Haram? Halal? Makhruh?

Listening to Music? Is it HARAM?

MUSIC
Yes? or No?
(Part 1 of 4 parts)

MUSIC - IS IT HARAM (*Forbidden*)? (1 of 4)
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Is Music HARAM (Forbidden) *Really*?

[illegible] opinions based on the (4) parts of the Quran and the our

A Topic of Dispute in Islam: Music Listen (while you read)

Mustafa Sabri

Beyan-ul-Haq, issue: 63, year: 2, vol: 3, 1910 (A journal which used to be issued by the Islamic Scholars Society)

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(Highest religious authority) in the Ottoman State.
He died in 1954 in Egypt.

If the head of the family is fond of tambourine, It is no wonder why the whole family dances! [1]

Whether it is through natural/physiological means or instruments, or tunes, depending on the kind or the different ways, music may be forbidden or disliked or even allowed according to some Islamic religious edicts. However, it is also known that Islam avoids absolutely accepting or remaining indifferent to the issue of music. It is this latter fact, ie, a sort of position by Islam, of cautioning by not allowing music, or encouraging it without reservation. It is this position whose reason or essence we will be discussing.

It would not do justice at all to compare this position of reservation by Islam with heartsick people who are unable to appreciate the joyful effect of music which is considered by those who are fond of pleasures, as of great spiritual value. Perhaps Islam does not see right to remain indifferent to music because it knows how delightful music is to our nature and how strong it is on our feelings. Our religion has an exceptionally good view in any case, in discovering the hidden dangers which might be inherent in the sweetest and most pleasurable things. Indeed, a heavenly religion should lead to the truths which are unattainable by man himself, as this is expected in the guiding nature of the religion.

Firstly, music is a useless activity which in fact, is a state of passiveness. As we will explain in another article about gambling, the fact that such an inactivity, which is inherent in those so called professions, did not escape the attention of our religion.

Secondly, the benefit and pleasure taken from music involves a meaning of deep slavery in passion. Since Islam is the only enemy of passiveness and slavery in passion, an important duty of Islam is to search their traces in unexpected hide-outs.

Although it might be difficult for some to realize the fact that music has a sense of passiveness, those with a subtle mind would not hesitate to accept it, as it is not possible to imagine another worldly benefit of music. As for this world, it is useless as in the idiom of "no good for stomach" [2]
One should not ask hastily: how could this be claimed while there are many singers, instrument players in the West, for example, making a living or even a fortune? To make a living would not be proper unless it is done in a way which does not harm human dignity since it would not be at ease with conscience otherwise.

(One may think) that we are roaming from one bizarre opinion to another: Where on earth is the harm to human dignity in this? Again, one should not be hasty. The acts of pure entertainment are considered low-level professions in the eyes of unpolluted human nature. You should not

take seriously the applause and respect and perhaps requests given to the famous of these kinds of artists. Those who pay respects and make requests do not mind doing so, since they do it, in a way, taking away a crumb of honour from the artist, by hiding this loss from him. Likewise, a lot of respect is usually paid to some ladies in order to take sexual advantage of them.

From such an entertainment point of view, it shows a quite bizarre mentality of some parents who are proud of having taught their daughters how to play an instrument. It is also bizarre to see some people wishing to marry a girl with musical training, in an attempt to imitate Western civilization which, they think, gives the utmost importance to the respect of woman. It might be said that being able to play an instrument is not a shame for a woman as it is her natural duty to make her husband happy with her company. However, such an objection is not valid because happiness and enjoying each other's company in a marriage is a mutual benefit. Then, one can imagine how bizarre and ridiculous it would be for a man to say he is lacking the qualities for marriage just because he does not know how to play an instrument!

