

Improvising Middle Eastern Music on Lever Harp

Verlene Schermer
www.verlene.com

Arabic *maqams* are based on a musical scale of 7 notes. Some maqams have 2 or more alternative scales such as Rast, Nahawand and Hijaz. Many maqam scales in Arabic music are microtonal, including tones between the steps of our modern Western twelve-tone equal-tempered musical tuning system. They are mostly taught orally, and by listening extensively to traditional Arabic music. Most maqam scales include a perfect fifth or a perfect fourth (or both), and all octaves are perfect, so you could conceivably play a drone of the root and fifth of the tonic chord, and sing the microtones -- if you have time and the ear to learn those scales that include microtones. But, there are also a number of maqam scales that have no microtones, and these can be easily played on lever harp. We'll be focusing on a few of them for our workshop.

The Harmonic Minor Scale

The notes of the harmonic minor scale are the same as the natural minor or Aeolian mode, except that the seventh degree is raised. The seventh degree becomes the leading tone to the tonic because it is now only a half step lower than the tonic. It is called harmonic minor because the harmony created with the V chord is major and creates a better cadence to the home chord than the minor v chord.

The harmonic minor is also occasionally referred to as the Mohammedan scale as the upper half of the scale is the Hijaz jins, which is found in Middle Eastern music. The harmonic minor scale as a whole is called *Nahawand-Hijaz* in Arabic music, and as *Bûselik Hicaz* in Turkish music. And as an Indian raga it is called *Kirwani*. It is also very common in Jewish music. You can visit maqamworld.com for more information on maqams. Here is the A harmonic minor scale:

A B C D E F G# A

A few chord progressions in Harmonic Minor for Improvisation:

Am Dm Am E or Am E Dm E or Am Dm E Am

Here is a You Tube video of a few middle eastern tunes in the harmonic minor scale that I played in concert with my sister on flute: <http://tinyurl.com/paomhq2>

The Hijaz Scale

This scale occurs in Indian, Middle Eastern, Eastern European and Flamenco music. It is common in Arabic and Egyptian music, where it's known as *Hijaz-Nahawand* or *Bayati maqam*, and used in Hebrew prayers and Klezmer music, where it's called *Ahava Rabbah*, *Freygish* or just the "Jewish scale", and is called *Dastgāh-e Homāyoun* in Iran. It's the scale used in the North Indian classical raga *Vasant Mukhari* and the South Indian raga *Vakulabharanam*.

It's also sometimes called the "Spanish Phrygian scale", "Spanish gypsy scale" or "Phrygian major scale" and is common in Flamenco music. The flat second and the augmented step between the second and third degrees of the scale create its distinctive sound. The main chords of this scale are I, iv, and vii.

You can easily get this scale by setting your levers to a harmonic minor scale -- that's a natural minor scale with a raised 7th degree. Then start and end your scale on the 5th degree of the scale. So for the Hijaz scale on E, you would set your A harmonic minor scale -- all natural notes except G#. Then play from E through E.

E F G# A B C D E

A few chord progressions in Hijaz for improvisation:

E Dm E or E F E or E Am F E

Maqsum 4/4 basic rhythm:

1 & (2) & 3 4

Doom tek tek doom tek

Mevlana Melody (from Loreena McKennitt's Marco Polo)

The name Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi stands for Love and ecstatic flight into the infinite. Mevlana is one of the great spiritual masters and poetical geniuses of mankind and was the founder of the Mevlevi Sufi order, a leading mystical brotherhood of Islam.

The Mevlevi rites symbolize divine love and mystical ecstasy; they aim at union with the Divine. The music and the dance are designed to induce meditation on the love of God. Mevlevi music contains some of the most valuable elements of Turkish classical music. It serves mainly as accompaniment for poems of Rumi and other Sufi poets. The music of the sema (ceremony) is generally conducted by the chief drummer. Percussion accompaniment is supplied by the kudums (small kettledrums) and cymbals; melody is provided by the ney (reed flute), the string instruments, and the voice. The words and even syllables of the poetry are connected to the musical sentences. "Dervish music cannot be written in notes. Notes do not include the soul of the dervish." For more on maqsum and other Middle Eastern rhythms: aletadances.com/rhythms.html

Flamenco

Flamenco music shares some of the same scales and rhythms in middle eastern music because it originated in Andalusia while Spain was under Arab rule during the 8th through the 15th centuries. It is thought to be brought to Spain by gypsies from India. For more on Flamenco: andalucia.com/flamenco/history.htm

Basic Flamenco rhythm: (the / represents a "strum" and the **/ means to roll the chord)

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &
/ **/ / / /

Here are a few chord progressions that work for Flamenco style:

E F E or E F G F (leave low G natural, and a high G natural)

