



**PORTFOLIO OF ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS:
TAKING MUSICAL INSPIRATION FROM KUWAITI TRADITIONAL MUSIC
THROUGH THE LENS OF A PIANIST**

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Abstract

This project aims to create original compositions based on elements from traditional Kuwaiti music and explore their adaptability to the piano, bridging cultural heritage with contemporary artistic practices. The submission comprises a portfolio of 8 notated pieces (total duration of 57-61 minutes) plus the ensuing commentary. Recordings of the pieces are provided for reference.

Even though the piano is not part of Kuwaiti musical traditions, this project explores how its expressive and technical capabilities can articulate and preserve Kuwaiti traditional elements. Combining analysis of traditional Kuwaiti musical elements and creative practice, this research addresses key questions of compositional method, such as how to overcome the challenge of using relatively minimalistic resources (monophonic, repetitive) to create satisfying piano pieces.

Methodologically, the research employs extraction of key elements from Kuwaiti traditional songs and transcription/analysis of archival recordings to develop a portfolio of original compositions that reimagine Kuwaiti repertoire. The written commentary highlights the Kuwaiti elements such as melodic phrases and rhythmic cycles that are incorporated in each piece and reflects on the challenges of the creative process, the approach and the execution of each idea to achieve the goal of preserving Kuwaiti elements while transforming/adapting them into new compositions.

This research contributes to advancing Kuwaiti art by presenting a portfolio based on Kuwaiti elements aimed at the global stage for pianists of various levels and backgrounds. This project challenges the Eurocentric narratives of pianism while expanding the instrument's idiomatic possibilities.

Submission format

- 1 Portfolio of original compositions of ≈60 minutes duration
- 2 Commentary ≈18,000 words

List of compositions and approximate duration

#	Title	Duration in minutes
1	<i>El boshiya</i> البوشية	6
2	<i>Ala ya ahl elhawa</i> أأا يا أهأ الهوى	6
3	<i>Absheri ya ain</i> أبشري يا عين	6
-	<i>Hail rain set of three pieces</i> طق يا مطر طق	-
4	<i>Hail rain pop</i>	6
5	<i>Hail rain tranquility</i>	9
6	<i>Hail rain dazza</i>	11
7	<i>Habeebi sham'at aljillas</i> حببي شمعة الجلاس	10
8	<i>[K]ountry shores</i>	7

Total duration:
approximately 61
minutes

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Glossary

Term	Definition
<i>Emsabbig</i>	<i>Emsabbig</i> is a form of anticipation achieved by bringing the melody into the preceding bar followed by <i>sankaba</i> usually
<i>Falit</i>	Performing with loose tempo
<i>Farsh</i>	When a band play long notes to accompany a solo
<i>Iqa'a</i>	Rhythmic pattern or cycle
<i>Maqam</i>	Midde Eastern musical mode made of consecutive sequence of notes based on two or three sets of predefined intervals known as <i>jins</i> (plural <i>ajnas</i> , <i>tetrachords</i>), <i>iqd</i> (<i>pentachord</i>) or <i>nisba</i> (<i>trichord</i>).
Modulation	Refers to rephrasing and alteration rather than key change
<i>Sankaba</i>	Syncopation between the melody and the accompaniment/ <i>iqa'a</i>
<i>Taksima</i>	Improvisation that follows <i>maqam</i> and <i>maqam</i> modulation methods
<i>Wahda Wahda Wahda</i>	Signal followed by a clapping pattern to indicate the end of song

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Introduction

Kuwaiti music has adapted to the constant change in both the Middle Eastern and world art scenes since the end of the 19th century. Yet this adaptation hasn't adequately addressed the lack of Kuwaiti music written for the piano whether as original music or as an adaptation of existing traditional repertoire. The majority of these adaptation attempts were in the form of an arrangement to include accompanying instruments such as strings section.

This research aims to incorporate Kuwaiti traditional musical elements through original compositions based on Kuwaiti traditional themes and Kuwaiti musical elements. This was achieved by choosing traditional Kuwaiti pieces, focussing on a number of the qualities that are unique to each one and including these traits in a new composition as an insight to Kuwaiti traditional music. Traits of Kuwaiti music practices that are not unique to a specific piece but rather a common Kuwaiti practice are also introduced in the newly produced compositions and explained in the commentary. My aim is to make these new compositions as accessible as possible for performers with no knowledge of Kuwaiti music and for different levels of musicianship from intermediate to advanced.

The portfolio also proposes examples of musical ideas, embellishments and possible interpretations of a theme that exemplify Kuwaiti performing style whether in the melody or the rhythmic structure of the accompaniment. I have placed high value on preserving Kuwaiti performance practices. I have also explored the limitations of the piano related to producing key elements of Kuwaiti music such as its tuning system and proposed alternative approaches to overcome these limitations if possible. The in-depth analysis of each new composition and the rationale behind it should help to develop local music further in Kuwait and invite further research towards incorporating other instruments or producing other arrangements/compositions.

Finally, by creating a portfolio for publication this project will enrich the available contemporary repertoire with new materials derived from less explored sources and demonstrate my individual approaches to Kuwaiti traditional music. This will allow performers to explore my creative approach to Kuwaiti tradition and fulfil the Kuwaiti government vision of sharing our music with the world and being part of the international music scene.

Nationalism

Adapting traditional musical elements from a composer's local community into Western style music is considered as a form of musical nationalism as described by Andrew Killick (2021, p. 66). Nationalism has been defined differently by many scholars. One definition that I find we accept and share in Kuwait is that of Richard Taruskin (2001):

Definitions of nationalism depend, of course, on definitions of nation. It is not likely that consensus will ever be reached on their precise meaning, since different definitions serve differing interests. One thing, however, has been certain from the beginning: a nation, unlike a state, is not necessarily a political entity. It is primarily defined not by dynasties or by territorial boundaries but by some negotiation of the relationship between the political status of communities and the basis of their self-description, whether linguistic, ethnic (genetic/biological), religious, cultural or historical.

The above definition fits to some extent with the various ways in which Kuwaitis describe themselves. To begin with, the name Kuwait الكويت is actually a word derived from the Arabic word *kout* كوت which means fort. Kuwait initially was named Kout as there was a fort overlooking what is now known as

Kuwait Bay and overlooking the area from the borders of southern Basra (Iraq) to Al-khafji (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). People who lived in this region prior to 1960 are considered Kuwaitis. This definition of Kuwaitis aligns with the definition of a nation based on territorial boundaries. Also, another important part of the Kuwaiti identity is the diversity of ethnic groups that lived within the fort and later the expanded city. Those ethnic groups lived together and developed the Arabic language to form a unique dialect that is known in the Arab world. Some of the ethnic groups are not Arabic native speakers (Persian mainly) but learned to speak Arabic and contributed to shaping the Kuwaiti dialect. The diversity of ethnic groups also led to Kuwait displaying diversity in cultures, sub-religions of Islam (Sunni, Shi'a), Christianity and Judaism.

To summarise, Kuwait as a nation is a mixture of ethnic groups that created their own identity based on their diverse heritage, language, beliefs and traditions. This diversity is reflected in the created compositions by the use of selected rhythmic patterns. The patterns are associated according to tradition with the origin and/or function of a particular form or category of music, e.g. music for entertainment or for children. However, some forms are not included, to deflect any unintentional misrepresentation of sensitive related practices, such as religious music.

The intersection between music considered to be native to a specific community and Western-style music has been deeply discussed by Killick (2021), along with the expectations from Western musicians/critics in terms of adapting the role of a composer and writing music in a Western style. Killick suggests that Westernisation of non-Western music can include the incorporation of local elements into Western-style music, or vice versa by non-Western musicians (p. 59). Killick also discusses examples throughout history where non-Western musicians either adapted native musical elements in their Western-style compositions or composed purely in a Western style. Killick (p. 67) then concludes:

The present chapter has therefore argued for a broader conceptualisation of composition at the cultural intersections where the West meets the East (or indeed meets any other part of the world), one which also recognises the application of the Western composer concept as a means of extending and revitalising non-Western musical traditions on their home ground.

From the useful definition of nationalism to the critical analysis of influence of Western music on other cultures, my approach to Kuwaiti traditional music is intended to help introduce Kuwaiti music to a broader audience, rather than only Kuwaiti listeners, and could also be defined as musical nationalism. My work is part of an evolving practice of traditional music. However, retaining Kuwaiti identity in the music and defining some of its elements is also a critical aspect of this research.

Existing examples of approaches to adaptation of folk elements.

There have been many attempts and examples of musicians exploring, defining, performing and adapting traditional music. One of these attempts took the direct approach of quoting a selected folk tune and then writing a new piece based on it. I refer here to Percy Grainger and his well-known adaptations of folk tunes such as "Country Gardens" and "Molly on the Shore". The published scores of these two works included the original traditional melodies before the newly composed music. Also included was a brief introduction to the folk dance and details of how to pursue more information about it.

I focused on Grainger's method for two main reasons. The first is that by presenting the original melody as a separate score, the composer has taken the crucial step of allowing the performer to see precisely to what he has done to it.

A second reason is Grainger's use of the English language for performance directions to convey his musical ideas, rather than adhering to the common practice in Western music of using stock Italian performance directions. The language itself is not the focus, but the principle of using a creative approach to unconventional methods to deliver a musical idea is valuable, especially when an idea is new or rare. Grainger's careful approach to the method of presenting folk art drew a better picture and deeper understanding of the newly composed music and what it represents. This approach could be borrowed and altered to serve the aims of this research by using Arabic terms written in the Roman alphabet. Below are some examples of Grainger's music (*Figures 1,2 and 3*) to demonstrate Grainger's method of including the original tunes, a short description of the material used and the performance directions in English.

BRITISH FOLK-MUSIC SETTINGS

(The whole set lovingly and reverently dedicated to the memory of Edward Grieg)

No. 22. "Country Gardens"

English Morris Dance Tune

Collected by

Cecil J. Sharp

set for piano by

PERCY ALDRIDGE GRAINGER

Playing time: 1 min., 50 sec.

Birthday gift,
mother, July 3, 1918Rough-sketches for 2
whistlers and a few
instruments about 1908

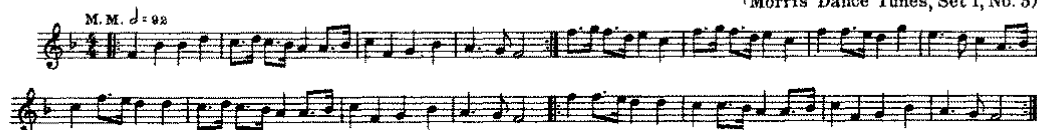
Worked out for piano, spring, 1918

PROGRAM NOTE

Groups of countryside dancers—"teams" of "Morris Men"—decked out with ribbons and jingling bells, still dance the Morris Dance to the accompaniment of such tunes as "Shepherd's Hey" and "Country Gardens" in some parts of rural England. We owe our knowledge of such things to that genius among folk-music collectors, Cecil J. Sharp, and those interested in the subject should consult MORRIS DANCE TUNES and THE MORRIS BOOK, both by Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. Macilwaine and both published by Novello & Co., Ltd. The traditional tune, as collected by Cecil J. Sharp, is as follows:

"Country Gardens"
Handkerchief Dance

(Morris Dance Tunes, Set 1, No. 3)

PERCY ALDRIDGE GRAINGER
New York City, Nov., 1918.

Fairly fast (M.M. ♩ = about 92) and with a leisurely swing

The top notes louder and sharper than the rest

Piano

mp R.H. detached
L.H. short

tea * tea * tea * tea * tea * tea * tea *

Figure 1: Country Gardens (trad). Transcription of the opening bars of the folk melody quoted in British folk-music settings by Percy Grainger, 1918, p1, Public domain, via <https://ks15.imsip.org/files/imglnks/usimg/0/07/IMSLP397808-PMLP431716-Grainger-CGpf.pdf>

2

des Bezirkes Schwerin
Musikalischesammlung
DDR 2751 SCHWERIN
Wismarsche Straße 144

MOLLY ON THE SHORE

The two Cork Reel tunes from "The Complete Petrie Collection of Ancient Irish Music" used in Grainger's folk-music setting entitled "Molly ón the shore" are as follows:

Tune No 902 (page 228.)

