

# A Symphony of Flavors



# A Symphony of Flavors:

*Food and Music in Concert*

Edited by

Edmundo Murray

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## PREFACE

The question sounds simple: what is the link between food and music? The answer, though, requires much judgment and consideration. The sky darkens, grey clouds come from the windy north and the snow swiftly covers the road. The cook has no idea what to do with the ingredients; there is no rhythmic section for the performer. Cooks and musicians can't find the way. A scholarly work about food and music has never been undertaken. From the kitchen to the rehearsal room, we need to join hands. A group of specialists from various disciplines and with different perspectives are called to cook and play music together. The dish smells good, thick and rich. A tune is flickering across the strings.

You love eating and listening to good music. So do I; and I loved editing this book. I read much from cookbooks and songbooks, from recipes and sheet or recorded music. I embraced the ethos of culinary historian Ken Albala, and tried my hand at cooking and making music. Sometimes, I was privileged to learn directly from the masters of the kitchen and the concert hall. It has been an amazing learning process, and the contributors have also enjoyed the experience. Working with them in a concerted effort has been a treat. Indeed, I congratulate and thank them for their good work.

This book would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, good humor, and generous friendship of my colleagues at the University of Cape Verde. In particular, I am indebted to Manuel Brito-Semedo, Maria de Fátima Fernandes, and Lúcia Cardoso; their support and their smiles will not be forgotten. Special thanks go to Clem Kobrak and Vicki Marianne Ashmead-Bartlett for their translations of the chapters written in Portuguese and Spanish. I am also thankful to Ginevra House for her editing and proofreading of the text, and to Anthony Wright, Samuel Baker, and Amanda Millar of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their patience and good advice.

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February 2015





## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: SINGING WHILE SOWING

EDMUNDO MURRAY

During a warm afternoon in July 2012, on the inland hills of Santiago, Cape Verde, a young woman sings while sowing. A group of men and women are planting *midju*, maize. The men work manually with a hoe and make holes in the stony soil every two or three feet. The women follow, placing two maize seeds and three beans in each hole. It is a time of hope. The rainy season should start in a few weeks. If it rains enough, the seeds will germinate and, after the *monda* (weeding out the land) they will become tall, dark green maize plants and vines of beans climbing on their stalks and producing the essential food of Cape Verde.

The woman sings, addressing the grains in her hands. *Ai midju! / pa kamóka pa kuskuz / pa katxupa na panela. / Txuba ben! ben!* (O maize! / to make roasted maize, white maize breakfast / to make cachupa in the saucepan. / Come rain, come!). It is a dialogue between living creatures. Her simple, rhythmic tune is repeated every time the seeds fall in the holes. It is a fundamental celebration of living: singing to food.

With her song, the woman is right at the intersection of food and music. In this book, the contributors also sing to food, trying to establish links between both human activities. This goal looks so simple that one risks repeating a catalog of truisms. We eat; we listen to music. There are plenty of analogies relating both. This book's objective is to reflect on how food and music work together, and to identify different types of relations in diverse cultural settings.

Music and food awake our finest sensitivities and our basic survival instincts. Hearing and taste conjugate a special relationship. They are often presented and represented together. The linkage between music and food has been a traditional field for artists to express, among various emotions, love and sexual desire, as well as environmental, urban, ethnic, and class

values (let alone plain hunger). Tourist guides, city handbooks and holiday cookbooks are just a few examples of the many quotidian representations in multiple languages and cultures.

The appealing relationship between music and food is included in these multidisciplinary studies about a variety of cultural spaces. The sources for researching these relations are scarce. The authors studied music scores and recordings, song lyrics, and dance movements, and compared them with their first-hand experience in the field, and with shared lore. This book intends to provide a theoretical framework and concrete examples, and to be a reference for studies linking both cultural aspects.

### Common grounds

Reflection on the relation between food and music has weak roots. Literature on food culture is abundant and growing almost daily. At least the same can be said of texts about music. However, books about food *and* music represent a surprisingly untapped field.

As stated in Jack Goody's study of West African foodways, the LoDagaa women of Burkina Faso and Ghana "sometimes try to lighten their work [manually grinding grain] by singing songs and chatting among themselves" (Goody 1982: 69). It is the same labor and social context in which many women sing their *Cantos de pilón* in the Caribbean region of Colombia and Venezuela (especially in Margarita island). This blend of cooking and music making may be observed in many cultures—such as in Cape Verde, where the women sing *Brial de pilão* (as mentioned in Manuel Brito-Semedo's chapter); it also exists in the Middle East and South East Asia. Women thus play a traditional gender role in synchronized food preparation and music making. Music conveys the sentiments of women who reinforce their identity with complaints about the society in which they live, as well as with erotic comments and recurrent irony about the men who rule their lives (in this sense, there is a contextual connection with *batuku* mentioned below). Goody also emphasizes the class distinctions from which *haute cuisine* originates (which are the same for classic music), namely, agriculture and writing (98). In India and China, according to the same author, the ritualistic performance of food is also intertwined with music, for instance, when for the rich in Vedic India "it became the practice to listen to music while eating dinner" (116).

Other essential texts in food cultural studies only mention music as a remotely connected topic. While most authors consider food production,

preparation, and consumption as structural processes in human societies, they tend to separate food from the arts, placing the former at a seemingly lower level of human activity. In Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Le cru et le cuit*, music is regarded as "a language ... and its messages can be understood by many but sent out by a few ... These facts make the creator of music a being like the gods, and ... music itself the supreme mystery of human knowledge" (1969: 18). Stephen Mennell, in his comparative study of French and British cooking traditions, suggests that the articles of *L'art culinaire* (published in 1883 in France) aim at "simplification and democratic helpfulness" and against a supposedly artistic ethos (1985: 237). Authors such as Adam Gopnik and Elizabeth Telfer view cooking as an applied or "minor" art (Gopnik 2012: 41; Telfer 1996: 59). If it is true that "all art is quite useless", as Oscar Wilde commented in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the primary object of food seems to be in the opposite direction to art.

