

Tarab by Richelle-Shemtov

Leonard Bernstein once said that his most creative moments were while resting and doing nothing. I like that. My own mind rarely rests. It finds a little time to be creative mainly when I am out walking or between waking up and getting up.

I composed this 'piece' one day while taking a stroll in the friendly winter sun with iPod plugs tucked in my ears, listening to a passionate aria from an Italian opera. It was as if the song came from within me, sweeping me up and away into the blue skies. Elating. If not for the occasional passerby, I would have burst into song myself.

In Arabic, this kind of musical experience has a name: *Tarab*. I know of no such word in English or Hebrew that carries the same weight. *Tarab* describes a feeling, a sensation, an uplifting surge of emotion that comes from music and music alone. Arabic-speaking people use it to describe their ethnic music. The songs of Ohm Kul Thum, the well known and loved Egyptian singer are a classic example.

On researching the term in Wikipedia, I read that *tarab* was originally used for a genre of music heard in Aleppo, Syria, but is also used to describe Arabic song and music in Egypt and other Arab countries: "That's because tarab isn't just a form of music, but a state of being. In Arabic, tarab is also a verb meaning a heightened sense of emotion or excitement. Tarab has been renowned since medieval times for the ecstasy-inducing power it has on its audience, be it through lyrics of joy or sorrow."

Though foreign to my ears, but thanks to my Iraqi-born husband, I have learnt to like and appreciate some Arab music, although it would not necessarily be classified as *tarab* for me. I have adopted and adapted the word to define the heightened sensation that comes from any music that reaches into one's heart.

Music has countless roles. It might make you tap your feet or dance; it might make you want to sing or laugh or weep. Music can be jarring or irritating - or it might have no effect at all. Sometimes it is the words, sometimes the instruments, sometimes the voice or the melody or a combination of these. Music can mimic the sounds of nature. The words may even be in a foreign language, but the very

sounds have the power to move, to excite. Music may often bring pleasure, yet only sometimes will it bring *tarab*.

My roots are in Eastern Europe; I have lived in Israel for most of my life. I do indeed love and enjoy the sounds and music from these and many other places. My soul however, is part African. Voices, sounds, beats - the rhythms of South Africa, of Africa - fill me with delight. *Tarab?*

Tarab or not, music inevitably brings back memories. Flashbacks to other times, places, events, and people - some still with us, some long gone. As I write this, I think of my father: He was always singing and taught us many songs we never heard from anyone else. The "Boer War hit parade" as my daughter called it.

My brothers, Herman and David, and I love to sing. And as we do, we remember. A way of keeping a little something of our childhood; our parents alive and with us.

(Since December 2010, when this was written, Herman and David have both passed away. Recently my own husband, Sabih also died. So many songs, so much music keep them with us. Kiryat Ono, January 2023).

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Written in 2010

Posted on the Share Your Stories Chol page in 2/2023