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CD BOOK

Kuwait

Sea Songs of the Arabian Gulf
Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band



Text & Recordings:

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Sea Songs of the Arabian Gulf

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Recreational Songs

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. <i>imjailisī</i> | 2:39 |
| 2. <i>'adsānī</i> | 10:35 |
| 3. <i>ḥaddādī</i> | 11:26 |
| 4. <i>imkhālif/imkhōlfī</i> | 4:47 |
| 5. <i>ḥasāwī</i> | 6:48 |

Work Songs

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 6. <i>sanginī</i> | 9:00 |
| 7. <i>dawwārī</i> | 1:37 |
| 8. <i>khatfah</i> | 3:11 |
| 9. <i>khrāb ṣidrah</i> | 3:06 |
| 10. <i>yāmmāl/mīdāf</i> | 1:10 |
| 11. <i>rāṣṭabl (yāmlī)</i> | 1:11 |

Sea Songs of the Arabian Gulf: Kuwait
Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band
Recordings and Texts By Lisa Urkevich¹

Introduction

The Arabian/Persian Gulf is one of the most musical regions of the entire Peninsula, and over the centuries, many categories of arts have flourished alongside one another including Bedouin genres, “Incoming” arts, and styles with Arab urban roots. But it is the songs of the sea that have had a special place in the hearts of citizens. From time immemorial the sea has been the leading force in shaping the culture and economic identity of Gulf societies. Historically, sea songs were part of daily life, whether one was aboard a vessel or on shore.

Before the 1930s and oil wealth, at various times over half of the population of the Upper Gulf States of Kuwait, Eastern Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar was involved in pearling or maritime trade (Fig. 1). Residents served as divers, captains, sailors, traders, food suppliers, fishermen, ship builders, and in other support roles. Merchant seamen, who were gone for six months out of the year, traveled to India, Yemen, East Africa and various points in between, and they were invariably accompanied by a contingent of musicians who led the singing crew during chores and entertained them in the evening. Pearl diving boats likewise were equipped with musicians, although they only performed shanties, work songs, which were vital for elevating the spirits of the tormented divers. Music too was common on shore. Shipbuilders and workmen loading and unloading vessels sang on the beach, as did women, especially during the diving season when, through song, they would implore the sea to safely return their men. When back home, seamen would meet in the evenings at a gathering place called a *dīwāniyah* in Kuwait or *dār* in the other Upper States and perform sessions of entertainment song cycles. So sea music was constantly being sung or listened to by Gulf peoples (Fig. 2).

With the development of the cultured pearl and the discovery of oil in the early 20th century, the Gulf pearling industry began to collapse and the need for functional sea songs decreased. However, many of the seamen and others who felt a strong affinity to maritime culture, continued to group together and eventually formed “bands,” each one associated with its own *dīwāniyah/dār* meeting place. These bands survive today and have a solid team of core members who are still often descendants of a long line of pearlmen and sailors. The musical *dīwāniyah* has replaced the vessel, and as would be found aboard a ship, there is protocol, a hierarchy of membership, and rules on various issues such as who shall perform instruments. Approximately ten such sea bands are extant in the Upper Gulf States. These large groups, which include from twenty to a hundred men who are further embellished by a substantial participatory audience, help to maintain heritage in times of vast modernization. Most bands perform at weddings, national events, and religious festivities,



Figure 1: Map of the Upper Gulf States. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar have shared maritime music traditions



Figure 2: Hamid Bin Hussein Band performing a *naḥmah* section of *ḥaddādī* in their *dīwāniyah* (Band leader Mohammad Bin Hussein is seated center with arms extended)*

but some also hold weekly social soirees. As was the case among the seamen of the past, these gatherings forge ties and foster both a nationalistic and community brotherhood.

Arguably, the most vibrant sea music survives in Kuwait. In many ways, economic and cultural changes came more slowly to Kuwait than to the other Upper Gulf regions. While oil was discovered in industrial quantities in Bahrain in 1932 and Saudi Arabia in 1933, it was not found in Kuwait until the late 1930s and was not exported until 1946. So Kuwaitis were among the last in the Gulf to relinquish pearling (Fig. 3). Indeed, due to a great affinity for its diving past, Kuwait did not officially close its pearl-oyster market until the year 2000, and was thus the last nation in the Arabian Gulf to do so. Moreover, more so than others, Kuwait was connected to the sea through shipbuilding and shipping. Indeed, the country was founded for its port, the finest in the Upper Gulf, and even as late as 1939-40 the Kuwaiti merchant fleet remained quite healthy, being comprised of 2000-2500 ships that were navigated by at least 30,000-40,000 mariners.² Thus, today in Kuwait there are still some alive who worked as traditional pearlers, sailors, and merchants, and they or their descendants have been active in the extant sea bands of the country, such as the Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band featured on this recording.

