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Title: The Sacred Music of Islam: Sama' in the Persian Sufi tradition

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Source: *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 6

Publication: This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared in the *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 6, British Forum for Ethnomusicology, 1997, pp 1-33.

Abstract: The creation of a specific liturgy, composed of prayer, litanies, singing, music and sometimes dance, known as *Sama'*, integrating music into the practice of meditation, is an important aspect of the contemplative life in Muslim Sufism. The essay explores the basic theological and mystical concepts of *Sama'*. Part 1 discusses audition in Islamic theology, where three schools of scholars existed: advocates, adversaries and moderates. The views of the advocates – the Sufis – are discussed, and in particular, key works on *Sama'* by the Persians Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Part 2 explores the idea of the Sacred and analyses Tusi and Ghazali's understanding of the three conditions ("right time, place and company") of *Sama'*. Part 3 examines the relation of music to poetry in Muslim mysticism. Part 4 explores the relation of Qur'anic cantillation to singing, poetry and *Sama'*. Part 5 discusses the contemplative fruits of audition, the relationship of ecstasy (*wajd*) to trance experiences, and the attitude of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad to dance, often considered an integral part of *Sama'*.

Know that hearts and consciences are treasuries of secrets and mines of jewels. Wrapped within them lie their jewels just as fire is enveloped in iron and stone, and hidden like water is concealed under dust and loam. There is no way of extracting such hidden things save by the flint and steel of audition to poetry and music (Sama), and there is no entrance to the heart save by the ante chamber of the ears. So musical tones, measured and pleasing, bring forth what is in it and make evident its beauties and defects.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (n.d.: 23, also cf. Macdonald 1901-2a: 199)

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The Sacred Music of Islam: *Sama‘* in the Persian Sufi tradition

Leonard Lewisohn

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Sama‘ in Islamic theology

The great historian of Islamic music H.G. Farmer (1942, intro.:1) once described the “interminable debate between Muslim legists concerning the propriety of ‘audition (al-*Sama‘*)’, or more properly 'musical audition',” as being “probably the most interesting of Arabic polemical literature.” For over a millennium this debate has generated interminable opinions and arguments pro and con by leading Muslim theologians, jurists, philosophers and mystics [1]. From the very earliest days of Islam, one finds a number of authorities who endorsed the legality of listening to music and a number of others who rejected all music as immoral and irreligious, as well as those who maintained the “golden mean” in this debate-in turn advocates, adversaries and moderates.

Writers who belonged to the first category – staunch advocates of the legality of music – were first and foremost the Muslim mystics or Sufis, to whom music was a spiritual staple, not merely a permissible (*halal*) but a required religious practice (*wajib*). “The question of the significance and legitimacy of music in the total structure of the Islamic tradition,” S.H. Nasr (1987:153-4) points out, “is not merely juridical or theological. It involves most of all the inner and spiritual aspect of Islam, and therefore whatever ambiguities exist on the juridical level, the ultimate answer, especially as far as the relation of music to Islamic spirituality is concerned, must be sought above all in Sufism.” Prof. Nasr's observation is very important to keep in mind since it was the Sufis with their *Sama‘* ceremonies who became the chief guardians and patrons of Islamic music throughout periods of history when

Puritanism dominated the social fabric of Muslim society and the cultivation of music was discouraged.

From its very beginnings, Persian and Turkish classical music has been associated with the *Sama* ' ceremony; [2] both the poets and the musicians were often of a Sufi background (Feldman 1993:243-66; Michon 1991:494). Not only did numerous Persian Sufis practise *Sama* ' as an integral part of their contemplative and spiritual method, one also finds renowned theologians who supported the practice and argued for its validity from a theological standpoint, [3] perhaps the most famous of whom was Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE). Following a personal crisis of faith in which "he doubted the validity of all he was teaching of religious lore," and found his spiritual cure could only be effected "by accepting a moral decision to withdraw and lay new bases for his life through Sufi practices" (Hodgson 1977, 11:181), Ghazali composed The Revival of the Religious Sciences (*Ihya' 'ulum al-din*), his greatest work which earned for him the sobriquet "Proof of Islam", with which (in the Sunni world at least) he has ever since been acclaimed. An entire book (see Ghazali n.d., II) of this monumental encyclopaedia was devoted to the defence of *Sama* '. His mystical exegesis and approach to the Sufi concert, which will be explained below, soon came to play a central part in subsequent debates on the legality of music in Islam.