Molly on the shore. A Cork Reel

From P. Carew's MSS.

Allegro.

Tune No 904 (page 228.)

Tempie Hill. A Cork Reel

From P. Carew's MSS.

Both the above tunes are here reprinted from
The Complete Petrie Collection of Ancient Irish Music

edited from the original manuscript by Charles Villiers Stanford
published by Boosey & Co., London & New York

This wonderful collection (in 3 volumes, containing no less than 1582 tunes and tune-variants) should be consulted by everyone interested in folk-music in general and in Irish melodies in particular.
Schott & Co London. S. & Co 3687. Percy Aldridge Grainger.

Figure 2: Molly on the shore. Transcription of the traditional folk melody quoted in British folk-music settings by Percy Grainger, 1918, p1, Public domain, via [https://ks15.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/6/64/IMSLP114922-PMLP188653-Grainger_\(1907\)_Molly_on_the_Shore.pdf](https://ks15.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/6/64/IMSLP114922-PMLP188653-Grainger_(1907)_Molly_on_the_Shore.pdf)

GRAINGER,

3

BRITISH FOLK-MUSIC SETTINGS

*(Lovingly and reverently dedicated to the memory of Edvard Grieg)*N^o 19. "MOLLY ON THE SHORE"Birthday-gift,
Mother, 3.7.07.

IRISH REEL

for

PIANO

Piano setting,
April, 1918

"Molly on the shore" was originally set for string four-some or string band (summer 1907) (Schott & Co., London.)
 "Molly on the shore" is also set for symphony orchestra, theatre orchestra, and violin and piano. (Early 1914) Schott & Co., London.

based on two Cork Reel tunes, "Temple hill" and "Molly on the shore," respectively Nos. 901 and 902 of THE COMPLETE PETRIE COLLECTION OF ANCIENT IRISH MUSIC edited by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (Boosey & Co., London.)

By kind permission of Sir Charles Villiers Stanford.

by

PERCY ALDRIDGE GRAINGER.

Fast. M.M. $\text{♩} = \text{between } 126 \text{ and } 144$

PIANO.

pp

no pedal until marked

pp

short

short

5

Copyright, 1911, 1914, by Schott & Co., London

Copyright, 1918, by Percy Grainger

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Schott & Co London.

S. & CO 2687
 Wiss. Allg. Bibliothek
 27 SCHIFFERH. Am Dom 2

Figure 3: Molly on the shore opening 10 bars by Percy Grainger, British folk-music settings, 1918, p2, Public domain, via [https://ks15.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/6/64/IMSLP114922-PMLP188653-Grainger_\(1907\)_Molly_on_the_Shore.pdf](https://ks15.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/6/64/IMSLP114922-PMLP188653-Grainger_(1907)_Molly_on_the_Shore.pdf)

Isaac Albeniz is another fine example of a composer borrowing musical ideas from his motherland, in particular in his work *Iberia*. The twelve pieces of *Iberia* resembles locations, events, songs or dances, mainly from the southern parts of Spain.

Albeniz also composed works influenced by Spanish folk music throughout different stages of his life as Clark (2015, p. 6) notes. Albeniz demonstrated a sustained interest in drawing upon Spain's folk traditions as the foundation for his compositions. Clark also describes some of the Spanish musical elements that Albeniz incorporated in his compositions as: "lively rhythms, modality, elementary formal structure and haunting melodic arabesques couched in poignant, chromatic harmonies reminiscent of Chopin."

An important declaration by Albeniz is that it is a Spanish composer's duty "to make Spanish music with universal accent" Clark (2015, p. 21) Musical style and legacy, para. 7). My intentions are to create Kuwaiti music with a universal accent that is accessible to a wider audience. Filling some of the gap between Kuwaiti piano music based on traditional music and the international music scene could be interpreted as piano music with a Kuwaiti accent.

We may summarise that Albeniz was a nationalist who was driven by the urge to write music based on what he believed to represent Spain as a country, its history and its people. The imitation of guitar playing style by the piano in some of his work such as "Leyenda" from *Asturias* shows him directly borrowing a playing style from a local instrument and creating a piece for the piano based on that technique.

Wajdi Abou Diab is a contemporary Lebanese composer who has written many pieces for the piano based on Arabic songs (mostly Lebanese classical songs) and other old Arabic instrumental forms (*sama'i*, *longa*). Two of his published books contain piano solos or piano accompaniment. These books are titled *Longa and Sama'i with Piano Accompaniment* (published 2020) and *Arabic Folk Tunes* (published 2020). In his description of the book *Arabic Folk Tunes*, Abou Diab states that his aim was to make Arabic repertoire which was accessible for inclusion in any classical chamber music concert alongside Occidental repertoire. Also in the same book page 4, he states the following:

"Arabic Folk Tunes" is a collection of famous Arabic folk tunes, chosen from across the Middle East and North Africa. It includes famous songs from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq, and beyond, arranged for solo piano by the Lebanese pianist and composer Wajdi Abou Diab. The aim of the arrangements is to give pianists from all around the globe the opportunity to play and experience the beauty of Arabic melodies and rhythms. They remain true to the spirit of the songs and seek to reflect the story each one tells.

Abou Diab's collection of Arabic tunes and his arrangement might falsely seem similar to our approach. However, his approach focuses entirely on arranging Arabic folk tunes rather than creating new compositions based on one or more key elements of a specific music/practice. Although we share a common goal of spreading Arabic music by making it more accessible especially to pianists, I focus more on producing fresh compositions based on traditional elements from Kuwaiti music than on arranging entire traditional tunes to make them better suited to the piano.

Abou Diab's arrangements of the Arabic folk tunes sometimes start with the original folk tune and then modulations are introduced as an embellishment. In contrast, in his other book where he arranged *Sama'i and Longa*, he was more conservative with his approach and kept the original music as it is while expanding on the harmony accompanying the lead melody (right hand).

It is also worth mentioning that Abou Diab has avoided any piece that has a microtone. This is in fact a very common approach by Arab composers writing for the piano, both when adapting existing music and when writing an entirely new piece. In my opinion, Abou Diab wanted his compositions to be

accessible to as many people as possible (which he clearly stated in the description of the first book) and the lack of viable solutions to address the piano's inability to produce pitches beyond the 12 semitones in equal temperament tuning is a valid reason to take such a decision. In fact, even with instruments capable of producing microtones, Arabic composers use Western harmony built on equal temperament to accompany music written with microtones as there is little known about structuring harmonies with microtonal *maqam* music. Although this practice is the common approach to this issue, I have decided to experiment with the concept of altering a *maqam* with microtones to be playable on a piano tuned as usual in equal temperament. This will be explained in detail in the commentary on my composition *Habeebi sham'at aljillas*.

These previous examples of composers from different places and times illustrate their passion for exploring, adapting and sharing folk music. This interest that drove them is what drives me now to learn from them and share my own people's art with the world. My approach to Kuwaiti traditional music will be a mixture of their methods, such as borrowing exact melodies and using local language to convey musical ideas like Grainger, or imitating a local instrument or playing technique, or even encompassing the spirit of traditional arts and the people's identity as Albeniz does, or introducing the piano to existing pieces in the way that Abou Diab does. All these methods and others will be used to create contrasting pieces based on Kuwaiti traditional music.

Introduction to Kuwaiti traditional music

Kuwait is a country on the northeast side of the Arabian Peninsula. The people of Kuwait are identified as two groups. *Hadar* (plural) حضر *Hadari* (singular) حضري (city dwellers), who are considered the descendants of city people from nearby areas such as Najd in Saudi Arabia, Zubair in Iraq and Iran. The other group is called *Badawi* (singular) بدوي *Badu* (plural) بدو, who are Bedouins (nomads) of Arabia (Alsahhi, 2018). The Bedouins in the Arabian Peninsula consist of different tribes sometimes with their own dialect and slight differences in culture and costumes in relation to other Bedouins and sometimes with unique singing styles.

Kuwaiti traditional music is divided into two categories based on whether it originates from *Hadar* (city people) or *Badu* (Bedouin/nomads) (Alsahhi, 2018; Alderaiwaish, 2013). Both Bedouin tribes and *Hadar* have their own culture and songs. Although some Bedouin tribes may have specific songs and dances unique to them such as *Dahha* from the *Anuz* tribe, all Bedouin songs and dances are referred to as Bedouin arts as a general category. *Hadar* has songs related to work, occasion and entertainment. This mixed community and Kuwait as a trading hub shaped and influenced folk music (Alhassan, 2011).

Alsahhi states that traditional music in Kuwait began to be formally categorised as "traditional music" only after the oil boom which as stated by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), (2022) happened after the first crude oil export in 1964. The rapid growth in Kuwait after becoming an oil exporter attracted professionals in various fields to work and live in Kuwait, especially Arabs from other countries. Those Arabs, particularly Egyptians, brought their own music and influenced Kuwaiti music. Alsahhi describes Egyptian influenced music as an Egyptianised Kuwaiti style, and states that this influence was heard in elements such as rhythmic patterns, styles and in some cases, dialect. Alsahhi does not clarify the exact changes but it is known to many musicians in Kuwait that the term "Egyptianising of Kuwaiti music" relates to Egyptian rhythmic patterns being introduced to Kuwaiti musicians, with melodic interpretations and musical embellishments that were not previously common to Kuwaiti performers, along with musical instruments such as the viola, cello and double bass (the violin was known before that). Even though such deep influence occurred, the

traditional way of performing Kuwaiti folk music is still preserved and can be easily distinguished from the Egyptian-influenced way. Also, as in any other country affected by globalisation, Kuwaiti pop music became dominant and the traditional music became more specific to national occasions except for the few forms that are often used for entertainment purposes. The categories I borrowed material from are traditional Kuwaiti music related to entertainment that included children's songs. Also, some of the songs I extracted elements from have parts that have been performed by Egyptians. I have avoided using their unique way of performing but kept what is shared with Kuwaiti music in terms of *maqams*. Therefore I have used Kuwaiti traditional music with Egyptian influence but didn't carry over their signature methods of interpreting the music.

The piano in Kuwait

The first recorded date of the piano's arrival in Kuwait was in 1911. It was brought to Kuwait by Dr. Eleanor T. Calverley (Al-Rayes, 2023). Also, the first recorded Kuwaiti song that has a piano is *Ala ya ahl elhawa* (ألا يا أهل الهوى) by Abdulla Fadhala recorded in the 1960s prior to his death in 1967 (a link to the original song is in the discography section, uploaded by Bader_tv (2015)). As confirmed by Alsahhi, the song was recorded in Egypt. Further investigation is required to confirm whether Abdulla Fadala decided to add the piano in the song to introduce it as a new instrument to Kuwaiti audiences or to include it as a newly known Western instrument to Kuwaiti audiences. Prior to the 1960s, there is no traceable link to the piano as a known instrument in Kuwait. On the other hand, Alhassan (2011) discusses Egypt's music curriculum development from the 1930s to 1958 and Kuwait's borrowing from the finalised Egyptian music curriculum in 1958. Alhassan concludes that the borrowed curriculum included Western music theory and piano along with Western and Egyptian repertoire. He also points out that students usually performed within the school activities.

Piano and Western music concerts increased noticeably after the Iraqi invasion (1990-1991). A possible reason is the rebuilding of the country after it sustained heavy damage. Many firms hired Western expertise to help restore and develop the country. The Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET) is where music has been taught since 1961. It was previously known as the Teachers' Institute. When it was established, before the invasion, most of the teachers were from Egypt. However, after the war, the music department hiring panel expanded their criteria to include teachers from all around the world including the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uzbekistan, Poland, Germany and Arab musicians who studied outside the Arab countries. Most of those teachers focused on teaching Western theory and piano performance. Although experienced educators were engaged, the curriculum was developed to prepare students with little to no knowledge of music to perform and teach a basic level of piano and theory. Alhassan confirms that the curriculum was designed to prepare music teachers for kindergarten and elementary schools. The teachers from outside the Arabic countries started performing in public gradually until the authorities decided to arrange Western concerts regularly.