Traditional Role of Sea Songs

When merchant seamen returned from their long winter voyages, often they were involved in pearl diving related activities. Divers and the crew would leave for the entire summer, four months from May to mid September. Hundreds of boats from each of the Gulf ports would depart en masse, with their national flags flying, and eventually converge at several large areas of pearl beds (Fig. 4). Life onboard merchant ships was more relaxed since there were long periods of sailing with inactivity, so along with work songs, there was time for recreational songs. In contrast, life on the pearling boats was unbearably crowded and harsh and the crew suffered great hardships (Fig. 5). Undernourishment was common, and the men were regularly plagued by lung disease, fungal infections of the skin, scurvy, and of course, they faced vicious shark attacks. Since the average workday could last up to sixteen hours, divers regularly collapsed when finished, thus there was no time or interest in any kind of recreational music. However, there was a great need for songs, that is, work songs. The unbearable heat, the hunger,

the loneliness, and the never-ending labor required the divers to have some kind of external encouragement. Justifiably, most pearl diving boats were manned with musician-crewmen that included a solo singer, but sometimes 2-3 singers called *nabhāmīn*, sing. *nabhām*. There was also a drummer who performed on the large double-headed barrel membranophone, the *ṭabl bahrī*, i.e., "sea drum" (Fig. 6). A third man would play a pair of small hand cymbals known as *ṭwysāt* (Kuwait, lit. "lids") or *tus/tasat* that are linked together with a long cotton chord (Figs. 7). The crew who would dance and shake to the music, would also join in on the

singing and add vigorous interlocking clapping called *sharbukah*, which is still commonly engaged in by Kuwaiti youth today.

A specific type of song accompanied each chore, whether it be hauling anchors, raising sails, manning oars, or dumping baskets of oysters onto the deck. Almost every task was accompanied by song, so the music was endless. Thus, pearling musicians were quite busy, although, now and then some also served as crewmen: such depended on one's status, as there were various ranks of musicians. Since a good *nabhām* could attract the top pearlers, keep them motivated through the chores, and help them pray to God for protection, some musicians were hired exclusively for their talents and were well paid, at times more so than the esteemed divers. Unlike pearling vessels, on the merchant ships there was often an "ud" (lute) player/singer known as a *imkabbus* who took the lead in evening recreational songs.³



Figure 3: Kuwaiti divers with nose clips coming up for air, Villiers, 1939;
© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London



Figure 4: Kuwaiti youth in 2010 on a pearl diving boat. Since 1986 each summer in the scorching heat, the Kuwait Sea Sports Club holds a month-long training camp for young men that results in a ten-day pearl diving expedition where they sail sixty miles to the oyster beds



Figure 5: Tired Arabian Pearl Divers with nose clips in need of musical encouragement, 1908, Leonard Woolf



Figure 6 and 7. *Ṭabl baḥrī* “sea drum,” a staple instrument of both work and recreational sea songs and *Ṭwysāt*, small hand cymbals known as *ṭūs/ṭāsaṭ* in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. *Ṭwysāt* are connected with a cotton cord and played by striking one downward against the other. Often two performers, each with a set, play them in an interlocking fashion

Fijirī Cycle

When the divers and merchant seamen returned from their voyages they would take part in all-night musical entertainments that are still performed today known as *fijirī* in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. *Fijirī*⁷ literally means “until *fajr*,” that is, until morning prayer when the celebrations would end. Kuwaitis used to use this word, however, since at least 1960 the term *uns* (joyfulness) is often used to designate entertainment sea music sessions. The *uns* song cycles were sung at home on land for mere enjoyment or for a special celebration like a wedding. They were often also sung on merchant ships or when a crew was docked at a foreign port, at which time Kuwaiti seamen might welcome locals or crew from other regional vessels to join in their festivities. *Fijirī* /*luns* was not done on pearl diving boats because the men were too exhausted in the evenings to take part in any revelry.

Fijirī /*luns* are headed by a few *nabhām* accompanied by percussionists with large choirs of men, sometimes hundreds, huddled together facing inward, seated on the ground in the fashion developed onboard a vessel (Fig. 2). They clap, sing, dance and jump in a stylized fashion, often leaping high into the air. The instrumentation includes two *tabl bahrī* and two pairs of *twysāt*--staple instruments of work songs--but also there are four to a dozen clay water jugs called *ijaḥala* or *jaḥala* (sing. *jaḥal*)--pronounced “*iḥala*” in Kuwaiti dialect--and up to a dozen *mirwās/marāwīs*, which are small cylindrical hand drums (Figs. 9, 10). In Kuwait the *hāwan*, a brass mortar usually used to crush coffee and herbs, is added to the group and played like a musical instrument. It is struck on the outside with sticks like an inverted bell, and often takes the place of the *twysāt* (cymbals) at least during the main *fijirī* cycle in Kuwait (Fig. 11). Earlier in the evening a sea band will play songs that call for fewer than a dozen frame (*tār/tīrān*) that have camel bells known as “*barashīm*” attached to the inside of the rim (Fig. 12). These drums might be brought out again later in the evening when the choice of repertoire becomes less restricted.

During the specific *fijirī* cycle, all the performers and participants are seated tightly together, as they would be on a merchant ship, which permits for a rich musical texture and overtones. The genres are sung in a set order. Sea singers can perform several pieces from each genre should they choose before moving to the next. The order is as follows:

1. *‘adsānī* (and/or *bahrī* outside of Kuwait. N.B., both *‘adsānī* and *bahrī* use frame drums. *‘Adsānī* is in 16/4 meter in Kuwait)⁵
2. *ḥaddādī* (12/4 meter)
3. *imkhālif/imkh lfi* (has no *ijrahān* section, 8/4 meter)
4. *ḥasāwī* (6/4)

