Mysticism and Music

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Music and spirituality have been intertwined by many religions and civilisations since the earliest times. Music has reflected the core of culture and been one of its most enduring elements—yet much of music behaviour remains a mystery. Why do humans create, perform, and listen to music? What is the source of music? How is a musician inspired? Does music have meaning, and more specifically, does it communicate an understandable message? In the Greek, Judaic, Christian and Muslim worlds, attempts to answer these questions were generally made by philosophers and theologians. It is only in this century that psychologists have addressed these issues. Musicians have rarely been part of the debate, although since the mid-20th century that has been changing, especially with the development of the fields of music psychology and aesthetics. Music has typically been seen as an expression of our spiritual nature, as an outcome of our communion—or even union—with God, a Supreme Being, Love, etc. Musicians were viewed as some of the select few able to participate in both the spiritual and material worlds. Music was viewed as an expression of that experience—an attempt to bring something of the spiritual realm to the understanding of the listeners.

Beliefs about music are culture specific. Our experience and learning teach us the cultural significance of certain sounds so that we then seek out sounds to which we can ascribe meaning. Walker (1990:4) comments that since musical meaning is the product of a learned belief system about particular sounds and not intrinsic to the sounds themselves, it is important to study the belief system itself, and not just to analyse reactions to isolated sounds. He observes that cultural beliefs about music usually associate music with the spiritual realm:

Music sound seems universally to be assigned some kind of affinity with the supernatural, either in the form of spirit beings or entities or in the way in which the actual elements of musical sound relate. In the latter case these elements are thought ideally to reflect the perfect harmony observable in the environment, particularly in the way planets appear to exist in perfect harmony. In the West we know this as Pythagoreanism, but this perspective had its origins in the civilisations of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, and India; from it there arose a
Merriam (1964) and Gaston (1968) each present lists of the functions of music found in most cultures. Both scholars include the relationship between music and religion. Merriam’s list includes validation of social institutions and religious rituals. He comments that music provides validation by songs telling what is proper and improper in the culture and through recitation of myth, legend or doctrine in song. Gaston notes that music and religion are integrally related. He believes the main reason is the common purpose music and religion have, i.e., to draw people together, to defend against fear and loneliness and because “music seems to be a particularly appropriate mode for reaching for the supernatural.”

Although the close relation between music and spirituality is recognised in most cultures, and references to the mystical experience of music are not uncommon, the question as to what constitutes mystic music has rarely been addressed in the literature. If one looks for anything related to “mystic music” on the World Wide Web, one is most likely to find the titles of recent CD’s or groups, but no explanation of why or how the term is used. On the one hand, it seems to be a concept that people think they understand and use loosely to refer to music with some sort of spiritual association, on the other hand, the very lack of research indicates it to be a difficult concept to approach. Mysticism, and even spirituality, relate largely to personal worldview, experience and emotion. Since mysticism is often described as “ineffable” and the concept of meaning in music is much discussed but little understood, the combination of the two in the term “mystic music,” becomes even harder to explain. Both concepts have to do with experiential reality and resist reduction to empirical investigative analysis.

According to Harkness, the term “mysticism” is prone to misunderstanding, although it, or something similar, is found in every major religion. “Mysticism…is the very life of religion, for it centres in the communion of the human spirit with the Ultimate Ground of Reality on which our existence rests.” (Harkness, 1973:16)

Mysticism, like music, seems to be a concept that is culturally defined. Web-ster’s Dictionary (1969:1497) gives a more general definition:

1: the experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics 2: a theory of mystical knowledge: the doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth, of ultimate reality, or comparable matters is attainable through immediate intuition, insight, or illumination and in a way differing from ordinary sense perception or ratiocination... 3a: vague speculation... b: any theory postulating or based on the possibility of direct and intuitive acquisition of ineffable knowledge or power.