To this day, Western concerts and Arabic pop concerts dominate the musical scene in Kuwait with little done regarding creating new compositions for the piano based on Kuwaiti traditional elements to be included in the Western concerts where the pianists mainly perform. A combination of Western and Kuwaiti programs could be developed to gradually introduce newly composed Kuwaiti music based on traditional elements to Western music enthusiasts as I personally believe they are the first to appreciate the newly composed pieces with Kuwaiti character.

Existing Kuwaiti traditional music written for the piano

Having many composers, whether Kuwaiti or foreigners living in Kuwait did not help with the fact that there aren't many written pieces for the piano in Kuwait. I personally came across a couple of pieces written by composition teachers in the forms of Sonata and Fugue, both written strictly as Western-style music. These genres of music are not what I am investigating, as I am interested in piano music based on traditional Kuwaiti elements. As published works, Dr Sulaiman Al-Dikan is the only composer who has ventured into traditional music and written pieces based on it for the piano. However, his compositional decisions are neither mentioned nor clear. The Kuwaiti musical element that has been either preserved or taken out in these new pieces is neither highlighted nor obvious in my opinion. As outlined in the introduction, my approach focuses on selecting specific Kuwaiti elements from particular songs, clearly articulating the intentions, methods, and compositional decisions involved, and explaining how much each piece represents aspects of Kuwaiti traditional music. Other musicians wrote or attempted to rewrite Kuwaiti traditional music for other instruments but that is unrelated to the research questions we are trying to answer, because none considered the piano in their attempts or published works for it.

Working with available material

The main source for Kuwaiti traditional music is in the form of performances which are produced and shared publicly, mainly by the Ministry of information, on social media platforms such as Youtube. It is the only accessible source for vast libraries of Kuwaiti music, and is not subject to the bureaucratic obstacles which occur when sources are requested directly from the producer (usually the Ministry of Information). The music is always in an audio/video format, with no written scores provided. Therefore, it is necessary to transcribe the main melodies and occasionally the rhythmic patterns when required as the foundation of a piece. Despite not having the Kuwaiti traditional tunes written, the rhythmic patterns are documented in some resources with slight variations, which requires me to validate the correct pattern with the corresponding audio recording.

Potential ethical impact

The subject of traditional music adaptation may be considered a sensitive topic. This is especially true when the material one is working with is related to religious practices or any form of sacred rituals. The traditional music that has been studied and incorporated in my portfolio only includes traditional music for entertainment. It doesn't include any sensitive musical practices in Kuwait that would require further authorisation or consideration before they could be worked with. All the material used has been sourced from public sources that have been produced and publicly distributed by the Ministry of Information or the licensed distributors. Those materials are found on public websites such as YouTube and other social media applications. In fact most traditional music performances are simply the community's way of getting together and entertaining themselves and the audience. That is why traditional music used to be performed in people's houses rather than on stages. Having said that, adapting traditional elements might be seen as an appropriation of Kuwaiti traditional music. Deschenes (2021) argues that appropriation in world music is an act of a musician to take a song, genre or an instrument from a particular culture without consent to fulfil a need, an assumption or prejudice. In my research, since I represent the Kuwaiti culture I'm adapting from, it could be thought to be the other way around. Adapting for the piano could be considered as taking from Western musical culture. In this regard Deschenes also described this phenomenon of taking from Western culture as

modernisation. Deschenes describes the Middle East and Asian countries' view of Western classical music as a form of civilised and modern art in contrast to outdated/ancient music, thus appropriation is perfectly accepted as a form of developing one's art to be similar to the developed Western world. I believe that taking elements from any culture is a form of modernisation rather than only Western culture. I also believe adding Kuwaiti traditional elements to non-Kuwaiti music enriches the music.

Research questions:

How can Kuwaiti traditional musical elements be effectively incorporated in newly composed piano music while preserving their authenticity?

What compositional decisions will help create satisfying piano music and address the challenges faced like repetitiveness of melodies, short musical phrases and *maqam*-based songs as sources?

How can Kuwaiti traditional rhythms be interpreted in the piano music while maintaining their cultural style?

What are the challenges and solutions in translating Kuwaiti musical themes written on *maqams* that have microtones?

How to introduce traditional Kuwaiti musical traits related to each composition to the performer/s?

How to introduce Kuwaiti influenced compositions to a broader audience?

Overview of compositional decisions and methods

My approach to creating a new piece starts with identifying the element/s that I would like to preserve from the original song within the newly created piece. The theme/motif is a primary element that has been represented in each new piece created for this portfolio. However, one particular piece (*Habeebi sham'at aljillas*) has a similar structure to that of the original song, preserving the whole song whilst transforming the instrumentation and scale (*maqam*). In other pieces I have carried over the structure of the rhythmic cycle of the song. *Hail rain tranquility* was created to show the philosophical depth in how the event of rain is perceived by Kuwaiti adults. *[K]ountry shores* is based on English/Irish tunes and has Kuwaiti elements added rather than elements derived from the original English/Irish tunes, to demonstrate the mirror approach of (*Kuwaitising*) تكويت a tune, a common term used in Kuwait for when something non-Kuwaiti is endowed with Kuwaiti traits, such as *iqa'a* or *maqam* in the instance of music.

My portfolio explores the spectrum between composing and arranging. *Habeebi sham'at aljillas* is closest to the arrangement side because of its keeping the original song structure, yet it is a new composition substantially different from the original song in terms of instrumentation, microtonal *maqam* alteration, accompaniment and embellishments. *[K]ountry shores* at the other end of the spectrum where a piece uses only a small fragment of material from a Kuwaiti tune to create a substantially new composition, *[K]ountry shores* is based on an English/Irish tune and has Kuwaiti elements introduced gradually throughout the composition. In my opinion, this spectrum covers a wide range of possible combinations of newly composed music based on Kuwaiti elements showing different proportions of borrowed and newly composed elements.

It is worth mentioning that harmony, in all its shapes and forms, doesn't exist in Kuwaiti traditional music and is considered a foreign element. Kuwaiti traditional music is heterophonic and follows the rules of *maqam* practice. Some Kuwaiti musicians believe that adding harmony to traditional songs

might ruin the distinctiveness and interrupt the flow of the music. On the other hand, many traditional Kuwaiti oudists add harmonic intervals to traditional songs such as thirds, fifths and sometimes full chords. Audiences usually appraise such demonstrations of musicianship rather than rejecting the non-Kuwaiti element. I believe it is essential to utilise the capabilities of the piano and borrow from the deep pool of harmonic structure to enrich my compositions and convey varied musical ideas. While doing so, I try to make sure that the traditional Kuwaiti elements are the main focus and the harmonic structure is there to support it.

Below is a table describing each new composition's key element(s) that have been transferred/transformed from the original music along with the theme/motif. The element(s) mentioned in the table are not the only Kuwaiti traits that have been transferred/transformed, but they are ones that are present in the original song (the source). The other Kuwaiti elements added are not unique to the original songs but shared in Kuwaiti performance practices. These elements that are common in Kuwaiti songs include embellishments that are used frequently in Kuwaiti music; *maqam* modulation; syncopation *sankaba* سنكبة between the melody and the accompaniment/*iqā'a*; *falit* فالت sections (loose tempo); *taksima* (improvisation that follows *maqam* and *maqam* modulation methods), each of which is further explained in the relevant section. A final Kuwaiti element is the signal to end the song, which doesn't have a specific name but Kuwaitis refer to it as *wahda wahda wahda* وحده وحده وحده. The signal can be given by the singer or by one of the percussionists. The signal words are *wahda wahda wahda*, which fits with Kuwaiti rhythmic patterns in 6/8 time, usually followed by a rhythmic clapping by the audience. This pattern is demonstrated in *Hail rain dazza* and *[K]ountry shores*.

Composition title & year	Borrowed Kuwaiti elements
<i>El boshiya</i> : composed 2022	Two <i>iqā'a</i> variations of <i>Samri iqā'a</i>
<i>Ala ya ahl elhawa</i> : composed 2023	The melody
<i>Absheri ya ain</i> : composed 2023	Song theme, Intro theme
<i>Habeebi sham'at aljillas</i> : composed 2024	Song structure, <i>qaderi bahri iqā'a</i>
<i>Hail rain Pop</i> : composed 2024	Lyrics, group singing
<i>Hail rain tranquility</i> : composed 2024	Philosophical aspect (the spirit of the rainy season)
<i>Hail rain dazza</i> : composed 2025	<i>dazza iqā'a</i>
<i>[K]ountry shores</i> : composed 2025	Rhythm transformation, <i>iqā'a</i> , <i>maqam</i> Introduction and modulation, embellishments commonly performed by Kuwaiti musicians

It is worth mentioning that some Kuwaiti rhythmic patterns contain subtle rhythmic deviations and expressive nuances in timing (microtiming) such as *qaderi bahri iqā'a*. A detailed rhythmic pattern is included in the new composition's first page.

Kuwait music has more than 27 *iqā'a* used at many occasions like wedding ceremonies or sea trips. These *iqā'a* were categorised by previous generations of Kuwaitis into urban, desert and sea بر، بحر، المدينة (Algallaf and Alabdul-lateef, 2022). these genres rely on the *iqā'a* of the music alone to define it rather than the *maqam*, instrumentations and other elements. Some *iqā'a* have a known setup of instruments and percussion instruments although it is not definitive as Kuwaitis tend to use whatever is at their hand (metal mortar, metal box, water jar) and sometimes borrow a percussion setup known for a specific *iqā'a* for a different *iqā'a*. The *iqā'a* beats are always noticeable even when percussions are removed because traditional Kuwaiti music tends to emphasise the *iqā'a* beat in the melody.

According to Kima (2011, p. iv), *iqa'at* consists of a pattern of 2 beats or more that contains beats and rests distinguished by timbre. Kima also states that *iqa'at* are employed in metric compositions and known for effecting the phrasing of the melody and the patterns of accentuation in the piece. Racy (2003, p. 113) indicates that *iqa'at* consists of the deep sounding stroke *Dom*, the sharp stroke *Tak* and rests. In Kuwaiti traditional music, *Tar* and *Sea Tabla* are mainly used to produce these contrasting sounds. *Tar* طار is a large, round shaped hand drum common in the Islamic world and the *Sea Tabla* *Tabil bahri* الطبل البحري, is a large barrel shaped drum 44-46cm long with circumference of 90-95cm that has 2 drum heads made of thick cow's leather on both sides, One side is thicker than the other side. The *Sea Tabla* is played either by hand or a stick (Algallaf and Alabdul-lateef, 2022). Algallaf and Alabdul-lateef have listed some of the Kuwaiti *iqa'at* and their number is 27. However, many of these rhythmic patterns (*iqa'at*) have a number of variations. These variations are a subject of debate between Kuwaiti traditional percussionists, who propose different variations as being the right *iqa'a*, even though many of them acknowledge that these variations are acceptable in Kuwaiti performance practices. Having said that, from analysing different traditional songs in the same style/rhythmic pattern, I concluded that these variations are part of the tradition and the process of altering the *iqa'a* can be found in almost all the recorded performances. These variations do not alter the *iqa'a* to the point where it could be considered another *iqa'a*, but their similarity raises the question of which is authentic. Figure 4 represents my own analysis of different songs performed in *samri iqa'a*.

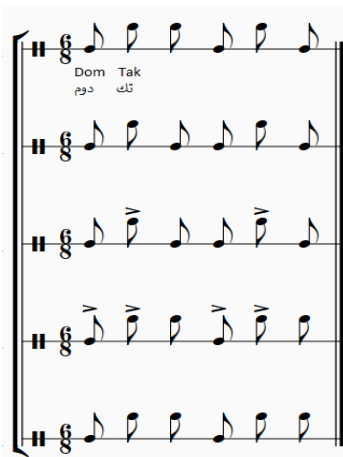


Figure 4: *Samri iqa'a* variations. Notes on the line represents open hand beat (*dom* دوم) and upper note represents rimshot (*tak* تاك). *Dom* and *Tak* are common names for these techniques in Kuwait and many other Arab countries.

