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Taarab Music in Zanzibar in the Twentieth Century

A Story of 'Old is Gold' and Flying Spirits

Janet Topp Fargion



TAARAB MUSIC IN ZANZIBAR IN THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY

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JANET TOPP FARGION

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Technical Note

The text is, necessarily, riddled with Swahili words, which I have attempted to explain and define within the text as they crop up. Swahili nouns normally include a root and a prefix that indicates the noun class the word sits within and whether the word is singular or plural. I have used the appropriate version of each word in the text, giving the singular or plural as necessary to make the class clear. Except in direct quotes I have used the English *Swahili* rather than *mSwahili* or *waSwahili* (person or people belonging to the Swahili culture) or *kiSwahili* (referring to the Swahili language), and have made it clear in the text what is being referred to.

I have drawn on a great many first-hand accounts from Swahili speakers and have rendered their words in the original language followed by translations into English.

For the most part I have included citations in the text. However, for websites, which often have lengthy URLs, I have included citations as footnotes.

I have a section in Chapter 1 on ‘Choice of terminology’. My decisions to use *taarab* as opposed to *tarabu*, and to frame the music of the larger orchestras as ‘orchestral *taarab*’ I feel are central to my approach for the overall work and thus sit in the theoretical framework elucidated in the chapter.

In relating alleged stories of protagonists behind poems I have chosen to use original names. These stories and anecdotes were told to me freely and in an unbiased way. I do not make assumptions on the truth of the stories – the point is to highlight the types of stories that sit behind the songs, not the people they are about. Furthermore, I believe the book demonstrates that the primary objective of the songs is to know the personalities and events that sit behind them. It is impossible to talk about the lyrics without knowing the people and stories behind them. It is thus futile to hide the names. Besides, the account is an historical one – there is no suggestion that the rivalries talked about in the *mpasho* phenomenon section are in any way persistent today.

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PART I

Introductions

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Chapter 1

Approaches and People

Theoretical Framework

This book explores a major African style of music called *taarab*, played for entertainment at weddings and other official and festive occasions all along the Swahili Coast in East Africa. It focuses on the style's development from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century as it has been described and experienced in Unguja, the main island of Zanzibar off mainland Tanzania. My primary fieldwork was conducted in 1989 and 1990, a highpoint for the genre locally, catching the *taarab* scene just as it was about to hit the international world music market and as Zanzibar's new policy of economic liberalisation began to bring fundamental change to the island in the form of tourism. The book thus reads as an historical account, describing the *taarab* setting in its various forms up to the end of the twentieth century. The final chapter introduces concrete developments post-2000 and evaluates their impact.

What emerges is a multifaceted style existing in a range of expressions as part of Zanzibari popular culture. *Taarab*'s various forms are connected by a common audience – women, who, as innovators and drivers of change have created a public space through which they wield power and contribute to an understanding of Zanzibari culture as a whole.

Taarab contains all the features of a typical 'Indian Ocean' music, combining influences from Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, India and the West with mainland African and local Swahili musical practices. The book explores the history and development of *taarab* music in Zanzibar, from its alleged importation to the island from Egypt in the 1870s as music of the *takht* ensemble to its current perception, by East Africans, enthusiasts and scholars alike, as a distinctly African, Swahili and, in this case, Zanzibari form of expression. The chapters explore the circles of mixed orchestral *taarab* clubs, Indian groups and professional groups, women's clubs, *kidumbak taarab* groups, modern *taarab* (or *rusha roho*) groups and youth groups. The resulting conceptualisation is of a series of entangled histories and parallel musical strands. Themes that emerge implicitly and explicitly include:

- the multilayered evolution of the style;
- stylistic influences of areas of the Indian Ocean, of the African mainland and as a result of the island's place in a global economy;
- the role of women;
- the interconnectedness of this genre (as an expression of popular culture) with social, economic, religious and political factors;

- the professionalisation of the style as a result of
 - the emergence of a music industry infrastructure, in particular revolving around a recording industry and the advent of private radio networks;
 - the heavy promotion of tourism on the island since the mid-1990s;
 - the entry of the genre in the late 1980s into the world music market.

