

# Umm Kulthum

**“Every singer must learn the Quran and recite poetry, for it strengthens the tongue and pronunciation of letters.”**

Fatima Ebrahim Al Sayyid, famously known as Umm Kulthum, was an Egyptian singer, songwriter and actress. Born in a small village between 1898 and 1904 in El-Senbellawein in Egypt, Umm Kulthum was blessed with natural skills, virtuosity and star power. In a career spanning 60 years, she became, and still remains, the Arab world's most adored musical icon of the 20th century.

From a young age, Umm Kulthum accompanied her father, the village imam, when he performed religious songs for occasions and celebrations. She developed impeccable musical abilities by listening to her father recite the Quran.

After studying music professionally, Umm Kulthum learned Arabic literature and poetry under the tutelage of renowned poet Ahmad Rami, who would later write compositions specifically for her to sing. Umm Kulthum's musical repertoire comprised of works written by a number of famous poets and composers including Ahmad Shawqi, Rigad Al Sunbati and Zakariya Ahmed.

As her reputation and musical legend continued to grow, Umm Kulthum taught herself the Arabic musical system known as *maqam*. Her live performances became known for Umm Kulthum's astonishing improvisational skills, stirring emotional emphasis and masterful musical range. Her singing would offer audiences a mesmerising experience of *tarab*.

In 1944, Umm Kulthum was awarded *Nishan el Kamal* (The Order of the Virtues) by King Farouk I of Egypt, an award reserved exclusively for female members of the royal family and politicians. She was a cultural ambassador to several Arab nations, president of the Egyptian Musicians' Union, and a member of the Egyptian government's arts committee. With a powerful voice and formidable personality, Umm Kulthum is unsurpassed in musical legacy across Egypt and the Arab world.



## DID YOU KNOW?

In 1971, during the unification of the United Arab Emirates, Umm Kulthum was invited by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan to perform as part of the celebration.

## FUN FACT

The singer's famous nickname, meaning 'Mother of Kulthum', was given to her by her father in honour of the Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) daughter.

## MUSICAL TERM

**Tarab:** An Arabic word referring to a state of enchantment where the listener is deeply moved and carried away by a musical performance.