Many traditional Kuwaiti songs have very short themes and working with such short themes has been a great challenge to me as it demanded creative thinking to avoid excessive repetition and keep the music flowing in a direction rather than looping. These short themes are usually repeated many times during a song by the singer, accompanying instruments if any and the chorus. This makes them memorable and immediately recognisable. In order to avoid mere repetition, I have applied a few methods in creating the new compositions. These methods include modulating the theme and adding ornamentations, modulating the *maqam* or scale, writing and varying the structure of the accompaniment and borrowing elements from the corresponding *iqa'a* of the original song. In addition, I have experimented with extracting philosophical ideas of the source song and developing the theme around them, transforming the original melody to give it a sense of direction and developing the accompaniment to emphasise the *iqa'a*.

Traditional Kuwaiti music is usually practised in groups, where there will be a singer who is usually an oud player accompanied by percussion and chorus. The band and the audience usually sit in a square shape which helps in making the audience engage with the band by singing along with the chorus and

clapping in a particular way depending on the *iqā'a*. This practice is incorporated in some of my pieces as an experimental approach to allow the audience to engage. This engagement requires the performer to lead the participation by setting rules and by educating the audience in their specific contribution if they are comfortable to engage with the performer. This requires careful consideration and preparation to execute flawlessly. The contribution of the audience in Kuwaiti traditional performances is given naturally as Kuwaiti people attend traditional concerts from a young age and listen to recordings. A well informed non-Kuwaiti audience should be able to participate similarly.

In my approach I consider these important qualities of traditional Kuwaiti music and preserve one or more of these traits in each piece, writing the music in such a way as to bring them forward and make them identifiable. When focusing on a specific traditional tune, one of the possible compositional methods is to play, improvise and create different ideas based on the tune. After deciding the path of the development of the theme, a combination of diatonic, chromatic and extended harmony is then introduced and experimented with using the Western approach to harmony. While the harmony is used to convey the musical ideas and help set the mood, the function of representing elements of the traditional Kuwaiti *iqā'a* is as important as the melody and in some cases more important. Imitating the *iqā'a* pattern (*Dom and Tak*) while adhering to the proposed chord progression bears fruit as a novel method of representing Kuwaiti traditional music. Another focus when writing Kuwaiti tunes is to include written-out ornamentations and improvisational pathways, while encouraging the musicians to interpret in their own way. This addresses the question of how Kuwaiti musicians might perform their music when it is adapted to the piano, yet have the chance to be creative in their own way. In order to achieve this, Kuwaiti musical terms are used in a number of the compositions and explained beforehand in the score. The main idea of each composition is also included in the score. This allows the musician to establish what the original traditional musical idea was and trace its transformation in the new compositions.

While this research focuses on Kuwaiti traditional music, my intention is also to experiment in reversing my compositional methods by adapting a foreign theme to the Kuwaiti tradition. This approach introduces Kuwaiti traditional elements while preserving the original theme. This has been achieved by altering the duration of the notes and adjusting the harmony to represent the proposed *iqā'a* on which the borrowed music is based. Another experimental element is to write a piece with vocals singing Arabic lyrics, adjusting any consonants that don't have an equivalent in the English language and having lyrics written in the Roman alphabet. Also In this research I focus on songs playable on a standard piano with equal temperament tuning in order to make the new compositions accessible to a wider range of performers. Experimenting with microtonal music requires altering the piano which is not a small feat. Many venues and piano owners refuse to alter the tuning as it is an extensive job and could shorten the instrument tuning retention period.

Some elements of Kuwaiti music will require creative approaches such as audience participation and the use of singers in some of the pieces. My approach of incorporating different known methods into Kuwaiti traditional music aims to expand knowledge of this practice by introducing a unique approach to the rhythmic basis of Kuwaiti traditional music. Experimenting with representing rhythmic cycles within melodies and accompaniments when composing the music introduces new possibilities for the musical ideas in comparison with the conventional focus on developing the melody alone. Another expansion is the adaptation of local Kuwaiti musical terms to use when a specific traditional technique or method is employed in addition to common musical terms. Another feature will be to experiment with the audience participation and ways to achieve this.

Feedback review and evaluation of the pieces has been received from 14 established musicians locally in Kuwait and in the UK over the period of 3 years from 2022. Audio recordings have been shared with me by the performers. The feedback was constructive and helped me adjust unclear ideas relating

mainly to rhythmic sections. I believe these unclear ideas were related to some of the performers who reviewed the pieces being unfamiliar with Kuwaiti performance culture. Therefore extra caution was required when writing the pieces, especially in aspects that directly represent a Kuwaiti trait, such as notes I have marked with accents to get the emphasis needed, because they form part of the important rhythmic pattern *iqā'a*. Links to YouTube performances of each song in its original Kuwaiti setting have been provided in the preface of each score and details of the *iqā'a* structure have also been included to help demonstrate how these *iqā'at* may be interpreted.

Commentary on my compositions

1- *El boshiya* البوشية: composed 2022

Solo piano

El boshiya is a widely known song in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf region. It consists of a simple three-bar melody yet has the potential to be developed into longer pieces or variations. The initial musical ideas were about writing a composition that reflects Kuwaiti musical qualities based on a Kuwaiti traditional song. Two key elements were focused on in this composition; the first was the melody and the second was the *samri iqa'a* (rhythmic cycle). The original song was performed in 10/4. However, another recording of the same song by the same singer was performed in 10/4 drifting in the middle of the song into 6/4. Singers now tend to perform this song in 6/4 (grouped as 3,3) *Samri iqa'a*. Because more than one *Samri* form was used previously, it was important to consider both variants as key elements to be included in the new composition.

In this composition, I'm focusing on the original song theme, whilst varying the texture and adding a rhythmic accompaniment that reflects rather than directly translates *Samri iqa'a*. I keep the theme dominant throughout the piece, retaining its lyrical trait and build a simple yet interesting harmonic development using *Samri iqa'a* rhythmic style in the left hand.

The notation below is based on the recordings of the original singer Mahmoud Alkuwaiti and the Kuwait TV band. Links to the recordings are below



Figure 5: *El boshiya* main theme in 10/4 time. Transcribed from the first recording

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXdepaykoro>]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pv8fJzgALps> Second recording



Figure 6: *El boshiya* main theme in 6/4 time. Transcribed from the second recording

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pv8fJzgALps>]

The figures below show the two variations of *samri iqa'a* used in the original song and other versions by both the original singer and other singers.

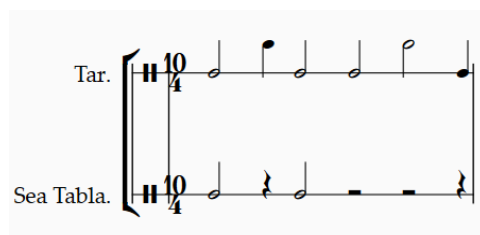


Figure 7: *Samri iqa'a* variation 1

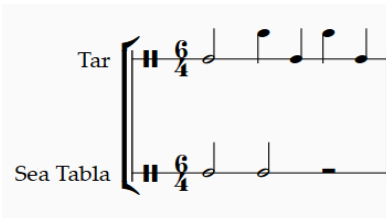


Figure 8: Samri iqa'a variation 2

Tar طار is a large, round shaped hand drum common in the Islamic world and the *Sea Tabla Tabil bahri* الطبل البحري, is a large barrel shaped drum 44-46cm long with circumference of 90-95cm that has 2 drum heads made of thick cow's leather on both sides, One side is thicker than the other side. The *Sea Tabla* is played either by hand or a stick (Algallaf and Alabdul-lateef, 2022).

The composition is divided into three sections. The first section (bars 1-25) emphasises the main theme by repeating it six times. The first and the second try to be as simple and clear as the original song is. In bars 8 - 12, the left hand is introduced with a rhythmic pattern of the *Samri iqa'a* variation 2 (Figure 8 with accents on the first and the 4th beat) to introduce tonal harmony based on the *Samri iqa'a*. The simple harmony follows the movement of the melody, then ascending and descending arpeggios are introduced at bar 13 to 16 to shift from the rhythmic pattern to a lyrical passage. The last part of the first section moves to dramatic open chords and modulations on the minor scale that ends with a descending arpeggio and a slowing of the speed to prepare for the next section and create a sense of conclusion of the first part.

The second section is written to emphasise the 10/4 rhythm and the main theme. The accented arpeggios of the left hand represent the *Sea Tabla*. The development of the section builds up tension then leads to a resolution of the tension created by the accented chords and harmony. This resolution is reflected in the modulation from a minor scale to major from bar 58 to 74. This shift to major scale creates a sense of relief after the tense and fast rhythmic chords and fast passages. The transition from bar 75 to 79 prepares for the third section. Slowing the pace of the music and reverting back to the 6/4 rhythm is the aim of this transition.

The third section builds toward the final conclusion and continues to provide relief up to the final bar. The section starts with the main theme which has been modulated from a minor to major scale and altered chords in the main theme for textural variety. This is accompanied by ascending arpeggios leading to the final chord. This section is to be played *falit* leading to the final conclusion. *Falit*, a common approach in intros and endings of songs, is sometimes confused with *taksima*. *Falit* is to play the music without strictly following the tempo but not so loosely that the duration of the notes is totally ambiguous. *Taksima* on the other hand is an improvisation starting with the piece's *maqam* and followed by modulations on the *maqam* and usually in free tempo even when accompanied by an *iqa'a*.

Performers are encouraged to add ornamentations such as trills and turns while maintaining the rhythmic structure especially when in tempo. This doesn't limit the endless possibilities of choices of ornamentations and any other techniques to convey their own identity. A Kuwaiti musician will be more conservative in altering the melody, but will instead freely add trills, mordents, turns and scale passages mostly descending one octave. Examples of embellishments and improvisational phrases for *El boshiya* are given in the score's preface for guidance.

2- *Ala ya ahl elhawa* أألا يا أهل الهوى: composed 2023

Solo piano

This is also based on a traditional song performed in Samri *iqa'a*, this time in a 6/4 time variant. This particular song was chosen due to the fact that it is the oldest Kuwaiti song that included a piano, even though the piano barely plays in the beginning of the song, just in the pattern at Figure 10 below.



Figure 9: *Ala ya ahl elhawa* main melodic theme



Figure 10: Piano part of the original song *Ala ya ahl elhawa*.

My intention for this composition is to create variations with different moods while retaining the original melody similar to a theme-and-variations form. The variations and mood shifts are to help convey the sense of a musical journey that is achieved by a combination of melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, textural and stylistic variations. This journey is dedicated to the song composer and singer Abdulla Fadhala as he was the first Kuwaiti to experiment with adding the piano to a traditional form. He was believed to be one of the first musicians who introduced new techniques, instruments and ideas to traditional musicians and the Kuwaiti community. The piano was one of those new instruments. Therefore, I am continuing his adventure by creating a whole piece based on the theme he composed while introducing unconventional ideas in relation to Kuwaiti music.

My composition starts with a simple ostinato referencing the original piano part in the song which is an imitation of the *samri iqa'a* (Figure 4). In the second bar, the song's original melody is introduced as a middle voice. The melody is then repeated with added notes on the top to enrich the harmony until the beginning of bar 14. Then a slowing transition of tempo follows with a majestic yet sweet interpretation of the main melody accompanied by triplets. Accents highlight the original theme. This leads to a conclusion in bar 20. A slow build-up to the first climax in bar 27 follows with the introduction of the new key of C minor. In this section the octaves represent hints of the melody and slowly calm down at bar 30. From bar 31 until 40 the main theme is played with strumming chords until a sudden shift in key and mood in bar 41 sets the mood for the next section. The *Leggiero* section contrasts with the previous section and the coming section while still maintaining the main melody clearly. This section is concluded in bar 68, and again there is a sudden shift in key, this time back to A flat major. The last section is introduced in bar 70 in the form of sweet and happy ostinatos in the left hand to accompany the main theme in a higher register. In bar 93 sudden contrary passages are introduced to prepare for the final conclusion at bar 98. The rhythmic values of the notes in the last bar represent a traditional Kuwaiti clapping that is common with the *Samri Iqa'a*.

