

Original Research Article**The Symphony Orchestra as a Mimetic Representation of the Cosmic Order and the Virtuous City: A Philosophical Reading of Al-Farabi's Works***Farshad Sheykhi¹, Hooman Asadi^{2**}, Shahla Eslami¹

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Abstract

This article reinterprets the structure of the symphony orchestra through the aesthetic theory and political philosophy of Abu Nasr al-Farabi. It investigates how the ontological and civic concepts in al-Farabi's major works can be identified and analyzed through the structure and function of a symphony orchestra. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology based on evidence from al-Farabi's primary texts and philosophical writings. The findings demonstrate that the symphony orchestra constitutes a perceptible mimetic representation of al-Farabi's cosmic and civic order. The hierarchical organization of orchestral instruments corresponds to the hierarchy of being, while the conductor embodies the twelve essential qualities of the First Ruler. Rehearsal and ensemble coordination represent the cultivation of virtue, with each musician functioning as a responsible citizen whose activity contributes to collective flourishing and individual and social perfection. Orchestral music, as imaginative art, serves as a medium for communicating intelligible truths to the broader public. The study further argues that musical instruments function analogously to matter, while musical tones correspond to form. The fourfold classification of orchestral instruments exhibits affinities with the four classical elements, and the succession of tones and harmonic progressions mirrors the continual transformation of the material world through the succession of forms. Furthermore, al-Farabi's classifications of the Virtuous City, the Ignorant City—including the Cities of Necessity, Baseness, Misery, Honor, Domination, and License—the Immoral City, the Altered City, and the Misguided City correspond to distinct orchestral typologies based on their intentions, artistic quality, and performance. The article concludes that a professional symphony orchestra characterized by artistic excellence and harmonious cooperation can be understood as a miniature model of the Virtuous City, where justice emerges through harmonic order and human flourishing is realized through musical perfection. Thus, orchestral practice embodies philosophical and ethical principles in a concrete, experiential form.

Keywords: *Al-Farabi, Symphony Orchestra, Virtuous City, Mimesis, Harmony*

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Introduction

In the philosophical system of Abu Naşr Al-Farabi, aesthetics is not a peripheral discipline but the unifying principle that connects metaphysics, philosophical psychology, and political philosophy. In his major works, particularly *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (Arā Ahl al-Madinah al-Faḍilah) and *The Political Regime* (al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah), Al-Farabi portrays the universe as a harmonious and integrated whole in which every being partakes of beauty and perfection according to its ontological rank. He maintains that the First Existent, by virtue of the absolute perfection of its essence, is the most beautiful of all beings, and that its self-contemplation of its own perfection constitutes the highest form of delight. This ontological order is translated, at the human and political level, into the concept of the Virtuous City, which Al-Farabi, in *al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah*, compares to a healthy body whose members cooperate harmoniously to attain human flourishing (sa'adah).

From the perspective of aesthetics and practical philosophy, the symphony orchestra may be understood as the artistic and perceptible counterpart of this philosophical system. As a sonic polity, the orchestra transforms the plurality of instruments into an integrated unity through mathematical order and rational organization, thereby offering a tangible experience of harmony, justice, and collective perfection. Each instrument fulfills a distinct function within the musical whole, just as every citizen in the Virtuous City contributes to the realization of the common good. Likewise, the conductor, through the coordination and integration of the ensemble, embodies the qualities of Al-Farabi's First Ruler (al-Rāis al-Awwal), representing both his ethical virtues and his political leadership, while the processes of rehearsal and ensemble coordination constitute the practical cultivation of virtue.

The significance of the present study may be explained from two complementary perspectives. First, it investigates the relationship between philosophy and

art as a means of rendering philosophical concepts experientially intelligible. Second, it proposes an interpretative model through which Al-Farabi's philosophical doctrines may be examined and understood within a musical and artistic framework. Although Al-Farabi's philosophy has been the subject of extensive scholarship, orchestral music has rarely been examined as an instance of the imaginative art (şina'a takhayyuliyyah) or as an experiential model of the Virtuous City.

The principal objective of this study is to determine how Al-Farabi's ontological and civic concepts can be identified, interpreted, and analyzed through the structure and operation of the symphony orchestra. More specifically, the study seeks to examine the correspondence between the hierarchy of being and the hierarchy of orchestral instruments, to elucidate the conductor's role as the embodiment of ethical and political leadership, and to analyze the ways in which virtue and civic cooperation are reflected in the activities of orchestral musicians throughout rehearsal and performance.

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology grounded in the extraction of philosophical evidence from Al-Farabi's primary sources and the critical examination of his principal writings, including *Ihşā al-'Ulum*, *al-Tanbih 'ala Sabil al-Sa'adah*, *Taḥşil al-Sa'adah*, *al-Millat*, *al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah*, *Fuṣūl al-Muntaza'ah*, and *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*. The findings suggest that the symphony orchestra may be understood as a perceptible mimetic representation of Al-Farabi's cosmic order and that orchestral music constitutes a powerful medium for communicating philosophical, ethical, and civic concepts through artistic experience.

Finally, this article argues that a professional symphony orchestra, when characterized by artistic excellence and harmonious coordination, should be understood not merely as an artistic institution but as a miniature model of the Virtuous City, in which justice is realized through harmonic order and human flourishing through

musical perfection. In this sense, the orchestra reveals a profound affinity between philosophy, music, and the ideal political community.

It should be emphasized that the symphony orchestra, as a modern institution of the Western musical tradition, did not exist in Al-Farabi's lifetime. Accordingly, the present study does not claim to reconstruct Al-Farabi's historical views on the orchestra. Rather, it offers an interpretative reading of the structure and function of the symphony orchestra by employing the conceptual framework of his philosophy.

Literature Review

A review of the existing literature indicates that a number of studies have examined various aspects of Al-Farabi's concept of the Virtuous City. However, none has investigated the structure and function of the symphony orchestra through the conceptual framework of the Virtuous City or explored their philosophical correspondences.

Mehrabani-Far & Salimi (2025), in "A Comparative Study of Human Communication in Habermas's Civil Society and Al-Farabi's Virtuous City", compare the political and philosophical perspectives of Al-Farabi and Jürgen Habermas.

Parkan & Ebrahimi (2023), in "The System of Social Trust: An Approach to the Modernization of Al-Farabi's Virtuous City", examine the relationship between the transformations of modernity and Al-Farabi's conception of the Virtuous City.

