

MUSIC AND IDENTITY: VARIED ASPECTS IN THE SINGING OF AN ARAB ISRAELI SINGER

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the singing of a female singer as expressing aspects of gender and vocalicity that are related to culture and multiculturalism. Singer Lubna Salameh is a Christian Arab woman that currently lives in the Western Galilee. A citizen of Israel and a member of Israel's Arab minority, Lubna Salameh is a professional singer who appears in Israel and abroad, and is today considered to be one of the leading Arab singers in Israel. The article presents Lubna as culturally plural: in terms of religion, she is Christian; in terms of culture, she belongs to Middle Eastern Arab musical culture; in terms of nationality, she is Israeli citizen. Her singing will be examined following several main aspects: the relations between gender and ethnic, religious and national aspects; the singer's vocalicity will be discussed first as concerned with the audible voice and the construction of the non verbal meanings, another aspect will be the performative dimension of Lubna's vocal expression, and another issue will be vocalicity as a cultural construct. The repertoire of the singer will be examined as gendered culture.

Keywords: Gender and Music, Gendered Musical Culture, Multiculturalism, Vocalicity, Arab Music, Music in Israel.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2000 I attended a concert in the annual Jerusalem Festival in which the performers were three female singers and the repertoire consisted of Arab music. One of the singers attracted my attention since her voice and performance were very impressive and I was intrigued as she was not known to me at all. I have found her identity and because I was so impressed by her performance, I continued to keep track of her musical activities and performances in Israel. This singer is the focus of the current article. Her name is Lubna Salameh and she is a Christian Arab woman, who currently lives in the town of Kafar Yassif in Western Galilee, Israel, of whose inhabitants are Christians, Muslims and Druze. She is a citizen of Israel,

and a member of its Arab minority¹. Lubna Salameh is a professional singer who appears in Israel and abroad, and is today considered to be one of the leading Arab singers in Israel.

SOME THEORETICAL THOUGHTS

Bernstein (2004: 4) claims that “Voices not only signify gender, but also ethnic, national and religious identities around the world”. This is the basic starting point of the examination of Lubna Salameh’s singing. In her case the combination of gender in music and the fact that she is a member of a minority in Israel is a platform that enables us to explore her singing following Bernstein’s idea.

The issue of gender is closely linked to the subject of vocality, thus when we address the issue of gender in Lubna’s singing we have to point out some theoretical concepts concerning the term “vocality”. Dun & Jones (1994: 2-4) attribute three aspects to vocality. The first is concerned with the audible female voice and focuses on the construction of the non verbal meanings. The second aspect puts an emphasis on the performative dimension of vocal expression: the dynamic, contingent quality of both vocalization and audition, and their vital interrelationships. The third facet treats vocality as a cultural construct. According to Dun & Jones by specifying female vocality, we also assert the centrality of gender in shaping that construction.

Since both language and society are structured by codes of sexual difference, both the body and its voice are inescapably gendered. The acoustic and expressive qualities of the voice are as much shaped by an individual’s cultural formation as is her or his use of language (Dun & Jones 1994: 2-4).

Music provides a wide range of opportunities for the expression of those nuanced sets of ideas on genders that are typical of every social group (Magrini 1995: 8). According to Magrini factors of musical behavior should be analyzed and valued as musical expression that is a gendered culture. Magrini claims that the existence of male and female performance practice of the Italian ballad has to do with the fact that the music making had very different goals and meanings for men and women (Magrini 1995: 3). A central part of Lubna’s repertoire is based on the

¹ Israeli society is composed of two main groups: the Israeli Jewish majority (75%) and the Arab Israeli minority (20%). The Arab population of Israel is divided into Moslems (80%), Christians (10%) and Druze (10%). The Arab minority is distinguished from the Jewish majority by language (Arab) and religion: Moslem, Christian and Druze (Haidar 2006). An important point related to this article is that the two groups – the Jewish-Israeli majority and the Arab-Israeli minority – in general have different cultures and the music is part of these cultural differences. The Musical culture of the Jewish majority is based on the Hebrew language and tends towards the western popular music style whereas the musical culture of the Arab minority in Israel is based on the Arab language and the Arab musical culture. This music consists of the popular music of the great Arab musicians of the 20th century, modern Arab Pop music and folk music (Regev 1993; Marks 2008a).

repertoires of famous female Arab singers, thus it can be treated from a gendered culture point of view.