In the second category – opponents of music – one finds the medieval *ayatollahs*, pointing the finger at and accusing of blasphemy all who believed music to be food for the soul. Such exoteric clerics considered music as belonging to the category of hateful things such as usury, fornication and intoxication, and argued that all musical activities, whether playing instruments or singing, are fundamentally vanity, interpreting, for instance, the reference in the sixth verse of the Surah Luqman to "idle talk" (*lahwa al-hadith*) as designating and thus banning singing (Farmer 1942:14).[4] Authors who shared such views include the likes of the theologian Ibn Abil-Dunya (d. 894 CE),[5] the Ash'ari theologian and preacher Ibn al-Jawzi (1201 CE), the jurist Ibn al-Hajaj (1336 CE), Ibn Jama'a (d.1338 CE) and the fanatical legalist Ibn Taymiyya (d.1327 CE) – the last of whom condemned anyone who practiced *Sama* ' as an infidel.

In general, however, the anti-musical bias of exoteric clericalism was but a reflection of much wider debates and differences which had existed between Islamic puritanism and mysticism from the earliest days of Islam – the former group stressing divine transcendence and the role of Law and the latter camp emphasizing the power of faith, immanence and Love. As Gritbetz (1991:52) has pointed out: "The difference of opinion regarding *Sama* ' can be viewed as part of a larger controversy which exists between the Sufis and the legalists, namely the Sufi support of the Neo-platonic "Eros" doctrine, and the Hanbalite-orthodox support of the "nomos" doctrine." Less often, however, one finds Sufis who considered *Sama* ' reprehensible.[6] Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi (d.1240 CE), for instance, known as the *Shaykh al-Akbar* "Supreme Shaykh", author of 600 books or treatises in Arabic on Sufi themes, in some of his writings appears to be vigorously opposed to *Sama* ' (e.g. Boase & Sahnoun 1993:51-2), while in other works (notably in his *Futuhat al-Makkiyya* or Meccan Revelations) presents arguments apparently in favour of it.[7]

In the third category – those who maintained the "golden mean" – one finds authors such as Abu'l-Qasim 'Ubayd Allah Ibn Khurradadhbih (d.911 CE) who in his *Kitab al-lahw wa'l-malahi* (Book on Diversion and Musical Instruments) defended the religious lawfulness of audition, noting that, from a philosophical standpoint, the science of music formed an essential part of the *quadrivium* (Shiloah 1993:113). Ibn Rajab (d. 1392 CE) in his book *Nuzhat al-asma' fi mas'alat al-sama* ' (The Ears' Delight in the Practice of Musical Audition)

also took a moderate stance – describing two categories of singing: sacred and profane, condemning the latter and condoning the former, considering, however, all musical instruments as forbidden (Roy Choudhury 1957:43-102). Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (d.940 CE) also defended audition in a chapter on music found in his work entitled *The Unique Necklace (Iqd al-farid)* (transl. Farmer 1942). Ibn Abd Rabbihi's discussion centres on the legality of singing, rather than music in general, although his arguments are relevant to understanding the place of music in Islamic culture as well. He argued that “he who listens to singing (*ghina*) does not take the verses of God [in the Qur’an] for mockery. And the most just view in this matter is that its medium (*sabil*) is poetry. So its good is good and its evil is evil” (ibid.). Essentially, Ibn Abd Rabbihi maintains that if the singer chants poetry of a spiritually uplifting and moral nature, his song is praiseworthy, but if contrary to that, quite reprehensible.

The focus of the present study of mystical music and dance in the Persian Sufi tradition will be on the views of the first category mentioned above, namely, the Sufis. Insofar as many – if not most – of the spiritual masters as well as secular practitioners of music from the earliest days of Islam were of Persian origin or birth, [8] the examples adduced here will be mainly confined to authors in the Persian musico-mystical tradition. [9] Amongst these authors, we concentrate on two Iranians: Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi [10] and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali who both composed key works on *Sama* ‘ (Tusi wrote his work in 1248 CE and Ghazali circa 1096-1111), while examples from other masters will be occasionally supplied to adumbrate the various contexts discussed.