Mehrabani-Far & Ghaemi-Nik (2023), in "From the Islamic Virtuous City to the Modern Metropolis: A Comparative Study of the Thought of Al-Farabi and Simmel and Its Implications for Contemporary Urban Culture and Life", compare the philosophical views of Al-Farabi and Georg Simmel.

Moqadasi & Rezvani (2020), in "A Critique of the Relationship between Authoritarianism and Al-Farabi's Virtuous City", investigate the relationship between authoritarianism and Al-Farabi's political philosophy.

Sabri & Alavi (2017), in "The Relationship between

Happiness and Virtue in Aristotle and Al-Farabi", compare the ethical and philosophical conceptions of Aristotle and Al-Farabi.

Kalbasi Ashtari & Hajizadeh (2014), in "Justice in Plato's Utopia and Al-Farabi's Virtuous City," examine the concept of justice through a comparative analysis of Plato and Al-Farabi.

Modarresi (2012), in "The Role of Ethics in Al-Farabi's Virtuous City", explores the relationship between ethics and the Virtuous City.

Saroukhani & Talebi (2009), in "The Virtuous City in the Thought of Abu Naṣr Al-Farabi", discuss the ethical foundations of Al-Farabi's Virtuous City.

Mohseni et al. (2023), in "The Relationship between Al-Farabi's Philosophy of Music and Plato", compare the philosophical foundations of Al-Farabi's philosophy of music with those of Plato and examine the role of music in the attainment of human flourishing (sa'adah). The foregoing review demonstrates that, although numerous studies have explored Al-Farabi's political philosophy, the Virtuous City, and his philosophy of music, no previous research has examined the structure and function of the symphony orchestra through the ontological, political, and aesthetic framework of Al-Farabi's philosophy. Accordingly, the present study seeks to develop an analytical model for interpreting the structure and function of the symphony orchestra on the basis of Al-Farabi's conceptual framework, thereby addressing a significant gap in the existing scholarship.

Theoretical Framework

Within the philosophical system of Abu Naṣr Al-Farabi, aesthetics occupies a foundational position that extends far beyond the domains of sensory perception and artistic production. Beauty is not merely an aesthetic quality but the very principle underlying the order of the cosmos, constituting the point of convergence between metaphysics, philosophical psychology, and political philosophy. Al-Farabi regards beauty as an intrinsic attribute of all beings and as the highest object of contemplation for both the First Existent

and human beings (Al-Farabi, 1982, 106–112). In his view, the perception of beauty provides the basis for the cultivation of virtue and the establishment of harmony in both individual and collective life. Consequently, art and music perform not only aesthetic but also ethical and educational functions. Music, in particular, is conceived as the imaginative art (*ṣinaʿa takhayyuliyyah*), through which intelligible realities are communicated in a perceptible form, rendering the rational order and unity of existence accessible through sensory experience (Al-Farabi, 2003, 54). The symphony orchestra, through the coordinated interaction of its instruments and musical sounds, constitutes a tangible manifestation of this cosmic order and offers a practical experience of harmony, justice, and collective perfection.

From the perspective of political philosophy, the concept of the Virtuous City occupies a central place in Al-Farabi's thought, particularly in *The Political Regime* (*al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah*) and *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (*Arāʾ Ahl al-Madinah al-Faḍilah*). The Virtuous City is a community whose members cooperate in pursuit of both individual and collective human flourishing (*saʿadah*), with every citizen contributing to the realization of justice and virtue (*ibid.*, 32–34). Al-Farabi compares such a city to a healthy body, in which every organ performs its proper function to preserve the health, coherence, and vitality of the whole (Al-Farabi, 1982, 256). He further develops a systematic classification of political communities, including the Virtuous City, the Ignorant City (*al-Madinah al-Jahilah*)—comprising the Cities of Necessity, Baseness, Misery, Honor, Domination, and License—the Immoral City, the Altered City, and the Misguided City (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 121–126). Beyond describing different forms of political organization, this classification provides an analytical framework through which various types of orchestras may be interpreted according to their aims, artistic quality, and patterns of internal cooperation.

Ontologically, Al-Farabi conceives the universe as

a hierarchical order of being in which every level participates in beauty and perfection according to its existential rank (Al-Farabi, 1979, 114–119). This metaphysical perspective provides the conceptual basis for correlating the hierarchy of being with the hierarchy of orchestral instruments. Each instrument performs a distinct yet indispensable function within the orchestral whole, and their coordinated interaction gives rise to an integrated musical unity. In this framework, instruments function analogously to matter (*hayula*), whereas musical tones correspond to form (*ṣurah*). Likewise, the continual succession of musical tones and harmonic progressions mirrors the perpetual transformation of the sensible world through the successive actualization of forms. The conductor embodies the twelve defining qualities of Al-Farabi's First Ruler (*al-Rāis al-Awwal*), assuming responsibility for preserving the coherence and order of the musical whole. Collective rehearsal and ensemble coordination similarly represent the practical cultivation of virtue and civic cooperation directed toward both collective flourishing and individual perfection.

The theoretical foundations of the present study are derived directly from Al-Farabi's primary writings, including *Iḥṣāʾ al-ʿUlum*, *al-Tanbih ʿala Sabil al-Saʿadah*, *Taḥṣil al-Saʿadah*, *al-Millah*, *al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah*, *Fuṣul al-Muntazaʿah*, and *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*. These works provide the philosophical basis for extracting the ontological, political, and aesthetic concepts upon which the present analytical framework is constructed, thereby making possible their systematic application to the structure and function of the symphony orchestra.

To clarify the theoretical basis of these correspondences, two fundamental concepts in Al-Farabi's aesthetics—mimesis (*muḥakat*) and the imaginative art (*ṣinaʿa takhayyuliyyah*)—require brief consideration, since the analytical framework of this study rests upon them. In Al-Farabi's philosophy, mimesis is not merely the external imitation of objects but the representation of truth through sensible forms. Likewise, the imaginative

art functions as the mediating faculty through which intelligible realities are rendered perceptible for the broader public. From this perspective, the purpose of art is not simply to produce sensory pleasure but to represent rational structures in perceptible form. Accordingly, insofar as the symphony orchestra embodies order, hierarchy, cooperation, and purposiveness through artistic practice, it may legitimately be understood as a mimetic representation of Al-Farabi's cosmic and political order.