Based on the theoretical ideas mentioned above, the singing of Lubna Salameh will be examined following three main aspects:

1. The article will try to enhance and explore the relations between gender and ethnic, religious and national aspects in Lubna's singing.
2. Vocality in Lubna Salameh's singing will be examined first as concerned with the audible voice and the construction of the non verbal meanings; another aspect will be the performative dimension of Lubna's vocal expression; the next issue will be Lubna's vocality as a cultural construct.
3. The repertoire of the singer will be examined as musical expression that is a gendered culture.

LUBNA'S MUSICAL LIFE HISTORY

Lubna was born in 1975. She is the eldest child of a family in which she has two brothers. Her father, Emile Salameh, came from the village of Tur'an in Western Galilee, and her mother, Nuhat (nee Bushara) from the village of Mrar in Upper Galilee. They are Catholic Christians.

On her mother's side, her uncle was an *oud* player and singer. Her father was a professional musician in his younger days: he played the *oud* and sang. Her paternal grandmother, Hanna Salameh, has a "wonderful" voice, and still sings, but was unable to become a professional singer as a result of the family's opposition. This grandmother was very close to Lubna, had great influence on her in musical matters, and encouraged her to become a professional singer. On her father's side, all her uncles and aunts have fine voices, and play the *oud* and the *darbouka*. Her father's sister, Violet Salameh (48) is one of the best-known Arab singers in the Middle East.

Lubna was born and grew up in Haifa, a city with a mixed population of Jews and Arabs, as did her father. From kindergarten to the end of high school she studied in the school of the Carmelite nuns in Haifa. Though she grew up as a Catholic, she married an Eastern-Orthodox Christian, and now belongs to that denomination. When she was a small child Lubna did not sing, and did not consider that she had any talent for singing; she was very fond of dancing. In her school, however, when the festivals or such events as Mothers' Day were celebrated, the nuns realized that she had a beautiful voice and was talented, and encouraged her to sing in school events. In the nuns' school Lubna sang choral hymns (Carmelite Catholic), Italian folk-songs, and Italian sacred songs. There was a small orchestra in the school (of girls only), which also played and sang Arab songs, mostly of Feirouz (the Lebanese Christian singer) and other Arab singers, mainly Christian.

Lubna has never had formal lessons in music and song. She has never learnt any formal voice training, or how to read music. All she has learnt, she has learnt by herself: from her father, from her aunt and her grandmother, from the radio, records and CDs. Lubna's development as a singer began in the school choir, and in time she began to sing solo parts. The school's music teacher was Albert Balam. In 1985 he organized a festival and competition in Haifa for young singers from the Arab sector. Lubna, at the age of ten, was one of the first children to take part in this competition. She sang songs of Arab singers such as Asmahan and Leila Mourad, and came first in the competition; it was her first public appearance. After winning the competition, young Lubna was invited to participate in a television program in Arab called "Tomorrow's Stars", which followed the careers of musically gifted children from childhood to the age of eighteen. Lubna was a regular participant in this program for eight years. As a result of her participation in the 1985 festival she was also invited to make a number of public performances in various places such as community centers, festivals for the promotion of Jewish-Arab coexistence, and public events in the Arab sector in Israel. From her childhood onwards her parents related to her singing very sympathetically and supportively and never raised any objections to it.

**GENDER IN RELATION
TO ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL ASPECTS
IN LUBNA SALAMEH'S SINGING**

The singer discussed here is part of the Christian group that is a subgroup within the Arab minority in Israel. The fact that she is a Christian, and not a Moslem, is of some significance to her situation as a female singer in the Arab-Israeli society. Here a short explanation of the status and situation of women in the Arab minority in Israel is requisite.

Although a significant progress has been made in Arab society in Israel in recent decades concerning the status of women, especially in acquisition of professional work and education of women, the status of women in Arab society in Israel is problematic compared to the status of women in the Israeli-Jewish society or the status of women in the Western world². The number of women in the Arab-Israeli society that go out of their home to work or have a career is very low compared to the Western world, and is only about 22%. A point related to our study here is that within this population of Arab women in Israel, the situation in the Christian sub-group is much better. The percentage of Christian-Arab women who have jobs and careers is much higher – 42%. Today, the situation of a woman in the Christian-Arab sector of Israel who pursues a career is much better than that

² Haidar 2006: 64-68.

of a Moslem woman, although that situation is still worse than that of the Jewish-Israeli women³.

