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"The Voice Of Egypt": Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, And Egyptian Society In The Twentieth Century (Chicago Studies In Ethnomusicology)



Synopsis

Umm Kulthum, the "voice of Egypt," was the most celebrated musical performer of the century in the Arab world. More than twenty years after her death, her devoted audience, drawn from all strata of Arab society, still numbers in the millions. Thanks to her skillful and pioneering use of mass media, her songs still permeate the international airwaves. In the first English-language biography of Umm Kulthum, Virginia Danielson chronicles the life of a major musical figure and the confluence of artistry, society, and creativity that characterized her remarkable career. Danielson examines the careful construction of Umm Kulthum's phenomenal popularity and success in a society that discouraged women from public performance. From childhood, her mentors honed her exceptional abilities to accord with Arab and Muslim practice, and as her stature grew, she remained attentive to her audience and the public reception of her work. Ultimately, she created from local precedents and traditions her own unique idiom and developed original song styles from both populist and neo-classical inspirations. These were enthusiastically received, heralded as crowning examples of a new, yet authentically Arab-Egyptian, culture. Danielson shows how Umm Kulthum's music and public personality helped form popular culture and contributed to the broader artistic, societal, and political forces that surrounded her. This richly descriptive account joins biography with social theory to explore the impact of the individual virtuoso on both music and society at large while telling the compelling story of one of the most famous musicians of all time. "She is born again every morning in the heart of 120 million beings. In the East a day without Umm Kulthum would have no color." —Omar Sharif

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Customer Reviews

Virginia Danielson had succeeded in presenting Umm Kulthum to us in ways we never anticipated before. She went in depth describing how the Egyptian society in the twentieth century impacted Arabic songs and how Umm Kulthum fit in all of this. In this book, I learned more about Umm Kulthum the person, the wife, the daughter, and the singer. How strong she was and powerful. Reading the book helped me understand more about her music and songs, appreciate more her voice and how she chooses her songs lyrics. This is a should get book.

This book is a wonderful reference source for those who wish to understand Middle Eastern Music and what sets it apart. The life of this great singer is well documented and researched.

This book is first and foremost about showbusiness in early 20th century Egypt and the rise of Umm Kulthum, a savvy business woman who pulled off what is essentially a whole business around her great voice. What texts to choose, what tunes to adopt, what composers to work with, what type of audience to seek, how much to charge for an entry ticket, how to promote a concert, how to cope with the introduction of radio into showbusiness, how to deal with the press, how to weather the criticism of envious competitors, how to separate public and private lives, how to deal with the religious establishment and the government, how to reinvent yourself in light of new musical influences and more are all questions Umm Kulthum faced at some point throughout her career. This book explains the context, describes the protagonists and the answers Umm Kulthum gave to each of those questions which gives a different angle on her personality: that of a savvy business woman. There is little here about musicology and musical technique per se so if you are looking for academic references on this topic you will be disappointed. If you are a fan of Umm Kulthum, you will understand what made her greatness over and above her great voice.

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