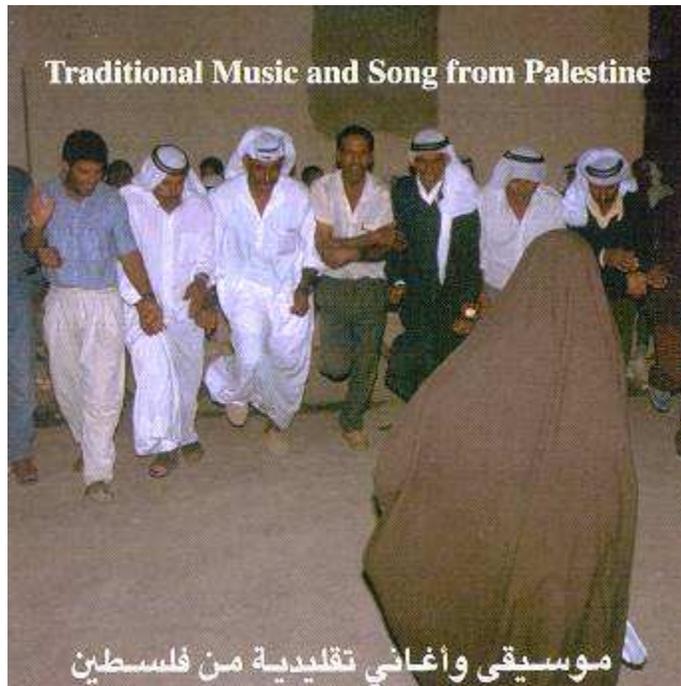


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M&A CD Reviews: Issa Boulos, [Traditional Music and Songs from Palestine](#)

Recordings by Bashar Shammout and Gidi Boss in cooperation with Westdeutscher Rundfunk , Cologne - Germany. Poular Art Center PAC-1001.

Photographs by Bashar Shammout.
CD with notes in English and Arabic.
No bibliography.
13 tracks recorded in the field. 1997.



The Popular Art Center (PAC) launched the Traditional Music and Song Research Project in the mid 1990s in an attempt to build a National Archive for the research and preservation of Palestinian folklore. With the help of the Welfare Association in Geneva, Switzerland and Buntstift Foundation, in Goettingen, Germany, the Center was able to collect and document many aspects of Palestinian life including information about traditional musicians, singers, songs, genres, instruments, rhythms, lyrics, melodies, and regional melodic variations as well as conducting more general research into the function of music in Palestinian society. The Center recorded hundreds of hours of live and/or staged performances mainly in the northern and central regions of the West Bank. The Center released this CD in 1997 as a first step towards introducing this music to the rest of the world. Thereafter, the Center has continued its collection of musical material and has expanded the regions that have so far been investigated.

This recording does offer something that has long been wanting in this field.

Whereas the music of most other Middle Eastern regions has been the subject of

ethnomusicological fieldwork for a number of decades now, that of Palestine is not so well known. Hence, this work provides documentation of some of the vernacular traditions of various folk instruments and vocal styles.

Many aspects of Palestinian folk music are presented in the CD: instrumental dance songs and/or pieces, improvisations, short songs and long songs. The CD highlights instrumental and vocal virtuosity and interpretations, in addition to regional melodic variations. The 13 tracks offer a reasonable overview of Palestinian folk music, albeit with some bias towards the northern regions. The notes provide tips about the history of the music, its origins, function in society, and the changes it underwent over the years. They also provide descriptions of the recorded instruments, playing methods, and the actual materials the instruments are crafted from.

My main criticism, however, concerns the notes, which appear to lack expert input. Not enough information is provided about the settings in which these particular pieces were performed, for example, nor is there any information about the vocal repertoire, poetry, vocal and instrumental improvisations. Introduced in the CD, for instance, is Musa al-`Hâfidh, (tracks 8, 11, 12 and 13), who is considered one of the best *Zajal* poets of his generation. *Zajal*, which is a form of poetry, common in the Levant area, is composed and sung in the colloquial Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian dialects of Arabic. The *zajal* poet is traditionally expected to improvise his own poetry and perform it in song at festivals and festive occasions (tracks 8, 11), often for long hours, when representing his village or community. Currently in his late forties, al-`Hâfidh attributes his knowledge and mastery of *Zajal* and *Zajal* techniques to his own father, a *Zajal* master, whom had tutored the young Musa early on. So far, al-`Hâfidh has published two works on *Zajal* entitled **Hadîth Qarâya**, and **al-Zajal al-Sha`bi**. In these books, he introduces some of the subgenres of *Zajal* such as: `Atâba (track 13), Murâbba`, Muthamman, Muanna, Qurrâdi, and discusses their melodic and structural designs, poetic meters, in addition to rhyme schemes.

His books also include some examples of each genre and explanations of their

poetic-musical compositional techniques and some common variations on them. Other performers were also introduced in the CD including Majid abu-Jarâr in tracks 1, 10 on *mijwiz* (a cane double-bore shawm), and vocal in track 9; Awa abu-`Hadid in tracks 3 and 4 on *shibbabah* (an end-blown flute) and *rababah* (a bowed lute); and Atif Swaitât in track 2 on *yarghul* (similar to the *mijwiz*, but with drone rather than double pipe). Information about the dialects and regional variations on melody and lyrics is equally lacking.

Furthermore, the liner notes omit detailed track information about the pieces and the performers and contain, in addition, a number of typing errors in the Arabic track list (for example: #1, *mijwiz*; #6 and #7, *zaffa* (wedding procession). Nonetheless, the field recordings are of good quality. Taken as a whole, the CD does fill a gap in our overall knowledge of the folkloric culture in Palestine, particularly by highlighting women's contributions to an unknown and exciting repertoire - as heard on tracks 5, 6, and 7. The project also server the very important purpose of documenting present-day Palestinian musical life.

Boulos, Issa. [Traditional Music and Songs from Palestine](http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/ma/index/number7/boulos/palesti.htm). Journal of Musical Anthropology of the Mediterranean, Number 7, M&A CD Reviews, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/ma/index/number7/boulos/palesti.htm>