In her performances, the feeling sensation of the power of her femininity is very important to Lubna. This notion is related to the problems of women's status within the Arab-Israeli society mentioned above. Lubna says that when she is on stage she has a feeling of tremendous power. "I, a woman, am standing up, and, in fact, controlling a big audience, and they follow me. That's a tremendous power which I possess as a woman, and I don't have it in any other area of my life".

The issue of gender in the Arab Israeli community is complex, and Lubna's activities as a singer can be interpreted in relation to the issue of women's situation in that community. Lubna's main audience consists of all sectors of Arab-Israeli society: Moslems, Druze and Christians, and as was explained above. The overall status of women in the Arab minority in Israel is low in terms of independence and career choice, thus her singing career is regarded as an exception by the Arab society she lives in. The figure of her grandmother, who wanted throughout her life to be a singer, and who, according to Lubna, had a "wonderful" voice, has been of cardinal importance in her life. Lubna's grandmother is still alive, and Lubna grew up with her stories, including her sorrow and pain when her family – primarily her father, and thereafter her husband – refused to accept her choice of a career as a singer because she was a woman. When Lubna began to discover her musical talent and her exceptional voice, her grandmother began to encourage her to sing, and she still affords her support and encouragement.

The support of her close family is probably the main reason Lubna was able to develop her singing career. Her close family did not oppose her appearing in concert-halls and on public platforms, either as a child or as an adult. Her parents, and her father in particular, gave her much encouragement, and did not consider the fact that she was a girl, and, later, a woman, to be an obstacle to her singing career. It should be pointed out that the approach of Christian Arabs in Israel to women is more liberal than that of Moslem Arabs. This is apparently the reason why those in the near surroundings of her childhood, which were Christian and urban, reacted favorably to her singing and performing. When she met her husband she was already a professional singer; he accepted this fact as part of her personality, and supported her, and related positively and supportively to her profession. When she married, however, and went to live with her husband in his village – Kafar Yassif, in Western Galilee, with a mixed population, her extended family did not approve of her performing mainly in the evenings – indeed, every evening. Most of her performances, primarily until the year 2000, were at weddings and Lubna says that her husband's family's attitude to her going out to perform at weddings every evening was extremely negative, and she and her husband were told "A respectable woman doesn't go out every evening without her

³ Vartzberger 2001.

husband”, and “No woman should appear on a stage in front of strangers”, and the like. In the early years of her life in Kafar Yassif she would leave her house secretly, from the back entrance, or under cover of darkness, in order to avoid comments being made to her or her husband. She says that her husband supported her throughout and that after several years his parents and brothers and sisters grew accustomed to the fact that she was a professional singer, and even began to see her profession in a positive light.

Motherhood and her career as a singer have created some internal conflicts in Lubna, which in my opinion are connected also to the culture of the society she belongs to. She has two daughters, one seven and one eleven years old. Over the past seven or eight years her career has required her to travel abroad frequently, to Europe and the US. These journeys last for several days, sometimes several weeks. When asked whether there was not a conflict between motherhood and her singing career, she replied “Not at all. I carried on working and developing myself as usual when my daughters were born”. She added that she was aware of the fact that her absence from home was not the normative behavior of a mother in her society, but the acceptance of her close family, mainly her husband, enabled her to ignore these norms. But later on in the conversation she said that motherhood began to be a difficult problem in her career when her daughters began to grow up. “When they were infants, it was never a problem to leave them in the evenings, or to travel abroad for a few weeks. But when they grew older, and my relationship with them became closer, I felt very anxious every time I went away for some time. From the practical point of view I had no problem, since my mother-in-law has been looking after the children since they were born, but I felt that my relationship with them was suffering, and my longing for them began to be intolerable”. She began to limit her trips abroad to four days each, so that her maternal role, and her relationship with her daughters, which is very important to her, should not suffer. Today she says that she tries to keep a balance between family and career, although, as she says, it is far from easy. An interesting subject which arose in the course of our conversations was her choice of a career for her daughters. She confessed that if it depended on her she would not influence them to become singers. “It’s a very hard life”, she remarked. When pressed to elaborate she admitted that she thinks it is still harder for women in her society to be a singer, a performer than for men. On the other hand, if they do choose such a career she will encourage and support them.