Except for *imkhālif* each of these genres subdivides into three sections: *ijrahān*, *tanzīlah*, and *naḥmah*. *Ijrahān*, from the word *jarḥ* meaning “hurt,” is a free solo improvisation section sung by a wailing, mournful *nabhām*. *Tanzīlah*, which follows, is the main choral section of the song marked by the entrance of the percussion, and *naḥmah* is the closing section where the chorus stops singing and instead will produce a light hum (called *wannah*) while the *nabhām* takes the lead in passionate wailing laments. During this third *naḥmah* section the *nabhām* truly shines and produces *ṭarab*—musical rapture, while the men of the chorus form small circles (a *mead*) and clap (*sharbukah*) and pat the ground. A lone participant will enter the circle and dance in a wiggly, jump fashion, like a slippery fish, after which, another man will take his place, and so forth (Figs. 2, 8).⁶

Each of these sea genres, ‘*adsānī*, *ḥaddādī*, *imkhālif* and *ḥasāwī*, has its own rhythmic mode that is heard in both the *tanzīlah* and *naḥmah* sections, while the *ijrahān* is unmetered. The texts for the *ijrahān* and *naḥmah* are chosen by the *nabhām* (singer) from preexisting or newly composed poems known as *mawwāl* or *zuhayri*.⁷ Sometimes the *nabhām* will improvise lyrics, and in earlier times he might have mentioned contemporary social or political incidences. The texts for part two of the seated sea songs, the *tanzīlah*, are pre-established, since all in the choir-audience must know the lyrics.



Figure 8: During *uns/fjirī* participants leap high into the air like fish bounding from the Gulf water



Figure 9: *Jaḥalah*/*iḥalah* water jugs. The lead singer Khalid Bin Hussein is seated in front of the microphone



Figure 10: *Marāwīs*/*mirwās* drumming at an *uns*. In the Upper Gulf, both heads on the drum are played, as the bottom one is tapped or at various times muted while the top head is struck



Figure 11: *Hāwan*, the brass mortar, is played as a musical instrument by sea bands of Kuwait



Figure 12: 'Adsānī performance with *tīrān* (frame drums) on which are attached *barashīm* (camel bells)

Uns (Joyfulness)

In Kuwait the term *uns* might be used to describe just the specific *fjiri* songs but often it implies a larger structure. Whenever a sea band performs in the Upper Gulf today, it is common to have *fjiri* "sea" songs preceded by songs that have a tie to the land (songs with frame drums), followed by songs that have a tie to the city (that is, "*ḥaḍar*," "settled peoples" songs, i.e., songs with an ud-lute). Regardless of the designators "land" and "city," all of this music is actually part of the sea community tradition. In early times certain land songs, certain frame drum songs, played a major role in shore performances, such as those held to celebrate the construction of a new ship. The city songs were well loved on the long voyages of merchant ships. So today a sea band at an evening party will usually sing at least one or two songs from the groupings, land, sea, city, in that order.

Before the official *uns* commences, there is a performance of a few loud hypnotic *laywa*, which is a music genre brought to the Gulf by African slaves centuries ago. It is sung/danced between the Maghrib and Isha prayers, that is, around 7pm. For *laywa*, specific African drums are played along with the double-reeded *ṣurnāy* (oboe-like instrument), the volume of which alerts all in the neighborhood of the coming *uns* that will normally commence around 9 pm.

Full *Uns* Structure as heard in Kuwait Typical Sea Band Evening Performance

Laywa, loud, African-inspired music, functioning as an "announcement" followed by a break for Maghrib prayer.

A. **Pay respect to the Land** (i.e., music that includes the *tār*). Sometimes excluded. If included, normally, no more than one or two types of pieces are performed.

‘arḍa baḥrī ("sea" version of the sword dance that hails from central Arabia)
sanginī
imjailisī (pronounced "*imyailisī*" in Kuwait)
khammārī

‘adsānī (normally part of *fjiri* proper but includes *tār* so has land affiliation)

B. Pay respect to the Sea (*fijirī* proper)

ḥaddādī (12/4 meter)

imkhālif / imkh lfi (8/4 meter)

ḥasāwī (6/4 meter)

C. Pay respect to the City (usually music that includes ‘*ūd*--lute)

ṣaut

bastah

khashābah (southern Iraqi style, only performed in certain *dīwāniyah*)

In the 21st century, following city songs, the evening might continue into the early morning hours with popular, danceable music known as *shakshakah* (“shake, shake”).

Note that since the rise of professional modern sea bands and the decline of maritime livelihoods, *uns* evenings might begin with a work song like *dawwārī* (#7), or especially with a *sanginī* (#6), since this later genre features *ṭīrān*, which are land instruments. A dignified, nationalistic ‘*arḍa baḥri* also often initiates an *uns* evening, especially for a musical session at a wedding celebration, and the Bin Hussein band might perform *imjailisī* (#1), another *ṭār*-based genre.



Figure 13: *Ṣurnāy* (oboe) traditionally accompanies *imjailisī* and *sanginī*. The musician puffs his cheeks which aids in the requisite *ṣurnāy* circular-breathing technique

THE RECORDINGS

Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band

The recordings are of Kuwaiti musicians made between 2006-2012, with the exception of the *ḥasāwī*, which was recorded in Kuwait the 1970s and the first part of the *imjailisī* track was recorded in the 1960s. The performers are from the long-standing Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band, which was founded in the 1940s and was originally comprised of seamen, like Hamid (an assistant captain), who converged and performed informally at the *diwānīyah* of the Kuwaiti Johar Al-Inghawi. When Al-Inghawi died in the late 1930s, Hamid kept meeting with the group. Subsequently, one of the members became an administrator at Kuwait Radio and encouraged Hamid to formalize the band, and thus the ensemble became official in 1952. The performance tradition was passed down to Hamid's family members and the band is now led by his son Mohammad Bin Hussein, whose brother Khalid serves as a principal *nabhām* and *imkabbus* (Fig. 9). Mohammad's sons are standard performers and they and other band youth will eventually take up the mantle and keep the ensemble alive into the future, which is impressive in times of modernization and competing interest. The Hamid Bin Hussein Band is highly respected for its commitment to heritage. The band performs regionally and internationally representing Kuwait, but they perform most regularly in their *dīwānīyah*, which is where most of these present recordings were made.