Three broad categories of *taarab* are identified and explored: an orchestral style modelled on Egyptian forms of urban secular music, serving the more affluent, Arab-orientated sectors of the society and constituting what has come to be referred to as ‘old is gold’; a *ngoma* (lit., drum, extended to mean an event with drums, music and dance) style known as *kidumbak* that was developed by people of African descent as a result not only of their exclusion, by politics and economic limitations, from the orchestral version but also, as Khamis suggests (2005:143), as a result of the utilitarian demand for *taarab*; and *taarab ya wanawake* (women’s *taarab*), leaning aesthetically towards the orchestral, but in practice towards the Africanisation or *ngoma* qualities of *taarab* more fully realised in *kidumbak*. None of the meanings and boundaries of these categories are totally fixed, of course. Stylistic characteristics intersect with issues of gender, class, ethnicity and geography, defining features that are unpacked in the course of this book. Over time the definitions shift closer and further from their centres and create new categories. Modern *taarab*, or *rusha roho* (lit., to cause the spirit to fly), is arguably one such new category that I see as stemming from a merging to a greater or lesser degree of all three forms of *taarab* and from a realisation of the genre’s commercial potential.

I have found it useful to draw on John Kaemmer’s concept of the ‘music complex’, which he describes as follows:

The logical step following analysis of a number of musical events is to link together conceptually those observed to be related, forming a nexus of events that can be called a ‘music complex’. This term can be defined as a set of musical events having the same goal, conceptualized in the same way, and supported by the same social group. (1980:63)¹

The study suggests that it is through the activities of women, to a large extent as audiences and primary consumers, but also as poets and innovators of musical concepts, that *taarab* has been Africanised or ‘Swahili-ised’ and popularised: this to the extent that the focus of women’s influence – competition and rivalry played out through song lyrics (the *mpasho* phenomenon described later in the book) – has carried through to virtually the only form of *taarab* still operating as a living, developing form, namely *rusha roho*. This is not to suggest that the other forms are dead. Furthermore, as we shall see, they persist in a context of revivalism.

¹ Kaemmer’s system of analysis is based on Anthony F.C. Wallace’s *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966).

Using the cultural realm of *taarab* as a case study, encased in the timeframe of the twentieth century, this investigation attempts to challenge the model that ‘male : female :: culture : nature :: public : domestic’ (Dubisch 1986a:8), in other words, that males occupy the cultural and public spheres while women the natural and domestic. By examining the history and development of women’s *taarab*, and placing this network in the context of the whole *taarab* music complex, the study highlights that women have created a public realm in which they wield power. Furthermore, apart from their reproductive, subsistence and caring roles, women are also ‘the true guardians ... of their authentic traditions and identity’ (Gordon 1968:36), and occupy both ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ domains. The study thus presents an example in the investigation of syncretism revealing processes of Africanisation in which local Zanzibari traditions and identity have been brought to and highlighted within the style through the activities of women. We see how these processes took place within colonialist and post-independent national self-sufficiency (Nyerere’s *Ujamaa*)² ideologies. Once such ideologies dissolved we see the genre’s entrance into the world music market with all the modernisation of music style, music industry infrastructure and performance context that that brought with it. While the study emphasises gender, ‘other factors such as class, ethnicity and geography, which help in giving a better grasp of the concept of *taarab*’ (Khamis 2005:138) are revealed too – these alongside descriptive variables such as musical and poetic structure, performance context, group organisation and instrumentation.

The approach has been influenced to a large degree by the idea proffered by Nketia across a range of his writings³ and summarised by Chernoff, namely, that ‘music offers a window onto indigenous perceptions of cultural modalities’ (Chernoff 1989:61). Music is seen not only in culture, but as culture. The first was proposed by Alan Merriam (1964), while the second was advocated by Herndon and McLeod (1982). Music as culture suggests the inseparability of music from the society in which it functions, or, in Chernoff’s words: ‘ethnomusicological discussions about the difference between studying the role of music “in” culture or the role of music “as” culture reflect a shift in emphasis from a reality that stands “behind” cultural activities to positing a reality that is acted out and incorporated “within” social action’ (1989:70). Indeed by looking at culture through music (ibid.) the strictly functional approach is extended by taking into consideration the refinements made of it by symbolic anthropology: empirical (visible and/or audible) features of culture can reveal ideas and motivations and go a long way to answering the anthropological ‘why’ questions. Thus viewing music as an ethnographic tool attempts to bridge the gap between ethnomusicology and anthropology. This study employs the ‘social fact’ (Barber 1987) and ‘living tradition’ (Richards 1991) – *taarab* music – which in one way or another expresses and shapes daily life, in order to gain insights into Zanzibari society.

² Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* policy is more fully described in Chapter 7.

³ See Nketia’s publications listed by Chernoff (1989:90–91).

It was through my attempts to understand how the *taarab* categories were linked that it became clear how useful this musical genre would be as a tool for a Geertzian ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1975). Aspects of the society began to emerge that, for example, explained a great deal about social divisions such as those between Arab and African, which in turn seemed linked to an elite/popular distinction and a Stone Town/Ng’ambo divide.⁴

The book thus is an exploration of how musical genres are perceived, defined and interpreted. Rather than confining the discussion to a single strand or category of *taarab*, as much of the literature to date has tended to do by focussing on orchestral *taarab*, I present a broader view by additionally exploring related performance that local oral testimonies confirmed as part of the same genre and that I have grouped to form an holistic *taarab* music complex. To an extent the same songs are performed in all the categories of *taarab*; to an extent they share poetic and music structure, and a similar core of instruments is used. The real link is not to be found, however, in a search for common ground in people’s definitions on a musical level. Rather it is found in the social context and function of performance. As such, the characterisation of *taarab* reveals a common denominator – the prerogative of women.

Note on Choice of Terminology

Taarab versus Tarabu

I have chosen to use *taarab* rather than *tarabu*. Although some people may Swahili-ise the word by adding a final -u in speech (still with the accent on the double a), I came across only a very few Zanzibaris who called it *tarabu* (with the accent on the penultimate syllable). Mainland Tanzanians and Kenyans tend to use this latter pronunciation. One person told me:

It is called differently according to the geographical area of the [individual] Swahili speaking, and there are reasons why. For instance on the Kenyan coast it is called ‘*tarabu*’. They have Swahili-ised the pronunciation because all Swahili words end up with a vowel. There isn’t a single Swahili word which doesn’t end with a vowel even if that word is of foreign origin. So ‘*tarab*’ became ‘*tarabu*’. But ... if one looks at the history of Zanzibar, even with the Swahili language itself, you will find that because Zanzibar was under the Arab sultanate for so many years, Arabs influenced Zanzibar a lot – much more than it influenced any other part of the East African coast. So even with the language you tend to come across Zanzibaris pronouncing Swahili words with an Arabic accent, especially those words which have Arabic

⁴ Stone Town and Ng’ambo are the two main sections of Zanzibar Town. See the description of Zanzibar Town later in this chapter.

origin. So ‘*tarab*’ [pronounced with a long first a, thus written in Zanzibar as *taarab*] remained ‘*tarab*’ (Abdilatif Abdalla, pers. comm., 27 April 1988).

Orchestral *Taarab*

Finding an adequate term to refer to the category of *taarab* summarised in this book as ‘modelled on Egyptian forms of urban secular music, serving the more affluent, Arab-orientated sectors of the society’ was a challenge. Zanzibaris refer to the *kidumbak* and *taarab ya wanawake* (women’s *taarab*) categories using both these distinct labels and the overarching term ‘*taarab*’. However, the music in the first category is referred to only as ‘*taarab*’. One person used the term ‘*taarab ya wanaume*’ (men’s *taarab*) to refer to this category. This may have described the very early ensembles and would be accurate for the club Ikhwani Safaa before women were admitted in the mid-1960s. The term is misleading with regard to the category as a whole, however. While all *taarab* is arguably women’s *taarab*, as women have historically been the primary consumers of the style, only women are permitted to become members of *taarab ya wanawake* clubs, while both men and women are admitted into the larger clubs, and women are often the prominent performers.

In the context of this book, which argues that all categories should be included in the definition of the musical style known as *taarab*, to use this term both to describe the style as a whole and to describe only one part of it would result in ambiguity and confusion. One possibility would have been to impose a foreign label: the mainstream, for instance. Used in its usual sense, the ‘mainstream’ describes well this category’s conservatism. It is not necessarily in orchestral form, however, that *taarab* could be said to represent the ‘prevailing trend of opinion, fashion, society’.⁵ *Taarab ya wanawake*, *kidumbak* and *rusha roho* are accessed by far more people, and it is in these forms that *taarab*, since the 1980s at least, has been more frequently experienced.

