The Mevlevi Sufi order has played an important intermediary role between Islam and the West, where Islamic mysticism in its various forms has long been a source of fascination. During the 20th century, Mevlevi poetry, Mevlevi music and the famous Mevlevi whirling ceremony have captured the attention of American audiences, giving the founder of the order, Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (d. 1273), substantial name-recognition and making him one of the best selling poets in the U.S. today. Presentations of the Mevlevi sema by both American-based groups and touring ensembles from abroad attest to the group’s continuing, and even growing, influence in the West. In today’s program, a panel of scholars and musicians explores the current role of Mevlevism in Turkey and in the U.S., followed by a concert of pieces drawn from the traditional repertoires of Mevlevi and other Sufi tarikats.
I. Turkish Sunni Islam and Sufi Practice

Our musical presentation begins, not with the Mevlevi themselves, but with musical excerpts representing some of the Sufi brotherhoods which have contributed to Mevlevi practices, both here and in Turkey. The complex character of Mevlevism is suggested in this set by some of the practices of the Sufi orders more closely associated with Sunni Islam, practices which include: the singing of songs (ilahiler) in praise of the prophet Muhammed; the restricted use of instruments except for percussion; ceremonies involving the singing of repeated rhythmic phrases (zikir); and finally the chanting of The Holy Koran in Arabic (tilavet) and of devotional poetry in Turkish (kaside). Under the influence of such Sunni Sufi orders, in particular those which originate from North India, some Mevlevi brotherhoods in the U.S. have come to include the above practices in their gatherings to a degree that might surprise their Mevlevi counterparts in Turkey.

**Tilavet: chanting of The Holy Koran, I: 1-7 The Exordium**

_Bismil-lâ-hir-Rahmân-ir’Rahim_  

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful  
Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe. The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. King of the Day of Judgment.  
You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help. Guide us to the straight way; The way of those whom you have blessed, not of those who have deserved anger, nor of those who stray.

**Saba ilahi** (devotional song)  
_Seyreyleyip yandım mah cemalini_  
_Nur kundak içinde yatar Muhammed_  
_Canımın cananısını ya Muhammed_  
_At the sight of your beauty I burn_  
_Muhammed lies in radiant swaddling clothes_  
_O Muhammed, my beloved_  

**Çargah ilahi** (devotional song)  
_Ben dervișim diyene bir ün idesim gelir_  
_Seğirdi ben sesine varıp yitesim gelir_  
_I praise those who call themselves dervish_  
_I want to go to them when I hear their calls_  

**Semadan Sırrı Tevhidi** (kaside ve zikir-vocal improvisation over repeated phrases)  
_Semadan sırrı tevhidi_  
_duyan gelsin bu meydane dever ne sana_  
_diyen gelsin bu meydane dever ne sana_  
_Those who hear the secret to be one soul should join us in this arena_  
_Those who say God from the deepest places of their heart should join us in this arena_  

**Rast ilahi** (devotional song)  
_Erler demine destur alam_  
_Pervane ye bak ibret alam_  
_Aşkin ateşe gel bir yanalım_  
_Devran girip seyran edelim_  
_Eyvah demeden Allah diyelim_  
_Let us get permission to become knowledgeable men_  
_Let us look at the moth and learn from it_  
_Let us burn with the fire of Love_  
_And whirl and dream_  
_Before calling out for mercy let’s say Allah_  

**II. Turkish Shiite Islam and Sufi Practice**

An historical split within Mevlevism is indicative of a further complication of Mevlevi identity, representing those more influenced by the Bektaşi Sufi order (the so-called Şemsi Mevlevis) and those influenced by Sunni tarikats such as the Nakşibendi (the so-called Veledi Mevlevis). After centuries of interaction between the
Bektaşi and the Mevlevi, their relationship came to an abrupt end in 1826 when the Bektaşi were suppressed by the Ottoman government and the order was forced to go underground. (The Mevlevi continued their close association with the Ottoman elite right into the early 20th century.) The Bektaşi practices which survived this period gradually evolved closer to those of the Alevi, a separate ethnic and religious minority group from Anatolia with theological characteristics similar to the Bektaşi. Today Bektaşiism displays more of the characteristics of the Alevi than of the pre-1826 Bektasi order and, despite the distinct histories of the two groups, they are at times represented as one: “Alevi-Bektaşi”.

This set features the nefes—a song type characteristic of pre-1826 Bektasi sufism. The songs all share a common reverence for the figure of Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, aligning them more closely with Shi’a Islam than with Sunni Islam. As some of the texts here demonstrate, Bektaşi ceremonies may include heterodox practices such as the ceremonial use of raki (local alcohol) or sarap (wine), making them at times the focus of official disapproval, with the result that much Bektaşi poetry involves coded language which is difficult for outsiders to interpret. The nefes here have been chosen because their texts are somewhat less prone to hidden meanings, though they still rely on language which suggests an earlier time.