Entertainment Song Recordings (*Uns-Fijirī*), 1-5

1. *imjailisī* is a rare music of the sea community now found only in Kuwait, and since at least the late 20th century—and perhaps much longer—it has only been performed by the Hamid bin Hussein Band. The name “*imjailisī*” comes from the verb *jalsa*, “to sit,” as the drummers, that include a *ṭabl bahri* and *tīrān* players, are seated with the singing audience. In the middle of them is another smaller standing group of a dozen or so men in flanks of 4-5, each bearing a thin shepherd's staff that rests on the shoulder. To the music, these standing men kick out their feet in time together, right then left. They will then all slightly jump and turn in the opposite direction and do this move again. Throughout, the dancers adjust their movements, sometimes walking forward in unison, or raising and lowering their staffs in front of them to the beat. *Imjailisī* is a celebratory genre that at one time was performed at Gulf weddings by men or women.

The track is in two parts and begins with a 1960s performance of the Hamid bin Hussein Band: it includes the playing of a loud *ṣurnāy* (oboe), as was tradition in *imjailisī* (Fig. 13). The second part of the track features a 2010 version of the same piece by the current Hamid Bin Hussein Band, but without the *ṣurnāy*. The instrument is often omitted in present times so that the text of the voices can be better heard.

The rhythmic mode of *imjailisī* is somewhat unique in that, unlike most other sea rhythms that feature the low “dum” and the higher “tek” frame drum sounds, there are also many light “ka” sounds, that is, light muted pats, played near the center of the membrane (Fig. 14).

♩ = 58-68



Figure 14: *Imjailisī* rhythm as performed by the Bin Hussein Band

Note that sea *imjailisī* should not be confused with the art form of Bedouin with the same name. Seamen pronounce the name of their genre as “im-yail-i-si”, changing the “j” to a “y,” which is common in Gulf dialect, while the Bedouin retain the “j” sound.

2. *‘adsānī* is often the first seated piece played during *uns*, or more specifically, some assert it is the first genre in a *fijirī* cycle. It has characteristics of both land and sea music proper. It features the *tīrān* (frame drums), which are primarily “land” instruments, and it has no “sea” instruments other than the *ṭabl baḥrī*. *‘Adsānī* in Kuwait includes a rhythmic mode related to the famous *khammārī* rhythm of Kuwait, which is usually performed in land songs, even at women’s wedding parties. However, like other *fijirī* sea genres, *‘adsānī* is subdivided into three parts, *ijrahān*; *tanzīlah*; *naḥmah*, and the last part (*naḥmah*) calls for the men to form a seated circle in which soloists dance. *‘Adsānī* are known for their prayerful words and mournful melodies. In a way, they serve like a blessing before the rest of the *fijirī*.

The *naḥhām* of the *ijrahān* in this recording is Khalid bin Hussein. After the solo *ijrahān*, the choir takes the lead, unaccompanied, in preparation for the *tanzīlah*, as is common in *fijirī* pieces (Figs. 15, 16).

	يا الله يا الله يا الله
Oh God, Oh God, Oh God	
	صلاة ربي ما جرى
Lord, I do not know what happened	
	في كل بحر سو جرى
In each sea of life something bad occurs	
	يغشي النبي خير البرى
Fearing the Prophet, the best human being	
	صلوا عليه وسلموا
Salute him and give thanks	

Figure 15: Text to the *‘adsānī tanzīlah*



Figure 16: Core rhythm of Kuwaiti ‘*adsānī* performed on frame drums

3. *ḥaddādī* is sea music proper, part of *fijirī*. Like the following two genres in the cycle *imkhālīf* and *ḥasāwī*, the primary sea instruments are used: *iḥalah/jaḥalah*, *hāwan*, *ṭabl bahrī*, and *mirwās*. In Bahrain, the *ṭ s/ṭāsāt* (cymbals) would be played instead of the *hāwan* (brass mortar). “*Ḥaddādī*” gets its name from blacksmiths or the large metal spike used to pound in oakum to caulk the ship. When several men are hammering on these spikes, a rich interlocking sound is produced somewhat similar to the sound of the Gulf clapping that one will hear in these sea pieces. Although the *ḥaddādī* is a tool for work, it should be noted that the song genre *ḥaddādī* is for leisure (Fig. 18).

This rhythmic mode of the *tanzīlah* and the *naḥmah* of *ḥaddādī* is a twelve-beat pattern (Fig. 17). The *naḥhām* on this recording is Khalid bin Hussein.