It must be mentioned here that in the Arab community in Israel (even in the Christian sector) women are still not encouraged to have careers which force them to be outside their home for long period of times. Having many conversations with Arab Israeli men and women proved that almost all of them disapproved of women who did not have full responsibility over their household and raising the children. Lubna’s way of life is still an exception in that society.

The fact that she belongs to the Christian sector also influences the way she presents herself on stage – she usually wears elegant evening dresses with open neckline and shoulders, and in her daily life she also wears western style clothes. This style of dressing is not the normative way of female dressing in the Arab-Israeli society, especially within the Moslem sector. Although the major part of her audience is Moslem she claims “I am a Christian not a Moslem, and I am also a modern woman”. Thus she thinks her way of dressing on stage is appropriate to her identity.

VOCALITY IN LUBNA SALAMEH’S SINGING

When addressing Lubna’s voice and the nonverbal meaning of her vocality I would like to discuss this issue from the angle of her audiences. Lubna’s singing voice is considered by her audiences, Arab and Jewish alike, as “unique, very expressive and beautiful”⁴.

The non-verbal meaning of her singing is an aspect that relates to Lubna’s different repertoires and audiences. Each repertoire and style of singing has a certain meaning to the specific audience. The varied styles in her repertoire lead to an increase in the types of audience before which she appears. The audience for Arab music, mainly of the great Arab musicians of the twentieth century, includes two principal groups: one, from the Arab Israeli population; and the other, a sector of the Israeli Jewish population which originated in the Middle East, and of whose cultural heritage Arab music forms part. For the audience of the Arab-Israeli sector, Lubna’s singing expresses their Arab cultural identity. Among the Israeli Jewish sector there is a group of Iraqi-born Jews who have a deep affinity for Arab music since they were born in Iraq and the Arab music is part of their upbringing. These Iraqi Jews are fans of Lubna and her music and for several years have been regularly inviting her to appear before small audiences in private houses. For them Lubna’s voice, style and repertoire (Arab songs) expresses their lost Arab culture they had to leave behind when emigrating to Israel.

The audience for her Israeli songs is primarily Jewish-Israeli. In their joint appearances this audience mostly consists of Israeli Jews who belong to the scene of “World Music” in Israel, as well as a group who have been regular fans of Gronikch as performer and composer for several years⁵. For this audience Lubna’s voice and singing represent “the voice of the other” since her style of singing is different to the mainstream Israeli singers. Arab music is considered part of “world music” for this Israeli audience⁶. Those who attend her concerts and performances on behalf of peace and co-existence between Jews and Arabs are Arab and Jewish Israelis who support the principles of peace, co-existence and tolerance.

⁴ These terms are taken from conversations with people in her concerts, interviews with Arab and Jewish musicians and articles on Lubna in the Israeli press and on the internet.

⁵ Shlomo Gronikch is a composer, song-writer and performer (pianist and singer) whose work and his cooperation with musicians of various cultures in Israel are considered to be outstanding.

⁶ Marks 2008b.

The performative dimension of Lubna's vocal expression is linked to her voice treatment and to her repertoire. One of the questions which Lubna was asked is how she gets ready for a performance. The question related to her singing: work on her voice, rehearsal of texts, musical preparation, and the like. Concerning her vocal preparations, she said that her voice warms up slowly. She noticed that in the early years of her performances, when she did not prepare her voice for the concert, it was only towards its end, after about an hour and a half into the concert, that her voice improved. So she learnt to devote a half-hour or an hour to warming up her voice before every concert. She does this by singing *mawal* – musical improvisations in high and low register, covering the total register of her voice. She does not practice regular “exercises”. “I just sing”, she says.

Lubna states that when she sings her Arab repertoire “the way I produce my voice and the way I present and perform the songs are exactly like the great female Arab female singers that I admire”. The singing style of the famous female Arab singers such as Umm Kolthum, Feiruz, Asmahan, and Leila Mourad is very clearly Lubna's singing.

Stage tension is an issue that concerns Lubna regarding her voice performance. She said that before every concert she was very tense and nervous. “I get exceedingly excited”. This never changes, despite the many years during which she has been performing. She is always concerned this tension will affect her voice performance. She tries to work on herself and to calm her fears, but confesses that this rarely helps: at the beginning of every concert, for the first fifteen minutes, “I really tremble”; only in the course of the performance does she calm down, and confidence takes the place of fear. “I feel my voice improves in the course of the concert, and it sounds much better at the end of the concert”. She remembers two concerts, one in Turkey and one in Israel, in which her apprehension did not leave her throughout the concert. Although they were both successful, she remembers them as terrifying experiences. She says that she has always suffered from stage fright, even as a child. She used to forget her words as a result of the tension, and developed a method of inventing words to conceal this.