2 Reasoning, process of exact thinking
This definition of mysticism allows for the use of the term in many different religious/spiritual contexts whereas Hayes' (1997) definition, while purporting to be general, is too exclusively based on New Age/Buddhist philosophy. Nevertheless, her purpose in writing may be also applicable to those of us involved in the study of music. She suggests that since physics and mysticism both increasingly present a similar worldview based on a concept of unity of being, an examination of these concepts by other disciplines would be timely. In Hayes' view, the goal of mysticism in many traditions is essentially the same—it is the path by which mystical experience is approached that varies. According to Hayes, mysticism is a loosely organised collection of premises whose evidence comes from experience. The most basic aspect of mysticism is direct experience. She then goes on to describe the various aspects of mystical experience such as the appreciation of all phenomena as manifestations of a basic oneness; reality as the experience of participating in the void, the all-inclusive whole; the understanding of the all and the none as experientially the same reality; and a view of the universe as a dynamic unity with the past and the future all rolled up in the present.

Theological and philosophical differences are evident in definitions of mysticism. While Hayes suggests that the goal of mysticism in all traditions is essentially the same, other writers would not agree. Christian writers on mysticism generally see the goal as communion with God. According to Inge, “Mysticism means communion with God, that is to say with a Being conceived as the supreme and ultimate reality.” (Inge, 1947:8) Jones uses the term “to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence.” (Jones, 1909:xv, italics his)

Writers on Christian mysticism have debated the use of the term "communion" versus “union” with God as the basis of definition. As Harkness (1973) notes, discussion of the difference in terms is important as the use of "union" has pantheistic implications of a metaphysical union with Deity which is contrary to belief in the personal God of biblical Christian faith. This concept of “Mystical union through the identity of the God within and the God without...is basic also to Oriental mysticism. It appears most clearly in the Vedanta of Hindu type from which much of the current interest in yoga is derived.” (ibid:23) Harkness cannot agree with this concept of union:

But is the human soul, or self, ever actually merged with God in such a manner as to lose its own identity, even for a transient moment? I cannot think so. It runs counter to all the basic structures of Christian theology to assume it. The basic doctrines of man’s creation, judgement, and redemption through Christ, man’s moral imperatives and responsible freedom, centre in the unique identity of each human self. Communion with God through the presence of the Holy Spirit...of this our faith assures us. When union is conceived in the senses of an immediate awareness of the divine Presence, this is open to us. Union as ontological or existential loss of human identity in the divine is not. (ibid: 23-24)
Harkness summarises four characteristics of mystical experience as identified by William James (1902, 1928)—ineffability, noetic quality, transiency and passivity. Ineffable in the sense that words—although there is much writing about it—cannot adequately describe the experience. Noetic in the sense that the “mystical experience adds to the subject’s grasp of reality by an intuitive rather than a logical approach.” (Harkness, 1973:29) The more extreme mystic experiences are transient but the general lifestyle of practising the presence of God is not. In terms of passivity, it is true that some experiences seem to come unexpectedly but active preparation is usually a part as one actively tries to quiet one’s mind.

All of these same characteristics could also be identified as aspects of musical experience. Nietzsche directly compares the experience of the mystic and the musician: “the musician’s inspiration is like the mystic’s union with the infinite.” (Portnoy, 1963:12) For him, music is an irrational process, an experience that transcends reason. Like mystic experience, it is ineffable. Since music is a nondiscursive language, Nietzsche reasons that to try to explain it by discursive language would be futile. Portnoy also refers to the ineffability of music: “The mystical experience which music gives us we cannot relate to others. Its very ineffability makes it impossible to tell someone...” (ibid:247).

