparable to books like Laudan Nooshin’s *Music and Play of Power in The Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia* (Farnham, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), the inclusion of the avant-garde and modernity make this book unique and worthwhile.

Editor Kay Dickinson leads with the book’s introduction, subtitled “‘Arab’ + ‘Avant-Garde’” with scare quotes and capitalization intact, which seems off-putting, but is an important move for the work that follows. In recognizing that the topic is worthy of both scare quotes to illustrate their contested nature, and capitalization for their importance, Dickinson sets the tone of the whole book. The goal of the book is not to define the Arab Avant-Garde, but to explore its important and contested nature by looking at a variety of artists who identify as both, while teasing out the implications of being so—both for relations of the artists to their own cultures, countries, and traditions, but also to the grand tradition of the avant-garde as it has been
established in western countries: the “... paradoxically conservative insinuations of a dominating European or American claim on vanguardism” (p. 6). Instead of straightforwardly outlining the book, Dickinson’s introduction outlines the new stakes that the book raises.

From there the book is broken out into three sections. The first is “Alternative Modernities: Norms and Innovations,” which examines the way that the Arab avant-garde interacts not only with national traditions, but also with the way that avant-garde acts as a military metaphor from the Western source of colonial power, both historically through various invasions, but also with the rise of Orientalism in modernity and Western avant-garde arts. The three chapters in the section have wildly different approaches. From mostly musicological approaches to Western-trained Beirut-based composers to a long-format interview with an Iraqi-American jazz improviser and student of *maqam* (a system of modal practice), and finally to a survey of locally produced music that challenges the notion of “world music,” the whole section seems purposely disjointed, while each chapter is excellent alone.

The second section, “Roots and Routes,” deals explicitly with issues around geography and the avant-garde. Consisting of three chapters examining individual musician/performers, it is the least surprising part of the book. The net result is that the Arab avant-garde is highly localized, if not individualized, and while Michael Khoury’s chapter “A Look at Lightning: The Life and Compositions of Halim El-Dabh” is the standout, none of them specifically addresses that issue, and how it makes the Arab avant-garde different from others.

The final section of the book, entitled “Political Deployments of the Avant-Garde,” has the easiest goal—to investigate “... how complex artistic expressions can coincide with and reimage anticolonial or antigovernmental rhetoric” (p. 11). The chapters that follow are the strongest in the book, not as a result of their somewhat simple goal, but with the depth to which they investigate how each respective avant-garde group navigates conceptions of Arab-ness in its own way. The first is an international group of improvisers, who, despite being funded by the State Department, have to work through severe bureaucratic and cultural impediments in the United States. Second comes a chapter about Palestinian hip-hop and its relation to American culture. The final chapter examines the evolution of heavy metal in Egypt, and the ways that metal fandom has been repressed by and counterbalances the Egyptian government and society at large.

Overall, this is an excellent volume. As a collection, it might be trying to cover too much ground too quickly, as each section is internally coherent but the relationships between the three are not as clear. Even a short conclusion might have helped without having to refer back to the introduction for context. Academic libraries supporting large Middle Eastern research
collections and music libraries focusing on popular or ethnomusicology will find this book to be of the most use.

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In Details of Consequence, Gurminder Kaur Bhogal examines several compositions by Debussy, Ravel, Satie, and Stravinsky that span the first three decades of the 20th century, setting them into a detailed textual history of the creative and discursive activity related to notions of ornament in French visual art and music. The focal point of this history occurs around 1900, when after being long-considered subordinate to whatever structures they adorned, ornamental patterns gained a powerful role in both domains. In musical scores such as Daphnis et Chloé and Reflets dans l’eau, we see and hear ornamental material such as trills, filigreed melodies, and virtuosic flourishes foregrounded as the principal structural and emotional content, without being subordinated to framing devices. In the 1910s, fluid, dazzling ornaments became problematic and increasingly old-fashioned when Cubist, Dadaist, and neo-Primitivist visual artists began to seek straighter lines and more repetitive decorative structures, as did Satie and Stravinsky in music. Thus ornament submitted once more to the rule of the frame during the 1920s. Putting a compelling new spin on Stravinsky, the author frames the Rite of Spring as transitional, mirroring the shifting understanding of ornament in 1913: its opening section features the fluid arabesque, while the subsequent sections turn to more linear, repetitive motifs.

Throughout the book, contemporaneous trends in painting, decorative art, and music are intertwined. This approach not only underlines the exchange occurring between French painters and musicians but is also a practical solution to the perennial musicological problem of how to attribute meaning in words to relatively non-representational musical scores. In this case, Bhogal deals with composers who were clearly intrigued by ornament but who unfortunately said very little on the subject. Turning to the written discourse of the broader musical community (especially music critics) and that of visual art professionals, Bhogal allows these textual sources a “prescriptive” function, potentially able to describe creative and interpretive