Sama ‘, which literally means “audition”, connotes in the Sufi tradition a hearing with the “ear of the heart”, an attitude of reverently listening to music and/or the singing of mystical poetry with the intent of increasing awareness and understanding of the divine object described; it is a type of meditation focusing on musical melody, by use of instruments, mystical songs or combining both (During 1988:13). “The most widely known expression of mystical life in Islam,” as Schimmel (1975:179) has called it, *Sama* ‘ is practiced by nearly all the Sufi Orders in Islam with the sole exception of the Naqshbandiyya (especially its Indian branches) who shared the aversion of exoteric Islamic orthodoxy to music in general. In Islam, its background can be traced back at least to the time of Abu’l-Qasim Junayd (d.910 CE) who was born in Nahavand near Hamadan in Western Persia, but lived most of his life in Baghdad where *Sama* ‘-khanas, lodges dedicated to the performance of mystical musical concerts, had been operative since the second half of the 9th century (ibid.: 181).

We do not propose here to discuss the historical origins of *Sama* ‘ beyond the borders of Islamic thought, nor explore the similarities of the various elements of its ceremony to forms of Near Eastern Shamanism, pre-Islamic Semitic paganism, nor compare the effects of audition with diverse strands of Christian or Jewish manifestations of ecstasy during the experience of music, nor analyse the theories of Muslim neo-Platonism (as featured in the thought of the *Ikhwan al-Safa* ‘ in their *Rasa’il* [11] for instance) in regard to music—all of which would entail several separate studies. In any case, since it is well-nigh impossible to establish any direct affiliation of the *Sama* ‘ ritual to any one particular pre-Islamic ethnic, religious or philosophical tradition, it appears far more reasonable to seek the foundation of *Sama* ‘ within Islam itself. [12] As During (1988:15) persuasively argues: “If the attitude of the auditor to *Sama* ‘ is not something entirely novel in oriental culture, the rite itself must be considered as an original achievement.” Furthermore – and as the examples shown at the end of this study indicate – the Sufis themselves were highly affected by profane poetico-musical traditions already existent within Arabic and Persian culture prior to Islam. Thus, it is easy to see how the *Sama* ‘ ritual developed in an intra-Islamic context as a kind of “counter-concert” deliberately set in contrast to profane musical gatherings; [13] the not so perceptible

difference, in fact, between the sacred and profane types of concert underlies the many disparaging remarks frequently made by both the nomocentric legalists and the more temperate mystics about the practice. *Sama'* was also firmly grounded in Prophetic *Sunnah* and *ahadith*, which were frequently cited in its defence by the mystics (Roy Choudhury 1957:66-70; Tusi 1938:140), and if this was lacking, there was also the sanction provided by the personal examples of the founders of the four schools of Islamic law, all of whom enjoyed music. [14]

Sama' and the Sacred: Preconditions of Sufi music

Since *Sama'* is both an art form and a spiritual exercise composed of music and poetry and singing, it can be grasped either by Art or Religion; that is to say, either aesthetically – not analytically; or spiritually – but not “scientifically”. [15] In his introduction to Erlanger's great work on *La Musique Arabe*, Carra de Vaux (1930:ix) observes the enormous impression which music made on Middle Easterners. “A simple distich accompanied by the lute, a few introductory notes sung by a beautiful voice, possibly a voice with the slightly raucous and guttural timbre as they love it in the Middle East, was enough to throw the listener into a state similar to that of ecstasy; he quivered, wept, fainted, he thought he was going to die. Arab literature is full of anecdotes bearing witness to this hyperesthesia of the musical sense.” Commenting on this observation, Rouget (1985: 298) insightfully points out that “one could just as easily interpret our relative indifference to music as resulting from a veritable form of anesthesia of our musical sensibility; in which case this would then be our culturally specific characteristic.”

Besides our apparent aesthetic anesthesia, the spiritual– or rather, secular – presuppositions of modern Western man also present obstacles to the understanding of the Muslim mystic's sensitivity to music. To medieval man – whether from the Christian West or classical Islam – the close connection of Art and the Sacred was taken for granted (Coomaraswamy 1977:43-70; Burckhardt 1986:8-9). Today, due to the predominantly secular mentality of Western society, with its aversion to all types of hierarchy, whether social or religious, a widespread prejudice has been generated that any type of formal discipline, be it artistic or religious, only serves to stifle the artist's “creative genius” and that rigid adherence to the impersonal and objective rules of Art only suppresses our “individual freedom of expression”. Thus, a strange condition has occurred in which modern man no longer beholds the Sacred to be prior – ontologically prior – to Art. This modern approach, needless to say, is alien to the basic assumptions of Persian mysticism in particular and Persian music in general. [16]