Historically, discussions of the creative process in music have referred to “revelation” or “inspiration” as the source of the creative experience. This is using theological terminology for what would likely today be referred to more generally as “intuition”. Webster’s definition also emphasises the attainment of knowledge through “intuition, insight, or illumination” and not through the normal senses or reasoning. Christian and Jewish theologians believed that musical expression emanates from a higher source:

Christian theologians, with the help of the ancient and medieval philosophers, fostered the divine theory of musical creation through the ages by insisting that music has ethical significance. The doctrine of ethos, that music possesses powers that can degrade or ennoble character, implies that music is a moral echo of God’s perfect world. The composer’s creative experience may be likened to a revelation in which the order and harmony of a perfect universe become brilliantly clear. It is this revealing moment of precious insight which he then imparts to us by re-creating in actual music an artistic testament of the prevailing laws of God.” (Portnoy, 1963:5)

Not only did many early Western writers consider that the musician was divinely inspired, they believed the musician created in a state of ecstasy or “divine madness”. As Portnoy words it,

Plato’s God...is a God who has favoured the musician above all other men, for he deprived him of his mind and imbued him with divine frenzy so that in
such moments of rare ecstasy men would know that he is a prophet of God...

and,

Plato's musician is a God-intoxicated mortal who creates by inspiration and not by rule. (ibid:7)

Aristotle and later Santayana believed that the creation of music grew out of man's need for emotional expression and a rational desire for order and form. Santayana suggested that music is created as a means of organising chaotic and primitive drives. Santayana thought it was reason that creates music but Aristotle echoed Plato in thinking the musician is "artistically mad". It is because of this "divine madness" that the musician is able to produce in music "not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." Aristotle believed that the musician has the ability to abstract the essence from sounds created by the movement of the spheres and to portray in tonal form the order of the universe (ibid:8, 13-14). Theophrastus, Aristotle's student and successor, agreed that music was an emotional expression but disagreed that it had anything to do with the divine. He believed that music has its origin in love, which is so overwhelming that feeling overtakes reason (ibid:9).

Numerous other philosophers agreed with the view of creativity as a blend of genius and dementia, of the state of frenzy or trance prerequisite to the creation of good music or poetry—as for the oracle uttering prophecy—and that music which elevates the soul must have been inspired by a higher force. With the advent of humanism, theologians and philosophers began to believe that musicians were inspired in the figurative sense only. There is a sense that imagination, inspiration, originality is part of creativity and that it is more than logic, rules, more than what can be learned objectively—that talent as well as training is needed. Music is seen as the composer's individual synthesis of feeling and reason (ibid:9-12).

Belief in the divine inspiration of the composer is rarely accepted now in the secular West, although it is still commonly accepted among many practising Christians. In the secular world, it is now generally believed that the composer is controlled by the unconscious (an idea developed by Freud), that music comes from our emotions in order to compensate for our daily needs but that the composer is able to lay open his/her emotional life in such a way that it evokes responses in the listener that might not otherwise rise to the surface (ibid:15). Among musicians who are practising their faith and those who acknowledge the spiritual element of their beings, there is still a strong belief that the creative aspects of composition as well as of performance are divinely inspired or at least have a spiritual source of some kind.

With the influence of humanism and the inquisitive and investigative tendencies of the Western psyche, there is a propensity to ignore or disbelieve what cannot be empirically verified. Other societies, less influenced by these attitudes, accept their
folklor/edebiyat

beliefs and traditions at face value. In fact, in some societies it would be an insult to the spiritual powers to attempt to analyse them in such a way. These more traditional societies know and accept their own experiences of the power of music. Ethnomusicological literature is full of examples of societies that believe the song/music are direct communications from the spirit realm—received by the musician in a dream, a state of trance—or as a result of a lifestyle practice of communication with the unseen world.

James' second characteristic of mystical experience—its noetic quality—thus seems also to be applicable to the music experience. Although views on "inspiration" change from culture to culture and over time, a recognition of the "intuitive" element in music composition, performance and response is strongly present. The role of reason and logic is perceived as being relevant more in the reduction of this "intuitive" experience into the form and structure of music.