Figure 17: Core 12-beat *ḥaddādī* rhythm performed on *jaḥalah* and *hāwan*

يا رب أصلي ذا الجلالة وما نسيته الصلاة

O Lord, I pray for You, full of glory, I never forgot to pray

ولو يبلغ المختار طه ومن مدمع العين جراري

If you would only listen to your chosen one Taha, My eyes are crying

Figure 18: Lyrics to the *tanzīlah* of the *ḥaddādī*

4. *imkhālīf*⁸ is sometimes referred to as *ḥaddādī imkhālīf*. *Imkhālīf* is related to the word “*khalāfa*,” that is, something that goes against the rules or is different. *Imkhālīf* pieces are different in that, unlike the other seated sea songs, they only have two sections, not three. There is no introductory *ijrahān*. The *tanzīlah* and *naḥmah* of *imkhālīf* are in an eight-beat pattern, which is something like the second half of a *khatfa* work song rhythm. The *naḥām* on this recording is Salman Al-Amāri (Figs. 19, 20).



Figure 19: Core rhythm of *imkhālīf* in 8/4

	دموع العين مجراها
	على الخدين جرى ماها
Tear drops are falling	
On the cheeks, you can feel their wetness	
	كفا الله سوهدنيا
	وعلينا اليوم مجراها
God help us with the sleeplessness	
That we suffer from today	
	تعالوا حاولوا ما بي
	ترى جرح الهوي فيني
Come, feel what I feel	
To see how much love has hurt me	
	وأنا المجروح بالصوابي
	وبحيل الله يزول الهم
I am wounded with love	
And only God can relieve the pain	

Figure 20: *Imkhālīf tanzīlah* text

5. *ḥasāwī* refers to the oasis region of Al-Ḥasā in eastern Saudi Arabia (Fig. 1, i.e., “Hofuf;”) and it is also a regional family name. It is not as prevalent in Qatar, but in the other Upper Gulf states, the seated sea music section of a *fjiri/uns* always concludes with a *ḥasāwī*. As with *ḥaddādī* and *imkhālīf*, a band can play as many *ḥasāwī* as it would like, but when the last one is finished, they must put away their sea instruments and, since at least the late 19th-early 20th centuries, move onto *ṣaut*, a genre with urban roots. While many *ḥaddādī* may be heard in an evening, normally only one or two *ḥasāwī* are played.

The *ḥasāwī* music is in a 6/4 meter with a stately triple feel. The *ḥasāwī* on this recording is quite famous and was made in Kuwait in the 1970s. The *nahhām* is Issa bin Jassim who worked with the Kuwaiti Al-Mayouf Band. Members of the Bin Hussein group join him in this performance (Fig. 21).

ijrahān/jarhān

I planted a garden in the one with a cold heart and tended to it

Crops grew beyond what I had hoped for

زرعت بستان في قاسي القلب ورويته

لما استوى الزرع وتزايد ما تمنيته

تنزيلة

tanzīlah

I cannot bear to be apart, I am miserable

Look, it stole my mind and everything I have

On Tuesday I became bed ridden

His [Her] sword is wonderful when he [she] cares

I wish I were a log in the hand of a carpenter

On the day he [she] comes back, I cannot bear it

ما قوي على الفرقة وأنا المحزون

قرون سلب عقلي وكل ما لي

يوم الثلاثاء صرت أنا فراش

في سيفه البدعة هو بالي

يا ليتي اعويد في يد نجار

يومي في جدومه ولا ياوي

Figure 21: *Ḥasāwī* text

Work Songs (Shanties), 6-11

The genre names of work songs provided here come from Kuwaiti maritime traditions and are used by Kuwaiti sea bands in the 21st century. Unless otherwise noted, most of these terms are also used or known by various bands in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. However, one should keep in mind that rhythmic embellishments or performance styles might vary between countries, and sometimes between bands within the same country. Also, there is occasionally more than one name for a work song genre--one might be preferred in one region, and another, in another region. For instance, *yāmmāl* is a common term for the rowing song in Kuwait, while the same song might be called *mīdāf* in Bahrain, however, mariners from both traditions will

use and respond to either name. Some work songs are performed on shore and some at sea. Shore songs tend to include frame drums (*tīrān*). Normally, frame drums were not played for work songs on a vessel.

Because of the hardships of pearlers' lives, the texts of work songs include strong prayers to God and mournful verses from poems known as *mawwāl*, *mawwailī* (little *mawwāl*), or *zuhayri*, the later of which is a type of seven-lined stanza poem that originated in Iraq. The soloist usually does not sing an entire poem, but rather chooses sections freely and will repeat verses or modify the words as he sees fit.

6. *sanginī*⁹ is not a work song per se but rather a genre that follows shore labor. It was performed on the beach after a vessel was cleaned and caulked and ready to enter the sea on a return trip, or upon the initial launching of a new ship (Fig. 22). *Sanginī* serves as a type of musical blessing. Its name comes from the Persian word “*sangīn*,” which means “heavy,” and a *sanginī* performance is “heavy” in that it is full of depth and grandeur, being comprised of three parts, the first of which has a lengthy 64-beat rhythmic mode. It is considered the most complex of all the songs affiliated with chores.

Today only Kuwaitis perform *sanginī* and they take great pride in this fact. Stories abound of Saudis and Iraqi ship owners requesting Kuwaiti *sanginī* before they would permit their fresh vessels to enter the water. Some in other Gulf nations have speculated that long ago their ancestors also performed *sanginī*. This is possible; however, to date most non-Kuwaiti musicians and their maritime fathers do not recall personally performing *sanginī*, while Kuwaitis cannot recall a time when they did not perform it. That, and the fact that the genre includes a rhythmic mode unique to Kuwait (Kuwaiti *khammārī*), supports the strong Kuwaiti affiliation, at least in the past century.