The artistic representation of food in the visual arts is a fertile field of study. Within the framework of medical, religious, psychological, and social needs, food is prominent in the history of painting. From the Paleolithic representations of wild animals as game (from 40,000 BCE onwards), right down to Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962) and present-day depictions of food, "edibles of all sorts symbolized the insubstantiality of material life" (Bendiner 2004: 9). At museums and galleries, we are epicurean viewers of "canvases of cooked fish, hams, pies, grapes, plucked geese, sausages, cabbages, lemons, apples, pears, ale, wine, salt and costly spices" (9). In sculpture, food has not only been the subject of several works of art but the medium itself. Carved bread has been found in Babylon and Roman Britain archaeological sites. In the Renaissance, Italian sculptors shaped butter and fruits to decorate aristocratic tables in Rome and Florence. Sugar and chocolate are still molded in a great variety of shapes, including fetishist depictions of genitalia. Current sculpture uses pizza, bacon, eggs, noodles, cheese, salmon slices, onions, potatoes, and many other foodstuffs that evoke the idea of edible, ephemeral art. Indeed, art history has been one of the first disciplines to draw "professional parallels between artists and cooks" (Nygard 2014: 170).

Other uses and representations of food occur in film, such as in Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), in which beef, soup, fowl, and pork are a prominent part of the story. In literature, the examples are plentiful, such as Archibald MacLeish's "globed fruit" in *Ars Poetica* and William Carlos Williams's delicious plums ("so sweet and so cold"), and

of course Hemingway's "Paris movable feast", without forgetting the gourmand and socially restoring question by Sir Toby in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*: "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?" (2.3).

Compared to other art forms, music's imbalance regarding food is notorious. Though sound may be the medium of music, food sounds are seldom included in music. Some pieces' background may conjure the atmosphere of the kitchen and cooking (frying, boiling, pouring liquids, slicing and crushing vegetables, and the table concert of glasses, dishes, saucepans, cutlery, and munching chat). Yet, food is seldom present in music.

In this book, Roberto Pérez and Anna Piotrowska study opera, ballet, and operetta as performing arts in which food is sometimes depicted with music. The examples include German *Tafelmusik* originally played at banquets, and other *Musique de table*, as well as J.S. Bach's *Kaffeekantate*, which is the main object of Pérez's chapter. In these and other musical works, eating and drinking places are a frequent *locus* (in Jack Goody's classification) for consumption and, indeed, for social interaction. There are the taverns in *The Damnation of Faust* (Hector Berlioz, 1846), Reynaldo Hahn's *Ciboulette* (1923) and Offenbach's *La Périchole* (1850), as well as Café Momus in Puccini's *La Bohème* (1896). Merry-making is a constant in most of these works, such as in Jacques Offenbach's trio *Un Jambon de Bayonne* (1856):

... *Le rillon, la rilette, le saucisson de Lyon*  
*Le champagne, l'andouillette, ah turlurette*  
*Non non non, ce n'est pas si bon que le vrai jambon*  
*Non non non, ce n'est pas si bon que le vrai jambon*  
*De pif paf pif pouf, ah de Bayonne*  
*De pif paf pif pouf, de Bayooooonne. ...*

(The pork rinds, the potted meat, the Lyon sausage  
 The champagne, the chitterlings, oh turlurette [little guitar]  
 No, no, no, it's not so good as the real ham  
 No, no, no, it's not so good as the real ham  
 From pif, paf, pouf, from Bayonne  
 From pif, paf, pouf, from Bayonne. ...)

As a counterexample of the festive mood, the villain Barone Scarpia in *Tosca* (Puccini, 1900) enjoys a solitary dinner served in his apartment at Palazzo Farnese, which is the occasion for reviewing his plans and anticipating the pleasure of seeing his enemies hanged.

Other classical pieces include allusions to food. The second section of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* (1936) occurs in The Tavern, and includes the satirical medieval poem *Olim lacus colueram*, in which a swan "turning on the spit ... burning fiercely on the pyre" laments its destiny. Variation 30 (Quodlibet), in J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, is based on a German folk song chanted at home or in the tavern: "Cabbage and turnips have driven me away. Had my mother cooked meat, I would have opted to stay." Franz Schubert dedicated a number of pieces to food, such as *The Trout*, *The Fair Miller-maid*, and the comic trio *The Wedding Roast*. A few works by Gioacchino Rossini contrast the abundance on well-to-do tables with the scant food of the poor. In *La Cenerentola*, Don Magnifico's dreams are peopled by "hens and sturgeons / candles and marinades / buns and cakes / candied fruits and sweets / slabs and doubloons / vanilla and coffee." Meanwhile, in his collection of lighthearted piano pieces *Péchés de Vieillesse*, Rossini included a collection of four "Hors d'oeuvre" (radishes, gherkins, anchovies, butter), four desserts (dried figs, raisins, almonds, hazelnuts), and a piece representing a German cake. Indeed, Rossini is the most famous classic musician among cooks, who often add "à la Rossini" to the name of creations which use *foie gras*, such as "Tournedos Rossini" and "Cannelloni alla Rossini". In *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, and other operas by Giuseppe Verdi, food and drink are a ritualized way to establish social cohesion. Erik Satie, the London-born Paris composer who only ate white foods, published *La Valse du chocolat aux amandes* (1913), *Lui manger sa tartine* (1914), and the eclectic *Trois morceaux en forme de poire* (1911).

