

# **KURDISH-SYRIAN FOLK MUSIC**

## **Description of the Production**

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## **Introduction**

Music is considered a universal language, and sometimes it does not even have a native land. The music carries the feelings, history, destiny, and dreams of the performers and the listeners, and thus becomes a very local music and creates a unique language. Over time, music has traveled together with people and the technical devices they invented, thus becoming a human expression that transcends national identity and geographical boundaries. Kurdistan and Syria has had a rich musical tradition for thousands of years. Bearers of different ethnicities and religions - who have lived and traveled through the territory of Syria over the millennia: Arabs, Assyrians, Syrians, Armenians, Greeks, Ysidies, Circassians, Muslims, Christians, Alawites, - have all contributed to this eclectic musical heritage.

## **Justification of the choice of topic**

Art and music should be open to all, like peace, beauty, love and happiness. Kurdish folk music materials are mostly melancholic, which is an expression of the difficult life in the mountains. The national melodic materials in Syria are organized into territorial divisions, since the nature of each musical material is different. Themes include courage, description of nature, love, longing, praise, pride, religion, asceticism, love sorrow. The authors and date of creation of the folk songs are not known, but the place of creation is precisely determined according to Kurdish and Syrian traditions.

Local folk music festivals are also organized according to this principle. As a result of several years of preparatory work, the Theater and Music Directorate of the Ministry of Culture organized the first Syrian heritage song festival in Damascus in 2022 with many Syrian heritage songs. The compilation is currently the most comprehensive in terms of quality and quantity in Syria. At the same time, they preserve the dialect and rituals of the city to which the song belongs. This is how they ensure the preservation and transmission of the ancient Syrian artistic heritage. The method of selecting the songs is to matching with the items preserved in the memory of the Syrian public.

The present research aims to create a grouping different from these in a wide range of folk songs. It examines the music related to the holidays that occur during the human life cycle: choosing a partner, wedding, creating a family nest, work. The thesis seeks the answer to which regions of the musical material of the listed topics have survived in their oldest or most popular versions. The framework of the research work is therefore not the collection of stylistic features or musical motifs occurring in individual landscape units, but rather the life and destiny of the individual who, through music, becomes the center of the community in the given period of life; and who, on the family holiday, gains the fullness of his humanity without words, with the wealth of musical expression. In the scientific history of folkloristics, the practice of selecting folklore texts on an aesthetic basis is evidenced. Folk music can be heard anywhere all of the world, the human soul can identify with what the music says.

## 1. ASPECTS OF THE COMPILATION OF THE PROGRAM

This performance consists of one Kurdish song and three Syrian songs, reflecting the rich musical heritage of the region and highlighting the violin's versatility in folk traditions. Creating a program of Kurdish and Syrian wedding songs with violin accompaniment requires careful selection, cultural sensitivity, and original musical arrangement to ensure an authentic and engaging performance. The following aspects guide the compilation process in the selection of the songs:

### 1.1. *Cultural Significance:*

I chose songs that are traditionally performed at weddings, ensuring they are well-known and beloved within the communities and to select pieces that represent the diverse musical styles and regional variations within Kurdish and Syrian folk music.

### 1.2. *Musical Structure:*

I collected songs with varying tempos and moods to create a dynamic and engaging program and to balance between upbeat, danceable tunes and slower, more emotive pieces to reflect the different phases of a wedding celebration and incorporate traditional rhythmic patterns and ornamentations typical of Kurdish and Syrian music.

### 1.3. *Song Selection*

#### 1.3.1. *Kurdish Songs:*

a) „*Shirin, shirin*”: is a beloved Kurdish folk song that holds a special place in the hearts of the Kurdish people. The title "Shirin, Shirin" translates to "Sweet, Sweet" in English, and the song typically expresses themes of love, longing, and admiration. Its cultural significance, musical richness, and emotional depth make it a treasured piece of Kurdish heritage, often performed at joyous gatherings and celebrations. Whether through its enchanting melody, rhythmic vitality, or heartfelt lyrics, "Shirin, Shirin" continues to resonate with listeners, fostering a sense of connection and community among the Kurdish people. Here's an overview of the song, including its cultural significance, musical characteristics, and typical lyrics.

#### *Cultural Significance*

"Shirin, Shirin" is often performed at Kurdish weddings and celebrations, where it serves as a symbol of love and joy. The song's melody and lyrics are deeply rooted in Kurdish culture, reflecting the region's rich musical heritage. It's a popular choice for festive occasions because of its cheerful and uplifting nature, which encourages dancing and communal celebration.