Posing the question: “Where does the twentieth-century artist concerned with the Sacred stand with regard to prayer or reaching the threshold of a true encounter with the living God?”, the contemporary English composer John Tavener (b. 1944), who converted to the Greek Orthodox church in 1976, points out (1988:33- 4):

The modern artist is isolated: he is an eccentric. He has the same natural and normal incentive to creative activity; he has the same thirst for objective truth, the same loves and hates. But he has not the same clientele, no longer is he naturally employed as part of the ordinary company of builders or furniture-makers. There is no natural or proper place for anything he makes. The concert hall isolates him and his work from everything around it. It is not he (or she) who is abnormal: it is his age and its circumstances... Once upon a time the artist was often the anonymous painter of Ikons, the composer of chants for huge liturgical structures. He or she once fasted, prayed, attended all night Vigil Services. To live was to adore, through every brush stroke, the one and only creator.

Tavener's comments on the difficulty of interpreting the tradition of Christian classical sacred music in terms of modern secular categories of aesthetic reception have a Near Eastern reprise in Muslim sacred music or *Sama'*. From the earliest days, the Sufis had argued that it was impossible to authentically experience music's "sweet concord" (in Shakespeare's words) and consequent therapeutic effects without also observing its proper spiritual conditions incumbent upon both performer and listener. One need only consider the vast number of manuals which were composed on the proper conduct (*adab*) to be observed by the Sufi during *Sama'* to realise how inseparable the practice of *Sama'* is from the ambience of its ritual "sacred" discipline: the Sufi *tariqah*. [17]

For instance, the foremost point of etiquette, upon which all the Sufis are agreed, is that silence and stillness must reign throughout *Sama'* notwithstanding the participant becoming affected by ecstasy and rapture (*wajd*). The great Sufi theorist Abu Hafs 'Umar Suhrawardi (d.1234 CE), in his Arabic-language *'Awarif al-ma'arif* (1364 A.Hsh./1985:86), perhaps the most celebrated manual of Sufi discipline, doctrine and practice in all Islamic thought, emphasises that *Sama'* is the audition of sound and the realisation of ecstasy without shattering the inward silence, self-control and contemplative sobriety of the Sufi:

The aspiring disciple, yearning aspirant, sincere wayfarer and seeker inspired by divine love must invest himself with the robes of pious vigilance (*taqwa*) which inspire him with steadfastness and grant him hidden powers of will, and which bear the fruit of high spiritual rank and salvation in the hereafter. In this fashion, the flames of divine yearning within him will be rekindled every moment and freshly renewed so that God's grace – the bounty of this world, will bless all of his days, such that in *Sama'* he will be able to control his movements, except when he is unable to keep his peace – like a person who must sneeze, no matter how much he wishes not to. [18]

Proper musical "audition" depends on the acoustic sensibility, the spiritual "attunedness" of the soul, states Suhrawardi. But that is not the whole rule, since "Audition demands proper time, place and brethren (*zaman, makan and akhwan*)" (Ghazali 1319 A.Hsh./1940:388) – as Abul-Qasim al-Junayd's (d. 910 CE) celebrated rule went. This rule, mentioned by nearly every Sufi who subsequently wrote on *Sama'*, is commented upon at length by both Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi in his treatise on *Sama'* and by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in his Persian book *Kimiya-yi sa'adat* (The Alchemy of Felicity) (ibid.:388). If we examine how the three conditions are described by these two authors, the former with mystical exactitude utilising the terminology of *tasawwuf* and the latter with the same terminology and similar definiteness complemented by a passionate concern for theological rectitude, the inter-relation of Music and the Sacred in *Sama'* in the Persian Sufi tradition will perhaps become clearer.

i. "Right time"

The first category which Tusi and Ghazali set themselves to define is the "right time for *Sama'*". The "proper time [for *Sama'*] is when their [the Sufis'] hearts enjoy purity so that they desire to concentrate their aspiration in seeking their Beloved's goodwill," Tusi informs us in order "to divest their outer being of sensual characteristics and release their inner being from attachment to attaining high spiritual degrees or stations (*talab al-darajat wa tahsil al-maqamat*), so as to collect their transconscious selves (*asrar*) [to be receptive to] the infusions of the breaths of divine mercy" (Tusi 1938:123, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn).

