



## **Performance Philosophy and Sufism**

**Oct 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> 2017**

**Centre for Performance Philosophy, University of Surrey**

### **Friday Oct 6<sup>th</sup>**

10 - 10:30 Registrations and Welcome

10:30 - 12 Presentations by Serap Erincin (Louisiana State University, USA), Halal Ghoname (University of Marburg, Germany), Sinead O'Conner (Open University, UK), Bridget Fisk and Sarah Sayeed (Independent Artists, Manchester) Chaired by: Laura Cull

12 - 1 Lunch

1 - 5 Participatory talk and whirling workshop w/ guest presenters Azize Guvenc, Emre Basaran and Faridah Busemann (Tumata, Turkey) Chaired by: Hannah McClure

### **Saturday Oct 7<sup>th</sup>**

9 - 9:15 Introductions by Laura Cull Ó Maoilearca for the Centre for Performance Philosophy

9:15-10:30 Keynote Address and Screening of 'The Woman Who Whirls' (2017) and conversation - with Hannah McClure (University of Surrey, Guildford) and Professor Cosimo Zene (SOAS, London) Chaired by: Sabine Sorgel

10:30 – 11 Tea

11 - 11:30 Presentation by Mark Hamilton (Regents University, London) Chaired by: Sabine Sorgel

11:30 - 12:30 Introduction of Special Issue and Presentation of opera, 'Say I am You Mevlana' (2012) excerpt - w/ guest presenters, Dunja Njaradi (University of Arts, Belgrade) and Michael Ellison (University of Bristol) Chaired by: Juliet Chambers-Coe

12:30 - 1:45 Lunch

1:45-2:30 Circular Panel with all contributors Chaired by: Hannah McClure and Juliet Chambers-Coe

2:30-3:30 Launch of 'Global Journeys of Sufi Whirling, Sufism and Arts Practice' a special issue of the journal Dance, Movement, Spiritualities (Intellect) Drinks Reception

## **Abstracts and Presenter Information**

### **Serap Erincin**

Title: From Flow to Oneness: Sufism, Trance, and Psychophysical Performance

Performance theorists and practitioners who favor psychophysical methods such as Polish director Jerzy Grotowski, the creator of Poor Theatre, and Richard Schechner, the founder of Environmental Theatre, acknowledged and incorporated the significance of Sufism in their performance philosophies and methodologies. Sufism is perhaps the most embodied of spiritual practices or at least the one that most outwardly professes the psychophysical nature of the ritual that defines it: through their codified spinning and dancing, the whirling dervishes get in touch with a greater being to achieve peace and love – or as Mevlana Celaludin Rumi reiterated in his interpretations of tevhid, oneness. That is, this specific physical act of whirling achieves a certain spiritual/psychic transformation, a state of holiness.

The trance like state whirling dervishes attain in their performances is akin to the level of performance Grotowski desired from his performers. He wanted them to achieve “holiness.” The performers trained with various psychophysical exercises to accomplish this. Grotowski describes a trance-like state, one that requires the performer to completely surrender their physical being to a higher self, yet in order to do this they must know their physical actions by heart and perform with precision –

like the dervish. This trance-like state is the “basic performance process” that Schechner describes as “universal,” “movements ‘take over’ the performer, as in a trance” (1985:99). The key to achieving this trance state is to focus on the movement and to trust that the rest will follow. This is why psychophysical methods allow performers to get “in the zone” -- what sports psychologists think of as a “magical” state where “performance is exceptional and consistent, automatic and flowing. An athlete is able to ignore all the pressures and let his or her body deliver the performance that has been learned so well (Young and Pain 1999:21). In this paper, I will examine the psychophysical dynamics involved in the Sufi practice of ritual whirling through a performative philosophy and to enrich ways of achieving flow, spontaneity, precision, and oneness in performance.

Serap Erincin is a multimedia and performance artist and director originally from Istanbul. She received her Ph.D. from New York University and is Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at Louisiana State University. The recipient of various awards, her work also focuses on performance philosophy and phenomenology. She has published on experimental performance and human rights performance and is the editor of *Solum and Other Plays from Turkey* and the special issue of *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*. She is also the writer and director of plays such as *Atrocity Boulevard*, *Inside “Out,”* and *Connected*, and the curator of several symposiums and the Neurohumanities Initiative and Salons. **Contact:** [se556@nyu.edu](mailto:se556@nyu.edu)

### **Halal Ghoname**

Title: The Dhikr of the Eye: Representing Spirit in the Sufi Artistic Practices

Sufism is an important limb of Muslim Philosophy constructed upon the emphasis of the spiritual connection and relationship between man and the Divine. Although Sufis trace the origins of Sufism back to the time of Prophet Muhammed and his companions, the word Sufi became the acknowledged title of all Muslim mystics by the end of 200 A.H/816 A.D, and the first person to adopt Sufi as a title was Sheikh Abu Hashem Kufi(d.150 A.H/768 A.D). (Bilqies, 2014, p. 56) .