#### *Musical Characteristics*

- *Melody and Mode:* The song is characterized by its melodious and lilting tune, which often uses traditional Kurdish modes. These modes are similar to but distinct from general the Arabic maqam system, giving the music a unique regional flavor, it named kurd maqam.

- *Rhythm*: "Shirin, Shirin" typically features lively and rhythmic patterns that are common in Kurdish celebration folk music. Percussion instruments like the daf (frame drum) often provide the rhythmic foundation, creating an energetic and danceable beat.
- *Instrumentation*: Traditional Kurdish instruments such as the saz (long-necked lute), the kamancheh (spiked fiddle), and the daf (drum) are commonly used in performances of "Shirin, Shirin". These instruments contribute to the song's authentic folk sound.
- *Vocal Style*: The vocal delivery in "Shirin, Shirin" is expressive and heartfelt, with singers often employing ornamentations and vibrato to convey deep emotion.

### *Typical Lyrics*

While there may be variations in the lyrics depending on the region and performer, a typical rendition of "Shirin, Shirin" includes expressions of love and admiration for a beloved. Here's an example of the kind of lyrics you might find in the song:

*Sweet, sweet, sweet flower  
Your love burns my soul deeply*

*Sweet, sweet, my heart  
Has been taken to the garden of youth*

b) *Maqam Bayat*: is one of the most popular and frequently used maqamat in Arabic music. It is especially prevalent in various forms of traditional and folk music, including wedding celebrations across the Eastern world including in Syrian and Kurdish traditions.. The maqam's distinctive scale makes it a favorite in weddings. Its emotional tone is often described as warm, tender, and expressive, making it an ideal choice for music that conveys the joy and depth of the celebrations.

*Musical Characteristics*: This maqam often features a half-flat second degree, creating a unique sound that resonates deeply with listeners. This versatility allows Maqam Bayat to convey a range of emotions, from joy and celebration to deep spiritual reflection.

*Scale Structure*: Maqam Bayat typically starts on the note D (D Bayat). The scale is characterized by its specific intervals which give it a distinct sound.

*Application in Wedding Songs*: Maqam Bayat is frequently used because of its celebratory and uplifting nature in wedding songs helps set a festive atmosphere, making it a natural choice for songs that mark significant moments during the ceremony, such as the arriving and entrance of the bride and groom, the wedding procession and the celebratory dance segments.

*Cultural and Regional Variations*: Maqam Bayat's popularity extends beyond weddings into other forms of celebration and religious contexts. The maqam's adaptability to different regional styles and its emotional range make it a cornerstone of Eastern music traditions.

### 1.3.2. Syrian songs:

a) "Yalli Khadeto Mahboubi" (يلي خدتو محبوبي) is a quintessential Syrian wedding song, which translates to "The One My Beloved Has Taken" It is steeped in the rich traditions of Syrian folk music, is a well-known and cherished Syrian wedding song that beautifully captures the

emotions and associated with love and marriage. Its cultural significance, musical richness, and expressive lyrics make it a beloved piece of Syrian folk music. By celebrating love and joy through its enchanting melody and lively rhythms, the song not only adds to the festive spirit of weddings but also strengthens the cultural heritage and communal bonds of the Syrian people.

### *Cultural Significance*

"Yalli Khadeto Mahboubi" holds a special place in Syrian wedding traditions. Its lyrics and melody resonate deeply with the themes of love and emotional attachment making it a staple at weddings. The song is often performed during the zaffa (wedding procession), as well as during the wedding party, where guests join in singing and dancing. Its enduring popularity reflects the song's ability to convey the collective joy and celebration of the wedding ceremony.

### *Musical Characteristics*

- *Melody and Mode:* The song features a melodious and evocative tune that is typical of Syrian folk music. It employs the maqam system, a set of scales and melodic patterns used in Arabic music to evoke specific emotional responses. One of its subspecies of the maqam system gives the song its distinctive, emotive quality.
- *Rhythm:* "Yalli Khadeto Mahboubi" typically features lively and engaging rhythms that are perfect for dancing. Traditional percussion instruments such as the darbuka (goblet drum) and riq (tambourine) provide the rhythmic backbone, creating celebratory beat that encourages guests to dance.
- *Musical instrumentation:* The song is often performed with traditional Syrian instruments, including the oud (a pear-shaped stringed instrument), the qanun (a type of zither), and various percussion instruments. These instruments contribute to the song's authentic folk sound and enhance its festive atmosphere.
- *Vocal Style:* Syrian singers bring a heartfelt and expressive vocal style to the performance of "Yalli Khadeto Mahboubi." The vocal delivery often includes ornamentations such as trills and melismatic singing, which add emotional depth and richness to the song.

