ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

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AnIsl 53 (2020), p. 95-112

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Aziz El-Shawan. A Cosmopolitan and Nationalist Composer in 20th Century Egypt

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A Cosmopolitan and Nationalist Composer in Twentieth Century Egypt

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a politically and culturally situated preliminary reading of the biographical and artistic trajectory of Aziz El-Shawan (1916–1993), a cosmopolitan and nationalist Egyptian composer. The article characterizes the two cosmopolitan cultural formations in Cairo in which he partook and their impact on his career and music: a «modernist capitalist» formation which developed within the framework of colonial rule and the Egyptian monarchy from the late nineteenth century up to the 1952 Egyptian revolution; and a «modernist socialist» formation, partly configured by Soviet political and cultural influence, from the late 1950s up to the early 1970s. The article describes how Aziz El-Shawan became a composer, the phases of his artistic and professional career and his musical style.

Keywords: Cairo, cosmopolitanism, Egyptian music, nationalism, opera

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✦ **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article propose une lecture préliminaire politiquement et culturellement située de la trajectoire biographique et artistique d'Aziz El-Shawan (1916-1993), compositeur égyptien cosmopolite et nationaliste. L'article caractérise les deux formations culturelles cosmopolites du Caire auxquelles il a participé et leur impact sur sa carrière et sa musique : une formation « capitaliste moderniste » qui s'est développée dans le cadre de la domination coloniale et de la monarchie égyptienne de la fin du XIX^e^ siècle à la révolution égyptienne de 1952 ; et une formation « socialiste moderniste » partiellement façonnée par l'influence politique et culturelle soviétique de la fin des années 1950 au début des années 1970. L'article décrit comment Aziz El-Shawan est devenu compositeur, les phases de sa carrière artistique et professionnelle et son style musical.

Mots-clés : Le Caire, cosmopolitisme, musique égyptienne, nationalisme, opéra

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Introduction

This article[1] proposes a preliminary reading of the journey of Aziz El-Shawan (ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, 1916–1993), a cosmopolitan and nationalist composer who developed his artistic career in 20th century Cairo.[2] It presents a politically and culturally situated outline of El-Shawan's biography and his activity as a composer, interweaving his voice, ideas and music with particular reference to his Piano Concerto and his opera *Anas al-Wuǧūd*. The article characterizes two cosmopolitan cultural formations in Cairo in which El-Shawan partook.

1. This article is a revised version of a lecture I delivered at Harvard University's Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library on March 24, 2018 at the invitation of the Music Department and the Center of Middle Eastern Studies. A shorter version was presented at the Music in the Arab World Study Group Symposium of the International Council for Traditional Music held from January 7 to 10, 2019 at Ifao in Cairo.

2. El-Shawan belonged to the second generation of cosmopolitan and nationalist composers. The first generation includes Yusef Greis (1899–1966), Hasan Rashid (1896–1969) and Abu Bakr Khairat (1910–1963). In addition to El-Shawan, the second generation comprises Gamāl ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (1924–1988) and Rifʿat Ǧarāna (b. 1924). Rāǧīḥ Dāwūd (b. 1954) and Munā Ġunaym (b. 1955) integrate the third generation of composers while the fourth generation, born in the 1970s, includes Nahla Maṭar, Patrick Bishay (Bišāy), Amr Okba (ʿAmr ʿUqba) and Ramz Samy (Ramz Sāmī). While the first two generations of composers developed a nationalist musical idiom, the third and fourth generations created personal styles inspired by diverse trends that characterized Western "art" music in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. For an overview of the introduction and localization of Western music in 19th and 20th century Egypt and a brief characterization of the trajectory and hybrid musical idioms created by Egyptian composers in the 20th century, see El-Shawan, 1985; El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, 2002; al-Kholy, Robinson, 1993; al-Kholy et al., 2003.

What were the values, world views, and agencies that characterized El-Shawan's cosmopolitan habitus? How did these contribute to shaping his life and music? How did his musical discourse articulate with Egypt's nationalist and modernist projects?