3- *Absheri ya ain* أبشري يا عين: composed 2023

Piano and percussion

The original song *Absheri ya ain* has two sections, one *falit*, meaning freely or ad lib, and a metered section. My goal in this composition is to create a piece that focuses on the approach of the original song while allowing room for improvisation on the melody. The first half of the composition resembles the *falit* playing style of the original song. The second half represents the strict tempo in the left hand in the form of broken chords and single notes while maintaining a strict accent that mimics the *Sea Tabla* part of the original song. The right hand represents the main melody in a lyrical yet lively voice. Also pianistic ornamentations are written to either resemble the singer's subtle mordents or the *Nay* phrases and techniques. That said, some purely pianistic techniques are also incorporated to demonstrate the skills of the performer and introduce a challenge.

The original song on which my composition is based, though composed in the traditional *iqa'a*, has new non-Kuwaiti elements added to it. The string section and Egyptian *nay*, along with an electric keyboard, briefly play arpeggios in the introduction. The song also starts in the style of *falit*. The rest of the song is similar to my other source songs in terms of using *iqa'a* and having one main theme that is repeated by the instruments, singer and chorus respectively.

It is the last song performed in the *Samri iqa'a* that I have selected to use as a source. While this song shares the *Samri iqa'a* with *El boshiya* and *Ala Ya Ahl El Hawa*, this song was composed and recorded after the previous two (the specific date is unknown but is around the mid-60s) and uses the following variant:

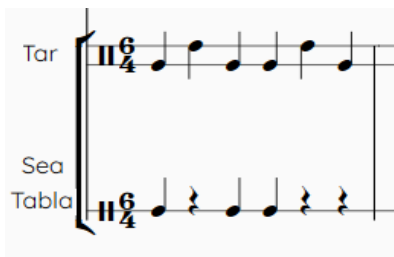


Figure 11: *Absheri ya ain* original *samri iqa'a* variation

The first page up to the first system of the second page are *falit* (loose tempo/ad lib). The original introduction is played as it is in the beginning of my composition. After that the main introduction is repeated but with arpeggios ascending then descending in a flowing motion. The last repeated part of the original intro (bar 3) gradually builds speed and introduces a regular tempo and pulse. A dark arpeggio starts to build along with the speed and volume to conclude with a double forte on a spread diminished chord in bar 7. In bar 8 a slow passage concludes the original introduction and leads to an ascending arpeggio that ends on a long pause. In bar 12 there is a sudden shift from slow-paced long phrases to a playful and fast melody repeated two times and then one more time in a lower register followed by a buildup to a fast-ascending scale representing the climax and the conclusion of the introduction.

In bar 21 the rhythmic pattern *Samri iqa'a* is introduced in its traditional form. The rhythmic pattern is also strictly played by the piano representing the *tar* in the pattern and the *Sea Tabla* in the accents that are introduced in bar 27. In bars 27 and 28 the piano mimics the traditional clapping in a *Samri* setting. This is purely optional to set an example for the audience if the performer decides that they may engage by demonstrating how to clap and when. The song's main theme is introduced in the original

rhythmic pattern is transformed to a straight four beats to reflect the more common rhythms in pop songs. Additionally, the middle section of the song has a solo part for reed instrument, representing a common practice in Kuwaiti music that offers freedom to the performer to demonstrate their musical talent in both technical and emotional aspects. The piano alternates roles as a lead and an accompanying instrument, thus giving way to other instruments to shine and vary in sonic complexity.

The song starts with descending broken-octave arpeggios followed by upward strums in bar 2 and 3, in a subtle resemblance to the rain drops (*Figure 13*).

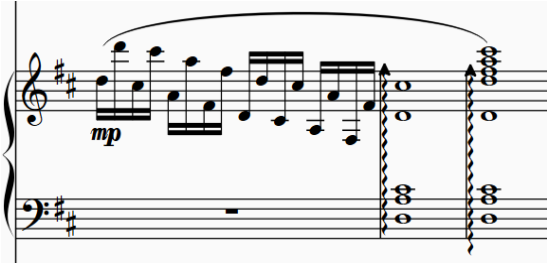


Figure 13: Descending broken-octave arpeggios in the introduction of Hail rain pop

Bars 26-29 repeat bars 1-3 with an extended strum at bar 28. Bars 1-3 and 26-29 act as brackets for what lies within. This is to highlight the short journey of the melody shifting from 6/8 time to 4/4 time and introducing block chords. The original song theme in 6/8 time representing *dazza iqa'a* (more details about *dazza iqa'a* in *Hail rain dazza* composition section) is at bars 5-10 (*Figure 14*).



Figure 14: Bar 5-10 Hail rain original song theme in dazza iqa'a

At bar 18, the time signature changes to 4/4 and four quarter-notes are played to establish the new rhythm in the form of a metronome click. The transformed theme is then presented at bars 19-21 (*Figure 15*) and then repeated at bars 22-24.



Figure 15 Bar 19-21 Hail rain transformed melody in 4/4 time

The new theme has a swing feeling to it, representing syncopations affiliated to Kuwaiti traditional practices, especially in *Iqa'at* in compound time. This swing can be counted in semiquavers as: 4/3/5/4 per bar. This swing can be felt in the instruments' parts except for the drum kit, which has a straight 4/4 beat divided in semiquavers as 4/4/4/4. Bar 29 is the start of the 2nd part of the song. It starts with a drumbeat setting up the straight 4/4 beat.

At the beginning of the score, directions are given to encourage the audience to clap with the chorus section on the beat. This is optional but highly recommended to achieve the organic feeling of Kuwaiti children singing and joining each other by either singing or clapping. Also in the chorus section at bar 39-45, there is a written instruction for the singers to clap on the beat (*Figure 16*).

Figure 16: Bar 37-39 Optional instruction for singers to clap

Bar 64-86 introduces syllabic singing, to add colour and to accompany the saxophone solo. The rhythmic values of the phrase emphasise the swing feeling by singing on the 4th semiquaver of the 2nd beat (*Figure 17*). At bar 97 the song transposes into the key of F major to add complexity and introduce a sense of direction to the many repetitions in the singing motif. This is one of my approaches to tackling the challenge of working with the very short and repetitive themes I face with Kuwaiti traditional music. Although this technique is not common in Kuwaiti music it can enrich this cross-cultural exchange of performing techniques and compositional decisions.

Figure 17: Bar 63 syllabic singing

My composition has many examples of Kuwaiti performance practices and qualities. Starting from bar 1, the broken octaves used to resemble the rain drops also resemble a common embellishment technique performed by oudists. The technique is performed by alternating the strings plucked from lower strings to higher strings and is usually performed to demonstrate virtuosic skills. Another element is the syncopation mentioned earlier. Fast passages ascending and descending are common in Kuwaiti practice as embellishments.

Another important element is role exchange and developing an antiphony in the form of a call and response, which can be noticed from bar 31-37 between the piano and the saxophone (Figure 18).

The figure displays three systems of musical notation for Tenor Saxophone (Ten. Sax.) and Piano (Pno.). Each system consists of two staves. The first system (bars 31-33) shows the Tenor Saxophone playing a melodic line with a *mp* dynamic, while the Piano provides accompaniment. The second system (bars 34-36) features a more complex interaction with dynamics ranging from *p* to *mf*. The third system (bars 37-39) includes *cresc.* markings for both instruments, indicating a build-up in intensity.

Figure 18: Bar 31-37 Antiphony between the piano and tenor saxophone

There is a piano solo (bar 47) and a saxophone solo (bar 63). Both solos have common embellishments used in Kuwaiti traditional practices such as fast turns and fast ascending phrases. Also, there is an emphasis on the swing and is dominant throughout the solos. This swing represents the common Kuwaiti practice of swinging repetitive melodies. Also, the saxophone solos have the Arabic element of *taksima*. This can be identified by the long expressive breathy notes as suggested in the score and the decay of the notes (decrescendo to silence) (Figure 19).

This is a common technique in *taksima* where the performer starts with long notes to establish their presence to the audience. Other techniques that are common in Kuwaiti music in *taksima* are the fast turns in bar 69 (Figure 19).

The figure shows a tenor saxophone solo across three systems of notation (bars 62, 65, and 68). The first system (bar 62) is labeled 'Sax Solo' and 'Expressive and breathy notes', featuring a triplet of eighth notes followed by a long note with a *ppp* dynamic, then a *ff* dynamic, and finally a *mf* dynamic. The second system (bar 65) shows a long note with a *p* dynamic followed by a *f* dynamic. The third system (bar 68) includes a *mp* dynamic and a *pp* dynamic with a '7' marking, indicating a fast turn or flourish.

Figure 19: Bar 62-70 tenor saxophone solo

The rest of the group play the role of layering the background (*farsh* فرش) during the solo, *farsh* being an Arabic term indicating that one or more instruments are playing repetitive phrases or rhythmic layers to support the lead voice by adding depth and texture without overpowering the lead.

The use of the piano in different roles throughout the song highlights the possibility for the piano to act as a bridge, combining different playing techniques. It is able to represent important elements from both Kuwaiti music and non-Kuwaiti music smoothly, for example exchanging roles of lead and accompaniment, call and response, musical conversation with the saxophone and playing complex rhythmic phrases to intensify the swing feeling.

Performance practice feedback

I had the opportunity to introduce and rehearse this composition with a group of undergraduate students. The pianist expressed difficulty in coordinating the left hand and the right hand as this swing feeling was new to them. On the other hand, the bassist perfectly executed the part and maintained a clear swing feeling throughout the piece. The saxophonist had real difficulty playing the whole piece due to the detailed embellishments in the part and the solo part. I revised the notation to make it easier to read but with little success. I have then shared the score with postgraduate students to compare the initial impression and the feedback after going through the composition. They found the piece challenging and interesting to study and perform. They also displayed interest in the ideas they hadn't experienced before and the rationale behind them, especially the swing feeling, the solo parts and the singing in Arabic with clapping, for both the audience and the singers. I have concluded that the difficulty with the undergraduate students was due to their limited musical skills. After all they were young and recently started their journey in the world of music performance. Performing *Absheri ya ain* and *Ala ya ahl elhawa* would be more achievable.

B- *Hail Rain tranquillity*: composed 2024

Instruments: piano, flute and rain soundtrack

The second piece focuses on the philosophical depth, tranquillity and calmness of the rain as perceived by many in Kuwait. The rain is considered the bringer of good and prosperity in Kuwaiti culture. This composition uses a soundtrack of rain to be played on speakers. The aim is to recreate the experience of listening to the rain and imagine the dry and hot desert being nourished and revived by the water. A note on the score encourages the performers and the audience to listen and imagine the picture of the rain over a dry desert to enhance the experience and relive the tranquil sensation of the rain in the desert. The rain soundtrack is the focus of the music and the piano and the flute are in the background. The piano part is based on the song theme. The melody keeps evolving in a subtle manner representing the flow of ideas passing amongst the rain observers.

The piano and the flute represent two elements of the rain. The piano circles the original song theme in an abstract idea. The melody goes through subtle modulations and acts like fragments of random raindrops but shares the theme (*Figure 20*). The chord progression and tonal shifts are led by the melody. Block chord pulsation (*Figure 20*) quietly represents passing time while the melody's sudden tonal shifts reflect the different ideas that occur in a person's mind when admiring rain.

Figure 20: Bar 3-13 subtle modulations and block chords rhythm in Hail rain tranquility

At bar 22, the flute is introduced in the composition (Figure 21). The flute represents soothing, cool breezes and the deep breaths of the spectator.

Figure 21: Bar 21-25 beginning of the flute part.

At bar 47 the flute takes the lead and the piano dies away. The flute plays music reminiscent of the traditional song melody in long notes with silence in between (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Bar 44-51 flute solo

At bar 71, the flute part comes to an end and the piano is reintroduced softly and in free tempo to represent distant memories. At bar 76 a regular tempo resumes, and the melody faintly represents the original theme (figure 23).

