

Songs from Kabul: The Spiritual Music of Ustad Amir Mohammad (SOAS Musicology Series)

John Baily

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This book presents the vocal art music of Kabul as performed by Ustad Amir Mohammad. At the heart of Kabul's vocal art music is the ghazal, a highly flexible song form using Persian (or Pashto) texts derived from a variety of sources. Much of this poetry is in the Sufi tradition, with frequent metaphoric allusions to love, wine and intoxication. In musical terms, the Kabuli ghazal style is related to ghazal singing in India and Pakistan, but the setting of the texts to music is distinctly Afghan, with interpolated couplets sung in free rhythm, fast instrumental sections and dramatic rhythmic cadences. As befits a Sufi music, it has a regularly repeated cyclical structure with trance-inducing properties. Central to the book is the audio CD, containing six ghazals, one mosammat and one Afghan-style tarA¢na, all recorded by John Baily between 1974 and 1976 in the city of Herat, in western Afghanistan. At that time Ustad Amir Mohammad was Herat's most sought-after singer in the Kabuli style, playing mainly at wedding parties of wealthy Heratis. In these valuable recordings he is accompanied by two outstanding local musicians, Rahim Khushnawaz on rubâb, and Gada Mohammad on dutâr.



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