I have chosen to use the word ‘orchestral’. In some of my earlier writing I used the word ‘ideal’ instead. ‘Ideal’ was used by one of my central interviewees in reference to the five instruments that make up the Egyptian *takht* ensemble on which *taarab* is arguably based. These are: ‘ūd (short-necked plucked lute), *qānūn* (trapezoidal board zither), *nāy* (oblique-blown flute), *riqq* (round frame drum with metal jingles) and violin. In the 1940s the *takht* ensemble expanded to include, besides the ‘ideal’ instruments, several violins, a cello, double bass and accordion. The same development took place in Zanzibar and a fully equipped ‘ideal’ ensemble is now a full-blown orchestra. The choice of the term ‘orchestral *taarab*’ seemed to be more descriptive and to carry fewer potentially misconstrued value judgements than a word such as ‘ideal’ might imply. At the same time it must be noted that *kidumbak* and women’s *taarab* musicians themselves acknowledge

⁵ OED Online, accessed 23 May 2012; definition of mainstream.

the centrality, at least historically, of the core *taarab* ensemble in the development of their own categories of the music.

Fieldwork Experience

In October 1986 I was volunteering in the International Music Collection at the British Library National Sound Archive (now known as the World and Traditional Music Collection at the British Library),⁶ then headed by Lucy Durán and curated now by myself. I had recently immigrated to London from South Africa having completed a Bachelor of Music majoring in ethnomusicology. Together with a fellow student, Carol Muller, I had spent a year researching gumboot dancing in Durban. While I still felt very involved in gumboot and knew I still had a great deal to learn from my gumboot teachers in South Africa, for a range of reasons I was not able to spend more time in that country. I was on the look-out for another African music subject. I wanted to make a logical rather than an arbitrary move to another topic so, as a pianist, I decided to focus on the use of the piano accordion in Africa. Lucy had me listening to and indexing hundreds of LP and 78 rpm discs of African music. There was a great deal to get excited about.

After several months I came across a commercial album of *taarab* songs recorded in the 1960s by John Storm Roberts and issued as *Songs the Swahili Sing* (Original Music OMA 103, issued later on CD with the catalogue number OMCD 024). I had never heard African music like it. I wondered in particular who the Swahili were and why they should make music that sounded at once Arabic, Indian and African. The melodies were haunting, the rhythms calm. I could not, at the time, understand the Swahili language that the songs were sung in but it was obvious from the delivery that the words provided the real key to the style's popularity: they were performed with articulation and meaning. When describing *taarab* as he heard and recorded it in the 1950s, Hugh Tracey used the phrase 'poetry and languid charm'.⁷ This summed it up perfectly for me. To clinch it, the music used a piano accordion or harmonium. The album sparked an interest in the music for me and marked the beginning of my quest to discover more about it – that continues to the present, more than 25 years later.

Although Swahili is one of Africa's major languages and there were understandably many linguistic studies, comparatively little scholarly research on Swahili culture had been done when I was starting my research in the mid-1980s, and almost nothing had appeared in English on the music. This paucity of secondary sources emphasised the importance of oral information. I conducted

⁶ See <http://www.bl.uk/wtm>.

⁷ This phrase gave the title to the Topic Records release *Poetry and Languid Charm: Swahili Music from Tanzania and Kenya from the Late 1920s to 1950s* (TSCD936, 2006). This CD includes several recordings made by Hugh Tracey as well as a description of his recording trip to the region in the 1950s. This is discussed in greater detail later in the book.

interviews with East Africans living in London to begin to formulate a definition of the style. I began to learn the language and got help in translating the few pieces on *taarab* that had appeared in Swahili journals.

