

A magazine article

1 Read the article. Match the headings a–d with the paragraphs 1–4.

- a The end of an era b Early years c Live performances d Becoming famous

A SINGING LEGEND

Cairo came to a standstill on the days when she sang on the radio. Millions of people mourned her when she died. What would the Arab world have done without this girl with the amazing voice if she had never left her village in 1923?



1 _____

Umm Kalthoum was born in a small village in the Nile Delta in 1904, the youngest of three children. Her father Al-Shaykh Ibrahim was the imam at the local mosque and the family was quite poor, so Al-Shaykh Ibrahim sang religious songs for weddings and other celebrations to earn some extra money. Kalthoum used to listen to him teaching songs to her brother Khalid, who accompanied his father. When Ibrahim discovered his daughter had learnt the songs and when he heard how well she sang, he asked her to join them. Sometimes, when Khalid was unwell, she sang in his place. Soon she and her father started to travel further and further away from their village to perform – as well as charging higher fees for an evening's entertainment.

2 _____

In 1923 Kalthoum moved to Cairo to help her career. At this point she was still singing the religious pieces she had learnt from her father, accompanied by a chorus of male singers. These songs were regarded as very old-fashioned in the city. She was encouraged to sing modern songs about love instead and to use a small orchestra (*takht*) of traditional Middle Eastern instruments instead of backing singers. By the early 1930s, she had sold enough records to embark on a tour of the Middle East, performing in cities such as Damascus, Baghdad, Beirut, Tunis and Tripoli. Kalthoum's radio broadcasts also became very popular. She performed on the first Thursday evening of each month, reaching hundreds of thousands of Egyptian and Arab listeners who would never have been able to go to hear her sing in person.

3 _____

The 1940s and 50s are known as Umm Kalthoum's golden age. She started to work with composer Zakariya Ahmad and poet Mahmud Bayram al-Tunisi using words and music which were typically Egyptian in style, and this proved to be spectacularly successful. One of her concerts typically lasted around three hours and would contain only two or three songs because she would repeat parts of a song over and over again. This was a style of music which is believed to have its roots in pre-Islamic times, when slave girls would sing poetry at weddings. It made the length of a song unpredictable because it would become longer or shorter depending how the audience was responding to the music. The usual response was wild excitement, cheering and applause.

4 _____

As Kalthoum got older she began to experience health problems. She lived in the US for a time where she received medical treatment for kidney disease. However, she returned to Egypt in 1975, where she died. Four million people attended her funeral, the biggest ceremony in the history of the Arab world to date.

"The usual response was wild excitement, cheering and applause."

2 Read the article again. Circle T (true), F (false) or NI (no information).

- | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1 Many people in Cairo stopped what they were doing to listen to Kalthoum on the radio. | T | F | NI |
| 2 If Ibrahim had had more money he wouldn't have worked as a singer. | T | F | NI |
| 3 Kalthoum performed several times a month on the radio. | T | F | NI |
| 4 Kalthoum always composed and wrote music on her own. | T | F | NI |
| 5 Kalthoum had been unwell for some time before she visited the US. | T | F | NI |

3 Answer the questions about the text.

- 1 How did Kalthoum's singing career begin?

- 2 What does the text say to indicate that Kalthoum's early performances with her father became popular?

- 3 In what way did Kalthoum change her style once she was in Cairo?

- 4 Why were Kalthoum's radio performances important in terms of her popularity?

- 5 How did the audience affect Kalthoum's performance at public concerts?

4 Answer the questions with your own ideas.

- 1 Can you name one of Kalthoum's songs? Listen to one on the internet if you can. What do you think about her style?

- 2 What types of music are popular in your country? What type do you like the most / least and why?

- 3 What do you think are the main reasons for becoming a very successful singer or musician?