The instruments used in *sanginī* are the *ṭabl baḥrī*, *twysāt*, six or more *tīrān*, and interlocking hand claps (*shar-bukah*). In earlier times the *surnāy* was included, but since the mid 1980s this oboe-like instrument has often been omitted. *Sanginī* is in three distinct movements each with its own rhythmic mode and tempo, but they are played successively without breaks as follows (Fig. 23):

1. *sanginī* (64-beat pattern), longest section. On the recording this section last almost five minutes.
2. *ishbaithī* (Kuwaiti *khammārī* rhythm, 16-beat pattern). Second longest section
3. *shāb rī* (16-beat pattern). Brief coda, or closing “tail” section

The drummers stand at the far side of two lines of men who face each other. During the first part of *sanginī*, which is actually called “*sanginī*,” the *nabhām* primarily sings, but in olden times there would be a *surnāy* player. Throughout this section, the linesmen will clap or stomp, making large slow, deliberate gestures, as

does the *tabl bahri* drummer, who raises his stick high or bends low. At various points, one rank of men walk toward the other to an eight-beat pattern, and when they meet, both ranks will squat for another eight beats, then shout, and the original rank will quickly return to its starting place. This move is repeated by the 2nd rank who likewise will advance on the first, then retreat.

During the second section *ishbaithi*, which has a quicker 16-beat Kuwaiti *khammari* rhythm, the linesmen clap and sing in alternation with the singing *tiran* players. Now and then a solo man may break free from the ranks and dance a little, but for the most part this section has no unified group movement. In *shab ri*, the third section of the genre, which is faster still, the men romp in a circle, clap and sing in a joyful, celebratory manner.

The recording was made during an Eid celebration in 2006 and the tempo has been slightly increased because of the band's elated spirit during this festive time. The *nahham* is Khalid bin Hussein.



Figure 22: First movement of a *sangini*. Two ranks of men produce a slow, deliberate clap. This *sangini* is being performed in a *dīwāniyah*

Sanginī
سنچني

1. *sanginī*

سنچني

نواح العيس فى من

The camel cries in Mina

2. *ishbaithī*

شبيثي\إشبيثي

Large chorus

هدوم ياقلبي هدو

مدار الغربي و جانا النوم

ياطير يلي مغرب

مغرب على باب الله

My heart is destroyed, destroyed

The cool, dry western wind encircles me and makes me sleepy

You bird (my Love), heading to the west

Go to the west, to the door of God [your future/dreams]

Percussionists-*fīrān* players

جيت الحلومح الموح

I came upon my love, concealed, hidden

[she couldn't see me clearly]

وروايحة تر الروح

When I smelled her scent,

my soul [whole being] was brought back to life

"Ay wallah" punctuates the movement--it means, "Yes, indeed," or "I swear" or "With God"

3. *shābūrī*

شابورى

مالك غير الفندوس

For you there is nothing but dates

7. *dawwārī* means “circling” and *dawwār* is the word for capstan. This song is for heaving the main anchor cable on merchant ships using a capstan, or for hauling a vessel onto the shore (Fig. 24). It can also be performed without the capstan. To perform a capstan *dawwārī* a team of sailors in single file walk in a circular pattern, taking turns moving the large spoke wheel, clapping and singing in between turns. In capstan-less *dawwārī*, more common on smaller vessels that have no room for the device, the men flank both sides of the rope, and while grabbing it, they walk in the opposite direction of the anchor or vessel, and then loop back to the front of the rope and take another turn (Fig. 25). *Dawwārī* is one of the most beloved and well-known sea rhythms of Kuwait. The rhythmic mode is in a 12-beat meter.¹⁰



Figure 24: A crewman pushing the bar of a capstan (*dawwār*), 1936-37. A *dawwārī* song would have been sung as the men turned the device. A.R. and S. Lindt



Figure 25: Men re-enacting a rope pull song in a *dīwāniyah*

8. *khatfah* is a song used to hoist the main sail on a vessel. A slow free section where the *nabhām* and crew announce their dependence on God and need for His assistance always precedes it. Once the rhythmic mode begins, the men must always clap and produce a deliberate, strong foot stomp in unison at strategic points (there tend to be short intervals between two successive pulls that permit the crew to adjust their grips on the mast rope). The tempo depends on the size of the mast. Larger ships with thick, heavy ropes and vast sails will call for slower music than a small pearl diving boat where the tempos for rope songs are quicker. During *khatfah* on a merchant ship, men will take breaks from the rope pulling to join in on the clapping and dancing. The rhythmic mode of *khatfah* is a 16-beat pattern and is slightly similar to that of *jīb*, a song sung for lowering the small sail.

The *nabhāmīn* on this track are Adnan Al-Kharees and Tariq Al-Houli who alternate performing.

9. *khrāb ṣidrah* (or *khrāb ‘ala ṣidrah*, or simply *khrāb*). *Khrāb* is the word for the anchor cable, and *ṣidrah* comes from the noun *ṣadr*, which means chest or breast. The *ṣidrah* of a boat is the bow, that is, the “breast” of the vessel. Therefore, some assert that *khrāb ṣidrah* is a song for heaving the anchor that is stationed at the

bow of the ship. Others say it is a rope pull song sung while seated, while the rope is at the seamen's chest level. *Khrāb šidrah* was normally performed on pearl diving boats or small vessels that did not have enough room to perform *dawwārī*.