According to James, the third quality of mystic experience is its transiency. Music by its very nature is transient. Although the term "music" is used in general culture to refer to recordings, concerts, books and notation, it is used more specifically to refer to music sound. Music sound only exists for the duration of the performance. Since the music sound can never be exactly reproduced, neither can our experience of that sound. Langer’s (1947:84) comment that, "Everything in the arts is created, never imported from actuality" reiterates Cassirer’s (1945:170) earlier writing that, "Art as a symbolic form of culture does not reproduce reality, but creates it." Art, and more specifically music, can therefore be considered to be its own reality and not a reproduction of other realities. But this reality is a transient one. Music differs from some other art forms in that it is recreated in each performance and cannot be said to exist outside of performance. It has no past or future—only the present—and exists only as it is experienced. In some ways, therefore, the very experience of music becomes a mystical experience. According to Hayes, one aspect of mysticism is the view of reality as the experience of participating in the whole. Another aspect is the merging of the past and the future with the present. Like mystic experience, music experience is also a participation in another reality, and only a transient experience in the present.

James’ final characteristic of mystic experience is its passivity. The question of the active or passive participation of the composer in the creative process relates back to the view of the source of music. In terms of experiencing the music sound, it is the response of the listener that is important. In many ways the listener is a passive participant in music experience. According to Farnsworth (1969), the mood or emotion conveyed depends on a variety of factors external to the music itself. The listener's response is affected by cultural learning and concepts held about music as well as his/her personality structure, mood at the time, word meanings of the libretto if there is one, and attitude towards music in general and towards the particular compo-
sition (in Radocy & Boyle, 1988:12). Musicians and those trained in the analysis of music are more likely to actively participate in their intellectual response to music, which in turn affects their feeling response. As in the mystical experience, some feel it is important to quiet the mind and to absorb the sound—or let the sound absorb you—on a feeling level to truly "experience" the music.

All four of the characteristics of mystical experience as identified by James are seen to have strong relevancy to musical experience. Although expressed differently, other writers identify similar characteristics in the mystical experience. Portney (1963) is one of the few to discuss music and mysticism. He clearly believes that music experience is a mystical experience. He states that, "The mystical qualities in music are greater than in any other art." (ibid:247) Although his discussion of mysticism and music is more of a philosophical nature, some indicators of what he see as mysticism in music can be deduced from his statements. He suggests that mysticism in music is related to:

a) the emotion that results from the relationship between our psyche, beliefs and musical sound:

Music without mysticism is comparable to religion without mysteries. Our response to musical tones is very much like those to holy images. We endow rhythms and tones with our psychic lives, we endow our sacred rituals and ceremonies with the mysticism that prevailed in the Magic Circle. Music without mystical qualities would be the equivalent of listening to scales and arpeggios that are executed with skill but leave the heart cold indeed... " (ibid:246)

b) becoming one with the music:

In the mystical experience of becoming one with music, not detached from it as purists insist, life is unravelled, re-examined, and then put together again. (ibid:247)

c) the power of music to carry one into another realm, perhaps to become one with the universe:

Music is a mysterious power that man looks to in order to carry him into another world, a better one than he knows. Many great mysteries are revealed to us in music. We may discover ourselves becoming one with the universe, experiencing things from a different perspective, and returning from whence we started. (ibid)

d) the ineffability of the musical experience:

The mystical experience which music gives us we cannot relate to others. Its very ineffability makes it impossible to tell someone..." (ibid:247)
e) the life-changing nature of the musical experience:

Music demonstrates its mystical qualities when it extends the areas of our consciousness and broadens our life experiences. A spiritual quality exists in music when as a result of having listened to it, we experience life more keenly than we had ever been capable of previously. (ibid:248)

f) an attitude of expectation:

A composer whose life is without wonder and awe cannot produce music with mystical qualities... Without curiosity there cannot be any spiritual awakening in a human life—no mysteries to be found in music (ibid:249).

As Hayes observed, although there are similarities in the goals of mysticism in all traditions, the path followed may be different. Another tradition with a strong mystic current is that of Islam. Islamic mysticism is generally known as Sufism. To the Sufi, reality is also ineffable and not understandable by normal perception or rationalisation. The path to mystic experience is through gnosis, or wisdom of the heart. Like the Christian mystic, the Sufi must go through a long period of purification in order to reach the goal of loving union, when the veil of ignorance is lifted. In Sufism, the emphasis is on Divine love which makes all the suffering experienced on the path of purification possible and carries the mystic’s heart to the Divine Presence (Schimmel, 1975:4).