My reading of Aziz El-Shawan's life, ideas, professional career and music is informed both by personal and disciplinary perspectives. As a daughter and piano student, I witnessed and shared part of his life and artistic journey. As a child and adolescent, I listened to him compose at the piano, witnessed him patiently rework his penciled sketches into manuscript scores and then copy those onto orchestral parts, I accompanied him to rehearsals and concerts, and shared many conversations around his ideas about music and life in general. As a musician, I performed several of his chamber music compositions with colleagues at the Cairo National Conservatory where I studied in the 1960s, as well as his Piano Concerto with the Cairo Symphony Orchestra in July 1972. As an ethnomusicology graduate student at Columbia University (New York), I interviewed him in the late 1970s in an attempt to gain a better understanding of his ideas, life journey and outlook on musical life in Cairo.

My perspective on Aziz El-Shawan's personal and artistic trajectory is informed by the mutually constructing and reinforcing processes of cosmopolitanism and nationalism.[3] As a critical concept, cosmopolitanism has been theorized in various academic disciplines. Recognizing the conceptual and theoretical diversity and even confusion that mark the discursive and political uses of this concept, the sociologists Vertovec and Cohen[4] argue that cosmopolitanism can be viewed or evoked as: a socio-cultural condition; a philosophy or world view; a political project that incorporates a layer of governance by transnational organizations and the activities of transnational social movements; a political project for recognizing multiple identities; an attitudinal or dispositional orientation that entails a willingness to engage with the other; and a mode of practice or competence.

Cosmopolitanism has been deployed in the conceptualization of cultural formations in the Middle East. Exploring representations of cosmopolitan Egypt in literature and film, literary scholar Deborah Starr[5] argues that in the Egyptian context, cosmopolitanism developed out of Imperial rule (Ottoman and British) and was shaped by the East West encounter while also drawing attention to how this conceptual and historical relationship has been undertheorized.

Ethnomusicologists have applied cosmopolitanism as an analytical tool for the understanding of musical exchange and hybridization; the processes and results of the appropriation of the music of others; their world views, human agency and imagination that are central to the creation of transnational musical styles and their global circulation. Martin Stokes, for example, considers that the concept "invites us to think about how people in specific places and at specific times have embraced the music of others, and how, in doing so, they have enabled musical styles and musical ideas, musicians and musical instruments to circulate (globally) in particular ways". He emphasizes that in comparison to the notion of globalization, cosmopolitanism

3. Turino, 2000.
4. Vertovec, Cohen, 2002.
5. Starr, 2009, p. 9.

"… restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of 'worlds', rather than a passive reaction to global 'systems'".[6] Turino emphasizes one of the fundamental characteristics of cosmopolitanism namely that, while translocal in purview, it is always localized.[7] Thus, binary conceptions (such as, insider/outsider; eastern/western; local/global) that undergird some of the analyses of cosmopolitan formations are untenable. Once a musical domain or style, introduced from the outside is appropriated locally, it begins belonging there. As the sociologist Ulrich Beck suggests, cosmopolitanism can be seen as a condition in which "the otherness of the other is included in one's own self-identity and self-definition".[8]

In turn, I use the concept of nationalism to refer to an ideology anchored on the assumption that nation and state are coterminous, an ideology that has engendered political, social and cultural movements. I also conceptualize nationalism as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense of "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak",[9] and as "a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves".[10] As many ethnomusicologists have shown, music, dance and other expressive modes are agents of nationalism[11] that have been instrumental in the construction and negotiation of nation-states, national identities and "national cultures".

Becoming a Composer in Cosmopolitan Cairo (1916–1954)

The first cosmopolitan formation in which Aziz El-Shawan participated can be described as "modernist capitalist"[12] and was configured within the framework of the Egyptian monarchy and colonial influence reaching back to the British invasion in 1882 and lasting up to 1952 when a coup d'état ousted King Fārūq and ended colonial rule. From the mid-19th through to the mid twentieth century, Cairo was a cosmopolitan city including Syrian, Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Italian, British and French communities. French cultural influence was significant among Cairo's cosmopolitans, including Europeanized Egyptians, for whom, as for members of other foreign minorities, French was the *lingua franca*. French influence began with the brief occupation of Egypt by Napoleon's army between 1798 and 1801 and was largely promoted through a network of educational and cultural institutions established in the 19th century. European music was initially institutionalized in nineteenth century Egypt through military bands trained by European teachers. Cairo's cosmopolitan elite, cultivated Western art music as a symbol of social distinction and power. Training was available through private instruction by European teachers who were resident in Cairo and several private music schools they