These, however, are examples supporting the quantity, rather than substance, of food in music. In fact, food is seldom a substantial reference in musical compositions. Whether in classical or popular music styles, love (romance, seduction, sex), peace (and indeed war), nation, religion, social justice, and friendship are themes much more often referred to by musicians and songwriters. Even the many Cuban *son* lyrics about food are often a sort of erotic transference from the body to music, as profusely illustrated by René Vázquez Díaz in his chapter. One clue to this question may be that when food is present in music, the actual reference is often found in other ontological fields. "Eating food in musical stage works", Anna Piotrowska observes in her chapter about operas and ballets, "is always symbolic in character and most commonly is immersed in the context of references to religion, morality, or nationalism".

The scarcity of actual food subjects in musical pieces and song lyrics is significant. But the inverse is not true. Interaction with music in the

production, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food is frequent. Labor songs include food production and distribution, in particular agricultural songs dedicated to various foodstuffs and street-selling pieces. Songs and musical compositions such as those mentioned above refer to cooking and food preparation, sometimes including recipes. The same can be said about eating and consuming, with a constant presence of feasting and banquet tunes. Indeed, food shortage, hunger and famine are a particular subcategory, which is sometimes used politically (e.g. “The Famine Song”, a Scottish football hooligan chant against Celtic, a football club started by Irish immigrants in Glasgow, Scotland). While music refers to food only occasionally, food refers to music in various ways. This may also be illustrated by the repeated advertisements announcing haute cuisine with fine music, the many restaurants named after a famous composer or musical work, and the menu language citing musicians, instruments, and compositions (let alone the titles of recipes which include an artist’s name, such as the abovementioned “Tournedos Rossini” or “Risotto Giuseppe Verdi’s style” by the Italian Food Academy).

The reason for the lack of correspondence may be found in the fact that music is invariably considered a fine art (the “art of arts” according to Joseph Conrad), while cooking is regarded as a minor art. One may ask, as does art historian Travis Nygard, “if art making [especially, painting] is similar to or different from following a recipe, whether artistic traditions are comparable to cuisines, and whether the highly developed taste of art and food connoisseurs are comparable” (Nygard 2014: 174). But music does not need food, and only occasionally refers to cooking or eating, which is generally viewed as a lower human activity. Nevertheless, food producers and distributors, restaurants and food businesspeople continue to appeal to the supposedly musical associations of their products and services.

It is indeed social factors which influence human perceptions and judgments regarding food and music. While the convention is that music is immaterial—indeed, often spiritual and intimately connected with religion—food gives a solid perception of materiality. Music is, according to common perception, the expression of the spirit (even if the body is needed to make and to listen to the music); food is a basic need of living beings. Music is (or, some say, should be) high among the human activities; food is a requirement to keep body and soul together. Music is, by definition, a social act; food is primarily individual. Music is human; food is animal (yet cooking is human). Or at least that is what many listeners/eaters perceive.

These distinctions become foggy in social groups undergoing deprived material conditions, food shortages in particular. Achieving acceptable levels of food security is the great reason to produce, distribute, preserve, and prepare food for consumption. Among the poor, food is the first priority and it is the most frequent subject of social activities, including music making. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the majority of food-related musical compositions have been created by notoriously deprived groups in which hunger and poverty is acute. Among them are the descendants of African slaves in Colombia, Cuba, Peru, and Brazil, and the indigenous peoples of the Andes and the Amazon basin. Among the hungry, many songs refer to obtaining foodstuffs (hunting, fishing, agriculture), selling or buying ingredients in the public market or streets (such as *pregón*, hawker songs), cooking (preservation and preparation techniques, recipes, and cooking tools), and eating (at home with the family or neighbors, at feasts and banquets, or more generally about digestion, hunger).

Among the illiterate, destitute, and oppressed, oral cultural practices are the norm. Their food customs, except for a few cooking tools and products that sometimes exceed the life of the individuals, are transmitted orally from one generation to the next and are thus subject to change. Even more so, the music of the poor remains unwritten. Most musicians play by ear, such as many of the Cuban artists mentioned by René Vázquez Díaz in his chapter. The people in these social groups are particularly attached to modes of performance and musical behaviors that are typical of oral cultures. Tunes, rhythmic patterns, and chord progressions (not to mention song lyrics) are the subject of endless variations and adaptations.

Following farming/language dispersal patterns, food and music practices (especially of the impoverished groups) generally circulate in the same way and with similar characteristics. In all countries of the Amazon basin, cassava or manioc (*Manihot esculenta*) is a staple food and there are a great number of recipes using it as ingredient. One ubiquitous preparation with cassava starch is cheese buns (known as *pão de queijo* in Brazil, *chipa* in Paraguay, *cuñapé* in Bolivia, *pan de bono* or *pan de yuca* in Ecuador and Colombia). They are present on millions of tables at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or anytime as a snack with coffee. Portuguese sailors introduced cassava to West Africa in the sixteenth century, where it also became a basic food. An opposite direction was taken by the Nigerian cakes *akara* made with black-eyed peas and onion fried in palm oil. One of the most traditional street and ritual foods in Salvador da Bahia in Brazil, *acarajé*, involves essentially the same preparation, which was

introduced by slaves from the Yoruba land of West Africa. Likewise, musical styles travel swiftly from one place to the other, receiving additions and rhythmic or instrumental changes according to the cultural influences in each area.

