



Smithsonian Folkways

5,000-year-old Echoes of Humanity: Baalbek, Lebanon

A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson

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Summary:

Students will compare and contrast two types (folk and art) music found in Lebanon, sing and play a simple song in Arabic, and dance the national dance called the Dabke.

Suggested Grade Levels: 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Country: Lebanon

Region: The Middle East

Culture Group: Lebanese

Genre: Folk Music and Modern Art Music

Instruments: Voice, body percussion, Orff Instruments, Recorders

Language: English and Arabic

Co-Curricular Areas: Geography, History, Physical Education

National Standards: 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 9

Prerequisites: None

Objectives:

- Students will listen and compare two contrasting pieces of music from Lebanon for timbre, melodic and rhythmic differences.
- Students will sing, play on instruments, and move to traditional Lebanese music.

Material:

- Maps of World, Mediterranean, and Lebanon
- [Afif Bulos Sings Songs of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan](#) FW08816 (excerpt "[*Tafta Hindi*](#)," tract 101) Download the *PDF* liner notes for information.
- [Arabic and Druse Music](#)," FW04480, excerpt "[*Druse Festival*](#)," (tract 205) Download the *PDF* liner notes for information.

- [The Baalbek Folk Festival](#), MON71383, download both sections of music and the *PDF* liner notes with explanation of the program.
- Body percussion, Voice, Orff Xylophone (or suitable substitutes) and Recorder

Lesson Segments:

1. Listen to 5,000 year-old Echoes from Baalbek, Lebanon and Compare! (National Standards 6, 8, 9)
2. An Ancient Song Sung Our Way (National Standards 1, 8, 9)
3. An Ancient Song Played on Our Instruments (Standards 1, 2, 8, 9)
4. Stomping on the Mud Rooftops: Dancing to the Dabke (8, 9)

Lesson Segment #1: “Listen to 5,000 year-old Echoes from Baalbek, Lebanon”

Standing on the 2,000 year-old Roman *Temple of Jupiter Steps* Baalbek, Lebanon

The Baalbek Festival Chorus & Orchestra
On the steps of the Roman Temple of Jupiter
c.1994 featuring *Fairouz & Wadi al-Saff*

On the steps of the Roman Temple of
Jupiter, July 2010. *Photo furnished*
by C. Fulton



a.
b.
c.
d.



Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students to locate the Middle East, the Mediterranean Sea, and the country of Lebanon on a classroom world map.
 - After locating the country of Lebanon (smaller than the state of Connecticut), ask students to listen briefly to a piece of music that was composed as an epic tale, “*The Story of Baalbek, Lebanon.*”
 - At 00:00 to 07:00 – What could the composer be telling you by using these instrumental sounds?

- At 1:04 – What could the ringing of the bells mean . . . how many times do the bells ring and how often in the music.
 - At 5:30 – Raise 1 finger when you hear a female solo voice, raise two fingers if you hear a male solo voice singing (not talking).
 - ✓ For discussion: Does the female singer Fairouz sing like someone in our country.
 - ✓ Does the male singer sound like someone singing in our country? Is there a melodic difference (scale tones);
 - ✓ What are the rhythmic differences in this music? (polyrhythm)
 - ✓ Do you find it interesting? Why?
2. Begin part two of the recording (Finale) and ask students to imagine a picture in their mind. For the discussion, ask some of the following questions.
- ✓ What does the man’s solo voice sound like?
 - ✓ What is he doing melodically with it?
 - ✓ Does it sound like a “song” or like he is actually “talking” but putting it to sounds?
 - ✓ It could be called a “recitative” in a Western European style Oratorio like the famous Oratorio “*The Messiah* ” G.F. Handel who composed
 - ✓ What instruments do you hear? Do they sound different from the instruments in the first part of this “Oratorio?”
 - ✓ Are there any string instruments that “sound” similar to some of our instruments?
 - ✓ Could you research on the internet and find out what they might be?
 - ✓ Can you hear the “**stomping**” in the *Finale* section where Fairouz sings?
 - ✓ What musical form is it when the vocalist and the chorus alternate singing? (Call and Response form).
3. During the final section of the finale, there is a typical *Dabke* rhythm considered the national dance of Lebanon. Ask the students to see if they can pat on their leg (anticipate) when they hear the dancers “stomp.”