Most of the people I interviewed in London and the articles I read agreed that *taarab* had started on Zanzibar Island (Unguja) and from there it dispersed to other centres of the Swahili Coast. My initial aim was to study regional variation between these centres, including Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Mombasa, Lamu and the Comoros. But after only a short time on Zanzibar, spent familiarising myself with the performers and audiences, I realised that there were important questions raised about *taarab* in Zanzibar alone. I decided to restrict the study to this island. Happily subsequent work has been done by others on some of the other centres and thus my work can be seen as part of the puzzle in understanding this rich musical genre.⁸

After the initial two years spent reading secondary sources, learning the language and conducting interviews in London, I spent 11 months on Zanzibar collecting data. I had accommodation in one of the Michenzani blocks of flats in Ng'ambo. This was on the edge of Stone Town where most of the orchestral and women's *taarab* rehearsals and events took place, and in the heart of *kidumbak* activity. I adopted a method of participant observation and followed the activities of both of the large orchestras, two women's clubs and two *kidumbak* groups. I attended rehearsals and performances as often as possible. I also conducted a great many interviews (structured and informal), mainly with musicians but also with *taarab* fans at large. I worked closely with two or three representatives from each category of the music, conducting repeated interviews throughout the initial research period.

I returned in 1997 for a month to catch up with friends and to see how things had changed. In the intervening years since my first stay, the tourist market had blossomed. One could get on and off the island more easily, buy pasta in the shops and get a pizza and beer in restaurants. I was able to see old friends and get their views in a series of interviews on how the *taarab* scene had changed. Besides tourism, religion, politics and an increased profile on the world music market were the main forces for change. There was also a rise in Islamic fundamentalism on the island, particularly among women. It was not uncommon to see women walking the streets in full *burkha*, and many members of the women's *taarab* clubs claimed to have withdrawn from music-making activities following pilgrimages to Mecca. The Tanzanian government had also recently changed to a multiparty state and the ruling *Chama cha Mapinduzi* (Revolutionary Party, CCM) was being seriously challenged by the Civic United Front (CUF).⁹ Political allegiances were split and opposing factions emerged in the community and sometimes within *taarab*

⁸ For Mombasa see Graebner 1991 and Igobwa 2007; for Tanga see Askew 2002; for Dar es Salaam see Tsuruta 2003; for Comoros see Graebner 2001 and Schmitt 2007.

⁹ Multipartyism was adopted in January/February 1992. The first multiparty elections took place in early 1994.

clubs. Zanzibari musicians had been invited to European festivals, CDs had been released on the European market and competition among the island's musicians was rife, all vying for an opportunity to be included in the next invitation abroad.

In 2005 I was awarded a British Academy research grant. This enabled me to make a further four trips to Zanzibar between 2005 and 2007. The first and third of these were timed to coincide with the Zanzibar International Film Festival (July 2005) and the *Sauti za Busara* music festival (February 2006) respectively. Both these festivals attract large international and local audiences and I wanted to see the island in full tourist swing. What would be on offer for local musicians during these periods? The Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA) had opened its doors in 2002, and the second and fourth trips were made outside festival time but during DCMA term time so that I could see the effect this significant development was having on Zanzibar's musical community. Tourism had certainly opened up new opportunities for musicians to earn a living in Zanzibar and the DCMA was playing its part in equipping aspiring musicians with the skills needed to take advantage.

In general I could see a Zanzibar now very much included in world markets. In the early 1990s when I told people I was going to Zanzibar I would have to explain where it was on the map. In 2007 I was not only able to forego these descriptions, but people would explain to me that they had just returned from or were planning to go to the festival next year.

After almost no recordings of Zanzibari music had appeared internationally for over 30 years, Ben Mandelson and Roger Armstrong's *GlobeStyle* series, recorded in 1988 and released a year later, sparked interest and increased activity resulting in a proliferation of professional publications on a range of Europe-based labels, many produced by Werner Graebner.¹⁰ Zanzibari *taarab* musicians had caused a sensation at the WOMAD festival in the UK in 2004. Bibi Kidude (undoubtedly Zanzibar's best-known cultural export) had been awarded the World Music Lifetime achievement award at the World Music Expo (WOMEX) in 2005. Yusuf Mahmoud (director of the *Sauti za Busara* festival) and Hildegard Kiel (director of the DCMA until 2008) had been recipients of BBC Radio 3's World Music Shakers award in 2007.

At the same time orchestral *taarab* musicians were bemoaning the death of *taarab*, and women's clubs had stopped performing altogether. *Rusha roho* and *bongo flava* or *zenji flava* (rap music from the Tanzanian mainland and Zanzibar respectively) were all the rage on the island. More detailed exploration and assessment of these developments forms the core of the final sections of this book.

