

## Introduction to Sufi Music and Ritual in Turkey

Irene Markoff tarafından yazıldı.

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## Introduction to Sufi Music and Ritual in Turkey

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IT IS DIFFICULT to appreciate and understand Sufism fully without an informed exposure to the expressive cultural forms that help define and enhance it. It is this dimension of Islamic mysticism that transports the seeker on the path of spiritual attainment into higher states of consciousness that promise spiritual intoxication (*wajd*) and a unique and intimate union, even annihilation ( *fanâ'*), in the supreme being. This emotional expression of faith is intensified and externalized in elaborate forms of meditation and esoteric techniques that are part of ritual ceremonies.

Through ritual, many Sufi orders and Sufi-related sects throughout the world of Islam have been able to articulate doctrines and beliefs through artistic traditions such as sung poetry, instrumental music and dance-like movements (*samâ'* or spiritual concerts) and have utilized meditation patterns that combine corporeal techniques and controlled breathing ( *dhikr* ; Turkish, *zikir* ) to induce or conduct trance and ecstatic states.

In Turkey, the Sunni brotherhoods (*tarikât*) such as the Halveti (Khalwatiyya), Rifai (Rifâ'iyya) and Kadiri (Qâdiriyya) engage in the collective musical *dhikr* that was the principal Ottoman dervish ceremony. In the true spirit of *dhikr* (recollection of God), divine names and expression of *tawhîd* (Turkish,

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*tevhid*

) (oneness of God with all existence) are repeated to rhythmic patterns often including rhythmic breathing, body postures with a variety of motions and hymns (

*ilâhî*

), songs of mystical love (

*gazel*

) and

*mersiye*

(sung poems commemorating the martyrdom of the imam Husayn at Karbala'). This form of worship meditation in line or circular formation is incomplete without recitation of passages from the Koran.

Segments of the Kadiri *dhikr* ritual were recorded in two Istanbul dervish lodges (1980 and 1988) by Kudsi Erguner, a Paris-based musician and Sufi, and issued on CD by the Geneva Ethnographic Museums's Archives of Popular Music. The ceremony begins with litanies (

*awrâd*

) that include verses from the Koran and praises to the Prophet Muhammad. This is followed by a poem of praise sung by singers called

*zakir*

(Arabic,

*dhakir*

) supported by rhythmic accompaniment supplied by disciples to the syllables of the profession of the faith (

*tahlîl*

formula). After a

*gazel*

(

*ghazal*

) is sung, the

*dhikr*

proper begins (

*Zikr-i Hay*

), which is chanted by the dervishes and forms an accompaniment for the

*zakir*

, who performs a poem of praise to the Prophet and then two

*ilahi*

-s (hymns sung to precomposed melodies that were the principal artistic forms produced by Sunni

*tarikât*

-s in Turkey). A

*taksim*

(solo instrumental improvisation in free rhythm) concludes the this section. Next follows a

*mersiye*

and a

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*gazel*

, and finally an

*ilâhî*

punctuated by repetition of the syllable

*Hû*

(Him). The ceremony ends with the first and then the last three

*sura*

-s of the Koran.

The well-known Whirling Dervishes or Mevlevi order of Dervishes in Turkey incorporate elaborate choreographies (*sema*) accompanied by sung poetry from the Mathnawi of the founder of the order, Jalal al-Din Rumi (Mevlana), that is set to compositions in the tradition of Ottoman secular art music (based on the *makam/mode* system) into their devotional ceremonies. The musicians who performed this music were trained professionals and sometimes composers affiliated with the order who did not seek to enter into a state of trance.

Although there are elements of audition (such as that of prayers and invocations), the central core of the ceremony is the *âyîn* that focuses on the integration of music, poetry and dance and culminates in *dhikr* triggered by set forms of movement that increase in speed and intensity. The introductory segment of the ritual includes a poem in praise of the prophet known as *naat* and

composed by İtrî (1640-1712) that is sung unaccompanied, a

*taksim*

generally performed on the important end-blown flute (

*ney*

), and a

*perev*

(prelude or composed piece for instrumental ensemble in fixed meter that uses a specific melodic mode (

*makam*

) and a metric mode (

*usûl*

) comprising a "great" cycle of 28 primary beats that are repeated twice. It is at this point that the dervishes walk in procession around the ceremonial space and engage in ritual bowing.