The music is free improvisation over a drone with no set rhythmic mode: in sea music, this kind of texture is known as *naḥmah*, and several work songs are in *naḥmah* style. Note that *naḥmah* is also the word for the third section of *fijiri* songs, which have the same texture as these work songs. In *khrāb šidrah* a single *nabhām* will offer melancholy verses, and when his voice tires, another *nabhām* will take his place. All the while, the crew is positioned on both sides of the rope, quickly pulling it in together, hand over hand, rocking forward then back in unison, while they produce low guttural humming known as *naḥbah* (Fig. 25). Some say the *naḥbah* sound resembles the low purr one hears underwater when there is pressure on the eardrums. Others say, it is otherworldly and symbolizes the jinn (genies) that the oxygen-deprived divers would encounter beneath the sea.

The *nabhāmīn* on this track are Adnan Al-Kharees and Tariq Al-Houli.

10. *yāmmāl/mīdāf* (i.e., oar, from *mījdāf*) is a rowing song. On pearl diving boats, sailors depended on rowing to launch the boat to sea, move the vessel during poor weather, and to travel between diving spots (Fig. 26, 27). On merchant ships, seaman used the oars to row small boats to shore and back. Therefore, the pace of the unmetred *yāmmāl* will vary depending on the speed of the rowing. The *nabhām* sings sections of *zuhayri* or *mawwāl/mawailī* poems. The choir, who are the rowers, respond with “hayy” or “hee” or two syllables, “hup hayy.” The refrain actually serves a function, because it is during this expulsion of air and the grunting of “hayy” that the crewmen pull back on the oars or haul in the anchor. In many *yāmmāl*, as presented on this recording, the refrain is “hup [hop] hayy” with the pull being on the higher pitched, stronger word “hup,” and the release on the lighter “hayy.” Many seamen have commented that the release groan resembles that of a camel when it collapses and rests after carrying a heavy load. A great deal of the mariners of Kuwait came from Bedouin ancestry. Their families left the deserts in the 19th century for jobs aboard the ships so one associating sea work with the burden of the beloved desert beast is understandable.

In a modern-day staged performance, it is common to hear *dawwārī* or *khrāb* first followed by a *yāmmāl*, as this combination occurred frequently on the pearl diving boats--after the anchor was heaved in (*khrāb*), the men would immediately man the oars (*yāmmāl*).

11. *rāṣṭabl (yāmlī)* is a work song with a fixed rhythmic mode that has been used for many tasks, such as changing the direction of the sail and folding the sail while it is on the deck and putting it away. Sometimes it

was performed on shore as the vessel was cleaned and coated in lime and fat during the *shoanah* caulking process (Fig. 29), or when dates were being unloaded. Since no *ṭīrān* (frame drums) are used in *rāṣṭabl/yāmlī*, it is likely that its original function was to assist on the sea rather than during land-affiliated chores. *Rāṣṭabl* is a more recent name and literally means “drum head,” but specifically applies to the head with the thicker membrane on the sea drum (*ṭabl baḥrī*), that is, the side that produces the lower “dum” sound and is often struck by a stick. Some say the song is called *rāṣṭabl* because the phrases end with many “dums.” The rhythmic mode is in 12/4 meter, and like *dawwārī*, *rāṣṭabl* songs are used often in modern commercials and festivals (Fig. 28).



Figure 26: Kuwaiti youth today in training to be heritage divers pulling a diving boat to shore. Traditionally this work calls for a pulling song



Figure 27: Kuwaiti crew rowing a pearling boat, 1939.

This type of work calls for *yāmmāl/mīdāf* songs. Villiers; © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

||: ♩ = 80
 Ṭabl Baḥrī $\frac{12}{4}$
 4

Figure 28: *Rāṣṭabl/yāmlī* rhythmic mode



Figure 29: Young heritage divers preparing their vessel in Kuwait in the 21st century. This shoana process includes scraping the bottom of a boat and hammering oakum into the seams, which calls for rāṣṭabl/yāmlī songs

Terms in Arabic

'adah	عدة		
'adsānī	عدساني	mīdāf	ميداف
'arḍah	عرضة	mirwās/marāwīs	مرواس\مروايس
baḥrī	بحري	nahhām	نهام
barashīm	برشيم	nahhāmīn	نهامين
bastah	بسته	naḥbah	نحبه
dār	دار	naḥmah	نحمة
dawwārī	دواري	nashah	نشّه
dīwānīyah	ديوانية	rāṣṭabl	راسطبل
fijirī	فجري	samrah/samrāt	سمررة\سمرات
ḥaddādī	حدادي	sāmri	سامري
ḥasāwī	حساوي	sanginī/sankinī	سنچني\سنقني\سنكني
hāwan	هاون	sardī	سردى
imjailisī	مجلسي	ṣaut	صوت
imkabbus	مكبّس	shakshakah	شكشكه
imkhālif/imkhōlfi	إمخالف\مخولفي	sharbukah	شربكة
ijraḥān/jarḥān	جرحان	shābūrī	شابورى
ishbaythī	شبيثي\إشبيثي	shoanah	شونة
jaḥalah	جحلة	ṣurnāy	صرناي
jinn	جن	ṭabl baḥrī	طبل بحري
kabbūs	كبّوس	tanzīlah	تنزيلة
khammārī	خماري	ṭār/ṭirān	طارا\طيران
khashābah	خشابه	ṭarab	طرب
khaṭfah	خطفة	ṭūs/ṭāsat	طوس\طاسة
khrāb ṣidrah	خراب صدره	ṭwysāt	طويسات
jaḥalah	جحلة	'ūd	عود
jīb	جيب	uns	أنس
la'ib	لعب	wannah	ونه
laywah	ليوة	yāmmāl	يامال
mawwāl	موال	yāmlī	ياملي
mawwaylī	موايلي	zuhayrī	زهيري
mead	ميد	yinash	ينش

