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'Ūd Taqsīm as a Model of Pre-Composition

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6. CONCLUSION

This dissertation responds to the research question: how does a *taqsīm* or an improvisation become a pre-composition? To address this issue, I have investigated the *taqsīm* practice of the Egyptian *'ūd* players Muḥammad al-Qaṣabjī and Riyāḍ al-Sunbāṭī. I have decoded their most significant traits in order to enrich and develop my own melodic-rhythmic vocabulary and deepen my understanding of the genre's structural, melodic, and rhythmic processes. Above all, al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbāṭī's practices were a solid reference and source of inspiration to design a model for pre-composing *taqsīm*-like pieces of music.

I conducted the composition process over a long period of time, and constantly reflected on and experimented with my improvisation practice. The experimentation was driven by two more questions: which techniques could be borrowed from the art of composition? And, in which way would it be possible to achieve variety in character from one composition to another?

My experimentations yielded a model of pre-composition through which I created a set of five pieces. These pieces can be more or less reproduced with adequate accuracy, and illustrate the influence of al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbāṭī in my work, and the knowledge and skills that I have developed and acquired throughout this project (three of these were analyzed and presented).

By the process I have followed in this research project I have sharpened my conscious awareness of the *taqsīm* as a generative process and became well aware of its different components at the macro and micro levels. I revised, enriched, and improved my skills in the genre.

The analysis of the *taqsīm* recordings by al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbāṭī's illustrate two different approaches of creative processes within the genre. Despite comparing two models of *taqsīm* practice separated by several decades, and in spite of the fact that they were recorded with different recording technologies, the two models of improvisation are great examples of how the genre has constantly evolved and further developed. For instance, in al-Qaṣabjī recordings we can recognize a connection with Arabic prosody. In al-Sunbāṭī's recordings, on the other hand, we can trace an influence of his instrumental music written for ensemble, such as the preludes to the songs he composed for Umm Kulthūm.

Below I briefly summarize and compare the most significant features of each player, and present how I addressed these features when designing my model of pre-composition.

Structural features

The concepts *action* and *resolution*, two concepts that I propose in this project, in addition to the concept of closure, proved to be highly beneficial to understanding structural processes in *taqsīm* and to creating my own pieces. The climax (a sub-concept of the *action*) as well proved

to be a crucial aspect in understanding the structure of the *taqāsīm* of both musicians. In al-Qaṣabjī model, which is adapted to the durational limitation imposed by the recording technology in the 1920s, the improvisation moves towards a single climax characterized by dense melodic activity. Many of al-Qaṣabjī's recordings build momentum when moving towards the climax and continue with an elaborate closure process. The climax and the final closure process are located at the last *fāṣilah*, and as a result in most of the recordings, this *fāṣilah* is relatively long when compared to the previous ones. Al-Qaṣabjī's recordings, especially the *taqāsīm* in ascending *maqāmat*, follow the basic phases or stages found in the *taqāsīm* genre, and mostly display a clear and sharp arch shape.

Al-Sunbātī's *taqāsīm* recordings, which were recorded almost five decades later, are characterized by a variety in terms of structure and revolve around one or two climaxes. The most significant aspect of al-Sunbātī's *taqāsīm* is a tension-suspense effect including atypical melodic behavior, modulation, and a substantial change in the rhythmic-temporal layer. Some of al-Sunbātī's recordings significantly expand the dominant level and/or alternate between the dominant and the tonic levels, or the dominant and the octave levels. The expansion or alteration is mainly achieved by full-fledged modulations and/or sections with unique melodic-rhythmic content.

Closure processes, especially *resolution* processes, are another element that proved to be helpful when observing structural design in *taqāsīm*. In most of al-Qaṣabjī's *taqāsīm*, *resolutions* are kept to the final closure, and maintain the momentum and a high pace of events after the climax. In al-Sunbātī's model, development sections often utilize *resolutions* as part of their closer processes and mostly display distinctive melodic-rhythmic material.

In some sense, in my own compositions I have followed al-Qaṣabjī by designing the structure around a single dense climax occurring in the piece's last *fāṣilah*. In every piece, I emphasize the growth and a sense of directionality towards the climax by careful treatment of the proportions of music material in every section. I cautiously treat the closure processes throughout the composition, and generally speaking, I avoid strong closure processes before the climax. For instance, some of the techniques I have used are implementing incomplete *resolutions* (i.e. *resolutions* that lack *iqāmāt* before the final cadences), or a measured growth in the cadences throughout the compositions. The strongest closure appears after the climax. It is followed by a highly elaborate *resolution* which emphasizes the graduality of the melodic descent. The final closure process ends with a strong cadence, the strongest in the composition.