Lyrics of the song: *The one my beloved has taken, and my eyes have not seen sleep*

*My heart is weary for you, preoccupied with separation*

*Oh my night, oh my eyes, oh my sorrow and delight*

b) "*Dakhlek Wal Hawa Shmali*" (دخلك والهوى شمالي), which translates to "Your income and passion are northern" is also a beloved Syrian wedding song known for its evocative lyrics and captivating melody. This song is an other staple in Syrian wedding celebrations, where it plays a significant role in setting a joyful and romantic atmosphere. The song's enchanting melody, lively rhythm, and expressive vocal style create a joyful and romantic atmosphere, making it a perfect choice for weddings. By performing this song, the wedding celebration not only honors the couple but also celebrates Syrian cultural heritage, bringing together tradition and communal joy in a harmonious and festive event.

*Cultural Significance:* "*Dakhlek Wal Hawa Shmali*" holds a prominent place in Syrian wedding traditions. The song's lyrics often evoke images of nature, love, and longing, which resonate

deeply with the celebratory and emotional nature of weddings. The song is typically performed during the wedding festivities, particularly during the bridal preparations and the wedding party, where guests sing and dance along, creating an atmosphere of communal joy and celebration.

#### *Musical Characteristics*

- *Melody and Mode:* The melody of "Dakhlek Wal Hawa Shmali" is both enchanting and emotive, characteristic of Syrian folk music. The song uses the a framework of scales and melodic patterns that evoke specific emotional responses. This system gives the song its distinctive and heartfelt quality, which is perfect for a wedding setting.
- *Rhythm and music instrumentation:* The rhythm of the song is lively making it ideal for dancing. Traditional percussion instruments provide a rhythmic foundation that is both dynamic and celebratory. The rhythmic patterns are designed to be infectious to participate in the dance and celebration. This song is also performed with traditional Syrian instruments: oud, zither and various percussion instruments.
- *Vocal Style:* The vocal style in "Dakhlek Wal Hawa Shmali" is soulful. Singers often use ornamentations and grace notes to convey deep emotion and add complexity to the melody. This vocal expressiveness is a hallmark of Syrian folk music, and contributes to the song's emotional impact.

Lyrics of the song: *Please, and the northern wind, oh breeze, tell me  
My heart and mind are gone, in love with you, my dear  
Oh my night, oh my eyes, oh breeze, tell me  
Awake at night, waiting, my longing touches your cheeks*

c) I also present two popular songs that were chosen by the director of an Arab film series (Lost Castle) depicting rural life because of their popularity: One of the folk songs' title: *Visit of the stranger* (زوروا الغريب). This song, with its poignant lyrics and traditional melodies, reflects the themes of longing, nostalgia.

d) The other folk song that stands out in the series is *Maha AlHawa my love* (مها الهوى). This song, with its evocative vocals and melodic instrumentation, captures the essence of romance and love that adding depth and emotion.

## **2. THE CONCEPT OF THE PERFORMANCE**

This section of my thesis describes the performance concept for a program of Kurdish and Syrian folk wedding songs with violin accompaniment. It details the thematic structure emphasizing cultural authenticity and the emotional depth of the music. The goal is to create a performance that is both aesthetically pleasing and culturally informative, providing a meaningful experience. My concept is designed to highlight the rich musical traditions of these regions while showcasing the violin's versatility.

## **2.1. Thematic Structure**

- *Cultural Journey:* The program is organized as a journey through a traditional Kurdish and Syrian wedding celebration. Each song represents different stages of the celebration, from the initial gathering to the finishing joyous dancing. This structure provides an arc that guides the audience through the cultural significance of the music, creating a cohesive and engaging experience.
- *Diverse Musical Styles:* The performance includes a variety of musical styles, from upbeat, rhythmic dance tunes to slower, emotive ballads. This diversity showcases the richness of Kurdish and Syrian folk music. By alternating between different tempos and moods, the performance reflects the dynamic nature of wedding celebrations.
- *Emotional Resonance:* The performance aims by carefully selecting and arranging the songs, to convey the emotional depth and joy inherent in Kurdish and Syrian wedding music. The violin, with its expressive range, is the perfect instrument to bring out the nuances of the melodies and connect with the guests on an emotional level.
- *Cultural Celebration:* The overarching vision is to preserve the cultural heritage of Kurdish and Syrian communities. The celebration not only entertains but also educates, fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of these rich musical traditions. The performance respects and honors the source material, ensuring an accurate and meaningful representation of Kurdish and Syrian wedding music and but also deepen the appreciation of Kurdish and Syrian folk traditions.