The *âyîn* proper begins with the *sema* (whirling dance) performed to music (played on classical Turkish instruments and sung by a chamber chorus) in four sections known as (

*selâm*

- s). During the third

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*selâm*

there is an increase in tempo (where a waltz rhythm is used) and a slowing down during the fourth where an air of restraint is once again maintained by the dervishes as they end the dance. The instrumentalists then perform a concluding prelude (

*son perev*)

and a concluding composition (

*yürük semai*)

followed by an instrumental

*taksim*

and recitations from the Koran.

Instruments heard in a recent recording of a complete Mevlevi ceremony (*âyîn* in the *makam/m* ode of Ferahnâk Airan) by the Mevlevi Ensemble of Turkey (1995) are

*ney*

(end-blown flute),

*kanun*

(trapezoidal, plucked zither),

*kemençe*

(bowed, pear-shaped lute held vertically on the knees),

*tanbur*

(long-necked, plucked lute with frets),

*ûd*

(short-necked, fretless, plucked lute) and

*kudüm*

(a pair of small kettledrums).

The esoteric ceremonies of the rural and more recently urban-based heterodox Alevi (and related village Bektai and Tahtaci) reveal shamanistic survivals of a Central Asian Turkic past, Shi'i tendencies where the imam 'Ali is almost deified and a filiation with the Bektai order of dervishes. Formerly known as Kizilba, the Alevi were viewed with suspicion and mistrust because of their so-called clandestine activities and inclinations to revolt against the authority of Ottoman Sunni authority. They were stalwart in their support of Shah Ismail of Safavid Persia whose poetry (written under the pen-name Hata'i) they revered in the past and continue to revere today.

Alevi religious musical services are referred to collectively as *cem* or *âyîn*. Their purpose is not only to focus on spiritual exercises that include elements of

*zîkr*

(without controlled breathing but with some elements of body posturing) and ritual dance (

*sema*

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) accompanied by sung mystical poetry in the vernacular and the sacred ritual instrument known as

*balama or saz*

(plucked folk lute with frets). They also serve to reinforce social solidarity and correctness of behaviour through inculcating the beliefs and doctrines of the sect and saintly figures as well.

Music is performed by individuals recruited from Alevi communities and descended from holy lineages of religious leaders known as *dede*. These specialists are viewed with respect and known as

*zâkir, aik, sazende or güvende,*

depending on regional usage. Many are also known to be poet/minstrels (

*aik*

,

*ozan*

) who perpetuate the tradition of dervish-lodge (

*tekke*

) poets such as the much loved and admired Yunus Emre (13th century), Nesîmî (14th century), Pir Sultan Abdal, Hataî and Genç Abdal (16th century) and Kul Himmet and Kul Hüseyin (17th century). The poetry was composed in the Turkish vernacular and follows the principles of folk prosody known as

*hece vezne*

in which the focus is the number of syllables.

The specialized sacred musical repertoire of Alevi musicians includes *deyi* (songs of mystical love),

*nefes* (hymns

concerning the mystical experience),

*düvaz*

or

*düvâzdeh imâm*

(hymns in honor of the 12 Alid imams),

*mersiye*

(laments concerning the martyrdom of the imam Huseyn at Kerbela),

*miraclama*

(songs about the ascent of the prophet Muhamad to heaven) and

*sema*

(ritual dance that is accompanied by folk lutes and sung poetry). The dances are performed with dignity by couples, and choreographies employ circle and line formations as well as arrangements where couples face one another, thus synchronizing their movements more closely. As the tempo of the music increases, the figures become more complex and intense.