Lubna's vocalicity can be examined also as a cultural construct. The Arab music which Lubna sings is monophonic music that is not based on harmony. A central element in this music is the *maqam*, which is the most fundamental constituent of the music of very many Islamic countries⁷. It includes two basic

⁷ Maqam includes two basic components: a fixed system of tones – in other words, a musical scale; and a system of melodic configurations based on this tonal system. A principle common to all *maqam* systems, wherever they are found, is that their melodic sequence includes intervals lower than a whole tone, and higher than a half-tone. Another characteristic of the *maqam* system is the element of improvisation. The Arab *maqam* system contains dozens of *maqamat*, which are divided into key “families”. Professional Arab musicians, including singers, have to be familiar with the principal families of the *maqamat*, and with the secondary scales on which the system of improvisation in Arab music is based. It is based on the transition from one *maqam* to another.

components: a fixed system of tones – in other words, a musical scale; and a system of melodic configurations based on this tonal system. Performance of Arab music relies upon melodic improvisation and musical modulation. Arab music has more than fifty melodic modes and several dozen rhythmic modes⁸.

Lubna, who uses improvisation in all her songs, learnt the rules of the *maqam* “Only by ear, I never had any formal or methodical instruction about the *maqam* or ways to improvise in it. Ever since I was a child I’ve known of the existence of *maqamat*, through my father and my uncles and aunts who sang and played, for they discussed them with each other. Ever since I began to sing I’ve asked which *maqam* every song was in, and so I made the connection between the songs and their *maqamat*. I also learnt improvisation from the family, from records, in the first place by imitation. Later on, when I felt more confident, I began to add my own motifs”.

Two years ago Lubna decided that she needed some formal musical education of Arab music, and began to learn to play the *oud* from a professional musician, Mr. Imad Dalal. In 2007 she studied in the School for Ethnic Music in Safed College, where she specialized in reading scores, and Arab and western musical theory. Today she still studies *oud* playing, score reading and theory, and claims that she is now able to accompany herself on the *oud* when she sings. She explains the reason for beginning formal study of music: “I felt that I didn’t have the requisite musical education to enable me to maintain my artistic development”. She wants to develop her ability to improvise in Arab music, as well as in the other types of music which she sings, and for this she needs specialized knowledge of the theory of the Arab *maqamat* as well as increased knowledge of western scales. In Lubna’s case, her vocality and repertoire are linked to her Arabic language and culture as well as to her gender. The main repertoire of Arab music in Lubna Salameh’s singing consists of the great female Arab singers of the 20th century.

In her childhood and youth her repertoire included the songs of certain female Arab singers such as Asmahan, Leila Morad, and feiruz. The reason for this is that at that time her voice had a limited range and these songs did not require a very wide range. Today her vocal range is larger, and reaches lower tones, thus she can now perform the more complex songs of female Arab singers like Umm Kulthum. Lubna regards her singing as part of the tradition of Female Arab singers. Her voice has a very characteristic tone color, which is identified with the style of female singers of Arab music. In Lubna’s words: “We, Arab female singers, sing from the depth of our throat and this gives our singing a very special quality of sound”. The aspect of the audience is related also to this gender based repertoire and vocality, since both her audiences – Jewish and Arab – expect her as a woman-

⁸ Marcus 1989; Touma 1996: 18-45; Danielson 2004.

singer to perform the female Arab singers repertoire according to a specific style of vocal and stage performance attributed to Arab female singing. These characteristic of Lubna's singing coincide with Magrini's theory (1995: 8) that Music provides a wide range of opportunities for the expression of those nuanced sets of ideas on genders that are typical of every social group. According to Magrini (1995: 8) factors of musical behavior should be analyzed and valued as musical expression "as gendered culture". For example, Lubna sings the Arab repertoire on stage in a performance style that includes standing without moving her body except limited movements of her hands, very close to her body. This style of performance is part of the cultural and moral codes of the Arab society in Israel. On the other hand, she explains that when she sings Israeli songs, like those of Shlomo Gronikch, or Bob Dylan's American songs, she uses her voice differently in order to accommodate it to their styles. "I sing these songs differently from the way I sing Arab songs" she says. "My voice production changes and I try to sing with the voice style of Israeli or American music. But I always leave places in my songs where I revert to an Arab tone and style, and that makes it my own rendering, especially in English and Hebrew songs".