## **2.2 The desired result**

The aim of the thesis is to group folk music works from the point of view of how folk music elements and folk dances related to the human life cycle lived in the memory of the people for centuries. What are the songs of related holidays or human activities, life stages that have become the best known or most prominent throughout Syria and the Levantine area. We offer a selection of these during the time available for listening to music as follows: The order of songs related to the human life cycle is not started from the birth of a child. Much more important is how the parents of a future child prepare for planning their own lives, choosing a partner, and creating a home even before marriage.

The first movement of the performance is therefore related to the life stage of youth: it presents the happy longing of a loving heart with cheerful melodies from the period of courtship. The second movement is wedding music with a firm, dignified expression, because in addition to future happiness, the issue of family responsibility also appears. The third movement is a musical accompaniment to a dabke dance that is customary on community holidays. A fun, rhythmic work song can be heard as the fourth movement which reflects the themes of nostalgia and the search for belonging. The fifth movement is the song of the romance and yearning because the cycle of life does not stop.

Out of the hundreds of folk songs listed in the thesis, three can be singled out due to their popularity, which are included in the songs of holidays and commemorations everywhere, regardless of the region. Why? Because Levantine folk music is about community, mountains, sea, exile, peasants and their land, lovers who are forced to travel to distant lands and never

return. It arises from some individual story or some collective feeling, and reflects and presents micro-histories in the most detailed and gentle way.

Folk music and oral narratives are ways of embodying the past - if only temporarily; it brings back the old times, the old stories that help us understand the new ones. The folk song is to let the emotions - which we desperately need at a given moment - enter our body. Folk music is actually a complicated tapestry of legends and parables. What happens in world history is of little importance compared to the stories we tell ourselves, our relatives, and our friends about what happened. Events matter little, only the micro-stories of events have a great and lasting impact on a person.

### **3. HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

Music is an expression of human creativity. Music is the most universal of all performing arts and can be found in all societies, often as an integral part of other performing arts and other areas of intangible cultural heritage.

Kurdish and Syrian folk music are rich, diverse traditions that reflect the unique cultural heritages of their respective peoples. Understanding the historical and theoretical context of these musical traditions is crucial for appreciating their depth and significance. This section explores the origins, cultural influences, and theoretical frameworks of Kurdish and Syrian folk music separately, providing a comprehensive backdrop for the performance of wedding songs with violin accompaniment.

#### ***3.1. Historical Context of Kurdish Folk Music***

*Origins and Evolution:* Kurdish folk music has deep historical roots that trace back to the ancient cultures of the Mesopotamian region:

*Ancient Beginnings:* Kurdish music can be traced to the early civilizations of Median, where musical practices and instruments were an integral part of daily life and ceremonial activities. These early influences laid the groundwork for the development of Kurdish musical traditions.

*Medieval Period:* Throughout the medieval era, Kurdish music continued to evolve, influenced by Persian, Arabic, and Turkish cultures. This period saw the introduction of new musical forms and instruments, enriching the Kurdish musical landscape.

*Modern Developments:* In the modern era, Kurdish music has been shaped by political and social changes. Despite challenges such as repression and diaspora, Kurdish music has preserved its traditional elements while also embracing contemporary influences.

*Cultural Influences:* Kurdish folk music is a product of diverse cultural interactions and a reflection of the Kurdish way of life.

*Ethnic Diversity:* The Kurdish people are spread across several countries, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, each contributing unique regional styles to Kurdish music. This geographic diversity has resulted in a rich mosaic of musical traditions.

*Nomadic and Rural Life:* Traditional Kurdish music often reflects the nomadic and rural lifestyles of the Kurdish people. Themes of nature, shepherd life, and tribal identity are prevalent in Kurdish folk songs, capturing the essence of their cultural heritage.

### ***3.2.Theoretical Context of Kurdish Folk Music***

*Modal Systems:* Kurdish folk music employs modal systems that define the melodic structure of the music.

*Maqam and Kurdish Modes:* Similar to the Arabic maqam system, Kurdish music uses modal scales that dictate the pitches, melodic patterns, and emotional tone of the music. However, Kurdish modes often have distinct characteristics and regional variations. Because of it was born the Kurd Maqam system.

*Improvisation:* Kurdish musicians frequently engage in improvisation within these modal frameworks, creating unique and expressive performances.

*Rhythmic Patterns:* Rhythm is a vital component of Kurdish music, particularly in dance and celebratory contexts:

*Complex Rhythms:* Kurdish music features intricate rhythmic patterns, often performed on traditional percussion instruments like the daf (frame drum) and the dohol (double-headed drum). These rhythms are essential for dance music and help drive the celebratory atmosphere of Kurdish weddings.

