

Lesson 5 - Umm Kulthum and Her Effect on Audiences



Essential Questions:

- What makes one person, especially an artist, famous or successful?
- How can a figure from a different time and place be relevant to our lives today?

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Explain the concept of “*tarab*” in Arab music culture
- Draw connections between Umm Kulthum’s musical performance and contemporary artists

Standards Alignment:

- Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies
 - RH 2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions
 - RH 5. Describe how a text presents information
- National Standards for Foreign Language Education
 - Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through a foreign language and its cultures (through analysis of lyrics)

Materials:

- NPR interview on Umm Kulthum and *tarab*
 - <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90326836>
- “Karnabal” by Al-Bustan composer Kinan Abou-afach
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD3SFeJuJmg>
- “Umm Kulthum Improvisation” demonstrating *tarab*
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eavlX3fkHco>
- Concert performance by Sabah Fakhri
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxiEbivmly0&feature=related>
- “*Tarab* as Musical Ecstasy” excerpt by Dr. A. J. Racy
- “*Tarab*” excerpt and interview with Virginia Danielson

Procedure (suggested time):

Opening/Hook/Activate Prior Knowledge/Do Now: (10)

When all students have arrived in the classroom play “Karnabal” for them. It is a contemporary composition by cellist/composer Kinan abu-afach. After the video is complete, have students write down their reactions. How would they describe the music? Did it make them want to clap, or dance? Write student responses on the board to stimulate discussion.

Introduction (3)

Write the word “*tarab*” on the board. Instruct students that in this class, they will be learning about this concept in Arab music. Roughly translated, “*tarab*” means “enchantment,” or a feeling of getting so caught up in a musical experience, that you get “carried away.”

Quick Writing Activity (5)

Ask students if they have ever attended a musical performance in which they felt “carried away” by the music. For students who have not had this experience, or may not have attended many musical events, invite them to brainstorm other times in their life when they might have lost track of time, or felt “outside themselves.”

NPR Interview on “Tarab” (15)

Introduce the following audio clip from an NPR segment on Umm Kulthum. Ask students to think about how this concept might have been applied to Umm Kulthum.

- <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90326836>

Umm Kulthum Improvisation

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eavIX3fkHco>

“Tarab” Reading Activity (15)

Introduce the attached reading as two scholars’ descriptions of “*tarab*” in Arab music. Read the passage, either out loud as a whole class, in pairs/small groups, or individually if you do not foresee difficulties with reading comprehension. Have a discussion with students after the reading is done, centered on the question of “What is *tarab*?”

“Tarab” Today (10)

Have students watch the accompanying video of Sabah Fakhri, a singer known as the “sultan of *tarab*” Instruct students to pay close attention to the singer’s repetitions, and the audience’s reactions.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxiEbivmly0&feature=related>

Closing (5)

Students can either write or share out answers to the following prompts:

What kind of musical performances make you feel this sense of being carried away? How did Umm Kulthum demonstrate this quality in her performance? If you were a musician, would you seek to create this feeling in your audience? What would you do to achieve this?

***Tarab* as Musical Ecstasy**

excerpt from

Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab
by Dr. A.J. Racy, ethnomusicologist (scholar of music)

“*Tarab* can be described as a musically induced state of ecstasy, or as "enchantment" . . . In [my studies] the familiar term "ecstasy" is used because it appears relatively flexible and capable of being redefined to fit the musical phenomenon being studied. In fact, the word "ecstasy" has been included in some English-Arabic dictionaries as one of the equivalents of *tarab*.

“[E]cstasy, like *tarab*, implies experiences of emotional excitement, pain or other similarly intense emotions, exaltation, a sense of yearning or absorption, feeling of timelessness, elation or rapturous delight. Moreover, the term "ecstasy" tends to fit the various conditions associated with *tarab* as a transformative state, for example those connected with intoxication, empowerment, inspiration, and creativity. The term has also been commonly used by modern ethnomusicologists to indicate states of consciousness that are musically based, and in some cases also mystically oriented.”

Tarab

by Virginia Danielson

It's fair to liken Umm Kulthum's music to the blues in the way she blended together Quranic recitation, classical love poems and folk songs. Ethnomusicologist Virginia Danielson says it also included ***tarab*** — a unique quality of Arab music that translates best to the word "enchantment."

“What [*tarab*] refers to is the experience of really being carried away by the music," Danielson says, adding that she heard that illustrated when she interviewed people about listening to Umm Kulthum's broadcasts. "People would tell preposterous stories about getting up and leaving the house and not knowing where they were going, and just all kinds of experiences of completely forgetting your troubles, completely being outside yourself, having been transported by the experience."

Source: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124612595>