**Pencah nefes**

- Musaf demek hatadır ol safhai cemale
- Bu kitap bir sözdür fehmiden ehli hale

**Ussak nefes**

- *Noldu bu gönlüm noldu bu gönlüm*
- *Derdü ganimla doldu bu gönlüm*
- *Yandı bu gönlüm yandı bu gönlüm*
- *Yanmada derman buldu bu gönlüm*

**Hüseyni nefes**

- *Mescit ile medreseyi*
- *Ismarladık zahitlere*
- *Hakka ibadet etme*
- *Yeter bize meyhaneler*

**III. Mevlevism**

A variety of musical styles have found their way into the practices today associated with Mevlevism, even including current developments influenced by commercial popular music. In this final section of the program the focus will be on what may be called traditional forms of Mevlevi music. *Ayin* is the name given to the four movement musical setting of the text of the whirling ceremony. The poetry being sung in the ayin is in a mixture of Persian and Turkish, much of it drawn from the *Mesnevi*, the revered work of Celaleddin Rumi that has been called “the Qur’an in Persian.” The ney (reed flute) is the ultimate symbol of Mevlevism since Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi begins the *Mesnevi* with a reference to it. To most people born in Turkey, the instrument is inseparable from the idea of mysticism, even when it is used in a secular context. Rather than perform a complete ayin tonight we will instead present two movements from a relatively recent ayin composed in the mid-20th century. This will be followed by a composition which the Mevlevis refer to as *niyaz ayini*—a kind of ayin in short form which was performed for a variety of occasions, such as the honoring of a donor to the Mevlevi order.

**Ney Taksim**

**Hisarbuselik Peşrev**

- *Ey ki hezar aferin*
- *Bu nice sultan olur*
- *Külü olan kişiler*
- *Hüsrevü hakan olur*
- *Her ki bugün Veledede*

**Hisarbuselik Ayin**

- *Oh, the creator of thousands of beings*
- *What a sultan you are*
- *Those who are your servants*
- *Become royal rulers*
- *So if today you believe in*
Inanuben yüz süre
    and therefore side with Veled
Yoksul ise bay olur
    If you're poor you'll become rich
Bay ise sultan olur
    If you're rich you'll become a sultan

Niyaz Ayini
    anonymous
Şem-i ruhuna cismimi pervane düsürdüm
    To the candle of your soul I have become a moth
Mevlayı seversen beni söyleme gamım var
    If you love the Lord don't make me explain, I'm in sorrow
Dinle sözümü sana direm özge edadır
    Listen to what I'm saying, it is about another way
Derviş olana lazım olan aşkı hüdadır
    What a dervish needs is the love of God
Aşkın nesi var ise maşuka fedadır
    What the lover possesses is sacrificed for the Beloved
Sema safça cana şifa ruha gıdadır
    The sema is joy, and it is good for body and soul
Aşk ile gelin talibi cuyende olalım
    Come with Love and let's strive to be the seeker
Zevk ile safalar sürelim zinde olalım
    Let us enjoy our time and be alive with divine Love
Hazreti Mevlana yeni gelin bende olalım
    Come to Mevlana so we can be his servants

Program notes and translations by M. Sanlıkol, R. Labaree

The panelists and the musicians

Jocelyne Cesari directs the Islam in the West program and has also held teaching positions in the anthropology department and at Harvard Divinity School. Her most recent books are: When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States (2004) and European Muslims and the Secular State (2005).


Robert Labaree (çeng, voice, percussion) is an ethnomusicologist specializing in Turkish music and medieval European music. He is chair of the Music History department at New England Conservatory and director of the conservatory's Intercultural Institute, which he established in 1993.

Mehmet Ali Sanlıkol (voice, ud, saz, ney) completed his doctorate in composition at New England Conservatory in 2004, is a composer and jazz pianist and president and co-founder of DÜNYA, a non-profit music collaborative based in Boston established in 2004.

Shanteri Baliga (voice, ney) has been a student of Frederick Stubbs for over 12 years, and plays with a number of Boston based ensembles.

Cem Mutlu (voice, percussion) a member of the DÜNYA board, plays jazz and a variety of world musics with groups in the Boston area.

Noam Sender (voice, ney) performs with a variety of ensembles in the Boston area and is a member of the advisory board of DÜNYA.

Frederick Stubbs (ney) is an ethnomusicologist specializing in Turkish music who teaches World Music and Ethnomusicology at the University of Massachussets-Boston.