In light of these theoretical foundations, the central hypothesis of the present study may be stated as follows: the symphony orchestra, through its organizational structure, performance practice, and rehearsal processes, constitutes a perceptible and practical mimetic representation of Al-Farabi's cosmic and political order. This theoretical framework provides the conceptual basis for a systematic analysis of the roles of orchestral instruments, the conductor, collective rehearsal, and harmonic organization, while demonstrating that music is capable of embodying philosophical, ethical, and political concepts in a concrete and experiential manner.

Research Method

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical research design to reinterpret the structure of the symphony orchestra through the conceptual framework of Abu Naṣr Al-Farabi's aesthetics and political philosophy. This methodological approach makes it possible to extract ontological, political, and aesthetic concepts from Al-Farabi's primary texts and to examine, through comparative analysis, their correspondence with the structure and operation of the symphony orchestra. In addition to providing a rigorous framework for investigating the relationship between philosophy, aesthetics, and music, the descriptive-analytical approach facilitates methodological transparency and enables the analytical model proposed in this study to be replicated and applied in future research.

The primary corpus of the study consists of Al-Farabi's principal philosophical works, selected because of their central importance for his ontological, political, and aesthetic doctrines. These include *Ihṣā al-'Ulum*, *al-Tanbih 'ala Sabil al-Sa'adah*, *Taḥṣil al-Sa'adah*, *al-Millah*, *al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah*, *Fuṣul al-Muntaza'ah*, and *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*. These texts were chosen because they provide the conceptual foundations necessary for extracting key philosophical concepts and examining their applicability to the musical and organizational structure of the symphony orchestra. Collectively, they constitute the primary analytical framework for interpreting Al-Farabi's metaphysics, political philosophy, and aesthetics.

The research was conducted in four successive stages. The first stage consisted of a close reading of the primary sources, during which philosophical evidence relating to the cosmic order, the hierarchy of being, justice, virtue, and civic cooperation was systematically identified, extracted, and documented. This process involved detailed textual annotation, conceptual classification, and the identification of elements potentially corresponding to the structure of the orchestra.

The second stage involved conceptual analysis. At this stage, the extracted concepts were examined to determine how each might be reflected in the organization and functioning of the symphony orchestra. For example, the hierarchy of orchestral instruments was correlated with the hierarchy of being, while the role of the conductor was interpreted in light of the defining characteristics of Al-Farabi's First Ruler (*al-Rāis al-Awwal*), thereby establishing the basis for a systematic comparative analysis.

The third stage comprised critical and comparative analysis. The philosophical concepts derived from Al-Farabi's writings were compared both with one another and with the practical organization of the modern symphony orchestra in order to evaluate the degree of conceptual correspondence between Al-Farabi's

philosophy and orchestral practice. Particular attention was devoted to the coordination of instruments, the role of the conductor, collective rehearsal, organizational coherence, and the manifestation of justice and virtue within ensemble performance. This stage provided the analytical basis for interpreting the symphony orchestra not merely as an artistic institution but as a practical embodiment of the Virtuous City and a mimetic representation of Al-Farabi's cosmic order.

In the final stage, the findings of the conceptual and comparative analyses were synthesized to evaluate the central hypothesis of the study and formulate its conclusions. This process involved the systematic organization of the findings, their correlation with the relevant philosophical evidence, and the integration of practical observations concerning orchestral organization.

The principal research instrument consisted of the systematic extraction and critical interpretation of philosophical evidence from Al-Farabi's primary texts. The comparative analysis was structured around a set of conceptual criteria, including the correspondence between the hierarchy of orchestral instruments and the hierarchy of being; the relationship between the conductor and the First Ruler; the role of collective cooperation in the realization of virtue and human flourishing (*sa'adah*); the analogy between instruments and matter (*hayula*), and between musical tones and form (*ṣurah*); and the correspondence between harmonic progression and the continual transformation of the material world. This methodological framework not only enables a rigorous philosophical analysis but also provides a replicable model for future interdisciplinary research.

Accordingly, the present study proposes an analytical framework for examining the relationship between philosophy, political order, and orchestral music, demonstrating that orchestral practice is capable of embodying Al-Farabi's philosophical and ethical concepts in a concrete and experiential manner.

To avoid purely intuitive analogies and to establish

a coherent framework for comparative analysis, the study evaluates the relationship between Al-Farabi's philosophical system and the structure of the symphony orchestra on the basis of a set of explicitly defined conceptual criteria (Table 1).

On the basis of these criteria, all comparisons presented in the analytical section are grounded in explicit conceptual correspondences rather than superficial similarities.

Discussion

Building upon the theoretical framework and the comparative criteria established above, it is now possible to examine systematically how the fundamental concepts of Al-Farabi's philosophy are reflected in the structure and operation of the symphony orchestra. In *al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah* (The Political Regime), Al-Farabi presents an ontological system structured along both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Vertically, the hierarchy of being proceeds from the First Cause, descending through the separate intellects and celestial souls to the natural and material world. Within this hierarchy, each level possesses a greater degree of actuality and existential perfection than the one below it, while simultaneously serving as its efficient cause. At the same time, every ontological level exhibits a horizontal order in which beings are differentiated according to their distinctive perfections and characteristics without standing in direct emanative causal relations to one another. Consequently, Al-Farabi conceives the universe as both hierarchical and systematically ordered, explaining multiplicity within the overarching unity of the First Principle (Al-Farabi, 1979, 69–71). This principle of unity in multiplicity finds a compelling analogue in the symphony orchestra. An orchestra consists of a diverse collection of instruments and timbres that differ in pitch range, tonal colour, and musical function, yet are organized within a unified structural order. Each instrument occupies a distinct position according to its capabilities and contributes to the harmonic coherence

Table 1. Conceptual criteria for the comparative analysis. Source: Authors.