One example, cited in the chapter by Manuel Brito-Semedo, is the Cape Verdean *batuku* style of Santiago island, which is traditionally performed by female singers (*batuqueiras*) and accompanied by percussion and dance. Directly or through Portugal, *batuku* would have been exported from Africa to Brazil, where it is known as *batucada*, a parading instrumental form of polyrhythmic music and dance. The origin of the word is uncertain, but it is associated with runaway slaves in the northern Brazilian state of Amapá.

Paradoxically, the tragic undertones of hunger and poverty are not a recurrent feature of food music. Whenever food is the subject of music, irony is likely to be in the festive narrative strategy. More often than not, food songs and musical compositions are comical parodies of everyday life and controversial situations in the family or neighborhood. Several lyrics include double entendre and sexual references, such as metaphors using fruits, vegetables or prepared food to refer to the human sex organs, or cooking as a reference to sexual intercourse. Other lyrics focus on the food itself, such as the agricultural songs or those including recipes, or on the social conviviality of eating with family members and friends, as it is described in Rihab Kassantly Bagnole's chapter on Syrian cultural behavior. Sad and gloomy compositions about food are unusual, and are often a vehicle to protest on the grounds of social justice. Examples include the tangos *Matufias* (1903) by Angel Villoldo, and *Pan* (1932) by Eduardo Pereyra and Celedonio Flores; the Brazilian rock song *Comida* (1987) by Titãs; *Canção da fome* (2011) by the Portuguese João Gil; *Hunger Strike* (1993) by Temple of the Dog; and the series of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century songs about the Great Irish Famine (some of them created well after the Famine and in the United States, as pointed out by Sean Williams in her chapter).

Apart from class, another qualitative difference is the genderized narratives played in the kitchen and the music room. The kitchen has been perceived—and is still perceived in a variety of social contexts—as the woman's place. Too many cookbooks are published everywhere with the female reader in mind: “The Pioneer Woman Cooks”, “100 Recipes Every Woman Should Know”, “Busy Woman's Cookbook”, and “The Disney Princess Cookbook” are some eloquent titles from current North American publishers (indeed, they are balanced by equally expressive titles such as



“Eat like a Man”, “Man Made Meals”, “Man Meets Stove”, and the like, which only reinforce the view that cooking is considered by most men and women as a female job). On the other hand, most musical spaces seem to be open to both men and women. However, there are some strikingly differentiated gender roles in music as well. While Wikipedia’s “List of female classical conductors” includes a few well-known names, the total number is shamefully small ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_female\\_classical\\_conductors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_female_classical_conductors), accessed 3 January 2015) (a longer list is provided in the website of Canada’s Kapralova Society, <http://www.kapralova.org/CONDUCTORS.htm>, accessed 3 January 2015). In Western classical music, some instruments tend to attract more men (brass) or women (harp, flute). For the most part, in jazz bands there are more women singing than playing saxophone or double bass. Compared to the music room, the kitchen has been traditionally neglected and forgotten by musicians because it is apparently a predominantly female-dominated place. Parallel to the field of literary studies and other disciplines in the humanities, food remains “a devalued object of inquiry, which ... is due to food and cookery being associated with women and popular culture” (Fitzpatrick 2014: 125).

Compared to music composed about food, drinking songs (*Trinklieder*, *Airs à boire*) are frequent, well known, and numerous. Alcohol consumption and music making are cooperative activities. Drinking songs are eminently social, to be sung by groups of drinkers in a public house or shared space. Many drinking songs are well-known melodies with new lyrics, and are often about women. Occasionally, they are obnoxious and shocking, and (often among the military) homophobic. Most drinking song lyrics include a strong identity component and are usually sung in the first person plural, “we”. Generally speaking, drinking songs do not refer to the production, distribution or preparation of alcoholic beverages. The most common relation established is between the drinkers, and with the effects of intoxication.

With some exceptions, drinking songs have been intentionally left out of this book’s scope, although alcohol may be connected to food in some chapters. The subjects of intoxication and identity issues associated with alcohol are distinct from food values. However, coffee, chocolate, fruit juices, and many soups and other nutritional fluids are considered by the authors of this book in terms of their relation with music.

## From analogy to metonymy

The most important connections between food and music are metaphorical. Analogies are spontaneously made between two activities that are seldom related. Many parallels are established: between the cook and the musician; the recipe and the musical score; the kitchen and the concert hall or rehearsal room; the appetizer and the prelude; the dessert and the conclusive coda. The cook may be seen as a composer creating a dish, or a performer interpreting the recipe with his or her own emphasis and personal gusto. In most cases, there is no actual contact between the two fields, and the comparison is well settled in the world of construed metaphors.

However, in certain circumstances, the material relation exists in the same space and time, and the two terms of the comparison—“source” and “target”, in Lakoff and Johnson’s terminology (1980: 69)—are contiguous. Listening to recorded or live background music in a restaurant occurs simultaneously to the dinner or lunch. Even more, the impact of the musical style and volume on the patrons and their choices and consumption patterns may be significant, as has been confirmed by marketing studies. Other material links—metonymical relations—between food and music are studied in the chapters on Latin America, including street food sellers and their *pregón* songs, music made while cooking, and the linguistic appropriation of food terms by musicians and music listeners.

The context for making music about food tends to arise from practical motivations: to accompany agricultural work in the fields, to sell foodstuffs, to while away the time whilst cooking, or to celebrate and feast with family and friends. Food music is not made for nothing, as in Wilde’s “useless” art: normally there is a pragmatic cause/effect relation.

