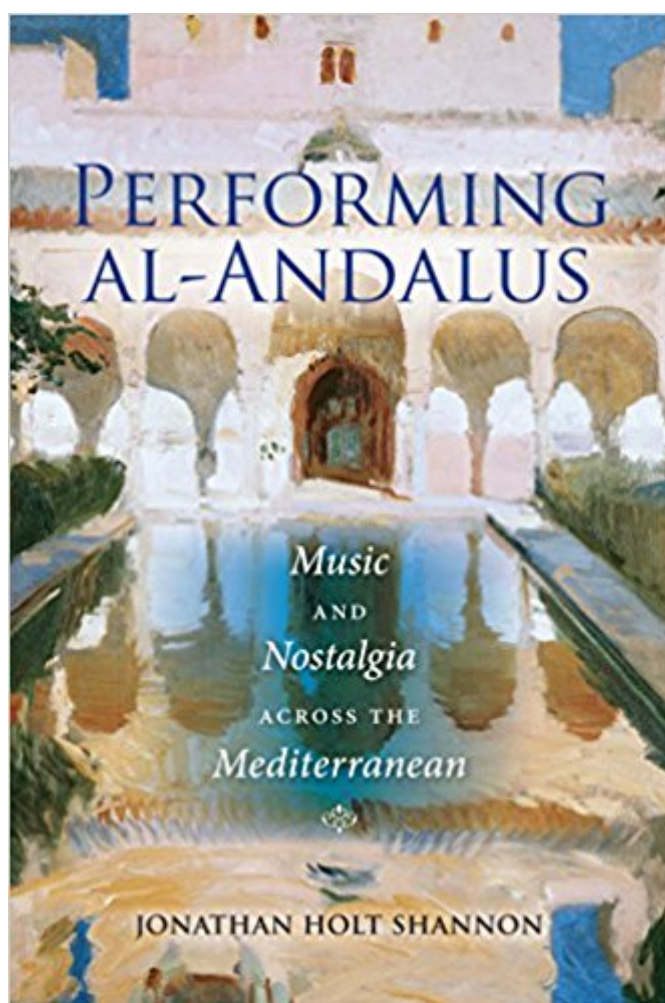


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# Performing Al-Andalus: Music And Nostalgia Across The Mediterranean (Public Cultures Of The Middle East And North Africa)



## Synopsis

Performing al-Andalus explores three musical cultures that claim a connection to the music of medieval Iberia, the Islamic kingdom of al-Andalus, known for its complex mix of Arab, North African, Christian, and Jewish influences. Jonathan Holt Shannon shows that the idea of a shared Andalusian heritage animates performers and aficionados in modern-day Syria, Morocco, and Spain, but with varying and sometimes contradictory meanings in different social and political contexts. As he traces the movements of musicians, songs, histories, and memories circulating around the Mediterranean, he argues that attention to such flows offers new insights into the complexities of culture and the nuances of selfhood.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] major intervention into the emergent field of Andalusian music studies: it is amongst the first full-blown anthropological studies of these traditions, and the first to attempt a cross-cultural comparative perspective.... [A] thought-provoking and illuminating study of the role played by the image and memory of al-Andalus in the modern Mediterranean world." — Carl Davila, SUNY College at Brockport  
"In this elegant, innovative ethnography of pan-Mediterranean musical connections, Jonathan Shannon identifies a protean 'rhetoric of al-Andalus' that intersects, crosscuts, undermines, and reaffirms standard historical narratives and contemporary national boundaries. Linking musical performance to artistic and political discourses, he reveals alternative imaginaries of belonging, and suggests the productive potential of nostalgiaPerforming

