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The Oriental Music Broadcasts, 1936–1937: A Musical Ethnography of Mandatory Palestine, edited by Ruth F. Davis, Middleton, Wis., A-R Editions, 2013, Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music, 10, xliv + 124 pp. + 2CDs, \$175 (hardback) ISBN 978-0-89579-776-6

A series entitled 'Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music' may at first glance appear to be a strange host for a publication built around a series of musically illustrated talks on 'Oriental Music' presented between 18 November 1936 and 28 April 1937 on what was then the newly formed Palestinian Broadcasting Service. Yet this volume edited by Ruth Davis, which comes packaged with two CDs, offers much valuable material for contemporary researchers. Not only does this edition extend significantly recent efforts to recover the neglected pioneering work of comparative musicologist Robert Lachmann (1892–1939), but it also presents its primary textual and audio material in an exemplary manner with detailed commentary that situates it firmly within current scholarly discourse.

Robert Lachmann, as Davis relates in her Introduction, was born in Berlin and received his doctorate in 1922 for work on the music of Tunisian prisoners. He consolidated his reputation as an authority in the field by undertaking extensive fieldwork in North Africa and played a prominent role in the 1932 Cairo Congress of Arab Music. Dismissed for being Jewish by the Nazis from his post as music librarian at the Berlin State Library in 1933, after some negotiation he accepted an invitation to found an Archive of Oriental Music at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Between his arrival there in 1935 and his premature death less than four years later, Lachmann was a prodigious researcher, writer and lecturer. Notable among his achievements was the creation of a sound archive containing over nine hundred recordings of mainly traditional music from a wide range of indigenous ethnic and religious groups including Jews, Samaritans, Muslims, and Eastern Christians. With the exception of a monograph on the music of Tunisian Jews based on fieldwork from 1929 that appeared shortly after his death (Lachmann 1940), his late writings remained for decades unpublished and his recordings underutilised by researchers.

Davis covers the wider movement to index, disseminate, and analyse Lachmann's legacy as background to her detailed account of the creation and recovery of the radio broadcasts on Oriental Music. Interim stages in the latter process include the publication by Ruth Katz of an incomplete version of their scripts (2003), interim reports on the full contents of broadcasts offered by Davis herself (2005 and 2010), and collaborative efforts to identify and digitally process the musical examples. Forty in number, these were discovered to comprise thirty-three live performances recorded to metal discs and seven excerpts from commercial recordings of Arab music. Davis has provided twenty-two of these items on the accompanying CDs, each in two versions: a direct digital transfer of the often noisy and physically flawed source, and a moderately enhanced sonic restoration. Since Lachmann believed that the making of recordings should serve as a prelude to their 'scientific processing', in this edition annotated staff-notation transcriptions of the sound examples are embedded in the texts of the twelve broadcast scripts.

In the first broadcast, which included no musical examples and bears the title 'On First Hearing a Genuine Piece of Oriental Music', Lachmann builds a conceptual framework for the remainder of his series. Immersion in the traditional musics of the Middle East, he maintains, enables the Western listener to engage in a form of time travel back to their primordial origins.

Comparable to the evolutionary schemes articulated by such other comparative musicologists of his era as Curt Sachs, the story of development that Lachmann sketches was also consonant with what were then current understandings of the development of Jewish and Christian liturgical chant. Thus, for him, the metrically free religious cantillation of Jews, Eastern Christians, Samaritans and Muslims together represent a musical past out of which arose the technical innovations that led eventually to the modally and rhythmically sophisticated repertoires of Arab urban music. Antipathy toward these venerable traditions by Western listeners was therefore a sign of ignorance which Lachmann attributes primarily to misunderstandings of their forms and cultural significance. Under no circumstances, however, should such misapprehensions serve as pretexts to what he judged to be misbegotten efforts to modernise or otherwise 'improve' them with tonal harmony.

The following eleven programmes, which generally progress from sacred to secular repertoires, fill out this framework for understanding the music of the Middle East. A discussion of the liturgical singing of Yemenite Jews in Jerusalem in his second broadcast is thus succeeded by episodes on (3) Coptic chant, (4) the religious chanting of Kurdish Jews, (5) Bedouin song, and (6) Samaritan liturgical cantillation and song. A pair of broadcasts on (7) men's and (8) women's songs for Yemenite Jewish weddings then illustrates what Lachmann maintains was a transitional stage between the word-based music of cantillation and the maqam-based instrumental and vocal repertoires of Arab urban music, the creation of which marked the attainment of higher levels of musical abstraction.

Lachmann explains the developed modal system of Arab music in episode 9, demonstrating it with three taqsims performed live on the 'ud by Ezra Aharon, a Jewish immigrant from Baghdad whom he had first recorded in Cairo. Commercial recordings are featured on the next two broadcasts which showcase, respectively, (10) a 'Western style' of Arab music cultivated in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, and (11) an 'Eastern style' that illustrated with Egyptian, Turkish, Persian, and Hindustani examples. Songs from an Arab village wedding in Central Palestine in the final episode (12) lead Lachmann to final reflections on relationships between musical style, social function, and national character that conclude with a plea to preserve the diversity of Oriental music from the 'destructive' effects of Europeanisation.

In the present edition, Davis presents the texts of all twelve broadcasts with extensive annotations that not only indicate their sources, but also bring Lachmann's writing into dialogue with more recent scholarship. She then deepens her analyses of his data and interpretations in the substantial commentaries that follow each script. Having rescued unjustly neglected musical scholarship from the 1930s, Davis does much else here to illuminate the subsequent historiography of Middle Eastern music.

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