As well as uselessness, another basic feature of art is also absent from most food music. Art is seldom made to be successful, and very often the work of art is neglected and forgotten. One symptomatic feature of the artistic value in many paintings, films, or poems and other artwork in general is that, rather than being perceived as beautiful or acceptable by the majority, they make people feel uncomfortable, provoking controversy and even negative reactions. Under certain circumstances (though not always), book burnings, attacks on theaters and artists, and other ugly, violent actions are a consequence of the inherent artistic structure (the “recipe”, according to Simon Fokt, 2013: 32) of the work of art. Even if they can prompt *tarab* in the audience, as in the case of Syrian music

mentioned by Bagnole in her chapter, works of art break the rules of generally accepted conventions on aesthetical and, more importantly, ethical levels. The paradox of most artistic creations is that they seldom reach immediate popular success, at least when they are installed, exhibited or performed (and frequently during the lifetime of the artist). Indeed, works of art help societies to evolve by changing deeply rooted conventions, though this occurs over a relative long period.

For the most part, food-related conventions are not easily modified. The vast majority of artistic representations of food are less related to evolution than to resistance to change. Food being a basic need in any society, changes in the way it is perceived are dangerous for social cohesion. Tradition is a recurrent theme found between the lines of, or openly expressed in, several food songs and musical compositions. However, the connection is not static, and an inverse relation could be established between the force with which a social group clings to its food conventions, and the status of its economic development. In general terms and without considering other factors, the poorer the social group, the stricter are its food-based cultural rules and table manners, and vice versa. Hence, a significant number of music compositions about food originate in folk wisdom, reinforcing group cohesiveness and the need to keep alive cultural traditions that support national, ethnic, religious, and other identities.

Conversely, the elites tend to welcome external influences and try out new musical and food experiences to express their social capability and aspirations. A recent example aimed at well-off consumers is the growing number of books joining food and music in sophisticated offerings. These works are the cultural enterprise of publishers who launch lavishly produced cookbooks within a musical context. *Diez Menús para un Concierto: la cocina de la música*, by the Catalan chef Joan Roca, includes theme menus for ten classical musical works. With an imaginative mind, Roca created recipes adapted to different musical compositions, such as “Suckling pig with coffee” and a dessert with “Milk caramel, yoghurt and coffee” for J.S. Bach’s *Kaffeekantate*, or “Roast woodcock” and “Hare à la Royal” for Franz J. Haydn’s *La Chasse*. Likewise, Michel Portos’s recently published *Un dîner en musique* is a collection of eight classical masters and menus, allegedly matching their biographical details. With a more serious ethnographic perspective, the *Ethnomusicologists’ Cookbook: Complete Meals from Around the World*, edited by Sean Williams (who is one of the contributors to this book), includes interesting recipes for a full meal, as well as short essays on food

and music, and recommended music listening for forty-seven individual regions, countries, and ethnic groups.

It is a bit disappointing, but not in the least surprising, to learn from one of those works that “music ... has nothing to do with cuisine” (Nathalie Krafft’s foreword to Portos 2014: 5, my translation). Even if one only considers the analogical relation between food and music, the world of metaphors in almost any world culture is so rich that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate them completely from one another.

### **The choir and the ingredients**

The idea for this book is the outcome of a failed academic conference. While teaching at University of Cape Verde in 2011–2012, a group of professors in the English and Cape Verdean Studies departments in the Praia Campus started working on traditional musical styles and the material culture of food in the Windward and Leeward islands of the archipelago. The initial results were encouraging, and scholars from other universities were invited to share their work in this field. The conference was planned for July 2012, but was postponed due to a lack of resources. A new call for papers was sent out, and the conference became a multi-author book evoking the diverse voices of an international choir of experts.

In the world of social networks, it is relatively easy to verify that most people love eating and listening to music. Moreover, most online profiles use food and music as key identity descriptors, and go into further detail explaining personal tastes and dislikes with regard to cooking and musical styles. The contributors to this book are no exception. They differ in age, background, experience, and perspectives but share a love for food and music.

The various voices who embarked on this sonic and gastronomic journey hail from Europe, the Middle East, West Africa, and the Americas. Most are seasoned travelers and actually live far from their home countries. Their professional backgrounds include ethnomusicology, music composition, art history, anthropology, literary studies, and psychology. They teach and research in various universities in Africa, Europe and the Americas, or are independent scholars and writers.

The chapter by Rihab Kassatly Bagnole is a study based on Syrian traditions, and presents cultural practices in which food, music, and dance materialize social bonds among people at home and in the neighborhood.

Material visibility and sensuality convey shared solidarity among family members and friends, and “evoke their sense of identity and support their feeling as a group.”

Further social implications are analyzed by Sean Williams in her study of ever-changing Irish food and music. Tradition and modernity in Ireland—one of the few countries with a musical instrument, the harp, in its coat of arms—are a key focus of Williams’s chapter, including the genderized *loci* of the house kitchen and the pub as settings for drinking, eating, and music making.

In his musical study of J. S. Bach’s *Kaffeekantate* and other classical works, Roberto Alejandro Pérez associates majestic rhythms with the paternal figure. He develops a structured analysis of the piece’s form and elements, noting how “the graphic design of the musical notation seems to remind us visually of the vapors curling up from a cup of coffee.”

Anna G. Piotrowska presents “dining scenes” in European operas, operettas, and ballets with a broad historical span. She emphasizes the role of food in musical stage works to support national identity and social aspirations, describing how, “Showing the traditional Polish welcoming [with bread and salt] on stage was extremely important for Poles in the nineteenth century. At that time their country did not exist as a political entity and was not to be found on any maps of Europe.”

Identity in Cape Verde, most likely owing to the fragmented geography of the archipelago, is less important at a national level than in the family, neighborhood, and island. To Manuel Brito-Semedo, Cape Verdean music, dance, and cuisine are “a perfectly balanced triangle with which to celebrate fertility, sustenance, joy and sadness; celebrating life—birth, marriage, and feast days—and also the tears and lamentations of death.”