While the goal of the Christian mystic is more that of communion with God, that of the Sufi mystic is not only union with God, but annihilation (fana) in God. The mystic is taken out of him/herself in an experience often described as ecstatic. Schimmel notes that the term wajd often translated as “ecstasy” means literally “finding,” i.e., “to find God and become quiet and peaceful in finding Him. In the overwhelming happiness of having found Him, man may be enraptured in ecstatic bliss.” (ibid:178)

The Koran asserts that everything worships God, but the expression of this worship has been a source of sharp divide among Muslims. One of the most obvious differences between the Shí‘is of Iran and the Shí‘i-related Alevís of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey is their attitude toward music. As Yürür (1999) notes, music is forbidden according to the teaching of the Shí‘is of Iran and the Aleví use of music and dance in worship is one of the aspects of Aleví-Bektashi faith that has caused the Iranian Shí‘is to label them as “heterodox.”

This present-day example illustrates a division that has existed for centuries. As Schimmel comments,
The handbooks of Sufism are filled with discussions as to whether the sama’ is permitted or not. The conclusions differ according to the mystical theologians and the orders. Orthodoxy would ban every musical and rhythmical movement. ... Others saw in sama’ an outlet for the religious feeling of the pious—and it was this musical side of some of the fraternities that attracted large masses. Those who longed for an emotional kind of worship that ritual prayer could not really provide might find it by listening to music or by participating in the dance movement.” (Schimmel, 1975:180)

Similar discussions are found in Christian literature. While the goal of both Christians and Muslims is to worship God, the debate centres on the legitimacy of the tools of expression used. For more conservative Muslims and Christians, the concern is that the worshipper may be more enraptured by the music sound than by God. Music and dance—in some Sufi groups also drugs and alcohol—have all been outward means used to move beyond oneself. The more conservative argue that in a “pure” approach, one should not need outward means. In contrast, Sufi mystics supporting the use of outward means believe, “For the perfect, every sound becomes heavenly music” (ibid:182). Both those who want to restrict the use of music and those who believe it to be an important element of worship recognise the power of music to draw the worshipper into another realm. Christian and Muslim conservatives react to this reality by forbidding or limiting it. Some theologians have argued the presence of “good” or “evil” elements in the music itself and the positive or adverse effects that music can have on the listener. The classical Sufi theologian Abu Hafs Suhrawardi though emphasises the importance of the state of the heart:

Music does not give rise, in the heart, to anything which is not already there: so he whose inner self is attached to anything else than God is stirred by music to sensual desire, but the one who is inwardly attached to the love of God is moved by hearing music, to do His will.... The common folk listen to music according to nature, and the novices listen with desire and awe, while the listening of the saints brings them a vision of the Divine gifts and graces, and these are the Gnostics to whom listening means contemplation. But finally, there is the listening of the spiritually perfect to whom, through music, God reveals Himself unveiled (ibid:182).

A new wave of worship has been sweeping the Christian Church, especially since the 1970’s. Catholic and Protestant churches involved in this revitalisation movement have seen the reintroduction of dance and music that evokes more congregational response. The same argument has erupted in Christian circles. Do the music and dance evoke only emotional and physical response or are they truly avenues of worshipful expression that allow one to see God? The answer from those supporting the inclusion of these elements is much the same as that given by Abu Hafs Suhrawardi—it is the attitude of the heart that makes the difference. One
whose heart is pure and turned towards God, sees God in and through the music and dance.