Row	In the Orchestra	In Farabi's philosophy	Criterion for comparison
1	Instrument families	Hierarchy of being	Hierarchical order
2	Unified Performance	Human flourishing (sa'adah)	Teleological unity
3	Musicians	Citizens	Cooperation
4	Conductor	The first ruler (al-Râis al-Awwal)	Leadership
5	Distribution of orchestral functions	Everything occupying its proper place	Justice

of the musical whole. The diversity of instrumental families—including strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, and, where applicable, the human voice—thus exemplifies the realization of multiplicity within an ordered totality (Berlioz, 1984, 408). From this perspective, just as beings in Al-Farabi's metaphysical system occupy hierarchical positions according to their degrees of existence and perfection, orchestral instruments are organized according to their acoustic characteristics and musical functions. The symphony orchestra may therefore be understood as a perceptible mimetic representation of the ontological order, in which unity is achieved through the ordered coordination of multiplicity. In *Fuṣūl al-Muntaza'ah*, Al-Farabi defines justice not as formal equality but as “placing each thing in its proper place” (*waḍʿ al-shayʿ fī mawḍiʿihi*). Every constituent of a system is just insofar as it acts in accordance with its own nature and capacities without exceeding the limits of its proper rank. This ontological conception of justice reflects both the vertical and horizontal organization of reality, regarding differences of rank as indispensable to the perfection of the whole (Al-Farabi, 2003, 62–63). Accordingly, justice consists in preserving proportion, harmony, and balance within an integrated structure rather than imposing uniformity upon its constituent parts. In orchestral performance, expressive parameters such as dynamic nuance, tempo, and articulation perform an analogous function. Subtle variations in intensity and pacing preserve clarity, balance, and expressive coherence while preventing monotony and

loss of musical vitality (Windsor & Clarke, 1997, 128–130). Al-Farabi classifies music among the mathematical sciences, alongside arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, regarding it as the science of numerical proportions and quantitative relationships among sounds (Al-Farabi, 2019, 86–89). Music is therefore understood not merely as an emotional experience but as a theoretical discipline concerned with the rational structure of sound. Harmonic organization, pitch relationships, frequency, and acoustic proportion are grounded in mathematical and physical principles, the understanding of which contributes directly to coherent and effective orchestral performance (Miller, 2015, 1). Furthermore, within his account of the poetic and musical arts, Al-Farabi characterizes artistic practice as a mode of mimesis and the imaginative art (*ṣinaʿa takhayyuliyyah*), capable of rendering rational and demonstrative truths intelligible to those who lack the capacity for philosophical demonstration. Music thus functions not merely as an aesthetic experience but also as an educational and political instrument through which the ontological order and conception of justice are represented in sensible form (Al-Farabi, 2003, 54). Al-Farabi regards the First Ruler (al-Râis al-Awwal) as the ontological and practical centre of the Virtuous City. The First Ruler is not simply a political sovereign but the most complete human being with respect to both theoretical and practical intellect. It is his responsibility to govern society through justice, courage, and prudent judgment while communicating

demonstrative truths to the wider community through education, rhetoric, and revealed law (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 112–113). In *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, Al-Farabi further maintains that the First Ruler must attain the highest stage of theoretical perfection. His intellect progresses beyond the states of potential intellect and actual intellect to become the acquired intellect (al-‘aql al-mustafad). At this level, intelligible forms are fully actualized within the soul, enabling conjunction with the Active Intellect, the final member of the hierarchy of separate intellects and the source from which intelligible forms are emanated. Such conjunction constitutes the necessary condition for the complete actualization of human cognition. Consequently, the First Ruler not only possesses demonstrative knowledge but is also capable of translating universal truths into legislative, symbolic, and rhetorical forms through which society may be guided. His political legitimacy therefore rests upon intellectual perfection and conjunction with the Active Intellect rather than upon hereditary status or coercive power (Al-Farabi, 1982, 266–269). Al-Farabi regards the First Ruler (al-Râis al-Awwal) as the ontological and practical center of the Virtuous City. The First Ruler is not only the most perfect human being with respect to both theoretical and practical intellect but also the individual entrusted with governing society through justice, courage, and prudent judgment while communicating demonstrative truths to the broader community through education, rhetoric, and revealed law (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 112–113). In *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, Al-Farabi further identifies twelve essential qualities required of the First Ruler, including the perfection of both theoretical and practical intellect, mastery of the necessary sciences, practical wisdom, moral excellence, the capacity for political governance, integrity of character and humility, pedagogical and leadership abilities, commitment to social justice, courage in decision-making, the integration of rational knowledge and

intellectual intuition, and the ability to guide society toward human flourishing (sa‘adah) (Al-Farabi, 1982, 271–274). From the perspective of orchestral performance, Harold C. Schonberg likewise argues that successful conducting depends upon a comprehensive set of competencies that correspond remarkably closely to the characteristics attributed by Al-Farabi to the First Ruler. These include purposeful technical command, an advanced understanding of orchestral acoustics and timbre, complete mastery of score reading, structural analysis free from dogmatism, the realization of an interpretative vision informed by historical awareness, the ability to devise technically appropriate solutions for each composition, active rhythmic listening, and a practical understanding of composition and orchestration (Bowen, 2003, 253–254). The correspondence between these two models of leadership is readily apparent. Just as the First Ruler unites theoretical and practical intellect in guiding society toward justice and human flourishing, the conductor integrates musical knowledge with practical performance in order to lead the orchestra toward coherence, balance, and the complete realization of the musical work. The twelve attributes of the First Ruler—spanning intellect, moral character, and civic leadership—may therefore be understood as conceptually analogous to the principal competencies of the orchestral conductor in the domains of technique, musical analysis, acoustics, and performance. This parallel suggests that effective leadership, whether in political life or in musical practice, requires the integration of knowledge, practical expertise, and the capacity to coordinate the components of an ordered whole. Within Al-Farabi’s philosophy, religion (millah) functions as the mediating link between philosophical wisdom and the broader community, constituting a mimetic representation of philosophy expressed through symbolic and imaginative forms. Philosophical truths, by virtue of their abstract and demonstrative character, are accessible only to those capable of rational inquiry; religion, however, communicates

these same truths to the wider public through narrative, metaphor, and symbol. In this sense, religion is not merely a body of legal prescriptions but an educational and formative institution directed toward the realization of individual and collective human flourishing, functioning in a manner analogous to the arts, which render complex philosophical ideas perceptible through sensible and affective forms (Al-Farabi, 2019, 27–29). A comparable mediating function may be observed in orchestral conducting. The conductor's gestures extend well beyond the mechanical indication of tempo, serving instead as expressive vehicles that communicate musical meaning. In the first edition of *The Grammar of Conducting* (1950), Max Rudolf emphasizes that conducting patterns must convey the full range of the music's expressive and emotional character rather than functioning merely as mechanical indicators of time. In this respect, orchestral conducting performs a role analogous to that of religion and art in Al-Farabi's philosophy: it mediates between abstract musical conception and perceptible performance, transforming musical ideas into forms that are intelligible to both performers and audiences (Bowen, 2003, 252). In Al-Farabi's political philosophy, particularly in *Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (Arā Ahl al-Madinah al-Fāḍilah), the First Ruler (al-Rāis al-Awwal) occupies the central position within the Virtuous City, standing in relation to the political community as the heart stands to the human body. Just as the heart is the source of the body's vitality, motion, and life, the First Ruler is the source of justice, wisdom, and human flourishing (sa'adah) within the city. All political, social, and ethical activities ultimately depend upon his guidance. Without the direction and presence of the First Ruler, the political community is incapable of attaining order and perfection, and its members inevitably fall into disorder, fragmentation, and purposelessness (Al-Farabi, 1982, 260–262). A closely analogous principle can be observed in orchestral conducting. The conductor's role extends far beyond maintaining tempo; rather, by employing a

comprehensive repertoire of leadership behaviours and adapting them to changing musical circumstances, the conductor ensures the coherent integration of the entire ensemble. In this capacity, the conductor becomes the principal source of coordination, cohesion, and the successful realization of the musical work (Hunt et al., 2004, 151).