Figure 23: Bar 67-80 piano reintroduced

From bar 90 to the end of the composition, the piano slows down gradually (*ritardando*) and is followed by 30 seconds of the rain sound.

Personal reflection on the composition

I have been listening to this composition for quite some time now and noticed that whenever I do, I remember the rain in Kuwait even though I live in the UK and it rains regularly. I believe encouraging the audience to close their eyes, imagine the cool rain in the desert and live the experience in their mind is an essential idea to successfully convey the philosophical aspect of the rain in Kuwait.

C- **Hail rain dazza**: composed 2025

Instruments: Piano, drum kit, bongos, wood block and group of clappers.

This is the third composition based on the *Hail rain* children song. In this piece, my intentions are to emphasise the rhythmic structure (*dazza iqā'a*) from the original song in the first and last section of my composition, and also to create variations of the original main theme in the 5 sections of the composition. These sections reflect different moods induced by the rain.

An important Kuwaiti element used in this composition is the clapping. It is a common audience participation practice in Kuwait. However, in this version the clappers are to be part of the performing group due to the fact that the audience may not be familiar with the clapping timing and cues.

First section [A]

This section shows the common Kuwaiti trait of polyrhythm which creates syncopation. It is represented in the polyrhythmic structure of the *dazza iqā'a* (Figure 24). In a traditional Kuwaiti performance of *dazza*, the main tar gives the feeling of 3/4 time signature while the sea drum represents the strong beat of a 6/8. The second tar plays on the weak beats creating an echoing effect. The finger cymbals are

usually alternating between dotted quarters and eighth notes as a variation to the *iqa'a*.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for the Dazza Iqa'a pattern. The top staff is labeled 'Main tar' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a melodic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The middle staff is labeled '2nd tar' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp, and a melodic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The bottom staff is labeled 'sea drum & finger cymbals' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp, and a rhythmic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note.

Figure 24: Dazza Iqa'a pattern transcribed by Mohammad Dashti

Clapping is also part of this section. It is used in a way that reflects traditional Kuwaiti *Iqa'at* clapping.

The composition starts with the wooden block playing dotted quarter notes and followed by the piano playing quarters. From bar 5, the polyrhythm can be noticed (Figure 25).

The image shows musical notation for the piano and wood block introduction. The top part is labeled 'Piano' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a melodic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The bottom part is labeled 'Wood Block' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp, and a rhythmic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. A tempo marking '♩ = 100' is present. A box labeled 'A' is placed over the first bar of the wood block part. The word 'Energetic' is written above the piano part.

Figure 25: Bar 1-10 piano and wood block introduction

At bar 13, The hihat is introduced to further emphasise the 6/8 rhythm in contrast to the piano part that mimics the first tar from the original *dazza iqa'a* (Figure 26).

The image shows musical notation for the hihat emphasis 6/8 rhythm. The top part is labeled 'piano' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a melodic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The bottom part is labeled 'Drum kit' and contains a 6/8 time signature, a key signature of one sharp, and a rhythmic line starting with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note. The bars are numbered 11 through 18. The hihat is introduced in bar 13, marked with a '+' sign above the notes.

Figure 26: Bar 11-18 hihat emphasise 6/8 rhythm

Clapping is introduced at bar 22 (Figure 27). It represents a call and response pattern to the piano part.

Figure 27 shows a musical score for piano and clappers. The piano part is in 6/8 time, marked 'piano' and 'f'. The clappers part shows a rhythmic pattern of claps and rests. The piano part consists of a series of chords and single notes, while the clappers part consists of a series of claps and rests. The piano part is in 6/8 time, and the clappers part is in 6/8 time.

Figure 27: Bar 21-27 clapping in response to the piano

The full *dazza iqa'a* is then introduced and recreated between the drumkit, bongos and wood block in bar 37 (Figure 28).

Figure 28 shows a musical score for piano, drum kit, bongos, and wood block. The piano part is in 6/8 time, marked 'piano'. The drum kit, bongos, and wood block parts show a complex polyrhythmic pattern. The piano part consists of a series of chords and single notes, while the drum kit, bongos, and wood block parts consist of a series of rhythmic patterns. The piano part is in 6/8 time, and the drum kit, bongos, and wood block parts are in 6/8 time.

Figure 28: Bar 37-43 *dazza iqa'a* full pattern recreated between drumkit, bongos and wood block

In bar 45-52, the polyrhythm structure is clearly demonstrated between the piano, percussion and clappers. Variations to the rhythmic structure are demonstrated between the piano and the clappers while the percussion maintains *dazza iqa'a*. This approach of having clappers alternate claps and the instruments' syncopating notes opposing the *iqa'a's* pattern is also a common practice in Kuwaiti performances (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Bar 45-50 syncopating effect between the piano and the clappers

From bar 53-95, The piano changes role from representing the *dazza iqa'a* to a melodic phrasing (Figure 30) as an introduction to the original main theme in bar 96. However, hints of the main tar remain in the left hand as in bars 53-54, 57-58.

Figure 30: Bar 53-59 piano transformation from *Iqa'a* imitation to melodic phrasing

The antiphony between the piano and clappers is reintroduced in bar 68, the clapping patterns repeating the piano right hand patterns rhythmically. The clappers then clap along with the piano transitional passage to indicate the conclusion of this part and beginning of a new part. This feature of joining the clappers with the lead instrument is another common practice in Kuwaiti music, which usually indicates a transition to a new section or the end of the piece (Figure 31).

The image shows a musical score for piano and clappers, divided into three systems. The first system (bars 67-82) shows the piano part with a treble and bass clef, and the clappers part with a single staff and a 6/8 time signature. The second system (bars 83-88) continues the piano and clappers parts. The third system (bars 89-95) features the piano part with a treble and bass clef, and the clappers part with a single staff. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mp* and the instruction "Pedal at will". The clappers part is marked "Clappers". The tempo/mood is "Sweet and lively".

Figure 31: Bar 67-95 call and answer antiphony between the piano and clappers

The next part of the first section [A] of the composition focuses on the original theme and variations. Bars 96-103 introduce the traditional original theme of the *Hail rain* song. This familiarises the audience with it and it is a reference point for the pianist for the modulations that occur next. It also gives an insight into my modulating methods and decisions. My intention is it helps the performer to reincorporate some of these methods into different parts of the composition (Figure 32). Variation 1 modulates the main melody with subtle embellishments while introducing ascending arpeggios that give the feeling of syncopation by highlighting the 5th and 8th eighth-notes of each bar (Bar 104-110). Variation 2 on the other hand introduces faster passages and common Kuwaiti performance embellishments (e.g. at bar 117). It also introduces another syncopating technique used in Kuwaiti music by silencing the 1st and 4th eighth-notes in the bar (e.g. at bar 113).

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of four systems of music. The first system, starting at bar 93, is labeled 'Main theme' and '96 Sweet and lively'. It features a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The bass clef accompaniment is marked 'mp' and includes the instruction 'Pedal at will'. The second system, starting at bar 100, is labeled 'Var 1' and 'mp'. The third system, starting at bar 107, is labeled 'Var 2' and 'Lively', and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth system, starting at bar 114, continues the 'Lively' variation with two more triplet markings. The word 'piano' is written vertically on the left side of each system.

Figure 32: Bar 93-119 Hail rain original theme and 2 variations

Bar 120-135 is a transformation for the piano away from focusing on the main theme to focusing on the *dazza iqa'a*. This part brings forward the clapping part and the piano's rhythmic representation of the *lqa'a* to emphasise the polyrhythmic nature of *dazza iqa'a*.

Variation 3 starts from Bar 136. In this variation, I have modulated the main theme in similar ways to those used by Kuwaiti performers (e.g. adding fast triplets and silencing the 1st eighth note of the bar). and also introduced variations to the accompaniment in the form of bass, third and fourth intervals then arpeggiated chords (Figure 33).

Joyful and lively
Var 3

piano

piano

piano

piano

Figure 33: Bar 133-156 variation 3

Following the previous idea of fusing the piano capabilities with Kuwaiti traditional approaches to a melody, bars 164-168 combine the emphasis of *dazza lqa'a* rhythmic variations with the harmonic structure (Figure 34). A *ritardando* occurs at bars 171-177 to indicate the end of the first section [A] of the composition and introduce the second expressive cadenza-like section.

piano

piano

Figure 34: Bar 164-169 build up to the last part of first section

Second section [B]

In this section, the percussion and clappers rest, giving space for the piano to shine and the pianist to interpret freely and express themselves. The first part of the second section is free-rhythm. The reason is to represent the *Hail rain* traditional theme from a different perspective and remove the rhythmic character developed in the previous section, giving different colours to the main theme.

The opening of the second section consists of ascending and then descending arpeggios with notes to the performer to play in a flowing motion like sea waves, as a hint of the Kuwaiti coastal origins of the *Hail rain* theme (Figure 35).

The image shows a musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'piano' and starts at bar 178. It features an ascending arpeggiated line in the right hand and a descending arpeggiated line in the left hand. The dynamic is marked 'p'. Above the staff, there is a box containing the letter 'B', followed by the text 'Free time' and 'Flow movement like the sea waves.' A dashed line with a '5' at the end spans across the top of both staves. The bottom staff is also labeled 'piano' and starts at bar 179. It continues the arpeggiated motion from the previous bar. A dashed line with a '5' at the end is positioned above the staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Figure 35: Bar 178-179 the opening of the second section

Rhythmic augmentation and thematic transformation of the traditional main theme starts from bar 184 (Figure 36). This creative and free-form approach is taken to explore non-traditional Kuwaiti methods of transforming a traditional theme and to create an opportunity for the performer to express their musical ideas without any boundaries. In traditional Kuwaiti practices, free improvisation tends to be ruled by the boundaries of *maqam* performance practices.

Third section [C]

In this section, a combination of key modulation, main theme augmentation and new rhythmic ideas are presented. Modulating to the B minor key and using fast ostinatos contrasts with section [B], which in character is slow, expressive and has the flow of sea waves. This section on the other hand brings out the tension created by heavy rain (*Figure 38*).

The musical score for Figure 38 is presented in two systems. The first system, starting at bar 200, is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 50 and a section marker 'C'. It features a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/4 time signature. The right hand (RH) plays a slow, expressive theme with a melodic line and a bass line, marked with dynamics *mf* and *pp*. The left hand (LH) plays a fast, rhythmic ostinato pattern, marked with *mf* and *pp*. The second system, starting at bar 203, is marked with a section marker 'D' and features a key signature of two sharps (D major). The RH continues the expressive theme, marked with *mp* and *pp*, while the LH continues the fast, rhythmic ostinato pattern, marked with *pp*.

Figure 38: Bar 200-205 Theme augmentation and key modulation to B minor.

Bar 215 is the beginning of a transition from the stormy ostinatos into a calm conclusion in the form of ritardando and key modulation to D major followed by a time signature change (12/4) and chords accompanied by arpeggios up to bar 217.

Fourth section [D]

This section represents the playfulness of the children and reinvents the theme in 4/4 time, with a staccato piano left hand using stride chord technique (*Figure 39*).

The image displays a piano score for bars 216-233, divided into two sections: [D] and [E].

- Section [D] (bars 216-223):**
 - Tempo: $\text{♩} = 40$, marked "Calm and expressive".
 - Dynamic: *mf* (mezzo-forte).
 - Character: "Calm and expressive".
 - Tempo change: $\text{♩} = 50$, marked "Light and playful" and "accel." (accelerando).
 - Tempo change: $\text{♩} = 70$.
 - Tempo change: $\text{♩} = 60$, marked "Left hand louder".
- Section [E] (bars 224-233):**
 - Tempo: $\text{♩} = 110$.
 - Character: "Light and playful".