6. Stokes, 2007, p. 6.
7. Turino, 2000, p. 7.
8. Beck, 2006, p. 17.
9. Foucault, 2002, p. 54.
10. Hall, 1996, p. 613.
11. Bohlman, 2004, p. 36.
12. Turino, 2000.

founded and staffed. One of the best known was the Tiegerman Conservatory founded and run by the Polish Jewish pianist Ignace Tiegerman (1893–1968) who moved to Cairo in 1931, following his studies in Vienna with Theodor Leszetycki, where he remained until his death in 1968. Annual opera, ballet and concert seasons performed by visiting artists and companies were featured at the Cairo Opera house inaugurated in 1869 with the performance of Verdi's *Rigoletto* as part of the Khedive Ismail's lavish celebrations for the opening of the Suez Canal for navigation. A Western music orchestra was part of the Egyptian Broadcast Corporation, which started its emissions in 1934, regularly performing concerts up to the early 1950s.[13]

It was within this cosmopolitan milieu that Aziz El-Shawan was born on May 6, 1916, to a middle-class Coptic family, where he received his education and musical training. His father, Aziz Ibrahim, was a government employee, his mother passed away when he was about six. None of his family members were either musicians or *aficionados*.

El-Shawan experienced a passion for music at an early age as he recalled in an interview conducted by two of his private composition students on October 12, 1992:[14]

> Since I was young, I loved music. I bought a plastic flute and would blow in it. This was my favorite toy. I don't remember what I played. When I was 9 or 10, there was a young man who played the *ʿūd* and the violin in the neighbor's window opposite my room. I became aware that there was something else besides the flute that produces melodies. I persuaded my father to buy me a violin so that I can imitate the neighbor… and I started to play intuitively.

El-Shawan completed his primary and secondary education at the St. Joseph – La Salle School situated in the neighborhood of Khoronfish (al-Ḫurunfiš) in Cairo, where he also received a Higher Diploma in Commercial Studies. Founded in 1856, this French Catholic school is part of a world-wide network of Lasallian educational institutions affiliated with the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a Roman Catholic teaching order founded by French priest Jean Baptiste de La Salle who was canonized in 1900. The La Salle School in Khoronfish is one of seven Lasallian schools in Egypt that are still functioning.[15] In addition to the regular academic curriculum, the school had a wind band and a choir at the church with which it was connected. The young El-Shawan was a member of both groups, an activity that exposed him to a large repertoire of Western music. In the band, he learned to play the clarinet and was also introduced to the French horn.

At the same time that El-Shawan was enrolled at the St. Joseph La Salle School, he pursued his ambition of being a virtuoso violinist by studying privately with the German expatriate Joseph Von Aubervon, a student of the prominent Czeck violinist and composer Jan Kubelík

13. El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, 2002.
14. I am indebted to Ramz Samy and Hossam El-Dib for conducting the interview and making it available to me. The translation of the interview is my own. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.
15. For a thoroughly documented history of French schools in Egypt, including the Lasallian network of educational institutions, see Abécassis, 2000.

(1880–1940). Lacking financial support from his father, this is how El-Shawan recalls having paid for his violin lessons:[16]

> [At]… school, if a student presented homework that was not properly done, the Catholic brothers would punish him by requiring him to copy one hundred lines. If he protests, the number of lines were doubled or tripled. Not one day passed without a student having this kind of punishment. Some of them had money. So, I thought that I could alleviate their punishment by copying the lines myself against payment of one millime per line, that is ten piasters per one hundred lines. So, ten plus ten, I was able to pay for the lessons with this German teacher.

Following his graduation in 1936, El-Shawan began working at the Singer sewing machine company, which provided him with economic independence and the means to continue with his violin lessons. This was then followed by employment in the record department of the Phillips Company and with the American airline company TWA.

Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco personal archive.

Fig. 1. Aziz El-Shawan holding his violin (*ca.* 1935).

16. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.

When and Why Did Aziz El-Shawan Turn to Composition?