The book, then, is an account of my understanding of the Zanzibari *taarab* history and existing scene to the turn of the twentieth century. The concluding chapters highlight additional factors in the continuation of the style into the twenty-first century. It is left open-ended as these factors continue to have an effect.

¹⁰ Graebner has produced for Dizim Records, Buda Musique, Jahazi Media and Marabi Productions.

Taarab as an Indian Ocean music complex has a multilayered development on Zanzibar and continues to have a multifaceted expression. The genre has always been in a state of change, bending and diverting according to social, economic and political dynamics. As a manifestation of Zanzibar popular culture, it is women who have kept it alive.

Mwalimu Idi Farhan – the Encyclopedia of *Taarab*¹¹



Figure 1.1 Mwalimu Idi Farhan, 1990

Source: Janet Topp Fargion

A great deal of my understanding of *taarab* was forged through my very valued acquaintance with the late Mwalimu Idi Abdulla Farhan (Figure 1.1). Mw. Idi, one of Zanzibar's most celebrated musicians, who passed away in late December 2010, was a multi-instrumentalist, composer of music and lyrics and influential teacher in the *taarab* tradition. Very few musicians on the island today can say they have not studied at one time or another with Mw. Idi. This short biography acts as a

¹¹ This biography is based on several formal and informal interviews I conducted with Mw. Idi during my research, and on his own written account of his life, which he prepared for me in 2008 to include in this book. Quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from these sources.

tribute and acknowledgement of his enormous contribution to *taarab*; but, as we shall see, it also points to the wide range of historical, social and musical factors to consider as we explore the genre.

Idi Abdulla Farhan was born in Zanzibar in Chukwani on 1 July 1926. He attended the Government Boys Primary school up to primary level (1939–44), continuing his education in 1946/47 at the Teacher Training College in Dole, Zanzibar. Following this he was sent to Makerere College in Uganda to study fine art and education (1949–50) and between 1951 and 1974 he taught fine art in a range of schools in Zanzibar. In 1975 he went to the Kenya Institute of Mass Education in Nairobi to attend a course on TV production. He was sent on study tours to China as part of this training, where he was introduced to the ‘economic stability of China as well’ (indicating the strong political ties with that country during this post-revolutionary time). That same year he was appointed Head of Production (until 1979) then Head of Graphics at TV Zanzibar (1979–87). He retired from the civil service in 1989, after which he served on a range of short contracts in the Department of Culture and Arts. He was given a special teaching position with the Department of Culture and Arts of Zanzibar and Pemba with responsibility for local *ngoma*, *taarab* and all kinds of arts in general. He was appointed Secretary of the Censorship Board and in 1981 sat on the National Swahili Council (1981–84) based in Dar es Salaam. From the late 1990s he also taught art at the International School in Zanzibar. His position as one of the island’s respected elders is undisputed.

Mw. Idi’s love of art and music began when he was a small child, taking his lead from his artist father, Abdalla Farhan bin Seif. Mw. Idi joined the orchestral *taarab* club, Ikhwani Safaa, in 1944. A self-taught musician, he learnt to play *qānūn* and *‘ūd* and composed music and lyrics of countless songs.

Since I was young I liked music because my father had a gramophone and used to play. I always sat down and listened very carefully how the sound of musical instruments of people of Zanzibar from Siti binti Saad and Arabic songs from Cairo. This is the only way that I began to appreciate music. At the age of 16 I bought a small *‘ūd* with 4 strings and tried to play and there was nobody to show me, to teach me but my ambition and interest gave me strong interest to go on and on and at last I began to get some idea and played a few songs. I managed to form a small group of my friends and had a small club. We played simple songs and sang freely. After that I joined Nadi Ikhwani Safaa in 1944 and I was afraid of meeting people who had experience of playing violin, *udi*, *dafu*, *dumbak*. There was no accordion then. I said I shall one play the *udi*, and started to practise alone in the evening. After 4 years I could manage to play some songs of Nadi Ikhwani Safaa, especially *bashraf*.

With these efforts, the club decided to make a clearer commitment to music and a special orchestra was inaugurated in 1945 with Ali Buesh as director, assisted