Within Al-Farabi's philosophical system, human flourishing (sa'adah) is not an accidental achievement but the outcome of disciplined cultivation and sustained practice. Human beings attain perfection only through the systematic development of their moral and intellectual virtues, gradually harmonizing reason and will by means of continuous education and ethical discipline. Human flourishing is therefore not merely the ultimate end of life but also the result of a lifelong process of moral formation and intellectual training. It is attained only by those who consciously order their lives in accordance with reason and virtue (Al-Farabi, 1979, 145–146). In al-Tanbih 'ala Sabil al-Sa'adah, Al-Farabi emphasizes that moral virtues are acquired in much the same way as crafts and arts. Just as writing once does not make one a scribe, a single virtuous action does not make one virtuous. Moral excellence becomes a stable disposition (malakah) only through the repeated performance of good actions and continuous practice, enabling individuals to respond appropriately and moderately under varying circumstances (Al-Farabi, 2005, 92–93). This principle finds a direct parallel in musical training. Every musician develops artistic excellence through sustained and purposeful individual practice. Ensemble rehearsals and formal instruction alone are insufficient; genuine mastery is achieved only when performers regulate their own learning, establish clear objectives, and engage in continuous, deliberate work on both their strengths and weaknesses. Focused and systematic individual practice thus constitutes the indispensable foundation of artistic excellence and professional performance (Platz et al., 2014, 1). Among the most significant ethical concepts developed in al-Tanbih 'ala

Sabil al-Sa'adah is the principle of moderation. Al-Farabi defines moral virtue as the mean between excess and deficiency and illustrates this principle through the analogy of bodily health. Just as the health of the body depends upon the equilibrium of its organs and faculties, moral virtue is realized only when human conduct maintains a balanced and moderate course. This analogy vividly demonstrates the central importance of proportion and balance within both ethics and moral education (Al-Farabi, 2005, 93–96). An analogous principle governs orchestration for the full symphony orchestra. Effective orchestration is based upon a coherent set of artistic principles designed to employ orchestral resources judiciously, expressively, and purposefully in communicating musical ideas. Above all, orchestration does not imply the simultaneous use of every available instrument. Full tutti passages, in which the entire orchestra performs together, occupy only a relatively limited portion of most orchestral scores. Instrumentation should therefore be determined exclusively by the musical requirements of the work: each instrument should enter only when its contribution serves the musical conception, while unnecessary instrumental parts should remain silent (Kennan & Grantham, 2002, 244). In Taḥṣil al-Sa'adah (The Attainment of Happiness), Al-Farabi maintains that genuine human flourishing (sa'adah) is not merely the product of individual effort but can be attained only through the cooperation and mutual assistance of the members of a political community. Social life and reciprocal human relationships are indispensable for the realization of the good, since no individual can independently achieve the full range of virtues and capacities required for perfection. This conception underscores the indispensable role of social solidarity in moral cultivation and demonstrates that individual and collective flourishing are inseparable; without cooperation and harmonious coordination, the attainment of human perfection remains impossible (Al-Farabi, 2005, 28–29). A closely comparable principle may be observed in orchestral

performance. Empirical studies have shown that both the presence and the quality of accompaniment significantly influence listeners' evaluations of a musical performance. Variations in accompanimental quality affect the perception of performance accuracy, musical expressiveness, rhythmic precision, tonal quality, and the overall artistic evaluation of the performance (Geringer & Madsen, 1998, 522). Likewise, the expressive quality of the accompanying performer can substantially shape listeners' perception of the overall expressiveness of a performance, even when the principal soloist remains unchanged (Geringer & Sasanfar, 2013, 170). In Fuṣūl al-Muntaza'ah, Al-Farabi further argues that genuine pleasure resides not in transient material satisfactions but in the apprehension of perfection. By cultivating intellectual virtues and developing the rational faculty, human beings attain a mode of fulfillment that transcends merely sensory and temporary pleasures, since such fulfillment arises from the actualization of their highest capacities and brings them closer to true human flourishing (sa'adah). For Al-Farabi, perfection and wisdom constitute the foundations of happiness, and the joy arising from them is enduring, unlike bodily pleasures, which are inherently impermanent. True pleasure, therefore, consists in the intellectual apprehension of perfection itself, whether through the cultivation of personal virtue or through the contemplation of universal truths. In this way, the pursuit of intellectual perfection becomes the point at which ethics, political philosophy, and the good life converge (Al-Farabi, 2003, 54). This conception may likewise be extended to musical performance. Expressive musicianship requires more than technical proficiency; it presupposes an informed understanding of the stylistic conventions, structural organization, and internal logic of a musical work. Only through such comprehension can performance become artistically meaningful and emotionally persuasive. Technical accuracy alone, without an awareness of stylistic principles and musical architecture, remains

insufficient to produce genuine artistic expression (Sloboda, 2000, 397). Within Al-Farabi's natural philosophy, perfection is understood as the process through which prime matter (*hayula*) is brought from potentiality into actuality. Matter, considered in itself, possesses only capacity and potential existence; it achieves actual realization only through the reception of form (*ṣurah*), which organizes, determines, and actualizes its latent possibilities. This transition from potentiality to actuality constitutes a fundamental philosophical model of perfection: a thing is perfected precisely when its inherent capacities have been fully actualized and given determinate form (Al-Farabi, 1979, 82–84). Al-Farabi extends this metaphysical principle to both individual and social life. Just as matter remains indeterminate without form, individuals and political communities likewise remain in a merely potential condition unless shaped through rational cultivation and moral education. Human beings and societies attain genuine perfection, individuality, and human flourishing only when their intellectual faculties and moral virtues are fully actualized. The relationship between form and matter thus provides the philosophical foundation for understanding both the realization of human potential and the attainment of authentic happiness.

