

Middle Eastern Music for Bellydancers: An Emotive Guide

1) What is a maqam?

The word maqam means place, location or rank in Arabic. Think of the maqamat (plural for maqam) as a genre of musical moods in Arabic music. The maqamat are built on changing scales that are in turn based on root tri-chords, tetra-chords, or penta-chords called a jins (ajnas is plural). The maqamat change as a skilled musician would improvise (taqsim). Most classical Arabic songs modulate from many different maqamat.

2) What are ajnas?

Jins (or ajnas as plural) are the roots of the various maqamat. Jins means “type or gender” in Arabic. Think of the ajnas as the building blocks of the maqamat. There are several families of ajnas, and various sources will note different families. The main families you should be familiar with as a bellydancer are as follows*:

- Ajam – very similar to a Western Major scale
- Bayati – feminine and vibrant in tone, used frequently in modern Arabic music, joyous
- Rast – masculine and powerful in tone, used in religious context (aka call to prayer)
- Hijaz – the ‘typical’ sounding Middle Eastern maqam, associated with traveling in a desert, being lonely on the road (in the Bedouin sense) or fascination and enchantment
- Kurd – attributed to the Kurdish people, airy and spacious, similar to the Phrygian mode
- Nahawand – described as sweet and simple OR the emotional maqam, extreme feelings
- Saba – can be construed as the ‘sad or lamenting’ maqam, also seen in sufi-religious music

* Note: these descriptions are based upon my anecdotal research and the research that ethnomusicologists have used to describe the moods of the maqamat. These are VERY subjective and VERY broad in assumption. There are hundreds of variations of maqamat, so don't be surprised when you may encounter a description of the maqamat that may be very different than what I have described here.

1) What are the roles of quarter tones in Arabic music?

One of the unique aspects of the Arabic music system is the quartertone. Think of the quartertone as a gray key on a piano. To the western ear, the quartertone may sound “out of tune”, but this is one of the most unique aspects of Middle Eastern music. As a bellydancer, you should become comfortable with pointing out a quartertone in music as it creates a subtlety not found in Western music.

2) How do I recognize a maqam or jins in a song?

Really, the only way to start becoming comfortable with the maqamat is deep listening. As a bellydancer, you should immerse yourself into Middle Eastern music. Most Arabic and Turkish classical songs are structured around maqamat. Try at first to depict happy sounds versus sadder sounds and moods. Picking out quartertones will help you narrow down the jins family the maqam may belong to. Talking to musicians who play Middle Eastern music will also help you educate yourself on the feelings of these songs...and never underestimate the power of Google

Workshop Combos:

1. Bayati – feminine and vibrant in tone, used frequently in modern Arabic music, joyous
 - a. Arabic Song in Bayati: Shashkin (Folkloric)
 - i. Combo: Arabic I travel with undulation to the left, chest drops (double time), hip circle
 - ii. Repeat to right with left foot start with maya accent on the extended nay
 - b. Ala Dalouna:
 - i. Combo: Arabic I travel with undulation to the left, chest drops (double time)
 - ii. Repeat to right with left foot start
2. Rast – masculine and powerful in tone, used in religious context (aka call to prayer)
 - a. Arabic song in Rast: Ya Shadil al Han (Sayid Darweesh)
 - i. Grapevine “ya shadily al han” with shoulder double accents, heel bounce, stomp booth feet lift left foot fast (dabke), left- right-left walking forward diagonal
 - ii. Repeat with the left foot start
3. Hijaz – the ‘typical’ sounding Middle Eastern maqam, associated with traveling in a desert, being lonely on the road (in the Bedouin sense) or fascination and enchantment
 - a. Arabic song in Hijaz Atesh Tanz (Folkloric)
 - i. Arabic 4 with $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy, hook turn, shoulder rolls with level change from knee
 - b. Yeshelim
 - i. Arabic 4 with $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy, Arabic 3 shoulder rolls with level change from knee
 - c. Rampi Rampi
 - i. Arabic 4 with $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy, Arabic 3 shoulder rolls with level change from knee
4. Nahawand – described as sweet and simple OR the emotional maqam, extreme feelings
 - a. Arabic song in Nahawand: Lamma Bada Yatahana (Mwhashshah)
 - i. Cross left foot (1), touch right (4) figure 8 startes, figure 8 right hip forward
 - ii. Repeat on other side
 - b. For Garoon Garron, cross touch becomes grapevine for B part
5. Kurd – attributed to the Kurdish people, airy and spacious, similar to the Phrygian mode
 - a. Arabic song in Kurd: Nassam Alayna el Hawa
 - i. Arabic 2 – Naima Akef, then Arabic 3
 - ii. Arabic 2 travel to right (Veselba travel)
 - b. Inta Omri
 - i. Arabic 2 – Naima Akef, then Arabic 3
 - ii. Arabic 2 travel to right (Veselba travel)

Resources:

Hourani, Albert, *A History of the Arab Peoples*. MJF Books, 1991
Racy, A.J. *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab*. Cambridge: 2003

Sawa, George, *Music Performance Practice in the Early Abbasid Era 750-932 AD*. The Institute of Medieval Music: 2004

Touma, Habib Hassan, *The Music of the Arabs*. Amadeus Press: 1996 Wright, Owen, *Arab Music: Music Traditions in the Arab Speaking World*. "I. Art Music" Grove Music

Dictionary: Oxford University: Online. *Al-Andalus* <http://dubsahara.com/oriental/music/history/al-andalus> Online.

Sheet music resources: <http://majidaanwar.com/2010/09/sheet-music-resources-updated-92910/>

Play List:

| Maqam | Song Title | Artist | Album |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Bayati | Ala Dalona | Bilal Hakkani | Shake It Up! Exotic Belly Dance Performances |
| Bayati Hijaz | Shashkin Ah Ya Zein | Omar Faruk Tekbilek Roger Abboud | Baklava: Sweet Sounds from the Orient |
| Hijaz | Atesh Tanz | Istanpitta | Exiled |
| Hijaz | Yesilim | Turku | Alleys of Istanbul |
| Hijaz | Rampi Rampi | Turku | Alleys of Istanbul |
| Kurd | Intra Omri | Mohamed Ali Ensemble | 10 Songs Every Bellydancer Should Know |
| Kurd | Nassam Alayna | Fairuz | Legend - The Best of Fairuz |
| Nahawand | Lamma Bada Yatathanna | Zein Al-Jundi | Traditional Songs from Syria |
| Nahawand | Garoon Garoon (Springtime) | Khafif | Masala |
| Nahawand | Bir Demet Yasemin | | Mostly Turkish Compilation |
| Rast | (27) Maqam example | Various Artists | Music in Egypt |
| Rast | (28) Maqam example | Various Artists | Music in Egypt |
| Rast Rast | Rast Dulab Rast | Aboudi Badawi Turbo Tabla | Arabic Maqams Made Simple Bellydance Overdrive |
| Rast | Ya Shadil Al-Han | Turbo Tabla | Bellydance Overdrive |