As this definition indicates, Tusi's understanding of the proper "time" for *Sama'* is largely unconcerned with the temporal realm, but rather pertains to the proper

“spiritual mood” or “mystical state” (*hal*) possessed by the Sufi, the right conditions which will enable him to enter correctly into a genuine musical reverie, a time of the heart or soul rather than a specific temporal reality of the body. Thus, concludes Tusi, “during such a time when [the Sufis] assemble, the illumination which graces the hearts of certain of them is reflected onto the hearts of others, so by gathering the general light, revelation, clarity and cheer is increased” (ibid.: 123). Time’s metaphysical arrow, one could say, must strike the Sufi’s heart before it hits the body. The same strictly metaphysical attitude and spiritual approach to the condition of the “correct time for musical audition” is also accentuated by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1319 A.Hsh./1940; 388) when he asserts that “*Sama*’ should not be conducted during any times when one’s heart is engaged [with worldly concerns], nor when it is time for ritual prayer (*namaz*) nor when eating or when one is distracted.” No doubt, it was in reference to this precondition that Jalal al-Din Rumi’s (d.1273 CE) famous verse should be interpreted (1925-40, I, vv. 2763):

Not every man attains the *Sama*’ true and pure,

Nor every bird may feed on figs.

ii. **“Right place”**

The second category discussed by Ghazali and Tusi concerns the surroundings necessary to evoke the Sacred: the places best suitable to conduct *Sama*’. Tusi opines that the places where *Sama*’ may be properly performed are “*zawiyas*, *khanagahs* and mosques, which are preferred over other spots, since the mosque was founded for sake of the bodily devotion and the heart created for the sake of divine gnosis and the theophany therein” (Tusi 1938:123-4, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn). Again, just as the “right time” is both a temporal “moment” and a metaphysical condition which connotes the heart’s detachment (*faragh al-qalb*) (Ghazali n.d.:265; Leonard Lewisohn; Macdonald 1903:2), the condition of “place” must not be interpreted too literally. Thus, the “place” of the concert is also paradoxically a “no-place”, a *u-topos*, a “heart-land”, rather than any specific bodily locus. A “place” is sacred by virtue of the heart’s presence there rather than the heart’s presence physically contingent upon the geographical locus of the body –

... since the heart is the site where divine illumination descends. So when a mystic endowed with the spiritual heart feels moved within a mosque on account of an increase of his heart’s interior illumination and soul’s serenity there, such stirring excels the corporeal motions of other devotees who are engaged in acts of ritual devotion yet lack the presence of such illumination... So when the brethren of purity (*ahl al-safa*’) assemble in a place of worship wishing that the light enjoyed by the hearts of some be conveyed unto the hearts of others so that their mutual illumination increase and that the purity of their souls be amplified, their souls become fortified by the *light of that place*, heightening their mystical states and perfecting their innate characters. (Tusi 1938:124-5, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn)

“Light of that place” is here underscored because the propriety of “place” is contingent on a spiritual precondition – enlightenment. Although, indeed, the heart finds “interior illumination” within the sanctified atmosphere of the mosque, the mosque also is illuminated by the heart[s] (“the site where divine illumination descends”) of the worshippers therein. Nonetheless, as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali states (1319 A.Hsh./1940:388; n.d.:265), the importance of the actual physical place is not to be underestimated, for *Sama*’ must never be conducted in a “dark and unpleasant place, nor in the home of despotic folk where all the time one feels aggrieved and vexed.”

iii. “Right company”

Ghazali (n.d.:265) underlines the negative effect on the Sufi gathering of those who “repudiate the practice of *Sama* ‘ while ostentatiously displaying their ascetic piety, being completely impoverished in respect to the ‘refined sentiment of the heart’ (*muflis min lata’if al-qulub*)” (Tusi 1938:124-5, English text). Tusi also describes the Sufi concert as “the stirring of the spirit by listening to wonderful realities in delicate poems and the abandonment of the attachments of created things, and being drawn to the spiritual stages (*manazil*),” concluding that “the instrument of obtaining these lights is the association of the [Sufi] brethren and the seeking of help from God”. Since *Sama* ‘ is an esoteric activity demanding a refined degree of understanding on the listener's part, it is usually considered a ceremony proper “for members only”, and from which the uninitiated are to be excluded.