Compared to singers and instrument players, although composers look, to some extent, free of the hidden disgrace explained above, the art of composing could not get rid of the pros and cons of singing or playing as they depend on each other. Also, while the waves of pride and dignity rise in teaching knowledge, as opposed to an atmosphere of of frivolity spreading from the classes of composers. Of course, we all appreciate the meaning of "playing music after forty years of age"[3]
That is why it would be quite offensive to ask a man of high rank in a government to sing a song no matter how good it is as it would be an affront to his dignity. As opposed to this, teaching knowledge regardless of rank is considered a means of increasing honour and pride.

An attempt to cover up the problem above, by claiming that a composer can concentrate on teaching music without having to put himself in a frivolous and disgraceful position by shouting or singing before students would, in fact, mean to admit our claim, let alone being an argument against it.

All these problems we have tried to expose above are about those who make a living through music. As for those who see it as a hobby, playing only for friends, the passiveness and the waste of time for both player and listeners are pretty obvious, not needing a special attempt to expose it.

During listening to music, people would not be doing anything for the good of humanity. They would cause, instead, a lot of money to change hands. And, in return for the money, what do these people get? Nothing! Consider this: Suppose a shoemaker sells you a shoe. And you wear it and walk to your shop. Let us say you sell books in your shop. You both make a profit and help knowledge and science spread in your country. This way you would serve in a chain of benefits in the society by making other people too to benefit, such as those who print or write books, and the manufacturers of paper or the cotton farmers and on the other hand, there are the craftsmen who process leather for shoes and the farmers who raise animals to provide leather. When it comes to music, although those who manufacture instruments and those who offer their skills for your hearing appreciation, by playing them certainly benefit, this chain of benefits ceases at you!

Paying for music is not the same as hiring a horse-and-cart to go out for a picnic, because this way you could contribute more to your work of being a complementary part of the chain of human needs by benefitting your health in addition to helping the cart driver make a living. Besides, those carts are used for transportation at other times than those of picnic. In short, picnic is one thing and music is another. Of course, nothing could be said against music when it is a medical necessity for a patient like clean air being one of the most important necessities in treating patients. Nevertheless, it is not known yet that music is prescribed by physicians despite the fact that treatment with music has recently become a familiar term.

Now, let us talk about another face of musical pleasures, the one involving a deep indulgence in passion: Under what kind of influence are the feelings of those who are in an atmosphere which is full of emotional temptations caused by music? The effect of music can have various ways: with music, a lonely person feels his loneliness more, an orphan feels more the loss of his parents, a patient feels more sorrowful of his situation, and an aged person feels sorrier that the most of his life has already gone. Yet again, with music, a lucky person with wealth and a high ranking position feels happy more than he usually is. In short, music paints the reality in darker colours by increasing the sorrow of the the sorrowful and the happiness of the happy. And this way, the effect of music resembles that of alcohol, causing people to perceive the reality in a more stretched way than it really is. Above all of these, music has a tremendous effect in agitating the feelings of romance and love. That is why a banquet with music is usually accompanied with pretty women and alcoholic beverages. Therefore, the most intimate secrets of love are exposed first by poems, then, under the disguise of music, in a similar manner to some women making themselves more attractive under the disguise of the hijab. Or, the words that cannot be normally said by lovers can be uttered by means of music and poetry. That is why it is not considered rude, if a person who is too shy to say "I'm dying for her, I'm crazy for her" shouts the same words before others by music and poetry. Furthermore, I wonder how parents who would like to raise their daughters in chastity and modesty with wisdom allow them to sing the most intimate words of love, considering this a good quality for a girl at the age of marriage despite the fact that it is shameful (in our society) for girls to utter even the word of marriage which is lawful in Islam. If the opinion of some thinkers of this century, who said "if

women are not kept busy, they would think of some other things do to", is to be taken, then women who are fond of playing instruments would have found even an irresistible guide to those kind of thoughts.

