

## A NOTE ON WRITTEN NOTES IN MUGHAM

Mugham is taught by aural tradition (not to be confused with oral tradition, which means storytelling). That means we learn by ear, by listening to a master. In the Conservatory, they do teach with written notes, but it is a mistake. Conservatory trained musicians tend to be 'sterile' technicians. They may be technical wizards on their instrument but the heart of the music is missing because they learned by symbols instead of heartfelt musical experience. There are historical reasons why the mugham melodies were written down, but they do not serve the music well. Mugham is interesting in part because it is not written, it is too flexible, too densely ornamented, too microtonal (notes between the so-called standard notes found on the piano) to be able to be taught by written musical notes. How can one possibly learn the many ways that a group of notes can be clustered into meter free phrases when one has been trained by written notation? Maybe someone could learn by written notes in the beginning, but then toss that training aside and dig into the endless gold mine of mugham improvisations, I don't know. That's not how I learned and I haven't seen lessons given that way, but I know they exist because I have seen the written notes, and they are impossibly dense. There was more ink on the paper than white paper around the notes!!