In fact, among the “brethren” or practitioners of *Sama* ‘ itself, a definite hierarchy exists. First come the ordinary laymen/women, the common Muslim believers (referred to in Qu’ran XLIX:10) with whom one should associate as little as possible; only “briefly, just enough that they may benefit by one” (Tusi 1938:126, Arabic text). According to Ghazali, neophytes in Sufism should not be permitted to engage in *Sama* ‘ at all. Beginners possess neither the ability to understand nor the “taste” (*dhawq*) for *Sama* ‘ and so their time is better occupied in *dhikr* and service (*khidmat*) on the Path (Ghazali n.d.:265-6). [19]

Here, parenthetically, it may be mentioned that the Persian Sufi shaykhs differed in their opinions about the permissibility of *Sama* ‘ for beginners and for intermediate adepts on the mystical path. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (n.d.:266), for one, absolutely denied that the beginner will profit from access to *Sama* ‘, “since sensual pleasures and attention to lusts and human qualities persist in him even though he may relish the savour of the mystic concert (*dhawq al-Sama* ‘)...such audition often merely amounts to no more than a summons to self-indulgence and lust, so that his path is cut off.” There were other Persian Sufi masters, however, such as Shaykh Abu Sa’id ibn Abi’l-Khayr (967-1048 CE), who completely contradicted this view, maintaining that *Sama* ‘ is highly conducive to spiritual advancement and illumination for beginners (Nicholson 1980:58ff). Generally speaking however, the consensus of early Persian Sufis – from Abu Nasr Sarraj of Tus (d. 988 CE) in his *Kitab al-luma* ‘ to Abu’l-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072 CE) of Khurasan in his *Al-Risala fi ‘ilm al-tasawwuf* down to ‘Ali b. ‘Uthman Jullabi Hujwiri (d.1071 CE) in his *Kashf al-mahjub* – accords with the views of Ghazali here: that *Sama* ‘ is harmful for beginners. [20] In practice, however, such fine print was more often than not ignored, and the more antinomian and liberal views of Abu Sa’id came to prevail in later Sufism in Iran proper [21] while in the Persianate culture of Mughal India the institutionalisation of *Sama* ‘ became an important tool in the popularisation of the Sufi orders in the non-Islamic environment of the Subcontinent”. [22] Finally, with the endorsement of the utility of *Sama* ‘ for commoner and Sufi adept alike by Rumi – whose works, especially the *Mathnawi*, were known all over the Persian-speaking world, his fame having reached the eastern fringes of the Muslim lands shortly after his death – the high status of *Sama* ‘ in subsequent Sufi tradition was ensured (Rumi 1330 A.Hsh./1951:289, *ta’liqat*; Kiyani 1369 A.Hsh./1990:430).

The second group are more advanced Sufis, whom Tusi terms “the brethren of disciplic devotion and love (*iradat wa’l-muhabbat*).” Despite their limited spiritual capacity, these brethren may be associated with so that “grace” may be filtered down to the common folk (Tusi 1938:126, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn).

Thirdly and lastly come “the brethren of purity and ecstatic consciousness, gnostic sciences, seclusion, heart-savour, yearning and perfection (*Ikhwan al- Safa’ wa’l*

mawajid wa'l-ma'arif wa'l-tafarid wa'l-dhawq wa'l-shawq wa'l-kamal). These are brethren in truth" (ibid.: 125-6).

In conclusion, according to Tusi the brethren of *Sama'* are to be divided into Muslims, novices in Sufism, and perfect gnostics, to all of whom it is beneficial, [23] whereas from Ghazali's point of view, the practice is considered reprehensible and injurious to all except advanced adepts in Sufism. The above discussion of the two mystics' views of *Sama'* also provides an excellent illustration of the ontological priority of the Sacred in the *Sama'* ceremony. Despite the difference in opinions concerning the permissibility of music audition for beginners, it is evident that the Sacred precludes, preconditions, encompasses and, ultimately, defines the ambience of the Sufi's audition. In the absence of the Sacred, there is no *Sama'*. As Ghazali (1319 A.Hsh./1940:388) reiterates:

If it so happens that a proud and worldly person be present, or the singer has profane motives, or some pretentious person be continually dancing and feigning ecstatic experience or a group of people heedless of God be attending who practice *Sama'* to indulge in their own vain humours or make small talk, staring about in all directions without any sense of reverence, or else a group of women onlookers be present there mixing with a group of young men so that each group is meditating on the other sex – such *Sama'* is to no avail.