However, is dreaming love and romance a bad thing? What else is like love that makes man feel angelic and gives compassionate and elevated feelings? Love is so strong that it is not possible to remain indifferent to the whining of the lovelorn and suffering hearts. Yes, this is quite true. However, there is no other issue, as delicate as this, vulnerable to abuse. Indeed, it was not an exaggeration when Hoja Nasruddin (Juha), when asked if he ever had a love affair, said: Yes, I was just getting involved once, but we were surprised![4]
Although love cannot be but mutual, it seems shameful for women in particular. And a man esteems a woman who only loves him. Besides, he would not excuse other women being in love with other men. And the woman he loves has no importance attached to her by others.

Having said these considerations about music, it has become easier to express an opinion about love odes which form the most elegant kind of poetry. As for the poetry of eulogy or satire they are not usually commendable as the former is a kind of flattery and the latter is fault-finding. As for the poetry to uphold the moral values we have no objection. Islam's position can be summarized as accepting the good poetry and rejecting its bad kind, anyway.

Although poetry is perhaps the best of the literal arts, Islam's uneasiness about poetry is because it does more harm than good. Even a student's obsession of poetry is considered a sign of going astray, leaning towards laziness even by scholars of the modern times. What consists of the capital of poetry is confessed by poets themselves:

"The material of poets never runs out
No end to lies even to an end this world is brought" [5]

In ancient times when poets never made such confessions (out of their pride), the nature of their poetry was exposed by the Holy Quran:

As for poets, the erring follow them. Hast thou not seen how they stray in every valley, And how they say that which they do not?[6]

However, poetry is far more important than music as poetry sharpens the mind and can be informative.

Before we finish the topic of music, let us add that, if the effect of music on feelings must indeed be an important need for the soul, the recitation of the Quran serves that need in a much more dignified way. This is also shown by the fact that harmonious recitation of the Quran is recommended in Islam. However, it should also be noted that a musical tune accompanying the recitation is not proper. In other words, a harmonious recitation is recommended in some hadiths of the prophet (pbuh), yet the scholars are against the musical recitation of the Quran. The reason of these two seemingly conflicting opinions can be understood by making a distinction between the two concepts of music:

If music is to be applied with its rules and techniques to the recitation it would violate the rules of tajweed [7].
So, this kind of music with notes and rules, like composed pieces, is not allowed in the recitation. However, if a person recites the Quran, associated with the beauty of his natural tunes, this is commendable. This way is very reasonable considering the fact that an abuse of the Quran with music must be avoided. That is why a piece of music is listened to for appreciation of its musical value, without necessarily understanding its words, for the most part. Although the meaning of the words in some pieces of music can be realized to some extent, the composers usually have to fill the gaps with "la la"s to balance the piece of music. Obviously, such a practice in the Quranic recitation is out of the question.

Besides, nobody wants to listen to the music of a person with no talent for it. As for the talented, their natural tunes are more pleasant and impressive than their musical skills acquired through musical training. Our claim should not seem bizarre. We have witnessed the loss of purity and sweetness in the recitation of once famous Quran reciters, after being exposed to musical education. Therefore, natural music should be superior to the acquired musical skills, as the former is an extempore act while the latter consists of repeating composed and used tunes. At this point we have got one more claim: It is known that one nation may not enjoy the music of another. So it means that the effect of music is in proportion to its locality. Therefore, a person's natural music should be superior, as being his personal music, to his national music...

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[1] In the original text, this was an Arabic poem. [2] This is a Turkish idiom used for professions which are no good to make a living.
[3] This is a Turkish idiom implying that a person does not behave as mature as his age requires.
The reader should bear in mind the Islamic and traditional values prevailing in his time among the Ottomans, while reading this article. With Western values about dignity and music, his opinions might become quite difficult to understand.
[4] This is a famous remark attributed to the well known folk figure, Hoja Nasreddin, indicating that love affairs can reach dangerous levels very quickly, no matter how innocently they begin.
[5] This is a Turkish poem in the original text. No reference for it is given.

[6]
The Holy Quran
26:224-226
[7] Tajweed: The method of proper authentic recitation of the Quran.

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