An accident partially disabled the pinky finger of his left hand, obliging him to give up his dream of being a virtuoso violinist. He then studied piano, theory, harmony, composition and orchestration with the Italian expatriate Pompeo Minatto who, together with other expatriate European teachers, trained several generations of Egyptian musicians and composers. In addition to this formal training, for his development as a composer, El-Shawan referred to the importance of the intensive aural experience he acquired as a regular listener to performances of Western "art" music by resident and visiting orchestras and soloists, including the symphonic orchestras brought to Cairo by the British organization ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) to entertain British soldiers stationed in the Egyptian capital during World War II. Following the War, he continued his studies with Orlovetsky, a Russian expatriate who, according to El-Shawan, had studied with a student of Rimsky Korsakov.[17] This was a turning point in El-Shawan's orientation as a composer. As he recalled:[18]

> I composed a piece and showed it to Orlovetsky. After he looked at the score, he tore it up. I asked him if the piece was that bad? He said no, but what is your nationality? … It was an awakening for me. I had to pay attention to what he called the "Egyptian expression". So, I then studied the *maqāmāt* [Arabic modal system] the *bašārif* [an Arabic instrumental form of Turkish origin] and so forth so that I could understand how Arabic musical forms worked… This was my point of departure into a truthful expression of Egypt.

The nationalist turn in El-Shawan's thinking about the music he would compose resonated with the national consciousness that Egyptian artists and intellectuals had been promoting through their artistic creativity during the Interwar period, and that may also be traced back to the nationalist movements against the ruling dynasty and colonial domination that arose in the late nineteenth century and continued throughout the first half of the twentieth.

El-Shawan composed his first orchestral works in the 1940s under the supervision of Orlovetsky: the *Fantasia* for orchestra (1945), the symphonic poem *ʿAṭšān yā Ṣabāyā* (1946), the *Overture of the Opera ʿAntara* (1947), the First Symphony and several film scores. These compositions were premiered by an orchestra that the composer provisionally formed by freelance musicians, that he sponsored and conducted at a concert at the Ewart Memorial Hall of the American University in Cairo on April 24, 1954. This concert, in which El-Shawan heard his compositions for the first time, marked the end of the first phase of his training and early activity as a composer. Thinking back on this event, he remarked: "It was a great artistic

17. To date, I have been unable to find information about Minatto and Orlovetsky.
18. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.

AnIsl 53 (2020), p. 95-112 Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco
Aziz El-Shawan. A Cosmopolitan and Nationalist Composer in 20th Century Egypt

success but a financial disaster."[19] Two years later, these early compositions were recorded on LP by the All Union Radio Symphonic Orchestra conducted by Aleksandr Gauk and Aziz El-Shawan in Moscow.[20]

Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco personal archive.

Fig. 2. Aziz El-Shawan conducting an orchestra that premiered his early works in Cairo (1954).

Stylistically, El-Shawan's early compositions are influenced by The Russian Five.[21] However, the incipient nationalist musical idiom that he was to develop during the next phase of his artistic journey is also evident. The Symphonic Poem *ʿAṭšān yā Ṣabāyā* is a variation on a folk tune after which the composition is entitled while the overture of the opera *ʿAntara* evokes the famous pre-Islamic Arab knight and poet.

19. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.

20. See Discography.

21. The Russian Five (also known as the Mighty Five or the *Kuchka*, in Russian) is a designation of a circle of five nineteenth century Russian composers who collaborated to create a distinct Russian nationalist musical style, often drawing on orientalist tropes. The circle was led by Mily Balakirev (1837–1910), and included César Cui (1835–1918), Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881), Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908) and Aleksandre Borodin (1833–1887).

Configuring a Nationalist Musical Idiom (1955–1970)

A new phase in El-Shawan's professional and artistic career began in the mid-1950s. This was a period of major economic, social, and cultural transformation in which a new "modernist socialist" cosmopolitan cultural formation[22] was partly configured by Soviet political and cultural influence. A coup d'état in 1952 deposed the ruling dynasty, ended colonial rule, and established a republican regime under the charismatic leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970). The political and economic changes that followed the establishment of the new regime led to the departure of the majority of the cosmopolitan communities that had thrived in Cairo since the mid nineteenth century. The Soviet Union was Egypt's main political, economic and military ally, an alliance that also impacted on the domain of culture. Soviet specialists in many fields were brought in to assist in building new projects, most importantly the Aswan Dam constructed between 1960 and 1970. A Soviet Cultural Center was opened in 1956. It housed a library featuring Soviet propaganda, Russian literature in the original language and in translation, and other publications in Arabic and Russian, offered Russian language classes, and organized a regular program of lectures, concerts, documentary film, fiction movies and art exhibitions by Soviet and Egyptian artists.

