

**New Look**

**Musician helped younger generation**

## Ahmad Baker sought to implement music in education system

This is the second in a series of articles on Ahmad Muhammad Yousef Baker (1939-2001), a gentle, gifted musician.

— Editor

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**By Lidia Qattan**  
Special to the Arab Times

In the fifties Kuwait was undergoing swift economical changes, it was a bonanza of opportunities for anyone looking for a job. Ahmad first thought was to get a job at the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC), where he had a friend, Mohammed Salah Al Din. As he approached the building his mind was still in a jumble of thoughts and contradictions; he knew what he wanted, but he could not silence the voice of his father in his head.



Lidia Qattan

It took him some courage to enter the office, but when he saw his friend, he felt at ease.

Ahmad's job at the KOC was registering every lorry coming in and check their content; the salary was good, 150 rupees, enough to make him proud and feel a certain independence.

Eventually his father accepting the fact that his son was growing up determined to find his own place in life, he hoped for the best.

Happy in his new commitment to life Ahmad became more settled; all the ambiguities and hesitations in his soul faded away, especially after he received his first salary and he could buy his first lute. It cost him 75 rupees, but it gave him such a joy and satisfaction that he regained his old serenity of mind. It was then that he decided to continue his education on his own, taking every opportunity of expanding his knowledge, reading voluminously and keeping in the company of intellectuals and artists.

Ahmad Baker also became a regular member of the group of artists of his neighborhood, whose thrilling atmosphere was congenial to his mental disposition and creativity.

In the music, the poetry and humorous conversation of the gathering he discovered the delight of living among alike souls, sharing alike

tendencies and making of art a manifestation of strength and nobility.

His father was not very happy of his involvement with the group, he did not like his son to be "one of them".

Artists in those days were not an esteemed category of people; though they were sought-after and hired to entertain social gatherings, they were looked down by society.

To be a poet, a singer, or a musician it meant living a life of uncertainty, hence Mohammad was afraid for his son; but as the days went-by and Ahmad proved his intention of continuing his education, he felt reassured that he would be all-right after all.

After working at the KOC, Ahmad found a better job at the aviation company after passing an entry test; he then underwent training in radio communication, in Morse signals and typing while working at the airport of Desma with his colleague, Abdul Karim; with them was an English man, whose job was to signal the aircraft during take off and on landing.

**Information**

Work was only during daytime because the airport was not equipped for night landing, it had only two electricity generators for the radio equipments housed in a small one-room building made of mud, information were coming in from Basra or from Bahrain, and here were no paved runways. When an aircraft, usually a B.O.A.C arrived at dawn, the runway had to be lighted with kerosene lamps, any other craft coming from Basra usually landed early in the evening, before the airport closed down. Subsequently Ahmad worked at the Finance Department, then at the Shuwaikh water-distillation plant and at the Port of Shuwaikh as an assistant accountant.

During that time, he used to spend his evenings at the Teachers' Club where he became a member of the group of intellectuals, poets and artists gathering there; among them was Hamad Isa Al Ragib, a gifted musician and song writer who later became a diplomat.

When Hamad Al Ragib was appointed General Director of Work and Social Affairs Department in 1956, that same year he opened a center looking after the folklore, which soon became the attraction of all the artists and poets in town.

Ahmad Baker was one of the first attending the center regularly along with Ahmad Al Beshar



Ahmad Muhammad Yousef Baker

Al Roomi, Saud Al Rashed, Ahmad Al Adwani, Ahmad Al Tattan and many others who joined later; together they worked to revive the Kuwaiti song, and preserve the Kuwait folklore registering old songs.

The "Sout", a typical Kuwaiti and Khaleeji song, sang for generations in every social occasion, underwent innovation; in the same category are — Al Samri, Al Kadri, Al Khamari, Al Hasawi, and Al Adsani, all of which underwent special consideration by the group.

Incidentally, part of the folklore are other categories of songs derived from different sources.

When membership expanded, the centre was relocated to a more spacious building overlooking the sea, about where now stands the Catholic Church in Kuwait City.

For Ahmad the time spent at the center was the happiest in his life and the most fruitful, for

he composed a wealth of songs, many of which became famous.

It was during this time of his growing involvement with the musical development in his country, that he sought a change of career and devote his time and energy to art.

**Responsible**

When he asked Hamad Al Ragib for a job at his department, he was promptly appointed responsible of the folklore section.

Henceforth Ahmad's purpose became focused on having a college of music in Kuwait.

As General Director he was on his job all day long even in the evening, it was a demanding responsibility that filled him with pride.

That same year (in 1956) he got married to the girl of his dreams who understood him and through the years proved to be his true friend and companion; from the start their union was

happy, for he found in her all he was searching in a woman — a sympathetic, understanding companion, a good mother for his children and a good housekeeper. Contented in his domestic life Ahmad Baker could bear with ease his new responsibility of family man; he became the proud father of one son and four daughters, all of them later became University graduates and reached distinction in one field or another.

