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Qawwali

The Mystic music of the Sufi's

Qawwali is an ecstatic form of devotional Sufi music. The music is filled with fast drums, clapping, and ecstatic singing, usually accompanied by a harmonium. Most will agree that the Persian saint Hazrat Amir Khusraw, who lived from 1253 until 1325 created the traditional form. Although the style is rooted in religious music, it has crossed into the secular music; you can find it being played outside temples, saints tombs, or in Bollywood films. The effect of the music puts the listener into a trance like state of silence or ecstasy, which is all welcomed at a qawwali performance. The term Qawwali represents the genre of religious music, the occasion it is played, and the Qawwal are the expert musicians playing the music.

The music itself is incredible, all the pieces of the ceremony fit together so dynamically. What might just seem like a call and response religious gathering, this type of music is meant to heal and release stuck energy and emotions from the body. The song and dance, I feel are one of the only way to truly describe the mystical essence of God. What makes these Qawwals such incredible musicians is that they control, and move the energy of the room, with songs that are

repetitive in nature. They are able to not only read to crowd but also each other musically.

The classic ensemble is made up of singers, clappers and drummers. Traditionally these three would sing praises, while being accompanied by the basic and sometimes complicated rhythms. The modern qawwal is filled with multiple tablas, cartals, and 2-3 harmoniums. There is always a lead singer situated in the front of the group. He is the one that holds most of the mystic knowledge of the group, and is the best singer. The tabla's sit close to him and then the harmoniums. The other singers in the group sit in a row behind and sing backup. The drums and clapping are some of the most important parts of the music to help keep musicians in time during states of ecstatic bliss.

Each qawwal starts with what is called the "alap". This is similar to the sound of AUM. One note is sung by the leader in silence, and then the rest of the group joins to make it a couplet. This one note is important because it sets the stage for the music. With this note the musicians listen to each other and also look and engage in the crowd. Slowly after this note the song is started and slowly it starts to crescendo into the full rhythm and song. Everything is perfectly calculated with the crowd, to make sure everyone goes into an ecstatic state. "Vel" is also an interesting concept to understand. It is the act of when the performance is in full swing money is thrown onto the stage and at the

performers. This is an expression of gratitude and an offering. When one is in commune with the essence of creation, and is drunk on the bliss, nothing else matters. It is symbolic of letting go of the material world, and offering it up all to creator.

During the performance the crowd is watched to see what specific lyrics, and musical phrases do to them. If a certain line is sung and it makes people go crazy, this line will be sung over and over again. The same goes for a note, if one note is sang, and it has a noted effected it will be sun over and over again. The music is based around ecstasy and healing, If a certain note or ambience in needed to create the healing space, the songs can change to create this atmosphere. The “Baraka” is the spiritual transfer that happens through music and vibration. Songs are sung to different states and the healing process starts. Wild shaking, dancing and singing, all in what is considered a modest culture. Some Pakistani Dr’s will prescribe qawwali as therapy to their patients

My own experience with this music has been amazing. Although I do not have been to Pakistan, my teacher has studied there for 15 years. The first time I heard the music I could not stop moving, dancing, and singing. When I started taking lessons, I began to learn about the power of voice and intention. My teacher would talk to me about language, and Qawwali can be sung in Hindi, Urdu, and Farsi. The language is not really what a matters it is the sound of the

voice and music. The language and words add to the music but the real healing comings from the sounds, rhythms, and movement.

Vocalization is very important in this style of music. A qawwali singer must have perfect pitch and be able to sing any note at will and expand ones voice to create all different frequencies. Singers devote their whole life to the art, practicing meditation everyday to master the voice as a healing tool. When ones voice can be pure and strong, they can connect to the mystery and create the mystic experience as it flows through them.

Some links to the masters

Nusrat Fatah Ali Khan,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWjsimEW82w>

Fanna-Fi-Allah Sufi Qawwali

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKUNZ2HJUTw&t=1003s>

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