Nasser's regime was anchored on a nationalist ideology and promoted anti-imperialism, a local brand of socialism, and pan-Arabism. He embarked on a far-reaching modernization and development program that involved all sectors of society, including culture. For the first time in Egypt's modern history, a Ministry of Culture was founded in 1958 under the leadership of Ṯarwat ʿUkāša (1921–2012)[23] who headed the Ministry from 1958 to 1962, and again from 1967 to 1970. One of the members of the Free Officers Movement led by Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970) that toppled King Fārūq, ʿUkāša was also a scholar, writer and translator. In addition to his military education, he was trained in Western music and completed a doctorate in literature at the University of Paris IV (Sorbonne). ʿUkāša and his team designed a two-pronged cultural policy that called for the revival and preservation of Egypt's cultural heritage while at the same time stressing the need for modernizing cultural production and "enriching national culture by cross fertilization with foreign cultural values".[24] A governmental institutional infrastructure for culture was created that guaranteed government patronage for all sectors of culture and free arts education, most notably the High Council for Culture and Arts, the Egyptian Book Organization and the Academy of the Arts including the Cairo National Conservatory, and the Ballet, Cinema, and Theatre Institutes. The state also founded and financed the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, the Ballet and Opera Companies, the National Theatre, the Arabic Music Ensemble, and the National Folklore Troupe modelled after the Moiseyev Dance Company. Since its creation over 60 years ago, the institutional

22. Turino, 2000.

23. Ṯarwat ʿUkāša's personal and professional trajectory, including his vision on cultural policy and its implementation, are detailed in his memoires, see ʿUkāša, 1988.

24. Wahba, 1972, p. 17. The reference here is to the West.

AnIsl 53 (2020), p. 95-112 Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco
Aziz El-Shawan. A Cosmopolitan and Nationalist Composer in 20th Century Egypt

infrastructure for culture launched by ʿUkāša's administration has continued to play a key role in patronizing cultural activities and arts education.[25] During the 1960s and 1970s, teachers, musicians and dancers from the Soviet Union and other eastern bloc countries partly staffed the arts educational institutions and some of the performance groups mentioned above. In addition, the best graduates of the Cairo National Conservatory and the Cairo Ballet Institute were granted scholarships to continue their studies in the Soviet Union.

Nasser's nationalist ideology, his regime's support for the arts, and the alliance with the Soviet Union provided El-Shawan with new opportunities for developing his musical career, and a context in which the nationalist musical idiom he was configuring gained new meaning. In 1956, he was hired as the Egyptian director of the Soviet Cultural Center where he worked in close collaboration with the Soviet director up to 1967. He was responsible for the organization of the Center's cultural program, a job facilitated by his fluency in the Russian language and the wide network of contacts and friendships he maintained with Egyptian artists and intellectuals. This position also enabled him to travel to Moscow in 1956 where the above-mentioned early works were recorded on LP.[26]

During the decade that followed the premier of his early works in 1956, El-Shawan wrote several of his major compositions, such as the Piano Concerto, the symphonic pictures *Abū Simbil*, and *Bilādī Bilādī* (My country, My Country), a cantata for four soloists, choir and symphony orchestra. In these and other works composed during the same period, he developed the main characteristics of his nationalist musical idiom, in particular, the centrality of lyrical melodies, the modal flavor inspired by the *maqām* system, the use of melodies based on Egyptian urban or rural songs, a chromatic harmonic language, and a vocal style that reconciles lyrical singing with the phonetics of the Arabic language.[27] Furthermore, during this period, El-Shawan defined the themes, ideas and sentiments that he aspired to express through his music. Many of his works embodied national sentiment and were configured around narratives based on ancient, medieval and modern Egyptian and Arab history that he studied throughout his life. He maintained that every composition had to have an idea, a subject, a message. In his words, "If I don't have something to say to people, I prefer not to write."[28]

His nationalist musical idiom during this period is illustrated by his Piano Concerto which is his most frequently performed composition. Written in 1959, it was premiered in Cairo in 1962 by the Egyptian pianist Marcelle Matta accompanied by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra conducted by the prominent Bulgarian conductor Sacha Popov (1900–1975). The most recent performance was given in 2016 at the concert commemorating El-Shawan's centennial at the Cairo Opera House.