This metaphysical framework may also be applied to musical instruments and orchestration. In Jami' al-Alḥan, Persian musical instruments and vocal sound are classified into four principal categories: string instruments, which produce sound through vibrating strings; wind instruments, in which sound results from moving air or vibrating reeds; percussion instruments, which generate sound through impact or vibration; and the human voice, regarded as the natural instrument (Darvishi, 2004, 43). Just as form actualizes the latent capacities of matter, musical instruments and the human voice organize and actualize the potentiality of sound, thereby making possible the full realization of musical expression and artistic form. In one of the most original aspects of his natural philosophy, Al-Farabi

explains the generation of the four elemental bodies—fire, air, water, and earth. He argues that these elements do not arise independently or by chance but emerge through the proportional relationships and continual variations produced by the celestial spheres. The motions and relative positions of the heavenly bodies, together with their varying degrees of heat, cold, moisture, and dryness, generate the conditions necessary for the formation and differentiation of the four elements. This account integrates natural philosophy with mathematical cosmology, demonstrating how cosmic order and celestial motion give rise to the material constitution of the terrestrial world (Al-Farabi, 1982, 164–168). A comparable pattern may be observed in the classification of musical instruments. Just as the natural elements arise from different combinations of fundamental qualities, orchestral instruments are likewise classified according to their physical construction and acoustical properties, each family possessing distinctive sonic capacities. String instruments, woodwinds, brass, percussion, and the human voice each perform unique musical functions and, like the four elements, contribute through their diverse combinations to the overall structure and harmonic balance of the orchestra. Al-Farabi further maintains that material beauty is not accidental but results from the harmonious proportion of the four natural elements. A body appears beautiful only when the elemental qualities of heat, cold, moisture, and dryness are balanced in appropriate proportion, thereby producing a state of equilibrium (*i'tidal*). Material beauty is therefore a sensible manifestation of the universal order of the cosmos: just as the changing proportions of the celestial spheres generate the four elements, the proper composition of those elements gives rise to beauty and natural harmony. Beauty, in Al-Farabi's philosophy, is consequently grounded not in superficial appearance but in structural proportion and ontological order, while aesthetic experience itself reflects the harmony of the cosmos (*ibid.*, 164–168). The same principle governs

orchestration. Achieving orchestral balance requires the careful distribution of harmonic sonorities and the transparent coordination of every instrumental section so that a satisfying resonance may emerge. At lower dynamic levels, problems of balance are relatively limited; however, as dynamic intensity increases, certain instruments must be doubled or even tripled in order to preserve equilibrium among the woodwind, brass, and string sections. For example, two flutes may balance a single clarinet, while two horns may effectively balance one trumpet. At the highest dynamic levels, instruments such as the piccolo and bass trombone naturally become more prominent, requiring orchestration to be conceived with the maximum dynamic range in mind. Observing these principles is essential for producing convincing crescendos, decrescendos, and an overall balanced orchestral sonority (Miller, 2015, 9–10). Al-Farabi also explains the continual transformation of the material world through the perpetual succession of forms. Matter, which in itself exists only as potentiality, continuously relinquishes one form (khal', divestment) and receives another (labs, investiture). This uninterrupted process of replacing one form with another enables matter repeatedly to attain new actualities and determinate modes of existence. Nothing in the material world is therefore static; every being is engaged in a continuous movement from potentiality to actuality and from imperfection toward perfection. The process of labs ba'da labs ("one investiture after another") thus constitutes the metaphysical principle governing renewal, transformation, and development within the natural world (Al-Farabi, 2003, 14–16). An analogous dynamic may be observed in musical silence. Although silence is temporally defined as the interval between successive sounds, its musical significance extends far beyond the mere absence of sound. Moments of silence function as structurally meaningful events that shape listeners' attention, articulate musical phrases, and generate expectation. The listener's perception of silence is profoundly conditioned by musical context;

an identical duration of silence may evoke entirely different expressive meanings in different compositions. Like the continuous cycle of labs ba'da labs, silence constitutes a dynamic process through which musical motion, anticipation, and transformation become perceptible to the listener (Margulis, 2007, 485). In al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah, Al-Farabi (1379) maintains that the ultimate purpose of every political community is the realization of genuine human flourishing (sa'adah). Any society that pursues merely partial, material, or transient ends rather than this highest good is, in philosophical terms, a diseased polity. This conception emphasizes the teleological foundation of political life: just as the organs and faculties of a healthy body function harmoniously in accordance with their proper ends, so too must the institutions, laws, and social relationships of a healthy community operate in accordance with reason and virtue if both individual and collective perfection are to be achieved. The health or illness of a society is therefore measured not by its material prosperity but by the extent to which its collective aims correspond to genuine human flourishing. Within this framework, Al-Farabi characterizes the Ignorant City (al-Madinah al-Jahilah) as a society whose citizens mistakenly identify perfection and happiness with perishable and material goods. In such a polity, human aspirations are directed toward bodily pleasures, wealth, power, or transient reputation rather than toward intellectual development and moral virtue. This fixation upon ephemeral goods prevents both individuals and institutions from attaining authentic human flourishing, producing instead a society devoted merely to the satisfaction of temporary desires. Such a community resembles an unhealthy body whose members fail to function in harmonious proportion and whose collective life lacks both rational order and ethical purpose. Consequently, genuine human flourishing can never be realized within such a political order (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 121–122). Within Al-Farabi's classification of political communities, the City of Necessity (al-Madinah al-

