

# Music, Literature, Dance and Fashion | Music | Composers and musicians of the Arab and Ottoman world

Sayed Darwich's (1892–1923) "songs speak vibrantly of hawkers, craftsmen, water carriers, waiters, boatmen of the Nile .... It is hardly surprising therefore that he has come to be seen as a musician of the people." (From Gabriel Saadé)

Because musical notation was generally not used by the traditional musicians of North Africa and the Near East, conservatories developed late in these regions. A pioneer in music education was Wadih Sabra, the composer of the Ottoman and, later, the Lebanese national anthems, who founded the Institute of Music in Beirut in 1910 and, in the 1930s, the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music where the emphasis was on European symphonic music. Photographs of anonymous musicians from the late 19th and early 20th centuries attest to the popularity of ensembles with musicians playing the violin, introduced from Europe, the tambourine, the lute and drums or flute. Some images depict women # playing the daff, a frame drum, or the tanbur, a variety of lute # but shown as types, not as known performers. Likewise, a "Turk" playing a kettle drum, which was introduced to European music from the Ottoman Empire, would have been a source of interest as a type rather than as a member of a military or imperial band.



**Working Number:** UK 018

**Name:** Drummer

**Holding Museum:** The British Museum

**Date:** c. 1790

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** This picture of a man playing a kettle drum, or kö#, appears in a two-volume collection of images of "Turks" of various walks of life compiled around 1790. Although he may have played in the Ottoman military band, the fact that the drum is placed on the ground and that he is not in uniform suggests that he played for royal entertainment.



**Working Number:** TR2 188

**Name:** An Entertainment Scene (The third day of entertainment) from Surname-i Vehbi

**Holding Museum:** Topkap# Palace Museum

**Date:** 18th century

**Materials:** Miniature; illustrated

**Curator Justification:** To celebrate the circumcision of the four sons of Sultan Ahmad III, rafts with fireworks, dancers and musicians floated before the sultan's tent at the Arsenal Palace. A two-storey floating structure contains pyrotechnicians above and daff players and dancers with castanets below. The row of men seated behind the daff players may be singers.



**Working Number:** TR2 187

**Name:** An Entertainment Scene (Evening entertainment in the Golden Horn) from Surname-i Vehbi

**Holding Museum:** Topkap# Palace Museum

**Date:** 18th century

**Materials:** Miniature; illustrated

**Curator Justification:** On the right the Grand Vizier's attendants gaze across the Golden Horn at the night's entertainment. From a balcony of Aynal#kavak Palace, Sultan Ahmad III watches fireworks, music and dance performed on two rafts. Drummers at the left are poised to strike their side drums, as others play trumpets and zurna. On the right, men play daff, zurna and pan-pipes for dancers holding castanets.



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**Working Number:** LB 134

**Name:** Portrait of Wadiah Sabra

**Holding Museum:** Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** Printed photograph

**Curator Justification:** Wadiah Sabra (1876–1952) was a leading figure in modern Lebanese music. A composer and pianist, he studied at the Paris Conservatoire. He composed the Lebanese national anthem in 1927 and founded and directed the Institute of Music in Beirut, later the National Higher Conservatory of Music. He combined Western and Eastern traditions in his operas, symphonies and chamber music.



**Working Number:** LB 133

**Name:** Portrait of Metri el-Murr

**Holding Museum:** Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music

**Date:** 19th century

**Materials:** Printed photograph

**Curator Justification:** Metri el-Murr (1880–1969) was a composer of songs using his own poetry as well as chants based on Eastern Orthodox models and translated into Arabic. El-Murr was a deacon in the church, and would have been familiar with the codification and modernisation of the system of chants, called neo-Byzantine, in the Orthodox Church in the 1830s.



**Working Number:** TR2 038

**Name:** Two Musician Girls

**Holding Museum:** Pera Museum

**Date:** Second half of the 19th century

**Materials:** Oil on canvas

**Curator Justification:** The painting by Osman Hamdi Bey demonstrates how the musicians, particularly the tanbur player, held their instruments while performing. The Turkish form of tanbur has of a very long neck and large round or oval body that produces a resonant sound. The tambourinist appears to listen to the tanbur player, waiting for the moment to begin playing.

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**Working Number:** TR2 035

**Name:** Portrait of a lady of the court playing the tambourine

**Holding Museum:** Pera Museum

**Date:** 1870–1875

**Materials:** Oil on canvas

**Curator Justification:** The portrait of a woman of the Ottoman court playing a tambourine indicates that this percussion instrument was made in a range of sizes as this one is smaller than that in the Osman Hamdi Bey painting. Moving to Istanbul in 1865, the French artist Jean Baptiste Antoine Guillemet later founded an academy of painting and drawing there in the European style.

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**Working Number:** IT2 094

**Name:** A Woman from Cairo

**Holding Museum:** MIBACT | National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography “Luigi Pigorini”

**Date:** c. 1880

**Materials:** Albumen

**Curator Justification:** The woman playing a small drum appears to have been photographed in the open air in Cairo, though whether she was playing alone or with others is unclear. Because of the angle of her pose, the size and shape of the drum cannot be determined, though the fact that she is resting it on her knee suggests that it is a drum, not a daff or tambourine.

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**Working Number:** MO 071

**Name:** Photograph of Jewish musicians

**Holding Museum:** General Library and Archives

**Date:** 1912

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** The subject of this photograph of 1912 is described as “Jewish musicians”, although only the two men in the centre of the picture

have musical instruments # a violin and a small tambourine. By the early 20th century the European-style violin had been adopted by Arab musicians in North Africa and the Near East.



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**Working Number:** MO 072

**Name:** Photograph of an Andalusian musical performance

**Holding Museum:** General Library and Archives

**Date:** 1912

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** Described as an Andalusian music performance, this photograph includes two violinists and a lute player. While the title may reflect the romantic view of the photographer, the style of music associated with Muslim Spain was perpetuated in various centres in Morocco. This performance takes place in a tented enclosure.



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**Working Number:** MO 074

**Name:** Photograph of a musician holding a violin and bow

**Holding Museum:** General Library and Archives

**Date:** 1912

**Materials:** -

**Curator Justification:** This musician is posed standing holding his violin and bow rather than actually performing. He would certainly have been part of a group of musicians which could have included the lute, nay, piano, and drum. Under European influence in the 20th century musical ensembles grew in size, at times almost to that of an orchestra.



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**Working Number:** TR2 191

**Name:** Woman Playing a String Instrument

**Holding Museum:** Pera Museum

**Date:** Early 20th century

**Materials:** Pastel on paper

**Curator Justification:** This pastel portrait of a woman playing a lute is the work of Fausto Zonaro (1854–1929) who settled in Istanbul and was one of the European artists employed by the Ottoman sultan. The absence of pictorial elements defining the space suggests that the woman is playing her instrument in private, rather than performing with or for other people.

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