25. Several of my interlocutors referred to ʿUkāša's administration as a "golden age" in which the state generously patronized the arts and arts education.

26. See Discography.

27. Coptic chant and hymns did not constitute a source of inspiration for El-Shawan's major compositions.

28. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.

Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco personal archive.

Fig. 3. Aziz El-Shawan thanking the audience following the performance of his Piano Concerto by the Swedish pianist Bengt Ake-Lundin accompanied by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra conducted by Muṣṭafā Nāgī (1992).

In B flat minor, the Concerto evokes *maqām hiǧāz*, emphasizing the augmented second of the *maqām*'s lower tetrachord (*ǧins hiǧāz*) and characteristic melodic turns. The opening section of the first movement is inspired by Rachmaninov's second piano concerto with the initial chords followed by a lush first theme played by the orchestra highlighting the string section. The cadenza of the first movement emulates an improvised *taqsīm*[29] on the *qānūn*, a plucked trapezoidal zither with 36 courses of strings that is central to the performance of Arabic music. In El-Shawan's words, "I wanted the piano to speak in Arabic."[30] Much of the cadenza consists of fast repeated notes played by alternating one finger on each hand, emulating the playing technique on the *qānūn*. The melody evoking the *hiǧāz* tetrachord of *maqām hiǧāz* with its augmented second is grounded harmonically with occasional drone-like

29. A *taqsīm* is an instrumental genre of Arabic music. It is a non-metrical solo improvisation that is structured by the characteristics of the *maqām* (a melodic mode that is distinctive of Arabic music) in which it is set. Traditionally, one or several *taqāsīm* were performed at the beginning of the *waṣla* (a suite-like sequence of vocal and instrumental compositions alternated with improvisations) to situate performers and audience in the *maqām*'s mood. Through the *taqsīm* instrumentalists exhibit their musical creativity and virtuosity. Following the disappearance of the *waṣla* during the second half of the 20th century, the *taqsīm* maintained its function as an introduction to lengthy songs (*aġānī*, singular *uġniyya*) and as a solo instrumental piece.
30. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.

bass notes and chords. The first and third movements evoke the song *sālma yā salāma* by the Egyptian Arabic music composer Sayyid Darwīš (1892–1923), adapting it to the Concert's tonal framework and pianistic style.[31]

By the 1960s, El-Shawan had earned local recognition as a composer. His work was performed by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra; he was commissioned by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, as were 30 other artists representing different artistic disciplines, to write a composition inspired by the temples of Abu Simbel before UNESCO's project of relocating the monument was implemented due to the flooding that would result from the construction of the High Dam; he was awarded the Egyptian Ministry of Culture's first prize in composition in 1956 and the Egyptian Government's Arts and Sciences Award of the First Order in 1967.

A new turning point in El-Shawan's career occurred in the mid-1960s when the Armenian Soviet composer Aram Khachturian (1903–1978) was on a state visit to Egypt. After hearing El-Shawan's piano concerto, the Soviet Armenian composer invited him to join his composition class at the Moscow Conservatory where he spent over two years between 1967 and 1970. His Moscow sojourn afforded him exposure to this city's rich musical life and to the works of Central Asian composers such as the Azerbaijanis Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885–1948), Kara Karayev (1918–1982) and Fikret Amirov (1922–1984). For El-Shawan, their music, alongside that of Khachaturian, represented a model of molding what he referred to as "an oriental expression into a scientific style".[32]

The Culmination of an Artistic Journey (1970–1993)

El-Shawan's return from Moscow in 1970 marked a new phase in his career which coincided with a new turn in Egypt's history. Following Nasser's death in 1970, Anwar al-Sadat became president and introduced major political and economic changes. He liberalized the economy, opened up the country to foreign investment, severed the alliance with the Soviet Union, expelled Soviet advisors, and closed the Soviet Cultural Center, among many other measures. Sadat's regime effectively ended the cosmopolitan-socialist formation configured under Nasser.

From 1970 through to his passing away in 1993, El-Shawan dedicated all his time to composition and to writing music appreciation books[33] supported by his wife Laila El-Shawan, a professional woman who provided for the family's financial sustenance and was a strong advocate of his artistic career. In addition, El-Shawan taught Harmony and Counterpoint on a part-time basis at the Arabic Music Institute and had a few private composition students.