Most people in rural Cape Verde still cook very slowly, in the traditional *kaleron* (iron saucepan) over a wood fire. Eroticism and fertility are ostensibly present in musical styles such as *batuko* and *kola san jon*, as well as when the women pound maize for the *xerém-de-festa*. In her chapter about Cape Verde, Simone Caputo Gomes cites the rhythms of the women preparing food with their *pilão* in Fogo island, such as the “exuberant, sensual [*coladeira*], with traces of *cumbia* and Afro-Cuban music.”

Among the regions studied by the authors, Latin America and the Caribbean stand out for their culturally mixed character. Influences from

indigenous Amerindian peoples, European settlers, slaves from many parts of Africa, and immigrants from within the region and everywhere in the world have shaped various sub-regional cultures. In my chapter, I analyze different types of connections between food and music in the region, and how these connections vary according to diverse cultural backgrounds. My focus is on song lyrics about food and the way the two aspects relate, with in-depth consideration of the cultural representation of social values.

In Cuba, Colombia, Brazil, and Peru the number of food songs is significantly high, and the influence of African and indigenous cultures in these countries is clear. René Vázquez Díaz studies the intimate relations between Cuban traditional musical styles and images of food that refer to sensuality and eroticism. Through analysis of various lyrics and connections with theater plays, the author gives a flavor of the African and Spanish influences in the relation between Cuban music and food.

The closing chapter, by Izaura Furtado, focuses on a Cape Verdean family living among the *caiçara* people of the river and coastal areas near Paranaguá, Brazil, with roots in indigenous, African and European populations. The author develops an interesting narrative with elements of her own family history in Brazil and their relations with neighbors and friends from all walks of life, as well as with visitors and sailors who came onshore. Furtado's reflections on identity through food and music are important to understand how the two cultural parameters work together.

Many world societies are absent from this book. Thoughts on the connections between food and music can be illustrated with work on cultures and regions other than those studied by the authors. Furthermore, categories of food music can be established according to the various steps of the food cycle: production, distribution, preservation and preparation, consumption, and disposition. Studying the shared features of musical compositions for each step will serve to illustrate further the understanding of food and music as cultural representations. Other disciplines may take advantage of the idea to link food and music, particularly in communication, cultural history, philosophy, and linguistics.

One further promising area for future research falls within the field of religious studies. Sean Williams in her chapter describes various situations in which the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland has directed the way people eat, play or listen to music, and dance. To Catholicism and other religions, festive times are normally an opportunity to regulate and condition social behavior. Eating and fasting, as well as music- or silence-

making, are first and foremost bodily sensual activities, and are thus connected with pleasure and the bodily concepts of sin and virtue.

The religious dimension of eating and making music (or their absence) can be illustrated from several sources. These include ceremonial rituals, such as the Vedic verses sung while ritual food is prepared in Hindu weddings; chants, such as those related to the Christian Lord's Supper (e.g., "Panis angelicus fit panis hominum", by Thomas Aquinas); *Tarawih* and other Ramadan prayers considered food for the soul; mealtime blessing songs (e.g., "Yedid Nefesh", sung by many Jews during the third meal on Shabbat); and of course the possibilities arising from the study of sacred scriptures, with texts such as: "the king [Darius] went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him" (King James Bible, Daniel 6:18).

With a view to awaken the reader's appetite for various food and music realizations, the polyphonic choir of contributors in this book offers a piece with diverse influences. The resulting tune has a syncopated harmony or, in the language of the kitchen, an uncured character typical of eclectic recipes handed down from many sources. It is up to the reader, the ultimate diner and music listener, to try the dish of the day and to sight-read the score. Like the young woman sowing maize in the arid Cape Verdean hills, in the following pages I invite you to sing to food.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE DELIRIOUSLY TEMPTING  
COMPLEMENTARITY OF SYRIAN FOOD  
AND MUSIC

RIHAB KASSATLY BAGNOLE

*Aatini al-nay wu ghanni fal ghina sirr al wujud; hal jalasta al-asr mithli  
bayn jafnat al-aineb wu al-anakid tadallat ka thurayat al-dahab?*<sup>1</sup>

—Gibran 1958: 42

*Allah jamil wu yuhib al-jamal*

—Hadith<sup>2</sup>

**Introduction**

Since the beginning of the current and ongoing crisis in March 2011, Syria has been widely covered by the world media. Most of the news has covered the clashes, combats between the Assad regime and the rebels who want to topple it, the horrific use of weapons of mass destruction on civilians, and the resulting international outrage over this act. As the public is bombarded with negative information about the violence and killing that is taking place, Syria remains a country of long-established cultural traditions, though these are frequently ignored in the media under the recent circumstances. Among these traditions, the Syrian people are proud of their cuisine and music. Their gastronomical recipes depend on a careful selecting of vegetables, meats, and grains; mixing traditional spices, herbs, and sauces; and presenting numerous small, tempting plates

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<sup>1</sup> “Give me the flute and sing; singing is the secret to immortality; Have you, like me, sat at dusk among the glowing vines laden with grapes?”

<sup>2</sup> “God is beautiful and loves beauty”. This Arabic proverb is common among all Syrians regardless of their ethnicity and religion. It is one of the collected *hadith* of Prophet Muhammad in *Sahih Muslim*, Book 1, Hadith N° 164.

in pleasing arrangements. Nevertheless, the *meza* (special light dishes prepared to consume with or without alcohol) and the *tarab* (enchancing music) together create an even greater recipe for a delightful time. It is usually during *sahret tarab wu inshirah* (an evening of music and enchantment) that the combination of music and food can be best fêted.