* Most of the performing musicians in the photographs are from the Hamid Bin Hussein Band. Cover photograph: Mohammad Bin Hussein, second from the right with Nasser Al-Hadhbh, band manager, on the far right. See Fig. 37 for a list of Arabic Terms with Arabic script.

ENDNOTES

¹ Much thanks goes to Mohammed Bin Hussein for permission to record countless hours of his ensemble and for providing a great deal of information on Kuwaiti sea music over the years. Also, special thanks to the leaders of the other major Kuwaiti sea bands: Ali Al-Roumi and Khalifa Al-Amīrī of the Al-Amīrī Band; and Sulāiman Al-Mayouf of the Mayouf Band. Additional fieldwork was undertaken in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, and gratitude goes to all the musicians who provided assistance.

² Allan Villiers, *Sons of Sinbad* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 351.

³ The term for ' *d* player, *imkabbus* (*emkabbus*), comes from the early 20th century Gulf name for the ' *d*, i.e., *kabb s*. This is likely related to the name “*qanb s*,” which is the lute from Yemen.

⁴ Other variations include *fijrī*, *ifijrī*, *fidjeri*, *lifijrī*.

⁵ The genre “*bahrī*” does not exist in Kuwait. The word *bahrī* simply means “sea,” so often all sea music is referred to generically as “*bahrī*.” However, in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar the word applies to a specific musical genre that uses frame drums and begins *fijirī* sessions.

⁶ This dancing is called *nashah* (*yinash*) or *la'ib*, lit. “play,” but with the regional implying, “compete” as in sport.

⁷ *Mawwāl* is a generic Arab word for vocal improvisation but it is also used in the Gulf to describe a simple poetic form that is sung.

⁸ Pronounced “*emkhālif*.” In Bahrain the word is *imkh lfi*.

⁹ *Sanginī* is often found transliterated as “*sankinī*” or sometimes “*sanqinī*” because there is no “g” sound in Arabic. However, the word derives from the Persian language and is always pronounced with a “g” in Kuwait.

¹⁰ The rhythmic mode of *dawwārī* and other sea songs can be found in L. Urkevich, *Music and Traditions of the Arabian Peninsula* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

About the Author/Producer:

Lisa Urkevich Ph.D. is a professor of Musicology-Ethnomusicology and Chair of the Dept. of Music and Drama at the American University of Kuwait where she teaches classes on the music and rituals of the Arabian Peninsula. For over fifteen years, she has lived in and undertaken extensive fieldwork in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. She is the author of *Music and Traditions of the Arabian Peninsula* (Routledge, 2014). www.urkevich.com

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Kuwait

Sea Songs of the Arabian Gulf

Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band

Recordings and text by Lisa Urkevich

Recreational Songs

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. <i>imjailisī</i> | 2:39 |
| 2. <i>'adsānī</i> | 10:35 |
| 3. <i>ḥaddādī</i> | 11:26 |
| 4. <i>imkhālīf/imkhōlfi</i> | 4:47 |
| 5. <i>ḥasāwī</i> | 6:48 |

Work Songs

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 6. <i>sanginī</i> | 9:00 |
| 7. <i>dawwārī</i> | 1:37 |
| 8. <i>khaṭfah</i> | 3:11 |
| 9. <i>khrāb ṣidrah</i> | 3:06 |
| 10. <i>yāmmāl/mīdāf</i> | 1:10 |
| 11. <i>rāṣṭabl (yāmlī)</i> | 1:11 |

The Arabian/Persian Gulf, a region that is among the world's oldest civilizations, is one of the most musical areas of the entire Peninsula. Over the centuries, many categories of arts have flourished, but it is the songs of the sea that have had a special place in the hearts of nationals. The musical color and texture of Upper Gulf music is like non-other in the Arab world, as large choirs of men join voices to sing heartfelt, haunting melodies over vibrant, percussive timbres. Until the early 20th century, sea songs were heard constantly, being sung for both work and recreation, on ship and shore, and during weddings and standard later night gatherings. When sea livelihood diminished, "bands" began to form to keep the musical traditions alive. Today, less than a dozen groups of the Upper Gulf perform sea music. Among the most lauded is the Hamid Bin Hussein Sea Band of Kuwait, who are featured on these recordings. These men, largely descendants of pearlmen and seamen, are cherished in the community, as their performances are both historically accurate and impassioned. The recordings and detailed booklet, with over 30 images, provides a glimpse into a precious music of this ancient culture.

This release is from the *Music of the Earth* Compact disc collection, a series of field-recorded traditional music which transports the listener directly into the villages, the homes, the fields, the festivals, the celebrations and the ceremonies of the peoples of the world. No stages. No studios. No special effects. Maps, photos, and notes from the original recording sessions compliment the recordings.



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