There are many regional variants of

*sema,*

but the most widespread and important are the Dance of the Forty (

*Krklar Semah*

) and the Dance of the Cranes (

*Turnalar*

*Semah*

) where the movements of the dance illustrate links to a shamanistic legacy and the transformation of shamans into birds who take flight.

The gathering of the forty saints refers to the moment, after the Prophet's ascension to heaven, when he beheld the manifestation of Divine Reality in Ali. The Alevi believe that this gathering can be viewed as the prototype for their central rite (*âyîn-i-cem*, *görgü cemî*), the Rite of Integration. This is a complex ritual occasion in which a variety of tasks are allotted to incumbents bound together by extrafamilial brotherhood (

*musahiplik*

) who undertake a dramatization of unity and integration under the direction of the spiritual leader (

*dede*

). The

*dede*

interacts formally with his 12 assistants and the body of worshippers as he applies Alevi religious idioms that reinforce links to Sunni Islam, the Bektai order of Dervishes and Shii Islam as well. The

*âyîn-i-cem*

can be heard on the JVC CD

*Turkey. An Esoteric Sufi Ceremony.*

Unfortunately for non-specialists, the notes are very vague and give no indication of location, performers, musical genres or poetic forms. The recording was made in Istanbul in 1993, and the ceremony includes in an order typical of a

*cem*

: a

*deyi*

that reiterates the line of descent of the sect in a historical framework, two

*düvaz*

(one based on the poetry of Hatayi, and the other on the poetry of Kul Himmet), prayer formulas, the

*illâllâh*

genre that incorporates the

*tahlîl*

formula into the poem to create an atmosphere of

*zîkr*

while sect members create rhythmic intensity by hitting their knees in time to the music and sway their bodies slightly, the Dance of the Forty (

*Krklar Semah*

), the Dance of the Cranes (

*Turnalar Semah*

) and prayer formulas.

Similar recordings of the *Alevi cem* (*Alevilikte Cem*) have appeared in Turkey and are useful in supplying information regarding the names of genres and the order in which they appear, although the recording mentioned below does not include all of the items mentioned on the cassette cover.

### Recordings

1. *Turquie. Ceremonie des derviches Kadiri.* Recorded by Kudsi Erguner in 1980 and 1988 in Istanbul. Notes by Ahmed Kudsi Erguner, Abdelhamid Bouzouzou. Archives Internationales de Musique Populaire, Musée d'ethnographie, Geneva. AIMP XII. CD-587. Recording can be purchased from: Musée d'ethnographie, 65-67 boulevard Carl Vogt, CH-1205 Geneve; tel. (4122) 28 12 18.

2. *Returning. The Music of the Whirling Dervishes.* Recorded in 1995 and performed by the Mevlevi Ensemble, directed by Dogan Ergin with Kani Karaca as featured solo artist (in place of a chorus). Interworld CD-916. The *âyîn* featured on this recording was composed by Dogan Ergin in the *makam* mode of Ferahnâk Airan. Recordings can be purchased from: Interworld Music Associates, RD3 Box 395A, Brattleboro, VT 05301 or tel. (800) 698-6705.

3. *Turkish Music. Music of the Mevlevi.* Unesco Collection--A Musical Anthology of the Orient. Recordings and Commentary by Bernard Mauguin. Barenreiter Musicaphon. BM 30 L 2019. This long-play record was not made recently but is valuable because of the detailed notes and accompanying photographs.

4. *Turkey. An Esoteric Sufi Ceremony.* CD recorded in Istanbul in 1993 under the supervision of Dr. Tsutomu Oohashi. JVC World Sounds. VICG-5345. Manufactured and distributed by Victor Entertainment, Inc., Tokyo, Japan. The recording is useful as documentation of an event, but the accompanying notes show little or no understanding of the subject matter.

5. *Alevilikte Cem 2.* A commercial cassette (12271) recorded and produced in Istanbul, Turkey,

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that presents an entire Alevi  
and the

*cem* and identifies the individual genres heard  
*zakir* (singer and *balama* player),

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