



# **Taarab Music in Zanzibar in the Twentieth Century: A Story of 'Old is Gold' and Flying Spirits (Soas Musicology)**

*Janet Topp Fargion*

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The musical genre of taarab is played for entertainment at weddings and other festive occasions all along the Swahili Coast in East Africa. Taarab contains all the features of a typical 'Indian Ocean' music, combining influences from Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, India and the West with local musical practices. In *Taarab, Music in Zanzibar*, Janet Topp Fargion traces the development of the genre in Zanzibar, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth. Of special interest is the role of women. Although men play the main role in the composition and performance of the genre, Topp Fargion argues that the modernization of the genre owes a debt to the participation of women - as audiences and primary consumers, but also as poets and innovators of musical concepts. The book weaves together the historical, social, economic, religious and political dynamics involved in the development of the genre, and investigates how these are played out in the performance of taarab music on Zanzibar.

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