



WHITE SPIRIT

Noureddine Khourchid and the whirling Dervishes of Syria and Hosni Hertelli (Shoof)

The sacred and profane collide when Sufi music and mysticism meet street art. Noureddine Khourchid & the Whirling Dervishes of Damascus bring their uplifting melodies, enriched by spellbinding dance moves, directly from war-torn Syria's Umayyad Mosque.

Led by the stirring voice of Khourshid, the son of a Syrian Sufi sheik, seven religious singers perform exquisite invocations, songs of praise and Sufi poems as three Whirling Dervishes spin on the stage. For the Sufis, the quest for the divine can be attained through a trance, through a repetition of the same leitmotiv which is sung and danced and which expresses the soul's burning desire to return to its original source.

This sublime musical experience is made thrillingly vivid as the stage magically comes alive with illuminated calligraphy painted by Tunisian street artist Shoof. His striking brushstrokes provide the dazzling backdrop to the mystical music and movement of *White Spirit*.

Shoof perceives the religious singers and Whirling Dervishes spectacle as pure energy which springs from deep inside then spreads until it is infinitely wide, gathering everything in its path....only to focus it all on one spot, to 'verticalise' it like a ray of light which shoots up to commune with heaven. Shoof has developed a rich and imaginative style of painting which is directly inspired by arabic calligraphy. Wishing to take the mystique out of traditional calligraphy, he has unravelled each Arabic letter, by letting himself be guided by the flow of the strokes. The calligraphic symbols appear monumentally and magically during performances enlightened by black lights.

Trance, music and visual art come together for a spiritual spectacle as exciting as it is enchanting.

Noureddine Khourchid & the whirling Dervishes of Syria

Noureddin Khourchid: Lead Voice
Abdulrahman Modawar : Choirs & Riqq
Mohamad Kahil: Choirs & Duff
Mhd Ghassan Alrawas : Choirs
Adel Halima : Choirs
Walid Alhamad: Choirs & Tombak
Basem Kadmani: Choirs & Ud
Hatem Aljamal : Whirling Dervish
Mahmoud Altaier : Whirling Dervish

Several mystical tales attribute a divine origin to music recounting that the soul, whose very nature is celestial, refused to take form but was seduced by the voice of an angel ordered by God to settle inside the body. The spirit is now trapped inside the body, but has kept a nostalgia for its origins ever since it was parted from them.

All this has been wonderfully put into words by the great mystic Jaladdin al-Rumi in his famous poem *The Nay's Lament*.

Listen to the story told by the reed, of being separated.

Since I was cut from the reedbed, I have made this crying sound.

That draws tears in man and woman alike [...]. Anyone far from their source, longs to go back.

This is how the Sufis sing of their separation from the original source and their ardent desire to be reunited with it.

The sama (spiritual concert) and the trance-like dance of the hadra (divine présence) are the direct expression of the many mystical ways to God, such as that practised by the 12th century Qadiriyya order, the Mawlawis and the Shadhîliyya (13th century). The basic aim is always to grow nearer to God by purifying the soul through the practice of dhikr (remembrance/ invocation of God's name).

The procedure for the Sufi sama can be purely vocal or have an instrumental accompaniment, according to the order and its rules. Those were instruments are used consider them to be an integral part of the ritual, so they're not played for pleasure, but only with the express aim of praising the Creator.

Parallel to the sung repertory of each Sufi order, the tradition of the inshad (religions hymnody) developed too in the Muslim part of the Arab world. This tradition is perpetuated by professional hymn-singers (cantors) who may come from the Sufi orders. They are invited to lead religious ceremonies or private parties, particularly at the time of Mawlid (the anniversary of the prophet's birth) and other holy days.

The ensemble

The ensemble presented here, consisting of seven munhid, hymn-singers from the Shadhiliyya order, together with three dancers from the Mawlawi order are well known for its serious approach and clear execution, and has made guest appearances all over the world.

The Shadhiliyya order, one of the most important in the Arab world, was founded according to the teachings and spiritual authority of a great Moroccan mystic, Abu al-Hasan al Shadhili (1196-1256), who settled in

Alexandria. From there his spiritual teachings spread right across the East and the Maghreb. After his death, the Shadhiliyya order was organised under the leadership of Shadhili's Andalusian disciple Asu al-Abbas al-Wursi (d.1286), then by one of al-Mursi's pupils, the Egyptian Ibn Atallah al-Iskandari (d. 1309), a major figure in Sufism. The teaching spread and the order exists in many different Arab countries, including Egypt, Syria and the countries of North Africa.

The Mawlawi (or Mevlevi) order takes its name from Mawlana (our master), the nickname of Jaladdin al-Rumi (1207-1273), the spiritual master and founder of an order in Konya (Turkey), organised after his death by his oldest son, Sultan Valad. As well as the dhikr common to all the Sufi orders, Rumi instigated the whirling dance for his disciples, known in the West as "the dance of the whirling dervishes". Originally -and in some cases the tradition continues - this dance was the spontaneous outward manifestation of an inner mystic state (hal) that seizes the adept at the least allusion to spirituality. Some Sufis explain the origins of this dance with the following anecdote: "Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, may God be pleased with him, the companion of the Prophet, was with God's Messenger, may God's prayer and greeting be upon him, when the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet and said, "Tell Abu Bakr that God sends him greetings and says that He is pleased with him. And He wants to know if he's pleased with God?" As soon as Abu Bakr heard the Prophet's account of the Angel's tidings, he began to twirl round and round on the spot, carried away by utter bliss."