Taken collectively then, the three "conditions" of time, place and brethren constitute the psychological, liturgical and sociological substructure of the Sufi adab of *Sama'*. Most of the Persian Sufi and master poets who evoke the experience of sacred mystical music emphasise the absolute indispensability of such conditions. Mir Husayn Harawi's (d.1318 CE) lines, for instance, illustrate this quite well (cited by Nurbakhsh: 1982:55, Leonard Lewisohn):

How well those adepts in states - heart declared:

"No soul existent, no living ego
may taste this wine."

Look how all the mystics, legion on legion, here fell prey to passion;

Aghast in God, they vanished in oblivion...

Best let the novice steer clear of all such disquisition.

For *Sama'*'s not for one who's bound by nature's urges,

wound up in greed and passion. Unless you cast aside

all this, how should it be fit for you?

Not all who languish merit such an aperitif.

Only the burning heart

is cut out for it.

When all who tread this way hazard all away,

lose their stakes for the sake of God, this is no place

for vain men to try their luck, or errant folk to joke about.

The music [24] of the *Sama'* ceremony is also permeated by a fundamentally sacred ambience. According to Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi, each of the instruments used in the Sufi musical concert has a sacred connotation and archetypal meaning (*ma'na*) which it incarnates and expresses. The large tambourine (*daf*) refers to “the cycle of all created beings (*dai'ra akwan*)” (Tusi 1938:98, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn). The hide on the tambourine refers to “the descent of divine visitations (*waridat*) from the innermost arcana (*batin al-butun*) upon general existence...” (ibid.). Even the jangling bells on the tambourine have spiritual significance. Listening to the voice of the singer in *Sama'* itself evinces another contemplative experience: recalling “the divine life which descends from the inner most arcana to the levels (*maratib*) of the spirits, the hearts, and the consciences (*asrar*)” (ibid.). The flute (*qasab*) refers to “the human essences” and the breath blown into the flute alludes to the “divine light penetrating the seed of man's essence” (ibid.).

Far from being “weak-minded” and “farfetched” as Ahmad Mujahhid maintains (Tusi 1360 A.Hsh./1981:20, introduction), in such descriptions one is presented with Music as Nature transfigured, an interiorised reality of *Sama'* which might well be compared with what Henry Corbin (1990b:16), in reference to Mazdean cosmology, has termed “a visionary geography.” Such a cosmology is “concentrated or concentrates a sacral space in *medio mundi*, in the centre of the vision contemplated in the presence of the visionary soul...Geographical features, mountains for instance, are here no longer merely physical features; they have a significance for the soul; they are psycho-cosmic aspects. The events that take place there consist in the very seeing of these aspects; they are psychic events.” [25] In exactly the same way, audition in the Sufi tradition is not done with the ear of mundane consciousness but rather “with a consciousness anchored in the imaginal world” (cf. Mitchell 1986:99). The spiritual consciousness or state (*hal*) attained by “listening to music” in *Sama'* was well understood by the English visionary poet William Blake, who said: “I would no more question my eye than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, not with it” (cited by Raine 1979:39).

Apropos the ontological priority of the Sacred in the *Sama'* ceremony mentioned above, another equally fundamental element in the metaphysical world-view of the Sufi musician/cantor (*mutrib* [26]) and the initiated auditor to his musical concert is the theocentric notion of reality which both shared. From the Muslim mystic's theocentric perspective, God is the sole Creative Force, Who in every moment creates both Concert, Music and Audition perpetually anew. [27] As the Persian Sufi poet Maghribi (d. 810/1408) expresses it (1993:383, *ghazal* 187:5-6):

Sure, in a painting
or in a drawing
there is nothing but a painting and a drawing
Yet Mani
 is hidden deep beneath
in all the art of Manicheism.

See nothing in all the songs and tunes and rhythms and lines
but the Rhythm-maker, the Musician, though
tones, scales, vibrations, emanations
be thousands.