The score is written for piano in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It features various musical notations including slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Figure 39: bar 216-233 section [D] and opening of section [E]

The fourth section [D] brings back the spirit of the children's song and reminds the performer and the audience of the context and character of the traditional song of happy children singing with joy because of the rain. The stride technique adds the feeling of movement to the section and introduces varied pianistic techniques to the composition.

Bar 226 is a transition from 4/4 to the upcoming 6/8 in bar 229 which is the conclusion of section [D] and the transition to section [E] (Figure 39).

Fifth section [E]

This section is partly a repetition of the first section [A] but the difference is in the *dazza iqa'a* development in the beginning of the section and in the ending of the composition. Bar 229-266 are a rendition of the *dazza iqa'a* with the percussion and the clappers and a transition to the repeated part of section [A]. Bars 267-301 repeat part of section [A] followed by a common Kuwaiti cadence from bar 302-304 (Figure 40).



Figure 40: Bar 301-304 Kuwaiti traditional cadence

Performance practice feedback

It is worth mentioning that when two pianists reviewed and performed the piece, the initial feedback was that the first two sections, [A] and [B], were confusing in terms of the notation. The pianists shared concern that the first section sounds more like 3/4 rather than 6/8 and the second section, notated in 12/4 time, was too hard to follow despite the phrases being clear. The reason for the first issue was that I had not shared the full score with the pianists but the piano part only, leaving out an essential structure of the composition which is the *dazza iqa'a* that demonstrates the 6/8 clearly while showing the complexity of the polyrhythmic character of the composition. After receiving the full score, the pianists acknowledged that the confusion has been cleared and that the notation made more sense.

The second part has been rewritten as a free form to reflect my idea clearly. The pianists also agreed that the revised version is more professional and more favourable in terms of fewer directions and more freedom for them to approach the section. An interesting piece of feedback from one of the pianists was that there was “too much micro-managing”; therefore, some written directions have been removed and instead the decision passed to the performer.

5- *Habeebi sham'at aljillas* حبيبي شمعة الجلاس: composed 2024

Instruments: Violin, piano, drum kit and wood block

This composition maintains the original structure of the song in terms of melody, *iqa'a* and section repetitions. However, intricate variations and adjustments are made to the whole song in terms of instrumentation, embellishments and harmonisation. This song is the closest to the arranging end on the spectrum between composing and arranging.

In this piece, I'm investigating the following:

- altering the microtonal *maqam* to be playable in the standard piano tuning.
- analysing and defining the microtiming when performing *qaderi bahri iqa'a*.
- writing different ornamentations and an improvisation for the violin and the percussion as an example of a Kuwaiti musician's performing decisions.

- the piano as an accompanying instrument in a Kuwaiti traditional song.

The original song is about love, beauty and the innocence of a young lover. The lyrics describe a young woman's beauty and describe her as "the candle in the audience" which is the title of the song.

The intention is to explore the approach of converting a microtone to a non-microtone and its impact on the song, and to make it accessible to a broader range of performers.

I have analysed the original song and have found that the microtones used by the band represent *Rast maqam*. Below is an illustration of this *maqam* depicting the *Jins* (tetrachords) and the intervals (Figure 41).

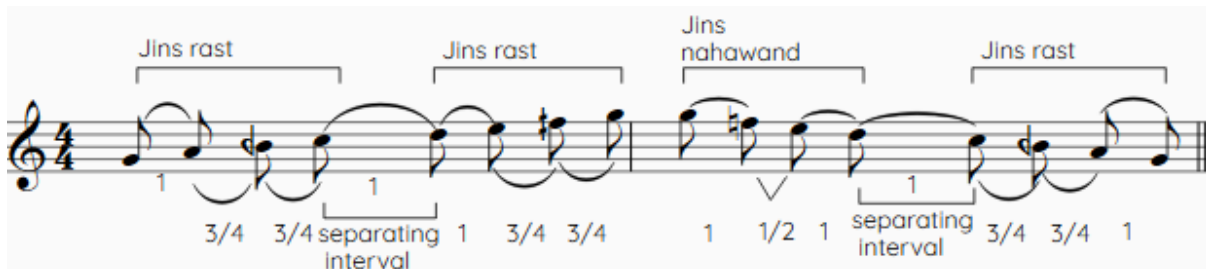


Figure 41: *Rast maqam* on G with intervals values shown.

The band and the chorus use these intervals constantly. On the other hand, the singer alternates between *Rast* and *Ajam maqam* (G major equivalent). This practice has been observed during my analysis of many Kuwaiti songs. I have informally discussed this with Kuwaiti musicians in Kuwait, who all confirm that this is a unique interpretation of different *maqams* in Kuwait. To be more precise, the singer is considered as not alternating between two *maqams* but singing on one *maqam*. In this song he is singing on *Rast* and the subtle adjustment of the microtones to semitones is an embellishment rather than a *maqam* change.

Another observation is that in *Rast maqam* music, the melody starts with the tonic note and the fifth is considered the note to resolve at. From the fifth note they tend to ascend to the tonic note one octave higher, then descend with an altered seventh note as shown on figure 41.

This is not the case with this traditional song, neither in the way *rast maqam* is interpreted nor modulated. The original song sounds closer to *Ajam oshairan maqam* in terms of interpretation rather than intervals (equivalent to G major, the same as *Ajam*). The difference between *ajam maqam* and *ajam oshairan maqam* is the emphasis on the third and sixth notes in *ajam oshairan maqam* rather than the fifth note in *ajam maqam*. Therefore, I have decided to alter the whole song to G major while maintaining the character of *Ajam oshairan*. The result is a new composition that has elements from both a Western diatonic scale and a microtonal *maqam*. In the piano part, the resemblance of G major is more dominant whereas in the violin part, the embellishments and the emphasis on root, third and sixth note suggest the piece is of Arabic origin.

The *qaderi bahri iqa'a* is the one used in this song. This *iqa'a* is mostly written in 12/8 and sometimes 6/4. The feel and beat of the *iqa'a* fit into the compound-time 12/8 when analysed. However, like many other Kuwaiti *iqa'at*, it is not divided equally. Figure 42 below is an illustration of how it is performed, noting that this is not a fixed duration, it is more of a feeling that changes slightly during the performance in this song and in many other Kuwaiti songs.

This method of delaying the second and third beats is common in traditional practices and considered unique to Kuwait in the Arabic region. It is a commonly-made adaptation when Kuwaiti artists decide to perform live or to record music abroad, they tend to hire local Kuwaiti percussionists to either record or perform the *iqā'at*. I have discussed this issue frequently with Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti musicians who are familiar with this aspect. I have always been told that it is impossible to achieve the Kuwaiti feeling of the *iqā'a* unless the percussionist is Kuwaiti. However, I believe otherwise. By exposing the performer to Kuwaiti *iqā'at* and by explaining these subtle differences using audio, video and a detailed score as above, the non-Kuwaiti musician should grasp this aspect and be able to perform it after practice. This is my own observation while attempting to explain the Kuwaiti interpretation of this *iqā'a* to Western students who successfully captured the style of this practice.

In an attempt to assist performers who are deciding to perform this piece, I have included Figure 42 in the beginning of the score and explained it in words in order to highlight this aspect.

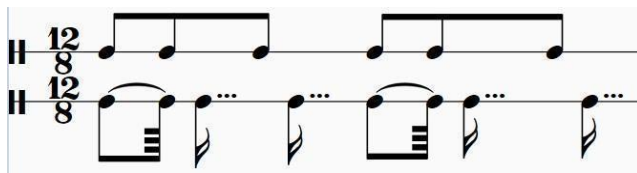


Figure 42: Qaderi bahri iqā'a grouping explained. the three quavers are not divided equally rhythmically in the 12/8 time signature. The first quaver is slightly longer than the 2nd and 3rd quavers.

When composing this piece, I started by playing the song theme and repeating it constantly while altering each repetition to represent an ornamentation while adhering to the compositional decisions of altering the *maqam* and maintaining *qaderi bahri iqā'a* rhythmic values. I have also accompanied a Kuwaiti violinist whilst he was performing the singing melody. Going over and over and altering the interpretation each time led me to the decision to write out as many musical phrases and embellishments in the score as possible, however complicated they may be. Similarly to the Kuwaiti way of performing Kuwaiti *iqā'at*, the violinist stated that it is impossible for a non-Kuwaiti musician to interpret the song the way a Kuwaiti would. Therefore, similar to the *iqā'a* approach, I have written various interpretations of the song's melody and percussion part. Below are excerpts from the composition displaying the difference between the original melody and the proposed rephrasing (Figures 43-49).

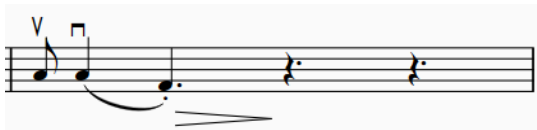


Figure 43: Original song phrase 1

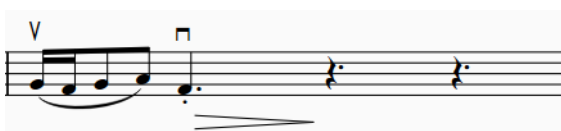


Figure 44: Rephrasing 1



Figure 45: Original song phrase 2



Figure 46: Rephrasing 2



Figure 47: Rephrasing 3



Figure 48: Original song phrase 3



Figure 49: Rephrasing 4

These use trills, mordents and glissandos to vary the colours and the emotions. They also create more lyrical melodies and create sweet moments that represent the original song in terms of the meaning of the lyrics. Figures 44, 46, 47 and 49 clearly represent choices of embellishments and modulations to the original melody. Kuwaitis in general refer to the lead instrument as the singing instrument. This is because lead instrument performers demonstrate musicianship in the form of variations and lyrical rephrasing, which is a Kuwaiti and Arabic trait in general. My intention is to capture this concept. Also adding syncopations along with variations is a typical Kuwaiti nuance.

At the end of this composition, I have written an example of a free improvisation for the violin. It was a challenge to try to capture as much of the style as possible without making the phrases too complicated. However, three Kuwaiti violinists performed the improvisation part and confirmed that it successfully captures the style of Kuwaiti violinists' improvisational decisions. I have included this improvisation example as a guideline rather than a part of the piece. However, if the performer is not comfortable enough to come up with their own improvisation, they can perform the written-out part.

The percussion part has several detailed intricate phrases that represent Kuwaiti ways of altering the *iqā'a* and syncopating it. Figures 50-52 below are examples from the composed piece and the traditional *qaderi bahri iqā'a*.

Figure 50: Qaderi bahri iqa'a

Figure 51: Qaderi Bahri iqa'a variation 1

Figure 52: Qaderi Bahri iqa'a variation 2

As mentioned before, syncopations and variations to the main *iqa'a* are expected in most traditional Kuwaiti music and it became a well-known Kuwaiti trait in the Arabian Gulf region. Figure 51 represents a common embellishment in the hi hat part (top x note). The first bar has two rests in the third beat to create the sense of delay in the *iqa'a*. In the second bar, the third beat is the same as the first beat of that bar, unlike in bar 68. This specific method of resting some of the notes is a common way to establish a sense of movement in the *iqa'a* and to create a rhythmical phrases that is always concluded with a longer note.

Figure 52 captures a common Kuwaiti trait. Syncopation is considered essential in Kuwaiti music and many established performers demonstrate their syncopation skills whether they perform on any instrument, percussion, clapping or even singing. The syncopated drum kick in figure 52 clearly gives a good example of how Kuwaiti musicians syncopate this *iqa'a*.

The original song is considered monophonic. Therefore, there is not an existing harmonic structure for me to use. Instead, I have harmonised the whole song by following the melody of the song and harmonising it using simple chords and arpeggios combined with the octave alternation technique mimicking the oud introduction (Figure 53, 54). There are instances where the piano takes the lead, representing the band, or engages in antiphony with the violin representing the chorus or the band (Figure 55).

Figure 53: Oud opening from the original song



Figure 54: Piano part resembling rhythmic values of oud's octave alternation part from original song

Figure 55: Conversation between the violin and the piano

Performance practice feedback

The newly composed piece received good feedback from both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti musicians. However, initially the early versions of the work were considered unclear in terms of the violin part, the percussion variations and the general performance of *qaderi bahri iqa'a*. I have consulted three Kuwaiti violinists regarding this issue and their recommendations were to write the bowing and add every intended embellishment rather than relying on the knowledge and experience of the performer. Thus, bowing marks and many expression marks have been added.