Lubna Salameh in concert (Jerusalem, November 2007).

LUBNA'S REPERTOIRE AS MUSICAL EXPRESSION AS GENDERED CULTURE

As mentioned before, a major part of Lubna Salameh's repertoire consists of the repertoires of known female Arab singers of the 20th century, mainly from the period called "the golden age of modern Arab music" (Hammond 144). This music is called "The Great Arab Music of the Twentieth century" and it contains the music composed by a group of musicians and singers that were active from the 1920s to the 1970s in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. The music created and performed by these Arab musicians and singers is prominently present in the contemporary Arab music and is referred to as a base for comparison for the music that came after this period. The music of that period is still the main component of the modern Arab urban music (Regev 1993: 12-13). Within that music there are a few prominent female singers that are considered as "The Great Arab female singers". These singers hold a special place and status in modern Arab music and musicians and composers of the group mentioned above, wrote special repertoires for these female singers. These songs are identified by audiences and musicians in the Arab world as "The Great Female repertoires". The most famous female singers of modern Arab music are: Umm Kulthum, Asmahan, Warda, Najat A-Sa'ira, Leila Murad and Feiruz.

As a child and adolescent Lubna's repertoire included the work of three or four great Arab female singers: Asmahan, Leila MoUrad, Feiruz (whose work constituted a central part of her repertoire), and Majida Romi⁹. This repertoire suited her voice, and, in her view, her musical comprehension as a child. As she grew older she began to consider the repertoire of other singers, such as Umm Kulthum, whose musical material was much more complex. She says that she began to find deeper insights, and also to sing "heavier" songs, according to her definition, in the repertoire of the artists whose songs she had not previously performed. When she was a child she sang songs whose deep emotional significance she did not appreciate. At about the age of twenty, she began to perform this musical material with deeper emotional understanding; therefore, in her view, her performances also gained a new emotional depth. Her voice, too, developed and grew stronger, and her register began to encompass the lower tones which she now uses. When asked whether she performs the repertoire of female singers only, she replied that today she sometime sings the songs of male Arab musicians such as Muhamed Abd al-Wahhab, Farid el Atarash, Wadi' a-Safi, and Abdel Halim Hafez. It must be mentioned here that singing the male repertoire is not done often by female Arab singers in Israel, and Lubna says it is not always accepted positively by the audience: "I think the audience prefers that I sing the "female repertoire" rather than the "male repertoire" but I like to try once in a

⁹ For further information about Arab popular music see Zuhur 1998, 2000, 2001; Hammond 2005.

while to sing “male” songs because I like to try new things and adding these songs enhance my repertoire with more materials”.

When asked about songs of Arab singers composed in the past ten or twenty years, Lubna replied that there are very few new female singers of quality who perform “good genuine Arab music”. She mentioned names such as Sabar abu Rab’i (Tunis), Assalah (Syria), and Angam, Zichra and Shirin from Egypt. We can notice that she is referring again to female singers rather than male singers. She agreed that her repertoire of Arab music is based mainly on the “old-timers” female singers, or the “classics”, as she called them.

Lubna is an Israeli citizen and another facet of her national and cultural identity is the Israeli one. Since the year 2000, Lubna has been singing Israeli songs written by the Israeli Jewish composer Shlomo Gronikch. They met in a performance in aid of peace and co-existence in 2000, and Shlomo, who is a composer and performer of the first rank in Israeli music, suggested that they should work together on a joint performance, which would include original music written by him and by other Israeli composers. Gronikch writes completely western music, in Hebrew, and Lubna has been performing with him regularly since the year 2000 in Israel and abroad. The audiences for these performances are usually Israelis living abroad, and Arabs from many parts of the Middle East who live in Europe and the US, as well as a few locals in each country. The concerts include songs which Shlomo performs alone, songs sung by Lubna, and others which they sing together. The repertoire consists primarily of songs written and composed by Shlomo, but also of Arab songs sung by Lubna, as well as songs of Gronikch which she sings together with him. Concerning the style in which she sings these songs, which are western from the musical point of view, and in the Hebrew language, Lubna says that she sings them rather differently from Arab music, but that she always adds “an oriental complexion” to Gronikch’s melodies, and even improvises on his songs, though in a different manner from the improvisations in her Arab songs. She adds that Shlomo expects her to perform his songs “in my special color, in which there is a good deal of Arab style”.