Moreover, Sufism is considered one of the richest arenas of research when examining the very rare, yet distinguished iconographic side of Islamic art. In this paper, I shall explore this branch of Iconographic art and address the idea of how it reflects the Sufi philosophy through artistic practices. Sufi artistic production does not separate the faith from the art, the spirit from the practice, and the body from the self, or the spirit. Sufi Iconographic art reconstructs the philosophical and spiritual unified paradigm that exhibits the universal definition of art as a creative course of actions in the expression of frame of mind, feeling, or spirit. (Rader, 1965, p. XVI) Sufism as a fundamental spiritual movement has contributed and enriched all aspects of Islamic culture. (Nasr, 1987, p. 12) It has played a significant role in Islamic arts from poetry, music, and dance, and developed to include representational art from miniatures to the modern life size paintings. **Contact** [ghoname@staff.uni-marburg.de](mailto:ghoname@staff.uni-marburg.de)

### **Sinead O’Conner**

Title: Leading a new whirl? Environment, Awareness and Performance

As a systemic environmental management facilitator, I would like to invite the Sufi community into an open dialogue that could lead to closer exchange and understanding of practices performed by experts in environmental management and sustainability - who are currently seeking and making new movements to refix complex narratives such as climate change. The aim is to discover if, and how, the practices of environmental managers and Sufi/dance practitioners can feed each other in addressing major questions surrounding the global environmental crisis.

Work has begun around this theme with dancers and movement practitioners, in general - through a recent collaboration held in the space of Dance Ireland. This national body is concerned especially about how dancers can further agency as global citizens, especially in relation to sustainability. In this presentation I wish to consider the alignment with Sufism more closely. **Contact** [sheoconnor@consultant.com](mailto:sheoconnor@consultant.com)

### **Bridget Fisk, Sarah Sayeed**

Title: Sufi in the City

This proposal seeks to contribute a 10 minute video presentation to the event Performance Philosophy & Sufism. This video will introduce the contemporary performance project currently in research and development called 'Sufi In The City' 'Sufi In The City' is conceived by Sarah Sayeed and is collaboratively created and performed by Bridget Fiske & Sarah Sayeed. This project has recently received Grants for the Arts funding from Arts Council England supporting current research and development.

'Sufi In The City' is a multi modal contemporary performance project in development that has emerged to currently explore questions within the subjects of: • spirituality within modernity (with consideration of technology and the metropolis), • lineages (including spiritual, genetic and geographic), • experiences of women within Islamic traditions, as well as, • performance practises & Sufism. Sufi artistic practices and philosophies inform this work via exploration of theme, function and form. Informing the exploration of a contemporary practice are the classical traditions of the Sufi dance, Qawalli and folk Baol music to name a few.

Sarah Sayeed is a musician, writer and composer who has grown up on a musical diet of Tagore, Motown and electronica. Performing nationally and internationally, and working across the mediums of music and theatre, Sarah's portfolio includes shows such as 'Samson and Delilah' and works presented at Sydney Festival, BBC Mela, Brighton Fringe and DePercussion. Trained in Indian classical techniques with maestro Swati Natekar, Sarah has released work through Public Transit Recordings. Sarah's approach to music is collaborative, with a growing move towards creating performance practises which look at the common meeting points between artists and their disciplines. In 2016 Sarah participated on Sound and Music's Portfolio project with Kulji Bhamra where selected composers developed their skills in writing for tabla, percussion and harp, using the notation system developed by Kuljit himself. **Contact** [sayeed.sarah@gmail.com](mailto:sayeed.sarah@gmail.com)