Assessment:

- Main assessment occurs during the lesson, checking for understanding.
- Discuss the different forms, styles, melodic, rhythmic and aesthetics differences in various cultures. Encourage all students to participate in an age appropriate manner. Replay some of the music from Sections 1 and 2, asking students to keep the beat with their fingertips, and then put the beat in their feet during various parts of the “*Finale*.”

Lesson Segment #2. “An Ancient Song Sung Our Way” (National Standards 1, 8, 9)
(If this is a stand-alone lesson, refer back to the maps in the beginning of lesson one)

Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students to locate the Mediterranean on a classroom world map. If not available
 - Discuss Dr. [Afif Bulos](#). What do linguists do? How does being a “linguist” help his translation from Arabic to English, a folk song from his country of Lebanon? Discuss possible “historical origins” of the song **“*Tafta Hindi, Tafta Hindi,*”** an original folk song from Lebanon.
 - In the document section “A brief History of Lebanon,” it mentions how Baalbek was a major crossroads for caravans, which explains why a cloth merchant would sing or advertise (by singing pre- electronic era) his “silk taffeta” woven in India.



- Listen to “*Tafta Hindi, Tafta Hindi.*” This song may be found in current textbooks; listen to both versions to see if there are differences. Show the original liner notes (provided for your convenience in this lesson). Begin teaching the song by oral transmission.
 - ✓ Sing several words, have students sing them back, increasing the number of words per phrase. A basic transcription is below. After students know a few phrases, add to the length of each phrase until the entire first verse is comfortable to sing.
 - ✓ **Note:** This song is based in our Western key of d-minor, frequently assumed a “sad” key. However, in many other cultures and on various continents, scale modes differ (such as this does) and do not signify sad or unhappy songs. There are many internet sources explaining the different scale systems. See additional resources at the end of this lesson.

Assessment:

- Students are able to sing the song completely through to the end of verse 1 in Arabic.

*Tafta Hindi - A Very Old Lebanese Song

Traditional Lebanese

Voice

Taf tah Hin dee Taf tah Hin dee Shash hah rear ree Ah bah yah

If tah hee ree, Yah sah bee yah wai la kosh min sh shu bek If tah bah ree

If tah hear ree wai la kosh min sh shu bek.

Indian taffeta, Indian taffeta
Silks and muslin, every kind.
Open for me, lovely maiden
From me all the ladies buy.

Called she for me, O you vendor,
Vendor of the crimson lace
So I sent into her palace
And beheld her dusky face.

Taffeta, taffeta, shooting arrows
From her eyes did pierce my soul
All my silks I offered to her
But she laughed and let them fall.

Welling fountain close beside me
In my heart I sing a lay;
Though unmindful of my longing
In my heart she'll always stay.

You from Sidon, you from Tyre
Let me tell you of her eyes
Dark like pools within a forrest
But she will not heed my sighs.

* PLEASE NOTE

There are major differences in the original verses sung by Afif Bulos, recorded for the Smithsonian Folkways c. 1961 and those found in U.S. school music textbooks. There is another melodic section on this recording. A native of Beirut, Lebanon, Afif Bulos hoped to be an opera singer but instead attended Harvard University where he earned a Ph.D. in Linguistics. In the original liner notes, Dr. Bulos furnished five English Metrical Translation verses to Tafta Hindi.

**ADDITIONAL STUDENT INFORMATION

Most likely, the origins of this song were from that of a traveling cloth merchant who had brought precious handwoven fabrics from India, most likely on a camel through the major trade routes through Baalbek. Included in the cloth for sale were shiny Silk Taffeta, especially prized for a women fancy clothing. It is also possible the cloth merchant traveled from one village to another, singing this song to attract business, a practice that still occurs.

