

# Singer Ghada Shbeir feels Arabic music today will not stand the test of time. That's why her album goes back to 10th century Al Andalus

**L**ebanese singer Ghada Shbeir has breathed new life into a 1,000-year-old form of Arabic music that she says was close to extinction. Known as *muwashahat*, her songs trace their origins to 10th century Al Andalus.

Now part of southern Spain, Al Andalus (or Andalucia) was settled and ruled by Arabs from the 8th to 15th centuries.

Ghada's album *Al Muwashahat* has sold well in the Arab world since its release last year and stirred interest in the West, winning a BBC World Music award.

## 'AGAINST THE CURRENT'

"I'm going against the current," Ghada said. "Give me one singer in the whole Arab world who has taken the

risk of putting out a CD of *muwashahat*. Perhaps they see it as something that would be a non-starter."

Ghada, an accomplished musicologist, found the songs for *Al Muwashahat* in university archives on a primitive type of cassette. Recorded in 1932 at a music conference in Cairo, much of the sound was hard to make out or erased entirely.

"You have to dig through them to find the words," she said.

## LAMENTS

Ghada laments the quality of today's Arabic music. "There are superb voices but a dearth of good composition, well-educated composers. Today, the one who sticks together one or two lines becomes a composer."

The contemporary Arab music scene is dominated by pop stars whose videos are beamed into homes across the region by satellite TV.

"Why should we throw away a style of singing because we can't make a pop video for it," Ghada said, doubting whether contemporary music would stand the test of time.

## JUDGEMENT

"What will history's judgement be? I hear music on the radio from the '70s or '80s that means nothing to me. All that is going to oblivion. It has no meaning.

"History is not merciful. From the 1970s until now, rarely have I seen work that I feel history will preserve."

— Reuters

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— Ghada Shbeir

In her album, Ghada Shbeir's voice is accompanied by traditional Arabic instruments including the oud, or lute, and nay, a type of flute.

Ghada's interest in the genre was aroused by reading poetry from Al Andalus, which was fertile ground for art and philosophy.

The era is regarded as a golden era for Arab civilisation.