31. There are numerous versions of *Sālma yā salāma* mixing the Arabic melody with Western popular music styles. The most well-known version was sung by Dalida (1933–1987), an Egyptian born Italian/French singer.
32. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.
33. al-Šawwān, 1988; 1990; 1992.

During this period, El-Shawan wrote works for the stage such as the ballet *Isis and Osiris*, evoking the Ancient Egyptian legend, and the opera *Anas al-Wuǧūd*, inspired by the stories of *The Thousand and One Nights*.[34] El-Shawan attributes the turn to large-scale compositions during this period to the confidence and maturity that he had gained from his Moscow sojourn.[35] The ballet was choreographed and recorded in East Berlin in the early 1970s prior to the Sadat regime ending relations with the Eastern bloc, which resulted in the termination of its planned staging in East Berlin. The opera *Anas al-Wuǧūd* was performed in a concert version by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Cairo Opera Company in the 1980s and was premiered posthumously at the new Cairo Opera House on June 23, 1996 and again staged in 2001.[36]

El-Shawan dedicated a good part of the 1970s composing *Anas al-Wuǧūd*. During my field work in Cairo between 1976 and 1978, I witnessed his close collaboration with the libretto's author, the poet Salāma al-ʿAbbāsī, carefully working on the tight fit between words and melody and the clarity of the Arabic words sung in lyrical style.

It is beyond this article's scope to present an analysis of this opera. Some of the most salient characteristics include: the modal flavor inspired by the *maqām* system; frequent usage of the tetrachord as a structural unit for developing melodic ideas; word-born melodies and melodic cells partly structured by the long vowels and the syllabic division of classical Arabic; a leitmotif embodying the love that unites the two main characters and heard in all three acts, serving as a unifying element.

34. The story unfolds in the early Islamic period in Egypt, following the Arab conquest in the mid seventh century. Anas al-Wuǧūd, an Egyptian soldier in the Sultan's army, and Ward al-Akmām, the Minister of State's daughter, are in love. The Sultan asks the Minister to marry his daughter, a request that she refuses. Shocked by his daughter's refusal, the Minister banishes her to the Island of Philae, the site of a famous ancient Egyptian temple complex in Upper Egypt. Anas al-Wuǧūd finds the site after crossing the Nile and fighting off crocodiles. The guard tries to prevent him from entering the palace where Ward al-Akmām was staying. Anas al-Wuǧūd kills him. The reencounter of the two lovers coincides with the end of Ward al-Akmām's banishment, the arrival of her father and the Sultan to declare her marriage to him. Ward al-Akmām refuses to leave Anas al-Wuǧūd. After finding out that Anas al-Wuǧūd killed the guard, her father orders the soldiers kill him but Ward al-Akmām offers her life instead. At this point, the Sultan emerges, withdraws his marriage proposal, blesses the lovers and grants them the castle to which Ward al-Akmām had been banished.

35. ʿAzīz al-Šawwān, October 12, 1992.

36. Both performances were by the Cairo Opera Company, the Cairo Choir, the Cairo Ballet Company, and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Yousef El-Sisi. The stage direction was in the hands of the French Michel Giès.

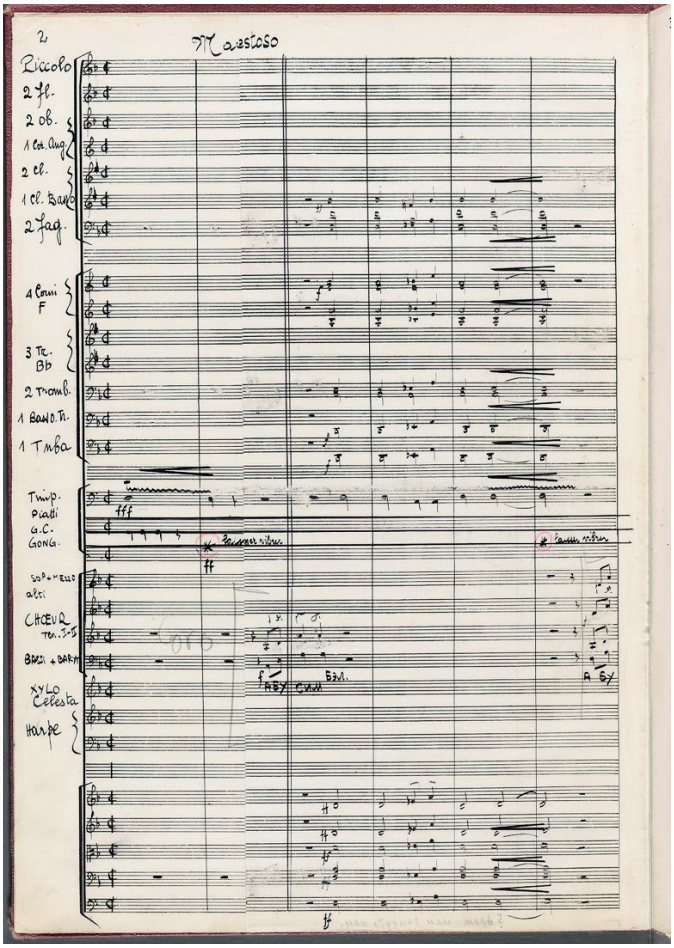
Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco personal archive.

