Wadih El-Safi

"Singing has a message, it has dimensions and values."

Wadih El-Safi was a Lebanese singer and composer born in 1921 in Lebanon. El-Safi was a true cultural icon, legendary throughout the Arab world, and beyond, for his powerful voice and musical talent.

El-Safi began to explore the world of music at 9 years old after moving to Beirut where he began singing in a choir and later studied at the Beirut National Conservatory. He learned to play an array of string instruments, which he would use throughout his career during his on-stage performances. At age 17, El-Safi won a competition sponsored by the Lebanese Broadcasting Network, the success initiated his musical career.

In 1947 Wadih El-Safi moved to Brazil for a few years, where he composed and performed for the Lebanese community based there. During the civil war in Lebanon from 1975-1990, El-Safi spent much of his time abroad. His travels had a significant influence on his practice as he often combined Lebanese melodies with urban music he was experiencing in other countries.

Wadih El-Safi was well-known for his uniquely powerful voice and incredible vocal range. He was a key figure in the development of modern Lebanese *folk music*, and its dissemination and influence in the Arab world. He contributed over 3,000 songs to Arab music that tackled themes such as patriotism and love. Many of these songs were composed by him or were collaborations with well-known Arab composers and singers such as Sabah, Fairuz and Mohammed Abdel Wahab. His vocal improvisations, known as *Mawwal*, were enjoyed by audiences all over the Arab world and beyond. El-Safi was, and still remains to be, a great source of inspiration for past and future generations of artists.

DID YOU KNOW?

Wadih El-Safi also sang songs in French, Portuguese and Italian.

FUN FACT

In 2011, postage stamps were issued in Lebanon in honour of Wadih El-Safi.

MUSICAL TERM

Folk Music: The traditional music of a particular region or group of people. It is typically transmitted orally from generation to generation.

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