al-Andalus illustrates how competing notions of Umayyad Spain – a Muslim golden age for Islamists, an idyll of tolerance for secularists – serve to critique a challenging present and inspire visions of a different future." Christa Salamandra, Lehman College and Graduate Center, CUNY "[This] study is well-written, engaging, and supported by a substantial bibliography.... Recommended." Choice "Shannon has proven once again his deep knowledge of the cultural and intellectual landscape of the region.... Through its comparative and cross-cultural perspective, *Performing al-Andalus* is accessible to a wide audience, addressing particularly those interested in how music interacts with memory cultures, ideologies of belonging and their circulation within a transnational context." Ethnomusicology Forum "Performing al-Andalus is a timely intervention in one of the most crucial debates of our time: the relationship between the Arab world and the West. With great erudition, delicacy of feeling, and stylistic elegance Shannon explores the feelings of commonality and estrangement through which musicians and audiences in Syria, Morocco, and Spain remember a bygone era of multicultural conviviality and envision a shared future in a new Mediterranean--beyond rigid terrestrial cartographies, beyond shipwrecked refugees, beyond the 'war on terror,' and beyond Islamophobia. A must-read." Veit Erlmann, University of Texas "A sizeable body of literature has emerged in recent years that explores the musical legacies of al-Andalus from both a historical and a contemporary perspective. Jonathan Shannon's book is a crucial addition to this scholarship." Music and Letters

Jonathan Holt Shannon is Professor of Anthropology at Hunter College, CUNY. He is author of *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* and *A Wintry Day in Damascus: Syrian Stories*.

This important, scholarly and thorough book, which is as much a discussion of socio-mythology as of musicology, puts into focus how affiliation with a particular place in medieval times has permeated Mediterranean peoples and beyond, particularly Arabs, Spaniards, and Jews, and today affects geo-politics and global fusion music. A cultural nostalgia exists by those with absolutely no experience even with shards of the ancient culture. The Golden Age of Arab culture, as reinforced even in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, is al-Andalus, Moorish Spain. The utopian notion of Andalusia, of interfaith comradeship, open cultural exchange, science and scholarship, and political stability, is essentially a 19th- and early 20th-century invention. The legend of Abu al-Hasan, nickname Ziryab (dark nightingale), the musician of the Baghdad court who outperformed and irked his master, who added the fifth string to the oud, was, in one version, a former Black slave. Moreover, when he fled

to al-Andalus, he arrived with a fellow court musician, the Jew Mansur-al-Yahudi. The cosmopolitan myth of Andalusia was well cemented by this story. Indeed, Ziryab (789-857) is said to have written thousands of songs and established the core style that led to muwashshah poetic forms and the nubat suites, although there is no documentation of his life until a rough account a century after his death. The enhanced legend has been accepted as fact in Spain, across North Africa and the Middle East, and I have heard it told by an Israeli-born Jewish musician. The book's main parts includes the attraction of historical al-Andalus or Hebraic ha-Sepharad plus analysis of the contemporary music identified as Arabo-Andalusian (one of the European musicological designations in use) in Syria, Morocco, and Spain, comparing different motivations and styles. In Syria, with pan-Arab concerns, the loss of Spain is held up with the loss of Palestine and the Golan Heights. The Syrian own muwashshah poetic suites, while differing from Morocco's in modes and rhythms and the presence of contemporary poetry, is claimed to be the more authentic and more Arab, and pride derives from the Caliphate of Spain in Cordoba being of Syrian origin. Morocco, on the other hand, just south of Gibraltar and readily included in al-Andalus through the mutual Almoravid dynasties, has nationality as its interest. It believes that its music and instrumentation, lesser tainted by Ottoman and Persian influences, is closer to medieval Iberian, its Sufi rites also better in preserving the ancient melodies and rhythms. Morocco recognizes the European influence in al-Andalus, carried on by diatonic and sometimes pentatonic modes lacking the microtones of the Levant. As for Spain, which exiled first the Jews and then the Muslims, who even today has a love-hate relationship with the Romani of Andalus, the region of southern Spain, and their flamenco, which includes vestiges of Moorish forms, al-Andalus and its music are simply integrated and absorbed as Spanish. Except for scholars, past composers as de Falla, Albniz, and Tárrega, Romani flamenco artists today, and Spanish students of Early Music, Andalusian music is essentially ancient and foreign, Moorish or Moroccan. Author-musicologist Jonathan Holt Shannon, fluent in Arabic and Spanish, offers a fine, thoughtful, and insightful analysis of the benefits and hazards of historic attachments and denials. His book offers much to consider. Indeed, the book's thesis hits home because my own affinity for Moroccan-Andalusian music, particularly Gharnati and Sufi, entangles a family history that traces back to Sefarad despite hundreds of years of Ashkenazi background. As he points out, the mythologies and legends are nice ideals, but the realities are poorly understood and probably not helpful in our world of continuing East-West conflict.

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