Fig. 4. The poster announcing the premiere of Aziz El-Shawan's Opera *Anas al-Wuǧūd* (June 1996).

Aziz El-Shawan's Manuscript Scores and Sound Recordings

Aziz El-Shawan's manuscript collection includes piano, vocal and orchestral scores, and parts of complete works, sketches and other materials in pencil and China ink. He usually first sketched a piano version and then an orchestral score in pencil. Once a composition was consolidated, he copied the piano and orchestral score and parts with a quill pen dipped in China ink (also known as Indian ink). To date, none of his scores have been published and many of his compositions were never performed.

Following the passing of El-Shawan in May of 1993, I became increasingly concerned about the safeguarding of his manuscript collection, which up to then had been stored at the family's apartment in Heliopolis, Cairo. The lack of adequately equiped music archives and libraries in Egypt led me to look into the possibility of entrusting his manuscript collection to a specialized international archive. Through the mediation of Dr. Virginia Danielson, ethnomusicologist and then chief librarian of Harvard University's Eda Kuhn Loeb Music Library, El-Shawan's manuscript scores were transferred to Harvard's music library in 2009. The collection is now



Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco personal archive.

Fig. 5. Manuscript Orchestra Score of Abu Simbel by Aziz El-Shawan.

available to the public. A finding aid was constructed and all his manuscripts were since digitalized and are now available online, including the opera *Anas al-Wuǧūd*, the Piano Concerto, the Symphonic Poem *Abū Simbil*, and the Cantata *Bilādī, Bilādī*, among other works.

The library of music scores at the Cairo Opera House that serves the Cairo Symphony Orchestra and the Cairo Opera and Ballet Companies contains copies of some of El-Shawan's major works. A project is underway to deposit copies of El-Shawan's complete works at this library.

Taking stock of the sound recordings of El-Shawan's compositions is a task that has not yet been fully carried out. A few works were recorded by Egyptian radio and television and by the Cairo Opera House but remain unpublished and are deposited at the archives of these institutions where they are not readily available for consultation. A handful of his works were released on LP and CD in the Soviet Union and in Egypt.[37] None of the recordings listed in the discography is currently commercially available and most copies are scattered in private and public archives and record collections. A few recordings are available on YouTube and other Internet platforms.

37. See Discography.

Coda

El-Shawan regarded his compositions as "refined Egyptian music" that draws on multiple musical resources and techniques, molding them into what he called a "scientific style". For him, "the true music (*ṣādiqa*) expresses the composer's character, and his national identity (*qawmiyya*), the depth of his training and the extent of his talent".[38] The concept of "Western music" or of "music cosmopolitanism" did not figure in his discourse. The music created in Europe between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries was an integral part of his habitus. It represented a resource on which he could draw to create a "modern Egyptian music", sometimes locally referred to as "*musīqā mutaṭawirra*".

El-Shawan was a cosmopolitan nationalist whose world, while firmly rooted in Egypt, extended beyond its borders to encompass multiple cultural spaces, ideas, languages and musical styles. His life journey and music were shaped by the contributions made by the two cosmopolitan cultural formations that thrived in 20th century Cairo. His music can be seen as an embodiment of Egypt's nationalist and modernist project as idealized by the segment of the Egyptian cosmopolitan elite to which he belonged during the second half of the 20th century.

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