Bridget is a dance artist with a career spanning Australia, the UK and including much international touring and collaboration. Bridget's work explores art and experience through engagement with subjects of human rights, culture, nature, science and consciousness. Through this Bridget is interested in engaging with what is challenging and what is wonderful. As a teacher and facilitator Bridget has worked in many community, education and professional contexts. Bridget as fulfilled guest and regular facilitation & teaching engagements with: The Lowry Centre for Advanced Training in Dance, Expressions Dance Company, The Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts, University of Salford, University of Roehampton, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Queensland University of Technology and many more. **Contact** [fiskebridget@me.com](mailto:fiskebridget@me.com)

### **Azize Guvenc, Emre Basaran, Faridah Busemann – Tumata –**

Azize Guvenc, wife of the late Dr. Rahmi Oruc Guvenc, will present her husbands work and legacy. Azize Guvenc is a Sufi musician and practitioner of Sufi music therapy in her own right and will share of the work and life she has shared with Dr. Guvenc. She will be assisted by Emre Basran and Faridah Buseman.

Dr. Guvenc was a sufi master, a music therapist, an ethnomusicologist, a composer and a poet. He studied philosophy at the Faculty of Literature, Istanbul University. At the Cerrahpasa Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul he completed his doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology, focusing traditional music therapy. Oruc Guvenc founded the 'Centre for Research and Application of Turkish Music' at Cerrahpasa Faculty of Medicine. Later, he was appointed lecturer at the 'Unit for the Research and Promotion of Turkish Music' at the Turcic Research Institute of Marmara University. Earlier, in 1975, Oruc Guvenc had founded TUMATA (Group for the Research and Promotion of Turkish Music) and began researching the origins and healing properties of Central Asian music. **Contact** [info@tumata.com](mailto:info@tumata.com), [azizeguvenc@yahoo.de](mailto:azizeguvenc@yahoo.de), [emre@tumata.com](mailto:emre@tumata.com), [faridah@arborist.de](mailto:faridah@arborist.de)

### **Cosimo Zene and Hannah McClure**

'The Woman Who Whirls' (2017) is an ethno-poetics of contemporary whirling practice. It speaks from and to the nature of whirling through visual and spoken non-linear narrative. Broadly experimental in its visual style, the film invites the observer into the inner world of the dervish through its cinematography and editing choices. Issues of tradition and agency, methodologies of practice, and contemporary spirituality are considered. The film was screened with live performance at Liverpool Hope University in April of this year and will be formally premiered on the festival circuit 2018. It runs 11 minutes 34 seconds. Produced and performed by Dr. Hannah McClure, Director Ella Wood.

Today's address and presentation will focus on the importance of dialogue between philosophies (plural), religions (plural) and the intersections and influences these have on each other. Here we recognise that religion is a living philosophy for its practitioners. In special reference to tradition and its powerful modes of transformation, issues of individuality and community are addressed through larger

discourses on philosophising by practice and the lived philosophies of our modes of spiritual development and their rituals.

Professor Cosimo Zene is a specialist in Religion and Philosophy at The School Of African and Oriental Studies, London. With a particular emphasis on religions as lived philosophies and the need for dialogue between philosophies, Professor Zene opens a space for intersections and conversation - ultimately toward the goal of harmony and peace. His expertise in the parallel, conflicting and complementary structures of thought and practice in Bangladesh, India and South Asia bridge now outdated East-West and North-South divides. As former head of his department he has created the new BA program in World Philosophies, emphasising plurality and dialogue and leading the way in new thinking. **Contact** [zc@soas.ac.uk](mailto:zc@soas.ac.uk)

Hannah McClure, PhD, MA, BFA, RPP is a lecturer and movement specialist at The University of Surrey and a registered and certified healer/bodywork therapist. Her background in professional performance spans fifteen years and includes the production of ten seasons of work with various companies including Open Air Dance and The Prisms Project. Her study of Sufism is a natural outcome of her practice-based research into ritual and performance. Broad areas of interest include ritual and religion, Sufism, shamanism, somatic awareness, ways of knowing (practice-research, embodiment, trance), processes of transformation and heart-centred sustainability. **Contact** [h.mcclure@gsa.surrey.ac.uk](mailto:h.mcclure@gsa.surrey.ac.uk)

## **Mark Hamilton**

Title: The Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of the Moment of Mystical Experience