As Walker (1990:180) observes, the belief that music sound has power to exert some control over our physical and mental states is common to practically all cultures. It is this power to connect us with our inner selves and with the spiritual or supernatural realm, to connect in some intuitive way that is not limited to our five senses, resulting in a musical experience that is ineffable, that makes music experience in many ways a “mystical experience.” This experience does not seem to be common to everyone. The question of whether these select few are able to experience music in a mystic way because they are chosen by God or have been following a particular path seeking God, Ultimate Reality, Love, the Great Void...is left to the philosophers and theologians of each culture and tradition. Walker’s comment on the prevalence of a belief in the relationship between music and the spiritual dimension and the accessibility of this type of musical and spiritual experience to a select group, is sufficient for the purposes of this discussion:

There is evidence in many cultures of a belief in the existence of music in some spiritual dimension, some perfect state accessible only to certain groups or individuals who are able to induce appropriate states of mind. The desire to contact the spiritual world—or the infinite, or the supreme intelligence behind all life, is a most important force in the spiritual side of human existence. This spiritual side seeks access to the music of the perfect state of existence, music being regarded as the language of perfection and the means of communication between the imperfection of existence and the perfect state (ibid. 59).

As we have seen, music, culture and religion are intimately connected in the Sufi tradition. According to Farmer, the Sufi conception of music as an aid to religion is very important in that it reveals their connection to ancient beliefs. Farmer quotes Ibn Zaila (d. 1048) as saying that sound influences the soul because of its musical structure and its similarity to the soul (i.e., spiritual structure). He goes on to say that Sufis such as the 11th century Persian Al-Hujwiri and Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) divide people influenced by music into two groups—those who hear its physical or material sound and those who understand its spiritual meaning. According to Sufi doctrine, the latter group does not hear the rhythm and melody but music per se. The Arab mystic Abu Sa’id b. Al-‘Arabi (d. 952) believed that ultimate truth could only be grasped through divine ecstasy which he defined as lifting the veil and witnessing the Watcher (Allah). Music is the most powerful means of reaching this ecstasy for, according to the Egyptian mystic Dhu’l-Nun, it “creates a divine influence which stirs the heart to seek Allah” (Farmer, 1957:440-441).

Schneider echoes this common belief in the power of music to
both lift one beyond oneself to communion with a higher power and to
give insight into one's inner being:

Music is the seat of secret forces or spirits which can be evoked by
song in order to give man a power which is either beyond himself or
which allows him to rediscover his deepest self. (Schneider, 1957:42)

It was such beliefs and practices that influenced the Dervish or ­
ders in their incorporation of music and dance into their rituals.

During (1992) is one of the few scholars to explicitly address the concept of
mystic music and seek to determine the elements that identify it as such. He dis­
cusses the question of whether there exists a “Sufi music” in the same
way that a distinct genre of Sufi poetry exists. If such a music does exist,
how does it differ from secular genres? In conducting his research, he
found that certain types of Sufi music have a quality which identifies it as
such to the experienced—though not to the ordinary listener. Analysis of
the music shows characteristics common with non-Sufi music. During
speculates that the key to recognising a piece of music as Sufi may be a
kind of rhythmic ostinato that somehow subtly indicates the dhikr ele­
ment. He concludes that no music is inherently mystical, but this type
requires the active participation of the performer or listener. He therefore
draws a first general principle and summary of Sufi music by stating that,
“Sufi music is a music made by, and/or listened to by, Sufis.” (ibid:284)

According to During, if a distinction between sacred and secular
music does exist, it is only recognisable by connoisseurs. Since in oral tra­
dition, melodies do not exist until they are realised through performance,
the interpretation is crucial in determining the spiritual effect. During
states that the musician mobilises his psychic energy to produce the musical
sound in the same way that he concentrates his consciousness on per­
forming the dhikr. He invests all of his inner energies into the sound and
the words and in turn draws power from the musical forms. “For the Sufi
singer or musician, the essential thing in the art of interpretation is the
circulation of this energy.” (ibid:286) Since form is less important than
process, Sufi masters teach that, unless the mastery of technique is ac­
companied by purification of the heart through surrender of the will and
development of virtues, it remains an empty and sterile form.