Currently, in many third world countries and especially in rural areas, it is still a common practice (2010) to have customers select a variety of different cloth fabrics and have suits, dresses, and party clothes designed and tailored individually and made by hand (the fabric is cut and sewn on an individual sewing machine and fitted for the customer by one person) for each member of a family rather than in a factory. Other income family members must learn to sew clothing for themselves since they cannot afford to buy expensive clothing.

Notes by Carolyn J. Fulton

Lesson Segment #3. An Ancient Song Played on Our Instruments (Standards 1, 2, 8, 9)

(If this is a stand-alone lesson, refer back to the maps mentioned in the beginning of lesson one)

Procedure:

- Use the transcription of “*Tafta Hindi*” found above.
- Teach the song and melody.
- Improvise on the barred Orff xylophones; use the lower instruments to provide an *ostinati* or *bordun*.
- If capable, the soprano and alto xylophones could improvise the melody (need to learn the b-flat and c-sharp on the recorder). A recorder could be used to play the melody (a similar sound heard in much of the music from this region).
- Students could also work on singing or playing the extra notes heard in the various (non-western) melodic scales.

Assessment

- Students are able to sing, play, and improvise on instruments the song “*Tafta Hindi*” and are able to explain what they are doing, what language they are singing in, and the cultural significance of the music (i.e. a merchant trying to sell his Silk Taffeta made in India to the women in a Lebanese village).

Lesson Segment #4. Stomping on the Mud Rooftops: Dancing to the Dabke

(If this is a stand-alone lesson, refer back to the maps in the beginning of lesson one)

Procedure:

- Use Smithsonian Folkways recording “*Arabic and Druse Music*” excerpt #14 called “*Druse Festival.*”
 1. First have students listen to the recording and ask them to tap (quietly) their forefingers together on the downbeat.
 2. Have students stand up, and ask them to but keep the “beat in their feet,” being careful to **begin** with their right foot (this will cross over into the actual teaching of the dance and the left foot doing the “stomp”).
 3. Have students, standing in place, **without** the music, very slowly crossing their left foot over the top of their right foot in a “grapevine” motion, changing the body weight forward. Practice this one stepping motion until it becomes relatively easy.
 4. Next, have students **lift** slightly their right foot on the ball of the foot) **while at the same time lifting the left across the right** foot (grapevine motion) and shifting their weight forward in order to step down on the left foot.
 5. Then move the right foot behind, now behind the left foot, the right. Begin again with the right foot lifting slightly and crossing the right foot over and them moving the right foot, to the right and shifting weight to right foot etc.
 6. When students are comfortable with the steps, have them put a slight lift and before the “stomp” while gradually winding around in a circle.
- Listen to the “*Druse Festival*” (also occasionally spelled Druze) *music* again and gradually speeds up the movements until they can match the beat of the music. At that

- time, students can join hands or hold on to outstretched arms – shoulder to shoulder, and begin dancing.
- The dance steps for men become increasingly more complicated with frequent displays athletic prowess. Women, traditional seem to remain a bit more sedate, but use their costumes effectively.
 - Also, note, though many surrounding areas consider the Dabke a traditional dance, many have differing steps.

Simple Directions for the Lebanese National Dance – the Dabke

1. Hold on to the hand of both people in which you are between two other dancers. Women often hold hands, while men often hold onto each other by the shoulders.
2. Standing, take two steps (first two beats) to your right (or left depending on the leader) **by** crossing the left foot over (grapevine) the right foot. The right foot lifts (on the toe) while the left foot crosses and takes the weight on the toes, while the right foot, steps to the right of the new left foot position.
3. On the third beat, slightly kick your left foot in the air as it crosses over the right foot, and “lightly” stomp the left foot on the ground (fourth beat) as it lowers to the floor and assumes the bodies weight in preparation for the right foot to continue moving to the right.
4. Continue the above directions, winding around in an unclosed circle until the music and dance is over.
5. Note: The **stomp is the most important characteristic of the Lebanese Dabke**. Many Middle Eastern countries use the same dance name for different dance steps. The “stomp” in the Dabke relates to the earliest origins of the dance when village communities assisted each other with “stomping in the cracks of the mud roof tops.”

