

The so-called “Cairo Trilogy” by Najib Mahfuz has frequently been analyzed from the perspective of the political and sociological light it shines upon the life of ordinary Egyptians in the early 20th century. The first novel in the trilogy, *Bayna al-Qasrayn* (Palace Walk), is particularly notable for its engagement with the popular music of that era, an aspect which has until now been absent from any analysis of the work. The novel offers extended descriptions of musical performance and audience appreciation, and Mahfuz’ use of frequent references to specific songs creates a mental soundtrack that complements his narrative. While some of these references call upon readers to join the fictional characters in giving themselves up to the enjoyment of the music in depictions of weddings and midnight parties with *`awalim*, others illuminate encounters between ordinary Egyptians and the occupying troops of the British Protectorate. Mahfuz’ knowledgeable and literate musical references create a mental soundtrack for a readership that he could presume was as conversant with the era’s two musical worlds as he himself was: the musically complex “long songs” derived from song traditions of the Ottoman court, and shorter, catchy *taqatiq* and *munulugat* encountered in contemporary Cairo cabaret life and (increasingly) on recordings that could be played back on a Victrola in a café or home setting. This early twentieth-century corpus of popular song was literally amplified—and transmitted to a new generation of appreciative listeners—when the trilogy of novels were adapted to the highly popular and entertaining musical feature film versions directed by Hasan al-Imam in the 1960s.