

Script: The Power of The Tunes
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Lead in: Music does not only play a role in entertaining us in our daily lives. Music has a greater power on a larger scale. One role that music plays is a political one as it has had an impact in several political incidents. This audio documentary exposes the role of music in its political aspect.

MUSIC: Fade In Oud playing then Under (01:02)

Several instruments and a variety of tones. It's interesting how music interferes in nearly all aspects of our daily lives. When alone or in groups. While working, sleeping, driving or walking. But what's more interesting about music is how it has an impact on a larger scale.

Ashraf El-Sherif (AE): "It plays a role in shaping public opinion in shaping individual and collective preferences in shaping behaviour and keeping values and ideologies. Yes it plays a role at the aesthetic level at the background." (00:22)

That was Political Science Professor at the American University in Cairo, Ashraf El-Sherif, who believes that there is a relationship between music and politics in different ways. Not only that, he also sees that a common factor between the two fields is how both music and politics seek freedom.

AE: "Freedom is not the freedom that you think of. It's not just the freedom to vote or the freedom to run for office or the freedom to have equal pay. It's also the freedom to enjoy your lifestyle to dance to sing to play music as much as you want with the people you want to the kind of music that you want." (00:15)

MUSIC: *Fade In Oud playing then Under (01:04)*

And by seeking freedom, music has played an important role in several revolutions across the years.

AE: "Well for example the 1968 major revolutions in France in Germany and in other parts of Europe and the Middle East. Music played the music and art music and visual arts as well played a key role in raising Youth Awareness solidarity and declaring rebellion. It was a revolution of the image and the sound. I call it like this the revolution of the graffiti and music clip music"

NAT SOUND: *Fade in Eskenderella in the square then Under (00:45)*

In Egypt as well, music was dominant in its recent political movements. One musical band that got really popular among the protesters in Tahrir square was Eskenderella. May Haddad, a member of Eskenderella believes that the square played a role in the band's popularity.

May Haddad (MH): "We cannot underestimate the role of both revolutions, 25th of Jan and 30th of June on our band and direction. This is a fact. We were among the protesters in Tahrir during both revolutions, composed and performed new songs among the masses that had gathered in the square." (0:22)

The band's revolutionary songs and music were a powerful element used to mobilize the masses during the revolution.

MH: "Our main aim is to give our audience a place or a moment where they let it all out. In other words, to give them hope and motivate them when they start giving up." (00:10)

Actually, Eskenderella has been known for their revolutionary and rebellious songs even before the 25th of Jan revolution. The band's two main members Hazem Shahine and Ahmed

Haddad collaborated for many years producing tens of songs which were known for criticizing political situations.

Ahmed Adel (AA): "Like the very famous song, New Year, when there was a bombing for the church in Alexandria. He composed a song and Hazem sang it with the band like two weeks after the bombing. So they always follow the current events and so on." (00:16)

Ahmed Adel, is one of the earliest fans of Eskenderella who started listening to them by coincidence in 2005, the same year the band was formed. Ahmed believes that the band's music was not constant over the years.

AA: They started as a band that plays heritage like Sayed Darwish and Sheikh Imam and these songs the old traditional songs of Egyptian folklore and culture. But then they changed." (00:16)

Ahmed thinks that the band used to perform more political songs in the past and now they are more focused on creating their own music which are not so political in many cases. While the band members do not see themselves as a political protest group as they provide non-political songs as well.

MH: "It will be unfair, like unfair to say that our songs are rebellious and revolutionary only because we have a wide range of songs and music addressing a whole wide range of social topics that we'd love people to listen to and explore." (00:18)

MH: "It is just sad how some people claim or put us in a certain box or create a stereotype about us" (00:10)

While Eskenderella's shift of the songs performed is said to be out of variation, Professor Ashraf believes that the current regime does not allow any musicians to play their music freely.

AE: "I don't think there are any kind of artistic band or individual artists able politically to stand or withstand against the regime whether in revolution opposition or reforms opposition." (00:15)

According to him, when it comes to political messages implied in music, musicians do only have three options to take.

AE: "Either to conform basically to become a pro regime singer or musician."

AE: "The other option is to fake opposition, I call it fake opposition like to pretend to be saying singing something different but still it's part of the market formula it's part it's consumed for the market, that's a kind of implicit conformism if I can say so."

AE: "The third option is to remain silent. Just don't do anything. And a fourth option to leave the country"

Reasons might vary, but the change any musician decides to take might leave the audience in a state of disappointment, a similar thing that happened with Ahmed when Eskenderella started to change their music.

MUSIC: Fade In Eskenderella playing then Under (00:36)

AA: "Well actually, now I like them, of course, but sometimes I miss the old days when they used to sing classical songs. So sometimes I long for the old band or the old version of the band. But now of course their songs are very well known by the people and sung and cheered all over Egypt. But sometimes, sometimes for me I missed that part." (00:36)

This audio documentary was produced by Nouran El-Ashry for the audio production course at the American University in Cairo, taught by Professor Kim Fox in the spring semester of 2018.

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