Daruriyyah) is a society whose inhabitants are concerned exclusively with the satisfaction of life's basic necessities. The end of human existence is reduced to survival and the minimum conditions required for material well-being. Since citizens aspire neither to higher intellectual goods nor to moral excellence, life in such a city remains simple and relatively free from the conflicts generated by greed and excessive accumulation (Al-Farabi, 1979, 170–171). An orchestral analogue may be found in an ensemble formed solely to meet the minimum requirements of performance. Rehearsals are brief and limited to ensuring technical accuracy, with little attention devoted to artistic interpretation or musical refinement. Musicians focus only on playing the correct notes so that the concert can proceed and remuneration can be received. The purpose of such an orchestra is therefore functional survival rather than artistic excellence or profound musical expression. The City of Wealth (al-Madinah al-Baddalah) is characterized by the pursuit of material prosperity as the highest human end. Wealth itself becomes the ultimate goal of life, while moral virtue is displaced by financial success and economic power. Social status is measured primarily by material possessions, and relationships are increasingly shaped by competition and acquisitiveness rather than ethical considerations (Al-Farabi, 1982, 280). Within the orchestral context, this model corresponds to an ensemble whose principal concern is commercial success. Programming decisions are determined primarily by ticket sales, sponsorship opportunities, and financial profitability, while artistic quality becomes secondary. The conductor and administrative leadership prioritize economic gain over musical integrity, so that financial success, rather than artistic excellence, becomes the defining objective of the orchestra. The City of Pleasure (al-Madinah al-Khissah wa al-Shaqawah) is one in which citizens devote themselves exclusively to sensual gratification and amusement. Human life is directed toward the pursuit of immediate pleasures, with little concern for

intellectual development, moral virtue, or genuine human flourishing (sa'adah). Such a society represents complete immersion in transient and endlessly recurring sensual satisfactions (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 123). Its orchestral counterpart is an ensemble whose performances rely primarily upon spectacle, visual display, and immediate excitement. Performers seek personal enjoyment on stage and instant audience approval rather than musical depth or artistic refinement. The orchestra aims to produce momentary excitement instead of enduring artistic achievement. The City of Honor (al-Madinah al-Karamah) is distinguished by the pursuit of prestige, public recognition, and social esteem. Reputation becomes the principal criterion of value, and individuals measure their worth according to the admiration and approval they receive from others. Consequently, actions and decisions are motivated less by intrinsic virtue than by the desire for public acclaim (Al-Farabi, 1979, 173–176). This model finds a parallel in an orchestra whose members are primarily concerned with personal visibility. Soloists compete for prominence, while even the conductor may become more concerned with personal reputation than with the artistic unity of the ensemble. The orchestra's overriding objective becomes public recognition rather than the creation of an integrated and profound musical experience. Finally, the City of Domination (al-Madinah al-Taghallubiyyah) is organized around the pursuit of power and the domination of others. Power is regarded both as the principal means and the ultimate end of political life, while citizens seek superiority by subjugating rivals. Such a society is characterized by perpetual conflict in which justice and fairness are sacrificed to the desire for domination (Al-Farabi, 1982, 283). al-Madina al-Jama'iyya (the City of Unrestrained Freedom) is a society in which unrestricted personal freedom and the satisfaction of individual desires constitute the highest values. Since no limits are imposed upon private inclinations, social order, ethical virtue, and the common good are

ultimately subordinated to individual preference (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 125). Its orchestral counterpart is an ensemble in which each performer interprets the music according to personal preference. Common tuning, tempo, and interpretative coherence disappear because the conductor either lacks sufficient authority or is entirely absent. The resulting performance is fragmented and incoherent, with collective harmony sacrificed to unrestricted individual freedom. Al-Farabi further observes that the rulers of the ignorant cities govern exclusively for their own benefit. Justice and the common good cease to function as political principles, while power becomes merely an instrument for satisfying personal interests. Such societies are therefore characterized by corruption, tyranny, and the neglect of genuine human values. In orchestral terms, this resembles an institution whose director or conductor exploits authority for personal advantage. Financial resources are diverted toward private interests, and performance opportunities are allocated through favoritism rather than artistic merit. The ensemble exists to serve individual interests instead of advancing artistic excellence or the collective good. al-Madina al-Fasiqa (the Wicked City) is composed of citizens who possess knowledge of the principles of the Ideal City and recognize the nature of true happiness, yet whose conduct remains indistinguishable from that of the ignorant cities. The discrepancy between knowledge and practice ultimately leads to moral corruption and social disorder (Al-Farabi, 1979, 197–198). Its orchestral equivalent is an ensemble thoroughly familiar with the highest standards of classical performance but unwilling to observe them in practice. Although musicians understand professional principles and frequently discuss them, rehearsals remain undisciplined and artistic standards are neglected. Knowledge exists, yet it fails to be translated into action. al-Madina al-Mubaddala (the Altered City) originally embodied the principles of the Ideal City but gradually departed from them over time. Although its outward appearance

remains largely unchanged, its ethical foundations and practical commitments have been progressively eroded (Davari Ardakani, 1975, 127–128). The orchestral parallel is an ensemble that was once highly disciplined, idealistic, and artistically distinguished but has gradually lost its former commitment. Institutional traditions survive in appearance, whereas the spirit of artistic dedication has faded, revealing a gradual departure from its founding ideals. Finally, al-Madina al-Dalla (the Misguided City) consists of people who believe in ultimate happiness and the afterlife but whose beliefs concerning divine realities and the Active Intellect are fundamentally mistaken. Although they aspire to the highest ends, erroneous convictions prevent them from attaining genuine guidance (Al-Farabi, 1979, 198).

Its musical analogue is an orchestra convinced that it performs music of the highest artistic value while fundamentally misunderstanding the work it presents. A composition of profound expressive depth may be rendered superficially, with performers remaining firmly committed to an erroneous interpretation. Noble intention is therefore present, but it is undermined by defective understanding. Al-Farabi also considers situations in which the relationship between individual virtue and the moral quality of the city becomes incongruous. A virtuous individual may reside in an ignorant city (al-Madina al-Jahiliyya), where society has not yet embraced rational and divine virtues, and where prevailing social practices conflict with the individual's moral and intellectual character. Conversely, an ignorant individual may live within the Ideal City (al-Madina al-Fadila), whose institutions and citizens are oriented toward virtue and true happiness, while lacking either the intellectual capacity or the moral disposition to comprehend and embody those principles. These contrasting situations demonstrate that genuine virtue and happiness can be fully realized only when harmony exists between the individual and the social order. The presence of a virtuous individual within an ignorant city, or an ignorant individual

within the Ideal City, therefore represents a condition of disharmony that limits the complete realization of human perfection (Al-Farabi, 2019, 39). The same principle can be illustrated through orchestral practice. A highly disciplined and artistically committed musician may perform within an undisciplined and artistically superficial orchestra. Although such a performer strives for profound musical interpretation and artistic excellence, the general atmosphere of the ensemble prevents the full realization of those abilities. Conversely, an inadequately prepared musician may belong to a highly professional orchestra. Despite the ensemble's overall artistic excellence, that individual weakens the orchestra's collective balance, coherence, and musical unity.