The percussion part was revised after feedback from a Western percussionist. Their recommendations were regarding separating the percussion part into two staves, one for the drumkit and another for the wood block, and also to rewrite the rhythmic values to be clearer to a non-Kuwaiti musician. Another suggestion was regarding the specific Kuwaiti way of interpreting *qaderi bahri iqa'a*. I have created a detailed notation of the rhythmic values that represents the way Kuwaitis will perform this *iqa'a*.

The revised version included the suggested alterations and when revised by the musicians, they confirmed the clarity and the success of conveying the ideas.

6- [K]ountry shores: composed 2025

Solo piano

The final composition of the portfolio is created in contrast to all the previous compositions. Instead of extracting Kuwaiti elements from a traditional Kuwaiti song, I gradually add Kuwaiti elements to an English/Irish tune. The English folk tune is the "Country Gardens" Morris dance tune and the Irish folk tune is "Molly On the Shore," a Cork reel. Both tunes are the building blocks of this piece. The reason for creating a piece based on non-Kuwaiti music is to view Kuwaiti musical elements from a different perspective e.g. how Kuwaiti elements alters the tune or how to embed these elements in non-Kuwaiti music. Each element added should be identifiable, given the fact that the original tunes this composition is based on are well known, thus making the Kuwaiti elements more noticeable. The elements are added in stages with markings in the score showing the element introduced. This should help the listener track the changes in the tunes gradually.

The beginning of the composition is the original tune of “Country Gardens.” This serves as a reference for what has been added/modulated in the subsequent parts of the music. The first element added is *dazza iqa’a* which has been introduced in the *Hail rain dazza* composition (Figure 57). The *dazza iqa’a* time signature is 6/8; therefore, the first step to introduce the *dazza iqa’a* is to change the original “Country Garden”’s time signature from 4/4 to 6/8. The second step is to introduce the *iqa’a* pattern into the left hand (Figure 56).



Figure 56: Dazza Iqa'a imitation

Figure 57: Dazza iqa'a

The next step is to adjust the “Country Gardens” tune to fit the new 6/8 time signature which immediately introduces the syncopation feeling of Kuwaiti traditional practices. Kuwaiti musicians tend to do this naturally when combining songs from different *iqa’a*. We think of the *iqa’a* as a frame and the melody as the picture to fit in the frame. The melody is the variable element in this case. Therefore, note duration has been adjusted to fit into the *iqa’a*. Bar 53 is the beginning of the rephrased tune (Figure 58).

Figure 58: Country Garden's rephrased melody

Bar 76 is a transition into the next part (bar 77-100) which introduces different left hand accompaniment examples based on the *dazza iqa’a*. Harmonic development is also introduced in the left hand to emphasise the music movement and to create different colours and varied sections (Figures

59,60).

75 Lively and joyful

pp *mp*

Figure 59: Variations in the accompaniment 1

93 *mf*

Figure 60: Variations in the accompaniment 2

The next section reverts to rhythmic accompaniment and shifts the focus onto modulating the tune (Figure 61). These modulations are introduced in steps. The first step is to introduce Kuwaiti performing techniques and embellishments; the second step is to think of the tune's major scale as a *maqam* and modulate it.

101 modulation *mp*

Figure 61: First modulation of the rephrased tune.

In the second modulation section, traditional Kuwaiti performance practices are introduced. *Sankaba* (syncopation) means to rephrase the melody to start on the off-beat and syncopate it with the rhythm or in this case, the accompaniment. *Emsabbig* is a form of anticipation achieved by bringing the melody into the preceding bar followed by *sankaba* usually (Figure 62).

109 Sankaba Emsabbig *mp*

Figure 62: Sankaba and emsabbig Kuwaiti performing techniques

Below is a comparison of *emsabbig* and non-*emsabbig* to demonstrate the difference (Figure 63).

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system is labeled '118 Emsabbig' and features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 7/8 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The second system is labeled 'non Emsabbig' and features a bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes.

Figure 63: Emsabbig and non emsabbig example

The third part of the modulation section is *maqam* modulation (bar 133-164). It is a practice common in Kuwait and neighbouring countries which is a transition from one *maqam* to another wholly or partially. However, when combined with Kuwaiti *iqā'a* and other Kuwaiti elements like embellishments and *sankaba*, it is considered a Kuwaiti performance style. A *maqam* consists of two or three *jins* (plural *ajnas*, tetrachords), *eqd* (pentachord) or *nisba* (trichord). One *jins*, *eqd* and *nisba* can be part of more than one *maqam*. To make it simple for performers not familiar with *maqam* structure, *Ajnas* names are mentioned in the score when the modulation takes place as a reference and to encourage exploring the melodic shapes of *maqams* and their different characteristic nature (Figure 64).

The image shows a musical score for four systems, each representing a different maqam modulation. The first system (bars 133-137) is labeled 'Hijaz jins on C' and features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The second system (bars 138-141) is labeled 'Nahawand jins on F', 'Kurd jins on C', and 'Nahawand jins on F'. It features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The third system (bars 142-146) is labeled 'Kurd jins on C', 'Saba zamzam jins on A', and 'Nahawand jins on C'. It features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The fourth system (bars 147-150) is labeled 'Ajam jins on F', 'Kurd jins on C', and 'Nahawand jins on F'. It features a treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes.

Figure 64: Maqam modulations

Below are the *Ajnas* and *Eqd* used in the *maqam* modulation section of the composition (Figure 65).

Figure 65 displays musical notation for various scales used in a maqam modulation section. The notation is presented in two staves. The first staff contains five scales: Hijaz jins on C, Nahawand jins on F, Nahawand jins on C, Kurd jins on C, and Saba zamzam jins on A. The second staff contains three scales: Ajam jins on F, Ajam jins on C, and Nawa athar eqd on F. The scales are written in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature, except for the Nawa athar eqd scale which is in 5/4 time.

Figure 65: *Ajnas* and *eqd* used in the *maqam* modulation section of the composition

Bar 165-172 is a transition to the next part of the composition which is based on the Irish tune “Molly on the Shore.” The transition leads to a change in the *iqā’a* to *sawt khayyali iqā’a* and a change in the time signature to 12/8 (Figure 66). *Mirwas* is the name of the percussion used.

Figure 66 shows the *Mirwas* rhythm in 12/8 time. The notation is in treble clef and includes a double bar line at the beginning. The rhythm is represented by a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, with the words “Dom” and “Tak” written above the notes to indicate the percussion pattern.

Figure 66: *Sawt khayyali iqā’a*

The Molly on the Shore section opening starts with *sawt khayyali iqā’a* imitation for 4 bars in the left hand with a subtle variation in the third and fourth bars (bar172-175) (Figure 67).

Figure 67 shows the *Sawt khayyali iqā’a* imitation in 12/8 time. The notation is in treble clef and includes a double bar line at the beginning. The tempo is marked “Sweetly” and the dynamics are marked “mp”. The left hand plays a rhythmic cycle of eighth notes and quarter notes, with the words “Sawt khayyali rhythmic cycle” and “Left hand rhythmic short notes” written below the notes.

Figure 67: *Sawt khayyali iqā’a* imitation

At bar 176, the modulated tune of “Molly on the Shore” begins, then like the previous melody, it is rephrased and modulated with embellishments to fit in the *sawt khayyali iqā’a* (Figure 68). The accelerando from bar 184 to 185 is a common Kuwaiti practice to add energy to a performance.

176

179

182

185 $\text{♩} = 100$

188

191

194

197

Energetic
accel.

mf

mp

mf

mp

mf

mp

mf

mp

Figure 68: Rephrased and modulated Molly on the Shore tune

A chord progression is introduced in bar 200 that still represents the *sawt khayyali iqa'a* but also introduces another layer of complexity in the music to keep the sensation of movement. The new accompanying chord progression is not part of Kuwaiti traditional practice, but I believe it is essential to demonstrate the capabilities of the piano and combine non-Kuwaiti practices to develop the music instead of adhering to the lack of harmony in traditional Kuwaiti music (Figure 69).

Figure 69 shows a piano accompaniment for measures 200 to 209. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 110$. The music is in a minor key. Measure 200 is marked *f* and 'Animated and joyful'. Measure 203 has a triplet. Measure 206 is marked *mp* and 'Sweetly and lively'. Measure 207 is marked *f* and 'Energetic and sharp'. The bass line consists of eighth notes, often with a triplet feel.

Figure 69: Added layer of complexity in the harmony

From bar 222 until the end of the composition is a long accelerando to build up energy. This practice is common in Kuwaiti traditional performance practice. The accelerando continues until bar 237 which is a variation on a common Kuwaiti ending musical phrase that concludes the composition (Figure 70).

Figure 70 shows a piano accompaniment for measures 237 to 240. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 140$. The music is in a minor key. Measure 237 is marked *fff*. The score shows a variation on a common Kuwaiti ending musical phrase.

Figure 70: Variation on Kuwaiti common cadence pattern

In this composition, the challenge was to rewrite a non-Kuwaiti tune to sound more Kuwaiti. The combination of elements used came after extensive trial of different *iqa'at*, *maqams* and embellishments. Feedback from Kuwaiti musicians and non-musicians was considered from previous versions of the composition. One comment was that this composition is "too Kuwaiti", referring to the *sankaba* and *emsabbig* techniques which led me to include the full "Country Gardens" tune as a reference and also to introduce the Kuwaiti elements more gradually.

Conclusion

In the course of this research, I have come across obstacles when addressing the core research questions, but after implementing various compositional techniques, I am satisfied with the compositions created and the methods I followed. My aim to create piano compositions with Kuwaiti elements gave me the opportunity to experiment with various methods, such as creating a theme and variations (*El boshiya, Ala ya ahl elhawa*) while retaining key elements of the original, and creating compositions based on philosophical aspects rather than technical elements (*Hail rain tranquillity*).

Challenges like short musical phrases and repetitiveness stimulated me to consider them as foundations rather than constraints. This helped me to overcome the challenges and creatively apply methods to create compositions that included other instruments and built harmony in various ways. Interpreting Kuwaiti *iqā'at* on the piano created a unique texture that consists of a combination of *iqā'a* pattern mimicry and fusion of chords and Kuwaiti performance techniques such as *sankaba*. Also exploring possible solutions to address microtonal *maqam* led me to create compositions with altered *maqams* that kept their authenticity.

Another aim was to explore how to communicate with performers who are not familiar with Kuwaiti traditions. This led to implementing the use of Arabic terms in Romanisation and describing them in each composition to help the performers in understanding the named technique or trait and to encourage them to further study them. Also Providing a QR code that links to the original Kuwaiti song in the score aims to help the performer go to the correct source related to the piece and become familiar with Kuwaiti traditional performance practice.

I believe each composition has a value and contributes to the musical knowledge by giving examples of compositions that are created with different methods covering a wide spectrum between arrangement and composition. Moving forward, I believe further implementation of Kuwaiti element extraction and embedding should be explored as well as exploring other Kuwaiti traditional *iqā'at* and practices.

This research also invites a broader reflection on the relationship between tradition, creativity and cultural translation in a musical composition. While the project demonstrated several practical solutions for integrating Kuwaiti musical elements into piano focused compositions, it also highlights the inherent limitations of translating orally transmitted traditions and microtonal systems into a Western instrument. Some nuances of *maqam* expression, rhythmic flexibility, and performance practice inevitably remain approximations when adapted to the piano. However, rather than viewing these limitations as shortcomings, they can be understood as productive spaces for artistic interpretation and intercultural dialogue. From holistic perspective, the research therefore contributes not only a set of compositions but also a methodological approach to engaging with Kuwaiti musical heritage within contemporary composition. It opens pathways for future composers and researchers to further explore the balance between preservation, reinterpretation, and innovation when bringing regional musical traditions into new instrumental and artistic contexts.

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