The term *sahret tarab wu inshirah* is commonly used to suggest guaranteed pleasure for the attendees. *Tarab* can be explained as a state of ecstasy that is achieved through music. It results from building up the *istimtaa* (enjoyment) of what is heard and seen, supported by the stimulation from both internal and external sources—a combination that leads to enchantment. This Syrian experience is expressed with the terms *matroub* and *matroube* (masculine and feminine forms) which designate participating individuals who are transported by the music to a uniquely delightful level of joy. Accordingly, when the senses of listening and taste are satisfied, the special level of enchantment amounts to an aesthetic experience which disseminates itself throughout the collective of participants. It is achieved only when the listener is willing, physically and mentally, to receive such an experience, whether the participant is alone or accompanied by others. Enchantment is not restricted to live music and can also be achieved variously by listening to a concert on video, television, or radio, especially when a person is seeking solitude to contemplate a nostalgic occurrence and/or focus on private emotions.<sup>3</sup> However, when *istimtaa* (enjoyment) kicks in, the mood for *tarab* is also activated via other forms of stimulation, such as smoking, drinking, and dancing, which embody their own sense of beauty and cultural significance as well. These elements reflect the traditional and modern attitudes of the Syrians who identify with their culture while entertaining their senses.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze what this unique experience of *sahret tarab wu inshirah* represents and how the common components that accompany Syrian gastronomy unite with popular musical compositions to embrace all the senses and heighten the feelings of pleasure, happiness, and identity among the Syrian people. This discussion considers customs and traditions that are generally respected among the populace despite

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to suggest that it is only on the occasion of *sahret tarab wu inshirah* that Syrians listen to music. Seldom are Syrians quiet people; they are loud in their tone of voice and the volume of their radios and other electronic devices. Walking through the streets of Damascus, for instance, one can hear a variety of sounds coming from apartments, shops, and passersby.

slow modification over time, and “invented traditions” that are created to suit the tastes of particular subgroups and then spread to other Syrians.

Many Syrians create opportunities to celebrate events filled with entertainment and enchantment. Occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, engagements, weddings, and many other gatherings for relatives, friends and neighbors necessitate arrangements for food, drink, music and other forms of activities for inclusion in these festive evenings. Therefore, *meza*, arak, the *argile*, and dance have become essential elements in *sahret tarab wu inshirah* for many people in contemporary Syrian society. (NB: A variety of spellings is found in English transliterations for Arabic words: *meza*, also *mazza*, *mazzah*, *mezzah*, *meze*, *mezze*; arak, also *araq*; *argile*, also *argileh*, *nargile*, *nargileh*, *hookah*.)

As a woman who was born and raised in Syria, I developed, not unexpectedly, an affinity for Syrian culture and customs. Accordingly, my first-hand impressions, assembled in the form of memories, enable me to access observations of my Syrian cultural heritage and origin from a distance in the United States (where I now reside) while, at the same time, providing readers in other countries a useful cross-cultural perspective.

I first became fascinated by the mood people created to enjoy *sahret tarab wu inshirah* when I started observing the activities of my neighbor from the balcony of my family’s apartment in the district of Kassaa in Damascus, Syria. The *sahret tarab wu inshirah* which my neighbor from Damascus used to create nightly did not involve a crowd, though it was entertaining to many uninvited spectators who witnessed the event from the balconies of surrounding apartments. The neighbor produced the same atmosphere of *sahret tarab wu inshirah* but preferred to live it as solitary moments of ecstasy to evoke a certain emotional situation, rather than as a deliberately shared experience.

This neighbor attracted my attention with his repeated loud songs during the hot summer nights. He resided on the ground floor of an apartment building while I lived on the third floor of the building across the way, which allowed me to observe the event very clearly. My neighbor’s apartment had an enclosed garden with a fountain in its center and a planted strip with rose bushes and jasmine trees along the wall. A variety of grape vines also stretched all over the garden wall and climbed up the wooden structures on the corners of the building. In the evening, the garden seemed exquisite, with water spraying from its fountain under a single hanging amber-colored light bulb, and the smell of Damascene rose

and jasmine perfuming the area. A table with *meza* plates was prepared next to the fountain, with a spindly *argile* (water pipe) beside it. I could see a bottle of arak, a bucket of ice, and a pitcher of water arranged on the marble rim of the fountain across from the compact disc player, which was loaded with recordings of famous singers, such as Umm Kulthum, Farid al-Atrash, Abd al-Wahab, and Sabah Fakhri. These renowned artists are now considered “classical” in their styles. Umm Kulthum is known for singing long lyrical poems, Farid al-Atrash is hailed for his songs with an inserted solo instrument, Abd al-Wahab is recognized for integrating classical Arabic and Western musical touches, while Sabah Fakhri is applauded for reviving the musical trends popular during the ancient Ummayyad period.

As it happened, my neighbor was in love with a female neighbor who occupied the first floor in the next building, and his songs were all appropriately communicating his affection, given that they expressed love, loss, and the bitter-sweet painful emotions of yearning and devotion. He would eat a bite of *meza*, drink a sip of arak, and smoke a puff of his *argile* while chanting a few words along with the music. As a *voyeuse*, even though I was enjoying the music and whiffs of perfumed air, I still lacked the great experience of my neighbor—the condition of love, the taste of the food, and the arak. The ambiance and the unforgettable episodes were all I could acquire, and I wished I could involve all the senses, like my neighbor.