Pitch and melodic features

Though I have not attempted to fill the gaps between the practice and theory of *maqām* in this dissertation, one aspect is noteworthy. Al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbātī's models exemplify two different approaches to modal tempo. Several of al-Qaṣabjī's recordings include a fast modal tempo where a modal change is carried out in almost every *fāṣilah*, phrase or semi-phrase. They mainly use a broad scope of *jins* possibilities or a wide range of modal colors within a *maqām*.

In al-Sunbātī's recordings, on the other hand, the *maqām* usually unfolds in a reserved and 'economized' manner.

Perhaps the differences in approach to modal tempo could be attributed to the fact that al-Qaṣabjī's model is compact due to the durational limitation of about three minutes. Nonetheless, these two approaches have served me as two strategies for creating diversity within my own compositions. And in my view, these two strategies can be taken into consideration when performing real-time improvisations.

By focusing on several pitch-related and rhythmic elements in each composition, I create a general character or an ambiance that is dominant over a large portion of the piece's duration. I aim to achieve as much diversity as possible in the type of character I create for each piece. Inspired by al-Sunbātī's practice, in each composition I create a tension-suspense effect before or during the climax that contributes to the dramatic effect. In addition, all the final cadences expand upon al-Sunbātī's cadence scheme exhibited in *taqṣīm nahāwand* and maintain several of the scheme's essential elements.

The elaboration on concise melodic ideas (creating coherent melodic content by employing repetition, transposition, and modification) forms an integral part of al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbātī's *taqṣīm* practices. Recurring patterns are found on the level of short melodic figures, semi-phrases, phrases, and even *fawāṣil*. In my model of pre-composition, I emphasize this notion and further develop the motivic processes. Every piece displays an elaborate motivic process creating melodic coherency among the piece's different *fawāṣil* and sections. By repeating large melodic segments or phrases, some pieces achieve elaborate or intricate forms.

Sequential treatment of melodic material, especially in descending melodic lines, forms a substantial part in the practices of al-Qaṣabjī and Sunbātī. In some sense, one of my challenges in this research project was to master the art of sequences or the sequential treatment as it is exemplified in the practices of these two great artists, and part of my own practice can be seen as a further development of these practices.

In al-Sunbātī's recordings, the sequential treatment seems more obvious for the simple reason that the real sequence (or the slightly modified sequence) is one of the most prominent features in his *taqṣīm* model and a landmark of his style. Al-Qaṣabjī, on the other hand, introduced a semi-sequential organization, especially in *resolutions*.

In my own compositions, I have used the sequence as the primary mechanism for melodic unfolding, either on a small-scale level, for example in scalar-like passages, or on a large-scale level, for instance in final *resolutions*. One notion that is unique in my model is using ascending sequences to create a sense of growth towards climaxes, especially in bridge-like segments or within the climax itself.

Rhythmic features

Investigating the rhythmic aspect in al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbāṭī's practices has been challenging. However, I tried to focus my observations on their most distinctive traits. Al-Qaṣabjī's rhythmic vocabulary includes a number of recurring rhythmic patterns that are derived from Arabic prosody. His rhythmic flow is based on various ways of combining these patterns. In addition, he intensively uses the *tarjī'āt* technique and *iqāmāt* with metric character.

Al-Sunbāṭī's most distinctive rhythmic qualities are influenced and shaped by his pre-composed instrumental pieces for ensemble. He often uses sequences and melodic segments based on duple and triple meter. In addition, his practice is characterized by a flexible pulse where tempo changes are occasionally evident.

In some sense, I have situated my rhythmic language between the practices of al-Qaṣabjī and al-Sunbāṭī. Seeking various musical fabrics in each composition was a helpful way of integrating and manipulating most of the rhythmic-temporal components I have encountered. In each composition, rhythmic variety and contrast are often used on the level of phrase, *fāṣilah*, or section within each piece through several (often intertwined) elements such as alternating between eighth and sixteenth notes, non-metric phrases and metric phrases, alternating between different types of *iqāmāt*, and by using phrases with or without the *tarjī'āt* technique.

The subject of pre-composed *taqsīm*-like pieces has been hardly explored. In this respect, my contribution to the field of *taqsīm* and Arabic music manifests itself in proposing a model for creating *taqsīm*-like compositions. This model is the result of a comprehensive analysis that serves the purpose of artistic research and practical knowledge. The analysis provides new insights into structural, melodic and rhythmical processes of the genre. In addition, my model of pre-composition elaborates on aspects of the practice of two of the genre's greatest masters.

Artistic research of pre-composed *taqsīm*-like pieces has great potential for further exploration. In this regard, one question would be: how can other models of pre-composition be developed? After conducting this research project, I believe that approaching the *taqsīm* genre from the point of view of pre-composition is beneficial to real-time improvisation. I also think that musicians could develop their improvisation skills through similar projects.