Such is the basic, the essential, condition of “Sufi music” according to
both the Masters of the Path and the Sufi musical masters. The rest
lies in the hands of God. Only He provides the musician with talent, in­
spiration and grace; and only He provides the listener with the grace of
the faculty of hearing. (ibid:287)
Numerous writers comment on the profound influence of mystic dervishes on the religious life of Anatolia. According to Yaman (1996:4), the first aspect of Islam accepted by the Turks was the *tasawwuf* or Sufi school. The process of Islamisation started in Central Asia but continued with the migrations into Anatolia in the 14th century. The Sunni dervishes and shaykhs mainly influenced the urban Turks, who adopted Islam more quickly. In contrast, the village and nomadic Turks only slowly and superficially accepted Islam. This latter group adopted an Islam with Shi'i tendencies from the *atas* and *babas* who more closely resembled their traditional shamans. Other names used in the region for what were the traditional shaman-minstrels are *kam, ozan, aşık*, and bakşy bakşı.

Elements of mysticism are still present in varying degrees in the traditional musics of the Turkic world. In spite of all the diverse influences it has absorbed, Turkmen culture has emerged as a very unique one, especially in the realm of music. Turkmen music is mostly a vocal art, generally with instrumental accompaniment. Zeranska-Kominek (1990), in his discussion of Turkmen repertoire, outlines 3 phases of a bakşi performance. All three stages seem to be part of a typical performance but the fluency and artistry of the performer are very much affected by the audience. In his example, we see the role of both the performer and audience in moving from emphasis on emotional to technical to ecstatic expression. Although Zeranska-Kominek does not identify such a performance as a "mystical experience," the religious and musical belief systems of the Turkmen with their heritage of shamanism and interaction with the spirit world, the level of rapport between bakşi and audience as essential ingredients of the music experience, and the sense of the bakşi becoming one with the music sound in the ecstatic phase, are all seemingly indicators of a type of mystical experience where the performer, audience and music enter a level of unity of being.

In Anatolian Alevi culture, the ocak-dedes are the primary culture bearers by virtue both of their charismatic lineage as *seyyids* (descendants of the Twelve Imams) and as descendants of the traditional Central Asian bakşi-kam-ozans. In the Alevi tradition, the dede is the inherited spiritual leader while the role of musician is assigned to a zakir, someone who shows musical and spiritual understanding. In actuality, the role of both "priest" and musician is often combined in the dede. Interviews with 43 ocak-dedes (Clarke, 1998) scattered throughout Anatolia showed that 58% of those interviewed play the *baglama* (long-necked lute) which is the instrument primarily used in the Alevi religious ritual (*cem*).

As we have discussed, beliefs about music affect our response to music sound. In order to determine attitudes towards the role of music in the Alevi community, the question was asked on three separate surveys to a) *ocak-dedes*, b) Alevi-Bektashi association and foundation directors, and c) members of Alevi congregations connected to the ocaks in field research conducted in 13 provinces in 1994-1996. The wording of the question created some ambiguity in the associations. Some di-
rectors answered specifically regarding the role of music in their association and others regarding their view of the role of music in the cem, although very few associations host cems (especially at the date of the survey). The question was: "In your opinion, what is the role of music used in the association / community?

1. To encourage one another?
2. To worship?
3. To entertain?
4. To preserve traditions?
5. To teach the faith / philosophy?
6. To express feelings?
7. To give or explain a message?
8. As a means to enter a trance?"

The following chart shows the responses of the dedes (column a), the associations/foundations (column b), and the members of the congregation (column c).

Many of the dedes also mentioned other roles such as:
- to turn oneself toward God;
- to say the mi'raçlama (song of ascension);
- it is indulgent, pleasing;
- as a means of raising one’s head outside of the cem, to bring excitement to express enthusiasm, exuberance;
- to bring the 12 servers to their roles of service;
- to increase unity, cooperation, love;
- to create a love (ecstatic), to love God (Allah), to make exuberant for ecstasy;
- to give advice;
we listen to each other in the service. There is also music after the *cem* that lasts until morning;
we turn toward God (*Hak*);
to remind of human love and of God’s love;
God’s love, human love;
to give love (*aşk*) through saying the *dhikr* of the 12 Imams and to show respect;
Love (*aşk*), to make you exuberant and to speak, a tool of emotion;
it brings enthusiasm, beauty;
integrates the people;
truth;
to *dhikr* the 12 Imams;
to protect the 12 Imams, to keep them strong;
sublimity, *dhikr*;
hymn with a mystic goal.