The rhythmical accompaniment for the vocalists is provided by daffs (frame drums, tambourines) played by two hymn-singers. In this context the daff has been described as shar'i (from the term sharia), i.e. lawful and therefore permitted by certain theologians. The imam al-Ghazali (1059-111) in his treatise *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revivification of the religious sciences) and the Sufi sheikh from Damascus, Nabulsi (1641-1731) in his *Idah al-dalalat fi sama' al-alat* (Insights into the arguments in favour of listening to musical instruments), both based their judgement on certain hadith and expressed their tolerance of the use of the daff and the tabl (a cylindrical, double-ended drum) to accompany the sama for use during religious festivities, whereas some strictly orthodox ulemas, including Ibn Taymiyyah, have forbidden not only the sama, but also singing and musical instruments in everything pertaining to religion.

Noureddine Khourshid

Noureddine Khourshid, born in Damascus in 1966, is the son of Abu al-Nur, sheikh of the Shâdhiliyya Sufi order in Damascus. At the age of five, Noureddine was regularly attending the weekly dhikr ceremonies held in the order's centre, the zawiya, and religious festivities such as Mawlid and the Laylat al-qadr (the Night of Destiny). He was taught the Quran and religious knowledge by the order, and also received training in religious singing and chant. His further education included a period of study in economics and science at Damascus University, after which he decided to devote himself to religious studies. Then came training in Koranic recitation and chant with Sheikh Qasim Hiba, followed by his participation in several competitions in Muslim Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. His vocal talent and skill soon attracted attention, and in 1987, in response to requests to sing at various religious festivities in his community, he founded a troupe specialising in performing religious hymns and songs of praise to the Prophet. In order to perfect his skill in the art of maqamat – a system of melodic modes used in traditional Arabic music - Noureddine continued to study music with various teachers and musicians from Damascus, including Adnart Aylcuch and the composers Zouhayr Mnini, Hussein Zahra and Anouar Dyab Agha. He also received special training for the muwash-shahat (sing muwashshah), the erudite vocal genre particularly dear to Syrians, who have distinguished themselves in this art of sung poetry for hundreds of years. Treasures from this repertoire are included in the repertoire of various orders in Syria and elsewhere in the Arab world.

The repertoire

In Islam, religious songs are classified by the generic term inshad, meaning to aspire to something, to desire or seek, to have an aim, to go in search of something. The word nashid, means a hymn or a canticle, and a manshid is a hymn-singer, a religious singer, or a cantor. From a poetic point of view the inshad repertoire includes invocations, songs of praise and songs glorifying God, prayers, praises of the Prophet, the story of the Prophets birth, his nocturnal journey and his ascension, his heroic deeds, miracles, his life in general and a large number of Sufi poems on the themes of divine love and ecstasy. The words for these songs are compilations of excerpts taken from poems around a single theme but coming from different sources and periods of history, which often makes precise author attribution difficult. The mystic poets most frequently encountered in this repertoire include Ibn al-Farid (1181-1235), al-Nabulsi (1641-1731), al-Barazanji (18TH century), al-Bura'i (13TH century) and al-Busiri (1213-1295).

Hosni Hertelli aka Shoof biography

Hosni Hertelli aka Shoof was born in Medina of Tunis, Tunisia, but moved to Paris in 2004 to study law at the University of Paris – Nanterre. After completing a DEA in history and legal anthropology and political sociology, he developed a rich and instinctive painting style directly inspired by traditional calligraphy. Unlike his calligrapher colleagues, he uses the letter as a reason to explore shape. Shoof explores lines and movements by using a range of tools such as the spray can, marker, brush or stencil.

Shoof use Arabic letters as a pretext to develop a style leaning more towards geometric abstraction. In contrast to the calligrapher who emphasizes writing itself and what it means, Shoof seizes the Arabic letter to dissect it, break it down and fragment it. The artist tries to move away from the language that can only be understood by those who know the codes. The meaning of the sentences that are written in his paintings, often striking or provocative, matter less than the aesthetic research around the letter. In the end, it is the composition of the features, the clever mixture of the full and the empty, the search for a structural deconstruction that will be at the center of the artist's work. Shoof's painting is nevertheless very much codified: the same brush, the same colour and an extremely mastered gesture that is repeated in a systematic way. Toward the essential, the artist maintains a direct link between his painting and his unconscious: during the gesture, thought no longer exists.

Shoof participated in the Tour Paris 13 and the project Djerbahood in Tunisia initiated by Mehdi Ben Cheikh and Galerie Itinérance. Shoof is also one of the artists presented at the 3rd edition of the Urban Art Biennale® 2015 exhibition at the Völklinger Hütte Museum.

Quotes

"An unprecedented performance that gives the spin" Téléràma

"This show combines Sufism and street art appears as an absolute success." Regard en coulisse

"The public lose all sense of time passing and forget to breathe, immersed in this mystical and infinitely harmonious performance." Culturez-Vous

"A performance of immense majesty." Mouvement

"White Spirit is a moment of sharing as immense as unique between communion and contemplation."
Theatrorama

“When modernity and tradition intertwine but never collide.” Le Courier de l'Atlas

Website: <http://www.zamanproduction.com/en/artist/white-spirit>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ZamanProductions>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ZamanProduction>

Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/zaman-production>

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Perth International Arts Festival

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Wendy Martin is the Artistic Director 2016 – 19.

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