Brief History of Lebanon



*Lebanese National Flag
Famous Cedar Tree in Center of Flag*



*The Ancient Phoenician/Lebanese Coastline
Photo furnished by C. Fulton, 2009*

- **Prehistoric Times (5,000-3,500 B.C.)**
Lebanon's history begins in Jbail (**Byblos**, on the coastline), where archaeologists have discovered the remnants of prehistoric huts with crushed limestone floors, primitive weapons, and burial jars as evidence of the **Neolithic** and **Chalcolithic** fishing communities who lived on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea over 7,000 years ago.
- **Phoenicians (3,500-334 B.C.)**
Lebanon first appeared in recorded history around 3,000 BC, with the settlement of the area by the Canaanites. The Canaanites established great maritime, trade, and religious city-states in several of Lebanon's coastal cities: Jbail (**Byblos**), Sour (**Tyre**), Saida (**Sidon**), and **Beirut**. The Greeks referred to these Semitic people as "Phoenicians," after the Greek word for the expensive purple-dyed textiles.
- **Baalbek** was an inland city, at the crossroads of the major north south and east-west trading routes, settled by the Phoenicians as early as 2,000 B.C. The Phoenicians built the first temple here, dedicated to the god Baal, the Sun God, from which the city got its name. Today, Baalbek's Phoenician origins have been covered and eclipsed by the great Roman temples later built on the site.
- **Greeks (333-64 B.C.)**
In 333 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered the Phoenician city-states, and ancient Phoenicia was absorbed into the Greek Empire. Greek customs and the Greek language were adopted.
- **Romans (64 B.C. - 399 A.D.)**
Roman rule in Lebanon lasted over 300 years. During this period, the old Phoenician cities continued to grow and prosper as centers of industry and commerce. The coastal cities (Saida, Sour, Beirut) exported cedar, perfume, jewelry, wine, and fruit to Rome and served as trading centers for goods imported from Syria, Persia, and India.
- **Byzantines (399-636 A.D.)**
The Byzantine era in Lebanon began with the split of the Roman Empire in 395 A.D. into the eastern/Byzantine part (with its capital at Constantinople) and the western part (with its capital at Rome).\
- During the **5th and 6th centuries A.D.**, ecumenical debates and corruption in the church led to increasing unrest. From this religious dissension, the **Maronite Church** established and took refuge in the mountainous Qadisha Valley region of Lebanon, and the Valley has remained a place of spiritual refuge. There are many archaeological remains of Lebanon's Byzantine era around the country, many built on top of and added to previous civilizations' cities and sites.

- The increasing unrest in the Byzantine Empire opened the region to raids and conquests by Muslim Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula. Following the death of the **Prophet Mohammed**, his successors built a large army that pushed back the Byzantine forces and undertook a series of successful invasions.
- ***The Umayyad Dynasty***, which flourished for 100 years (660-750 A.D.) in the first century after Mohammed, was the first of two dynasties of the Arab Islamic empire. They established Arabic as the official language of the empire, and they are remembered for their excellent city administration and planning and their patronage of early Islamic art and architecture.
- ***Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258 A.D.)***, rose to power after following a coup that shifted power eastward to Baghdad and imposed harsh control in Lebanon and Syria, leading to many local revolts.
- ***Lebanon*** and the surrounding region became an area of ethnic and religious refuge for many under Arab rule. Splinter Christian groups, including the ***Maronites and the Melchites***, settled in the Qadisha Valley and Zahl.
- Islamic followers of an **Egyptian caliph** settled in southern Lebanon and established the ***Druze sect***, still a major religious group in the Chouf and other areas (mountain villages) of modern-day Lebanon.

Smithsonian Folkways DVD Resource:

- Video Presentation on the Oud by [Rahim Alhaj, Iraqi Oud virtuoso, "Rast"](#)