The initial question attempted to distinguish between the role of music in the *cem* itself and in more general situations but this proved too confusing. For many of the dedes the concept of the role of music itself was difficult and usually precipitated discussion among the group gathered. Music "is" and as such is accepted by the community as an integral part of who they are. Direct questions as to the role of music resulted in various responses. Some wanted to respond with a "yes" to everything—but the interpolation of the question of whether music was to entertain generally pulled the respondees up short and resulted in a very definite "no" and sometimes even outrage at the suggestion. For the majority of the dedes, the interpretation of the role of music was exclusively in relation to the *cem*. For some, the term "entertainment" (*eğlence*) does not carry the connotation of enjoyment but rather of dance halls, bands, and possibly suggestive behaviour. For these dedes, the reduction of something revered to the profane role of entertainment was definitely to be avoided.

An examination of the results shows a possible grouping of cultural versus religious/experiential roles. For all groups, the highest scores were for roles 4-7, related to education and transmission as well as the expression of feelings. This suggests the high value that is placed on the protection of culture and the role of music in doing so. For the dedes, music’s role in worship was extremely important. As those representative of the priestly class, this is to be expected. The lower scores of the community and associations could represent their lower level of religious commitment. Many of those who answered the community survey had never actually attended a *cem*. This was especially true of the younger people who have had no opportunity to participate in the more liturgical aspects of their traditions. Their answers as to the role of music were more from conjecture than from actual experience. A few of the respondees to the community and association surveys also interpreted the questions in relation to association music activities rather than the *cem*.

The other question that received the greatest reaction was music’s role in
putting someone into a trance. Respondees were generally very definite about this. Many gave a very strong "no" and seemed horrified at the thought that they could be associated with such mystical practices. This contradicted their interpretation of Alevism as an open, contemporary, "Ataturkist" culture and seemed to associate them with a darker, mystical, ignorant age. In spite of this, a surprising 42% of the dedes admitted the role of music in inducing a trance. One dede laments the missing quality in music that holds people back from entering the desired trance: "It is impossible with one saz. The desire is there but not the music power." ("Tek sazla olamaz. İstek var fakat müzik güç yok.")

Many of the comments added by the dedes relate to our discussion of "mystic music." Comments dealing with the role of music in bringing unity, integrating the people, turning toward God, creating a feeling of ecstatic love, expressing God’s love and human love, all deal with the ineffable, noetic mystic-music experience that helps the individual transcend the normal material world into a spiritual realm—whether one prefers to label that realm as the unconscious, the mysterious, the great unknown, God, love, etc. As one dede explained, music in the cem consists of "hymns with a mystic goal."

During the long Soviet control over the Turkic Central Asian republics, attempts to implement Marxist-Leninist aesthetics and nationalities policies led to attempts to transform the content of religious songs by the replacement of texts that had been permeated with mystic, Sufi ideas. Similar attempts have been made in Turkey as folk and religious songs have been adapted—particularly in urban settings and the media—to reflect Ataturkist secular policies. After 70 years of such attempts, it is clear that the masses of both Central Asia and Turkey still strongly associate the musical sounds with religious meaning.

Music sound seems to be a vehicle—for at least a select group—to "mystical experience." During’s study is one of the few that attempts to determine the elements of the music itself that make it "mystical." He can only conclude that, "Sufi music is a music made by, and/or listened to, by Sufis" (During, 1992:284). It is clear that musicians and non-musicians alike identify music experience with mystic experience. More research as to music beliefs in a culture and the analysis of what those in the culture identify as "mystic music" is needed to address the question of why such music is considered "mystic."

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