Ahmad Baker came to public notice as a gifted music composer in 1956 with the song "Keffi Al Malam wa Allelani" (Stop the Blaming ...) with lyrics from the famous poet, Fahad Al Askar. Sang by the top Kuwaiti singer, Sadi Al Khaleej in 1961, the song was an instant success, for it presented a fresh approach to the traditional Kuwaiti song.

After it Ahmad Baker composed a wealth of music for songs and for stage plays; he also wrote the lyrics and music for the hilarious monologues — Playfulness before the Wedding and Difficulties after the Honeymoon composed for Hussein Abdul Retha, one of the most talented Kuwaiti actors and stage director, a pioneer of the stage movement in Kuwait.

In spite he was becoming more and more involved in his project establishing a Music Institute, Ahmad Baker continued his production of songs and writing music for local plays, among them was "Forsan Al Monakh" (Nights of the Bursa).

Through the years he produced about 95 successful songs, 12 sketches, some of which are highly humorous, and seven "Samai" (a form of concerto typical of the Gulf countries, which is played with full orchestra consisting of string instruments and a variety of drums).

Eager to spread a feeling for higher culture among the younger generation Ahmad Baker sought to implement music in the education system. He started with opening music classes in schools for students in the afternoon; he himself with his colleague, Mohammed Al Tattan were supervising on teachers.

Impressed by Ahmad Baker's enthusiasm and dedication to music, Hamad Al Ragib put him in charge of establishing the Music Institute that was in mind for so long; to gain expertise this gave Ahmad Baker the opportunity of completing his education abroad and gain a degree in music.

**To be continued**

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### 12 Top-Rated Tourist Attractions in

# Turkey



Packed to the brim with ancient monuments left over from a parade of conquerors and endowed with showcase scenery that never fails to impress, Turkey is a dazzling destination that straddles Asia and Europe. Its vibrant culture, famous food, and vast history wow all who venture here, while its glorious landscapes - from the sun-soaked Mediterranean to the mighty mountains and arid steppe - are highlights in themselves. Whether you want to lap up the Byzantine and Ottoman glories of Istanbul on a city break, laze on the beach, delve into history wandering through ruins such as Ephesus, or see some of the world's most surreal panoramas in Pamukkale and Cappadocia, this country has attractions galore.

**1 Aya Sofya**

Renowned as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, the spellbinding Byzantine glory of the Aya Sofya Museum (Hagia Sophia) is not only one of the top things to do in Istanbul, but also in Turkey. The staggering bulk of its exterior is rimmed by the delicate minarets

added after the Ottoman conquest, while the sumptuous and cavernous frescoed interior is a grand reminder of old Constantinople's might and power. This famed monument is a must-do for every tourist visiting the country.

**2 Ephesus**

Not to be missed, the mighty ruin of Ephesus is a city of colossal monuments and marble-columned roads. One of the most complete, still-standing Roman cities in the Mediterranean region, this is the place to experience what life must have been like during the golden age of the Roman Empire. A sightseeing trip here will take at least half a day to cover the major highlights and longer, if you really want to explore, so make sure that you plan your visit so you don't feel rushed.

**3 Cappadocia**

The surreal swooping rock valleys of Cappadocia are every photographer's dream. Cliff ridges and hill crests are home to rippling panoramas of wave-like rock or wacky-shaped pinnacles that have been

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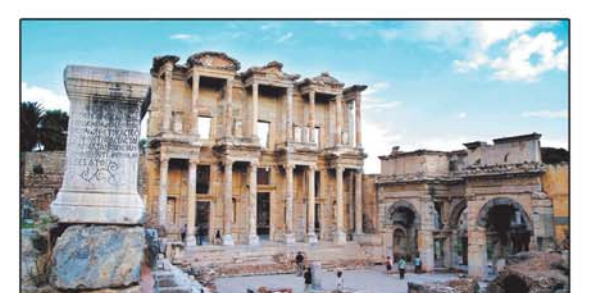
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formed by millennia of wind and water action. And if you don't feel like hiking for the views, this is one of the world's top destinations to take a hot air balloon ride. If the lunar landscape isn't enough to tempt you, nestled in these valleys are the frescoed rock-cut churches of the Byzantine Era, when this area was an important early Christian site.



**4 Topkapi Palace**

Sumptuous beyond belief, the Topkapi Palace takes you into the fantastical, opulent world of the sultans. It was from here that the sultans of the Ottoman Era carved out an empire that would extend up into Europe and down through the Middle East and into

formed by millennia of wind and water action. And if you don't feel like hiking for the views, this is one of the world's top destinations to take a hot air balloon ride. If the lunar landscape isn't enough to tempt you, nestled in these valleys are the frescoed rock-cut churches of the Byzantine Era, when this area was an important early Christian site.