

A rare musical encounter in the home of Avraham Salman

by Esther Warkov

Before immigrating to the U.S. in 1980, Simon Shaheen arranged to visit Avraham Salman in his Ramat Gan, Israel, apartment one morning. I was there to record the session on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. It was a rare instance (considering the era) where musicians of different ethnic backgrounds joined together for the sole purpose of creative music-making (in contrast to a paid engagement). The playing session was also exceptional because it brought together the two most accomplished performers of Arabic music in Israel, notwithstanding Shaheen's age (half that of Salman's), to play infrequently performed *sama'iyyat* from the classical repertoire. Although they had only played together a few times, the level of inspiration was high. Extended *taqsim* were interspersed between the sections (*khanat*) of the *sama'iyyat*. Their session was entirely unrehearsed except to agree on the order of *taqsim*. The entire session, including their remarks—which convey the spirit of this remarkable musical encounter—can be heard [here](#). One of Salman's *taqsim* is analyzed in *Taqsim: Instrumental Improvisation from Near Eastern Traditions* for the Anthology of Musical Traditions in Israel, Jewish Music Research Centre [publication](#).

I was electrified by Salman's creativity, and Shaheen also appeared very inspired, for example, during his *taqsim shad arban*, which elicited approval from Salman. Each musician seemed committed to maximizing their creativity, giving their best to please one another. At the end of the session, they exchanged affectionate remarks in Arabic. When Salman asked how I enjoyed it, I replied "*tarbani!*" (i.e., "I experienced *tarab*, an exalted state"), which seemed to amuse him. My "*allah*" (expression of approval) could be heard in his *taqsim husayni*—a breathtaking virtuosic improvisation with numerous modulations. Salman offered [this *samai and taqsim*](#) after the two of them had completed playing together, perhaps so Shaheen could be a part of the audience, which by then included a few family members. Shaheen ended the session apparently in an elevated mood, humming to himself, as can be heard on the [recording](#). This truly remarkable session is etched in my memory and preserved for posterity.