A comparable relationship may also be observed in the role of the conductor. Just as the First Ruler (al-Râis al-Awwal) guarantees the unity and proper functioning of the Ideal City, an ineffective conductor may undermine even the most accomplished orchestra. Berlioz (1948, 410–411) identifies numerous characteristics of unsuccessful conductors that systematically impair orchestral performance. These include:

- 1) Hostility or ill will toward performers, resulting in the deterioration of artistic performance.
- 2) Insufficient conducting competence and an inability to coordinate the orchestra and chorus effectively.
- 3) Inadequate knowledge of musical style, tempo, orchestral structure, and instrumentation.
- 4) Failure to maintain coordination among orchestral sections or between orchestra and chorus.
- 5) Inability to communicate musical expression and artistic energy, producing performances that lack vitality.
- 6) Discouraging or psychologically inhibiting performers, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of even the finest ensembles.
- 7) Distorting the composer's artistic intentions and reducing profound musical inspiration to banality.
- 8) Compromising performances of new works to such an extent that audiences may mistakenly attribute the failure to the composition rather than to the conductor.

9) Mismanagement of tempo, pulse, and rhythmic organization through inappropriate acceleration, deceleration, or inaccurate metric control.

10) Disruption of melodic continuity, harmonic balance, and accompanimental textures.

11) Creating confusion within the ensemble while attributing personal errors to performers or even to the composer.

12) Inability to manage complex musical forms, particularly operatic works containing recitative, aria, and irregular dramatic pacing.

13) Failure to make efficient use of limited rehearsal time and available orchestral resources.

14) Excessive pride or overconfidence, exemplified by composers who insist upon conducting their own works despite lacking the necessary conducting skills.

15) Misinterpretation of historical performance practices, particularly in older repertoire whose tempo indications and stylistic conventions require specialized knowledge.

These observations reinforce the central argument of the present study: just as the political and ethical order of the Ideal City depends upon the intellectual and moral excellence of its First Ruler, the artistic integrity of a symphony orchestra depends fundamentally upon the conductor's capacity to integrate technical mastery, interpretative insight, and effective leadership into a coherent musical whole.

Conclusion

Within Al-Farabi's philosophical system, music and the arts function not merely as sources of sensory pleasure but as epistemic and educational instruments designed to guide both reason and emotion toward the attainment of virtue and happiness. He classifies music among the mathematical sciences, alongside arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, thereby defining it as a discipline grounded in numerical proportions and rational order rather than subjective aesthetic experience alone. Consequently, music acquires an ethical and pedagogical function: it serves as a medium

through which intelligible truths are communicated to the wider public by means of sensible and imaginative forms.

This philosophical perspective is closely connected to Al-Farabi's conception of justice and harmony. Justice is understood not as formal equality but as placing each thing in its proper position (*waḍ' al-shay' fi mawḍi'ihī*), thereby preserving proportionality and balance within both the cosmos and the political community. A comparable principle governs orchestral performance. Nuance, dynamics, articulation, and tempo regulate the internal equilibrium of musical expression, ensuring clarity, coherence, and expressive integrity. Just as justice sustains the harmonious functioning of society, the precise coordination of musical parameters enables the realization of artistic unity. In both domains, harmony emerges through the appropriate ordering of differentiated elements rather than through uniformity. At the political level, Al-Farabi presents the First Ruler (*al-Rāis al-Awwal*) as the organizing principle of the Ideal City. Possessing the highest degree of theoretical and practical intellect, the First Ruler is capable of transforming demonstrative knowledge into forms accessible to the broader community through education, rhetoric, and religious legislation. The twelve characteristics attributed to this ideal leader—including intellectual perfection, moral excellence, justice, prudence, and the capacity to promote universal happiness—find a compelling analogue in the role of the symphony conductor. Effective conducting requires not only technical expertise and musical knowledge but also interpretative insight, organizational leadership, and the ability to unite individual performers into a coherent artistic whole. In both cases, successful leadership depends upon the integration of knowledge, practical competence, and moral responsibility.

The study likewise demonstrates that continuous education and disciplined practice occupy a central position in both Al-Farabi's ethical philosophy and orchestral performance. Virtues become stable dispositions only through repeated action and sustained

cultivation; similarly, musical excellence is achieved through systematic individual practice complemented by disciplined ensemble rehearsal. Moreover, cooperation constitutes an indispensable condition for perfection in both contexts. Just as individual happiness can be realized only within a virtuous political community, orchestral excellence depends upon the coordinated interaction of all performers, where even minor deficiencies may compromise the integrity of the entire ensemble.

Al-Farabi's typology of political communities further provides a productive conceptual framework for interpreting different organizational models of orchestras. The characteristics of *al-Madina al-Ḍaruriyya*, *al-Madina al-Baddala*, *al-Madina al-Karama*, *al-Madina al-Taghallubiyya*, *al-Madina al-Jama'iyya*, and the remaining imperfect cities correspond to orchestras whose objectives range from mere functional survival to commercial success, personal prestige, authoritarian domination, or unrestricted individualism. By contrast, the professional orchestra, when governed by artistic excellence, disciplined cooperation, and a shared commitment to the realization of the musical work, most closely approximates the philosophical structure of *al-Madina al-Faḍila*. In both cases, unity is achieved not through the elimination of diversity but through the ordered integration of differentiated functions directed toward a common end.

The analysis also highlights Al-Farabi's insight that virtue cannot be understood independently of its social context. A virtuous individual residing within an ignorant city, or an ignorant individual living within the Ideal City, represents a condition of disharmony that obstructs the full realization of human perfection. The same principle applies to orchestral performance: an exceptional musician working within a poorly disciplined ensemble, or an inadequately prepared performer within an otherwise outstanding orchestra, inevitably weakens the artistic coherence of the collective. Individual excellence therefore reaches its

highest realization only within an appropriately ordered institutional and communal framework.

The present study does not claim that Al-Farabi developed a historical theory of the modern symphony orchestra, an institution that emerged many centuries after his lifetime. Rather, it proposes an interpretative application of his philosophical concepts to the analysis of orchestral structure and practice. Through the concepts of mimesis (muḥakat), imaginative art (ṣina‘a takhyiliyya), hierarchical order, justice, cooperation, and the Ideal City, the symphony orchestra may be understood as a sensible representation of Al-Farabi’s cosmological and political order. This conceptual framework not only illuminates new relationships between philosophy, music, and political thought but also provides a promising foundation for future interdisciplinary research in Islamic aesthetics, philosophy of art, and musicology.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this study.

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