Similar incidents reflecting the relationship between food and music frequently occur on Syrian television channels when dealing with romantic situations of hopeless love. Food and music are crucial components apparent in such scenes, specifically those viewed in Syrian soap operas on the television channel Syria Drama. These Syrian series have been very popular among Arabs throughout the Middle East and around the globe because of their daring treatment of a variety of issues, their excellent writing, accomplished acting, and their accessibility through satellite dishes and digital Internet. A look at the number of viewers and comments on YouTube and other sites promoting Syrian soap operas reveal their vast popularity among Arabic speakers. Syria Drama recently aired a Syrian series based on the significance of sophistication of Damascene cooking, entitled *Znoud al-Sit (The Lady's Arms)*<sup>4</sup> during Ramadan 2012, and again in December of the same year. Each episode presents a session with *Sit*

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<sup>4</sup> Znoud al-Sit is also the name of a Syrian sweet consisting of cream-filled filo pastry garnished with syrup, orange blossom, and pistachios.

Eisheh Khanum,<sup>5</sup> who reveals the ingredients of a Syrian recipe to her female guests and teaches them how to cook it. The group listens to music, dances, and feasts as part of the narrative.<sup>6</sup> These recipes often include some of the dishes used in a *meza*.

## Meza

A *meza* generally consists of many small cold and warm dishes served with or without arak. It can be used as an appetizer followed by a hot meal, or alone as a light meal to boost energy and keep the diner active and cheerful. The *meza* plates usually complement each other in color, shape and size. If the *meza* includes some special recipes, they will be served on differently colored, shaped, or sized plates to emphasize their uniqueness. For example, my grandmother served her preparations on a large, oval clay plate that sat on a disk-like base to elevate it above all the other dishes.

The *meza* menu commonly includes numerous traditional dishes, such as *labane* (drained yogurt, salt, crushed dried mint, and olive oil); *hummus* (blended chickpeas, tahini, lemon, garlic, salt, and olive oil); *baba ghanouj* (diced broiled eggplants, tahini, lemon, salt, chopped parsley, and olive oil); olives (a variety of colors and sizes); pickles (cucumbers, eggplants, cauliflower, and other vegetables); *muhamara* (blended red peppers, bread crumbs, salt, walnuts, pomegranate, molasses, mint leaves, and olive oil); pita bread; *falafel* (balls of a fried mixture of chickpeas, parsley, coriander, garlic, cumin, sumac, sesame seeds, and salt); *kibbe* (fried, baked, or broiled balls of ground beef, bulgur and salt stuffed in ground lamb, onions, pine nuts, cinnamon, allspice, black pepper, and salt); stuffed grape leaves (cooked grape leaves stuffed with rice, meat, spices, and salt;

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<sup>5</sup> *Sit*, like *khanum*, is an Arabic term for “Madam”. The latter is of Turkish origin and is still used occasionally among Syrian merchants. *Eisheh* or *Aishah* is a female name famous in Islamic countries because it was the name of the third and youngest of Prophet Muhammad’s wives, who was also the daughter of the first caliph. It is also the name of a Syrian dish made with *eisheh khanum* beans (pinto beans), lemon and garlic, garnished with parsley. The name of the television show, then, represents a pun, referring simultaneously to the dish and the presenter’s name.

<sup>6</sup> Ramadan is the lunar month in which Prophet Muhammad received the Quran (the holy book of Islam). It is the ninth month of the Islamic Calendar and lasts twenty-nine or thirty days. Devout Muslims fast from morning to dusk during Ramadan and end it at the sighting of the new moon with the celebration of Eid al-Fitr (festival of breaking the fast).

another version of stuffed grape leaves can be meatless with added diced tomatoes, onions, walnuts, and parsley); *fatayer* or *sambousek* (spinach pies, meat pies, cheese pies); *shankleesh* (balls of dried Bedouin cheese covered with spices and mixed with cucumbers and olive oil); *taboule* (chopped parsley, tomatoes, mint leaves, bulgur, lemon juice, salt, and olive oil); *fatoush* (dried pita bread, tomatoes, cucumbers, parsley, mint leaves, watercress, onions, garlic, white vinegar, salt, and olive oil). Such a *meza* can be followed or served with *mashawi* (small pieces of skewered and grilled meat or poultry) or *kebab* (skewered mixture of ground meat, parsley, onions, salt, and spices).<sup>7</sup>

This combination of cooked and prepared *meza* dishes reveals the sophistication of Syrian taste. Such delicate recipes tell not only of health and nourishment, but also of the meaning of food as revealed through cultural traditions. In his famous trope, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) considers the complementarity and the opposing qualities of the “raw” and the “cooked” as a possible signifier to clarify the customs of various societies because they are a “manifestation of the mental or social activities” of a community (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 4). What is being consumed and how a community cooks expresses and demonstrates the originality that can generally allow the rest of the world to appreciate the level of stylization unique to a particular culture.

*Meza* dishes, which reflect shared community, are served on regular basis in Syria and commonly in many other Arab countries, especially Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. They are affordable and prepared with very little variation in the recipes in many houses. Jack Goody, who has researched celebration and food in Africa, draws attention to the common sameness within communities of the plates served in celebrations and for regular consumption—an observation that can be applied to Syria too—and he maintains, “a feast was a time of plenty, not a time of difference” (Goody 1982: 78).

Thus, familiarity with the food promotes a mood of engagement and connectivity with the surroundings and the participants. It allows the bonds between people to strengthen because they speak the same language and eat the same food. An Arabic proverb refers to this bond when sharing *khubs wu melh* (bread and salt) as one of the strongest between the

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<sup>7</sup> Occasionally, *kibbe neye* (raw ground tender lamb, ground onions, bulgur, salt, cayenne, cinnamon, and olive oil), *soda neye* (liver of a small freshly-slaughtered lamb, onions, parsley, salt, and olive oil) can be added to the menu when prepared in a family home and the meat comes from a trusted farm.