Bir Demet Yasemin

A Bunch of Jasmine

traditional Turkish

Am Am Am E Am

5 Am Dm Dm Am Dm

10 Am E 1. Am *fine* 2. Am

14 Am Dm E

17 Dm 1. E 2. E *DS al fine*

Hava Nagila

Traditional Isreal

E Am E F E



5 E Dm Dm E F E



9 Am Am Am



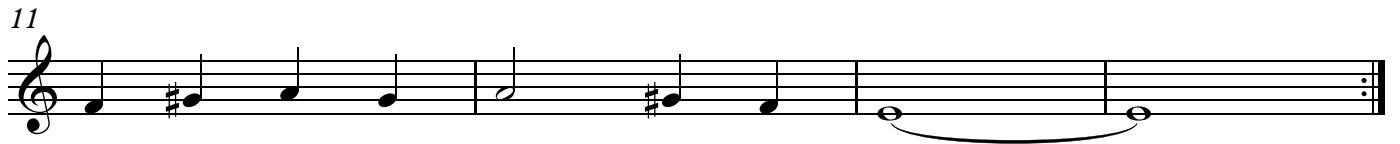
13 Dm Dm E E Am



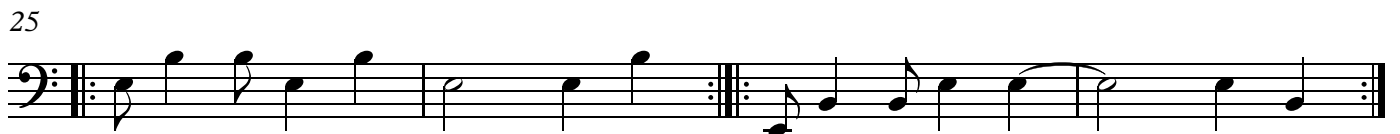
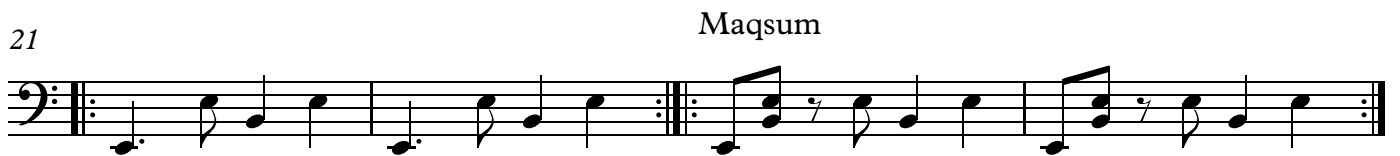
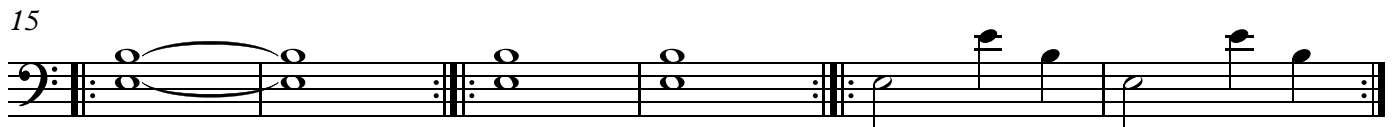
Mevlana Melody

Classical Turkish/Sufi melody
from Loreena McKennitt's Marco Polo
arranged by Verlene Schermer

Melody:



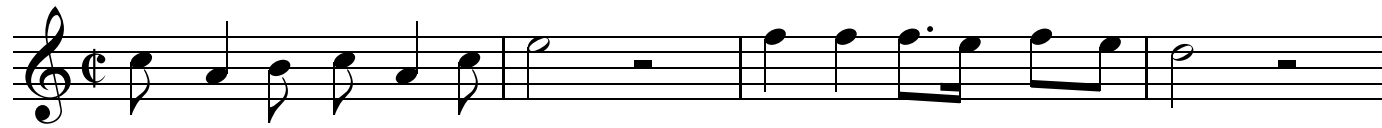
Left Hand Patterns:



Shuru Habitu Uru

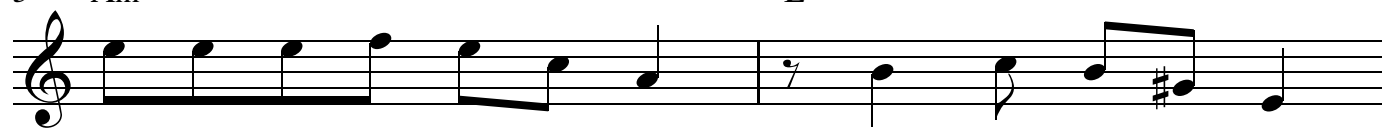
Isreal

Am Dm



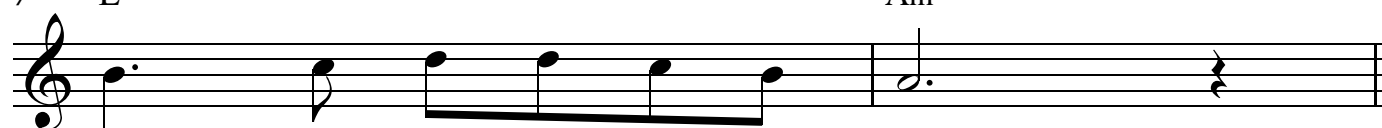
Shoo-roo hah-bee-too oo-roo Mah gah-dol hah-yam hah-zeh

5 Am E




Avsh vo - ke - det beh - cha - zeh vuh - hah - mach - ray - shah

7 E⁷ Am




Shoov po - lah - chat bah - sah - deh.

9 Am E⁷ Am Dm



Et, mah kosh too - ree-yah ve-keel-shon, Hit - lak-doo bi suh-ah - rah.

13 Am E



Vuh - nahd - lee - kah shoov, shoov - et hah - ah - dah - mah

15 E⁷ Am



be - shahl - he - vet yuh - ro - kah.

"Let's be happy and light-hearted. How great is this day.
Planting and making the earth new again.
Forward we will go, planting grain and
Making the fields bright and green for all to see."