*Ornamentation and Vocal Techniques:* Ornamentation and vocal techniques add expressiveness to Kurdish music:

*Melodic Ornamentation:* Kurdish music includes a wide range of ornaments.

*Vocal Techniques:* Kurdish singers often use vocal techniques like melisma (singing multiple notes on a single syllable) and vibrato to enhance the emotional impact of their performances.

### ***3.3. Historical Context of Syrian Folk Music***

*Origins and Evolution:* Syrian folk music has a rich history influenced by various civilizations and cultures over the centuries:

*Ancient Beginnings:* Syrian music has roots in ancient civilizations such as the Canaanites, Arameans, and early Semitic peoples. The rich musical heritage of these ancient cultures laid the foundation for the development of Syrian folk music.

*Islamic Golden Age:* During the Islamic Golden Age, Syria was a cultural hub, and its music flourished. The introduction of the maqam system and the development of new musical forms significantly shaped Syrian music.

*Ottoman Influence:* The Ottoman Empire's influence on Syrian music was profound, integrating Ottoman musical elements and instruments into the local traditions. This period also saw the formalization of many musical practices that continue to be important in Syrian folk music.

*Cultural Influence:* Syrian folk music reflects the diverse cultural and ethnic composition of the region:

*Ethnic Diversity:* Syria is home to Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, and other ethnic groups, each contributing to the country's rich musical picture. This diversity is reflected in the variety of musical styles and traditions found in Syrian folk music.

*Religious Traditions:* Music in Syria is deeply intertwined with religious practices, including Islamic, Christian, and Druze traditions. Religious music has influenced folk music, particularly in the use of certain modes and vocal styles.

*Urban and Rural Traditions:* Syrian music encompasses both urban and rural traditions. Urban music often features sophisticated arrangements and instruments, while rural music tends to be more simplistic and closely tied to agricultural and shepherd life.

### **3.4. Theoretical Context of Syrian folk music**

*Bedouin influence on Syrian music:* Bedouin nomadic tribes have played an important role in shaping the music present in the countries of the Levant. At the encounters of the Bedouin and surroundings regions, there was cultural exchange. The Bedouin culture was transmitted by travel of the nomad people to towns trading with the settled communities for centuries. Bedouin music is also inseparable from poetry as the other territories' music traditions of the Middle East. Many of the songs are kept in an oral tradition due to the nomadic nature of the Bedouin tribes.

*Bedouin folk musical forms:* Values that were adopted from the Bedouin culture into the musical genres can put in three groups: The first group were hospitality, chivalry and bravery. These types of system of ideas were sung in a song form or genre called "my partner" = shruqi. Belongs to the second group ideologies like love, heartache, and sentiment, were sung in a genre called "complaint" = "ataaba". Third group is the funeral lament music = „nadb” that honours the departed.

*Modal System:* The maqam system is central to Syrian folk music too, providing a framework for melody and improvisation:

*Maqam:* The maqam system consists of a series of scales and melodic patterns used to evoke specific moods and emotions. Each maqam has its own set of rules for melodic progression and ornamentation, making it a sophisticated and nuanced system.

*Improvisation:* Like in Kurdish music, improvisation plays a crucial role in Syrian music. Musicians often create spontaneous variations within the maqam framework, showcasing their creativity and skill.

*Rhythmic Patterns:* Rhythmic patterns in Syrian folk music are diverse and intricate, contributing to the music's dynamic character:

*Iqa':* The iqa' system in Syrian music defines specific rhythmic cycles used in compositions. Each iqa' has a unique pattern of beats that provides the rhythmic foundation for the music.

## **Conclusion**

The historical and theoretical contexts of Kurdish and Syrian folk music reveal distinct yet interconnected traditions that have evolved through centuries of cultural exchange and development. Understanding these contexts enriches the appreciation of Kurdish-Syrian folk music and informs the artistic concept of the performance, ensuring it honors and celebrates the unique cultural heritages of these communities. Through this exploration, the performance aims

to provide audiences with a deeper connection to the historical and theoretical foundations of Kurdish and Syrian wedding music.

Music is perhaps the greatest thing that humans have created throughout their history. It is the voice of the human soul, the language of communication between different races, peoples and cultures. Music unites what is separated by the opposing aspirations of peoples. On special occasions, thousands of people can be seen dancing to songs they don't know yet, to songs performed in languages they've never heard before. They gather to listen to the special music of distant countries and continents that they knew little about until now. Folk music is the cradle of other music. Preserving its traditions is a common task for all of us.

## Tartalom

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