This cooperation between Lubna and the Jewish-Israeli musician is an attempt to cross the gender boundaries that holds Lubna back in her Arab music environment by performing with a male musician and singing songs that are not gender defined.

This notion of stepping out of gendered repertoire applies also to the other new repertoire Lubna has added in recent years. Lubna’s acquaintance and work with Gronikch led to her adding a new musical style to her repertoire – the songs of Bob Dylan. Gronikch acquainted her with Dylan’s songs, since he thinks highly of him as a poet and singer, and Lubna said that “I fell in love with him at once”. She began to study his songs, and today she sings several of them in a mixture of English, Hebrew, and Arabic, whenever she appears with Gronikch. Gronikch arranges these songs in his own style, and Lubna sings them, sometimes together

with him. I asked her what she finds attractive enough in Dylan's songs to make them part of her regular repertoire, and the reply was that their message is so humane and moral; in addition, "there's a lot of emotion in his songs, and this attracts me very much. When I listen to him, I always feel as if he's singing to me personally". She says that she intends to increase the number of Dylan's songs in her concerts. She has bought several of his CDs, and is learning the songs in order to sing them. When I asked her how she manages with the different styles of Arab, western Israeli and American music, she replied: "For me, music is music. If I feel an emotional link with the sounds and words, it doesn't matter to me where they come from".

In the year 2008 I noticed in a number of Lubna's concerts a very distinctive song, whose words and music turned out to have been composed by Lubna herself. Lubna says that she has been writing and composing songs for several years, but she did not have the courage to include them in her concert repertoire until recently. Her lyrics are in the Arabic language and the music she composes has musical characteristics of Arab music as described earlier in the article. At the moment she is working on a number of her own songs, and she will sing them in her independent concerts with her regular orchestra. This independent creativity is very important to her, and she intends to develop it in future. When asked about gender in her songs she replied "my songs are definitely female songs. I write and sing as a woman. In my songs I describe my feelings as a woman and I see myself as part of the great tradition of female Arab singers of the past".

CONCLUSION

Studies of gender and music in recent years present most women musicians as culturally plural within themselves (Diamond & Moisala 2000: 3). Lubna is part of this state of women singers around the world: In terms of religion, she is a Christian; culturally she belongs to Middle Eastern Arab musical culture; in terms of nationality she is an Israeli citizen. When asked to give a hierarchic definition of her collective identity she replied: "I am an Arab, an Israeli, a Christian, and a bit of a Palestinian".

From the musical point of view, she considers Arab culture to be the most fundamental element in her music especially the music of the great female figures of the twentieth century. In addition, her identity also comprises, in part, Israeli popular music which she considers an expression of her being part of Israeli society. Western popular music, Mainly Bob Dylan's songs also forms part of her musical world. Her connection with Palestinian identity, which she has mentioned in several interviews, is expressed in her musical activities on behalf of peace between Jews and Arabs. This consists mainly of participation in peace festivals, and concerts, performances and recordings with a message of peace and co-existence.

Gender plays a major role in Lubna's identity as a singer, for instance, in her choice of repertoire, particularly in her choice of Arab music, in which she predominantly performs the music of women singers of twentieth century Arab music. Lubna is trying to break the gender limitations of her repertoire by adding male repertoire to her Arab music songs, and to enhance her professional knowledge of music in order to level with her all male musicians ensemble.

The musical and professional relations with the Jewish-Israeli musician Shlomo Gronikh express two aspects of crossing boundaries: the first is crossing the cultural, social and political boundaries that exist between the Arabs and Jews in Israeli society; the second is an attempt to cross the gender boundaries that holds Lubna back in her Arab music environment by performing with a male musician and singing songs that are not gender defined.

Her varied repertoire, and the different musical styles in which she sings, creates a variety of vocal characteristics which are required in order to execute these different styles. This fact broadens the complexion of her voice and her ways of musical expression. The different aspects in her identity – woman, singer, Arab, Christian, Israeli, and Palestinian – make her a singer whose musical personality is extremely varied and multifaceted.

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