

**Israel Katz, Sheila M. Craik, and Amnon Shiloah. (2014). *HENRY GEORGE FARMER AND THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ARAB MUSIC (CAIRO 1932)*. (Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts, vol. 115). Leiden: Brill. 430 pp., \$181.00. ISBN 978-90-04-26319-2 (hardback), ISBN 978-90-04-28414-2 (e-book).**

The result of four decades of scholarship, this most recent volume from Israel Katz focuses on the life and work of musicologist Henry George Farmer and the series of events that led him to take part in an unprecedented meeting of scholars in Cairo in 1932. Make no mistake: this is not a book about Arab music. Rather, it is part biography, part annotated bibliography, and part interbellum travel narrative, and perhaps best serves as a snapshot of a particular moment in the history of European orientalism. In this moment, a common modernist vision connected nations across the Mediterranean and led Egyptian government officials to conspire behind closed doors with Western scholars and Arab intellectuals alike, seeking scientific ways to “perfect Arab music” (p. 111).

The congress that is at the heart of this volume brought together household names in European musicology such as Paul Hindemith, Béla Bartók, Eric von Hornbostel, and Curt Sachs with scholars and officials from across Europe and the Middle East, and even featured appearances from Egyptian notables including King Fu’ad, Umm Kulthum, Ahmed Shawqi, and Mohammad ‘abd al-Wahab. Over the course of several weeks in the spring of 1932, this illustrious group met to discuss the past and future of Arab music. The tasks of the congress’s seven commissions ranged from cataloging Arabic and Persian manuscripts that made reference to music, to the “regularising of the musical and vocal Composition”, and addressing “the question of the introduction of the pianoforte into Egyptian music” (pp. 314, 170).

Henry George Farmer was an unlikely attendee at such a gala event. Of modest means but immense intellectual energy, Farmer spent the first part of his career as a union activist and bandleader at Glasgow's Empire Theater, while also conducting research in several areas of musicology. In 1912 he was commissioned to translate a work on Arab music by fellow socialist Francisco Salvador-Daniel, which he published as *The Music and Musical Instruments of the Arab*: reputedly the first English-language book on Arab music (p. 35). An instant local expert on the subject, Farmer began studying Arabic at the University of Glasgow where he completed his doctorate in 1926, having already published a number of articles. Typical of orientalist of his era, and as Amnon Shiloah notes in his preface, Farmer focused on textual sources and "abstained from dealing with living music" (p. xx).

Katz approaches the point at which Farmer's story intersects with the the larger goals and politics of the Congress through a pastiche of narrative, commentary, and primary source material. In the volume's five major sections, the author blends several genres and moves fluidly between large-scale political histories and intimate observations about health, tourism, and the social foibles of gentleman-scholars as they worked across multiple cultural divides. Katz supplements the five main chapters with 36 photographs as well as 15 appendices, featuring an annotated bibliography of Farmer's works, official documents from the congress, several of Farmer's speeches, and selections from his correspondence.

The volume is thorough and well researched. What's lacking, though, is a clear argument. It's possible to interpret this as among the strengths of a work built around primary sources; Katz refrains from a deep analysis of Farmer's story, and instead he deftly curates the documents to allow the story to tell itself. Farmer's voice is present throughout, whether in the form of his

letters, his personal journal, or the minutes of the commission meetings that he chaired. In this way, the book acts as an authentic and important record of the kinds of questions that musicologists and bibliographers in the orientalist tradition asked during the early part of the twentieth century, as well as the social, political, and scholarly contexts from which those questions emerged.

On the other hand, the lack of a strong thesis is also the book's greatest weakness. Katz works hard to position the congress in time, space, and context, but fails to identify compelling connections with contemporary scholarship. I found myself asking: of all of the luminaries at the Cairo congress, what was particularly important about Farmer's presence? Or, alternately, of all of the interesting moments in Farmer's life, why is it important to discuss his role at the congress? Furthermore, if the Cairo congress had major effects on the development of Arab and/or Egyptian music in the 20th century, Katz has chosen not to include those details in the text, although he does note that "local press coverage [was] often polemical and, at times, downright contemptuous of its creation, controversial topics, activities, and especially foreign intrusion" (251).

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