My presentation explores how particular understandings of time are developed through participation in mukabale, the whirling dervish ceremony that is the Sufi Mevlevi sema. I consider how this education might also inform a social conscience. I approach whirling as dynamic embodied movement in which the materiality of blood, skin and bone are utterly prominent. The sensory stimulation the mukabele generates anchors participants in the very present. Indeed, as a carefully defined somatic construct, mukabele requires participants to be highly and precisely grounded. Thus, whirling promotes a phenomenological orientation, an anchoring in 'the lived human subject rather than an abstract floating being hovering over the world' (Johnston 2017: 30). Yet it is also a technology of mysticism seeking to transmit spiritual knowing that can, like the wind, be sensed and felt but cannot be 'contained within imposed boundaries, or even the best definitions' (Burkhardt 263: 2007). The mukabele symbolises a ritual death and can be conceived as purification in preparation for one's own end-time. In this way, it asks participants to look forward to a final instant, whilst suggesting the possibility of a continuity extending beyond that line accessed through withdrawal to one's sense of an internal subtle timeless self. A pronounced effect of my personal whirling practice is an increased experience of being emotionally available. This shift might be seen as a change helping to bridge the materially time-bound and transcendental time-free understandings of subjective experience that the practice simultaneously develops. Böwering posits that Sufi practices such as mukabele draw together conceptions of an eternity 'pre- and post- existence into the moment of mystical experience' (Böwering 1997: 61).

Might the heart be the centre point of this moment and also the junction between what Böwering calls the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Islamic thought — ‘the individual’s overpowering dependence on the Creator’ and ‘one’s autonomous self-realization through one’s earthly interactions’ (Böwering 1997: 62)? How might embodied experiences of the interconnection of divine and earthly time expand one’s yearning for liberation into activism addressing the relief of others’ suffering too?

Dr. Mark James Hamilton is Senior Lecturer in World Stages at Regent’s University London. He trained at the University of Birmingham (BA & MPhil) where he focussed on embodied voice work. Extramurally, he studied the work of Jerzy Grotowski. He later trained in bharatanatyam (South Indian classical dance), astanga vinyasa yoga and kalaripayattu (Kerala’s native martial art). For thirteen years, Mark was the close collaborator of Mika, a seminal queer Maori performance artist. In the course of his doctoral studies, Mark trained in tai chi chen, judo and capoeira. He is also a practitioner of nuad boran (Thai yoga massage). Since 2013, Mark has been a participant in the whirling dervish ceremony of the Mevlevi sema at Colet House (London). Mark’s research explores the possibility of transcultural principles for performance training and the challenges of intercultural creative collaboration with Daniel P. Cunningham (exploring Grotowski’s legacy in queer art) and Shane Shambhu (developing drama through bharatanatyam). **Contact** [hamiltonm@REGENTS.AC.UK](mailto:hamiltonm@REGENTS.AC.UK)

### **Dunja Njaradi**

The special issue of *Dance, Movement, Spiritualities* titled ‘Global Journeys of Sufi Whirling: Sufism and Arts Practice’ grew out of a shared interest in Sufism and Dance between Dunja Njaradi and Hannah McClure. Tracing their journeys through the doctorate study of Dance and Sufism side by side, Dunja and Hannah found in each other a mutual desire to open discourses around these intersections. Dunja will present on the themes of the journal, some of the issues encountered in its topics and the breadth and depth of a growing field of study whereby Sufism may influence dance, theatre and performance, particularly through its deep philosophical tradition.

Dr. Dunja Njaradi is an associate editor of *Dance, Movement, Spiritualities*. She completed her doctorate on somatic movement and choreography in the department of Theatre Studies at Lancaster University. Publications include several articles and edited volumes on spirituality, somatics and ethnography. Dunja currently teaches at The University of Arts, Belgrade in the department of Ethnomusicology and is actively researching and teaching on topics of agency, histories and personal spiritualities. **Contact** [dunjanjaradi@fmu.bg.ac.rs](mailto:dunjanjaradi@fmu.bg.ac.rs)

### **Michael Ellison**

Dr. Michael Ellison grew up in Istanbul as the son of American ex-pats and later completed his music education at Tufts (MA) and his doctorate at The University of California Santa Barbara. Currently affiliated with The University of Bristol, Michael researches the music of Turkey and Anatolia, collisions and intersections of culture and contemporary opera. An active artist and composer, Michael is an ongoing codirector the Hezarfen Ensemble in Istanbul. Recent works include ‘The Sea

Crossed Fisherman' (2016), and 'Say I am You Mevlana' (2012) both full length operas for intercultural musical ensembles and orchestra.

Today's presentation will focus on the operas and the creative process which underpins them, specifically in relationship to the Sufi inspiration and thematics.

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