Jean During (1989:574) also insightfully points out, in the context of describing the spiritual state (*hal*) inspiring the vocal or instrumental artist performing Persian Sufi music, that: “Such aesthetics reflect an absolute theocentric point of view, because in each fraction of moment, any creature is saved from nothingness and brought back in an act of Perpetual Creation. The 'point of view' of God in the ontology becomes the point of view of the creative artist: especially in Persian music, the work does not pursue an autonomous life under the internal laws that govern it” (*Une telle esthétique reflète un point de vue théocentriste absolu, car à chaque fraction d'instant toute créature est sauvée du néant et ramenée à l'être dans un acte de Création Perpétuelle. Le 'point de vue' de Dieu dans l'ontologie devient le point de vue de l'artiste créateur: en particulier dans la musique persane, l'oeuvre ne poursuit pas à vie de manière autonome en vertu des lois internes qui la régissent*). *Sama'* is thus a musical experience whose aesthetic depth leads to metaphysical penetration; the notes reflect, indeed, become, the divine harmony. Such metaphysical reflections lead us as a matter of course to examine the specifically aesthetic nature of *Sama'*, that is: mystical poetry.

Poetry and *Sama'*

Besides the necessary conditions constituted by the triad of the “company” of the Sufis, proper spirituo-geographical “place” and temporal/metaphysical “time”, another essential element in the Sufi musical séance and part of the contemplative experience of *Sama'* is poetry. Poetry and words, as vehicles capable of communicating the Transcendental, are themselves highly inadequate. Music alone is capable of bridging the gap between the literal and anagogic levels of meaning, for the intense emotionality of any Sufi poem cannot be properly expressed except within the sacred ambience of the *Sama'* ceremony. Music constitutes the poem's emotional body of water; the poem – fish is born and swims in the ocean of *Sama'* – for without music, the vertical dimension of *Sama'*, the poem expires on the dry land of literal and horizontal meanings.

In the exordium of the *Bawariq al-ilma'*, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi (1938:121-2, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn) reveals the close relationship between poetry and *Sama'*, portraying its rites as a cognitive experience based on song rather than pure music: [28]

The audition of this group (*al-ta'ifa*, i.e. the Sufis) consists in mystical deliberation over (*mulahazat*) the hidden mysteries [concealed] within the highly refined poetry (*al-ash'ar al-raqiqa*) which are sung by the cantor (*qawwal*) when touched by ecstasy (*wajd*) realised by the assiduous heart of the gnostic and the perfect disciple. Such audition induces them to set aside resistance and through being drawn to the Unique Almighty Being to become aware of spiritual subtleties and mysteries. In order to remove these veils, on most occasions, after the performance of obligatory religious duties, they have chosen [the practice of] audition (*Sama'*) to beautiful voices since human nature is inherently inclined to the voice in order to procure by means of it what is beneficial and repulse what is harmful.

As Tusi makes clear in the above passage, it is important that the mystic audit “the hidden mysteries” within the poetry. Audition to such poetry/music during *Sama'* is not merely an aesthetic experience requiring attention to the words and music alone: it is rather a concentration on the symbolic correspondences and mystical references of Sufi poetry with the ear of the heart; an audition to the “hidden” melody within sound, to the secrets within the silent intervals as well as the notes of the music.

The soul's *Sama'* is not compacted
 Alone of words and consonants.
 No, in every pitch and strain
 there's another enigma contained.

So wrote Mahmud Shabistari (d. after 1337 CE) (1365 A.Hsh./1986:102; v. 854) in his Garden of Mystery (*Gulshan-i raz*), and Muhammad Lahiji (d. 1507 CE) (1371 A.Hsh./1992:532) in his famous commentary on this poem, apropos of this verse, pointed out:

For all those familiar with mystical states of consciousness (*ahl-i hal*) and adept in spiritual perfections (*arbab-i kamal*), the *Sama'* of the soul and spirit does not consist merely of the sounds and words heard from a musician (*mutrib*). No, behind every strain (*parda*) and melody, adepts apprehend a fresh mystery and mystical state. But such mysterious virgins do not expose themselves to every stranger; they never unveil their faces except to the most elect of confidants. No, not everyone who busies himself in audition (*Sama'*), claps his hand in passion or whirls in its dance is necessarily an initiate in tune with its mysteries.

Approaching the subject of poetry and music from a more theological perspective, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali enumerates some seven different occasions when poetry is traditionally permitted, sometimes even incumbent upon the believer to use: (1) the singing of pilgrims; (Macdonald 1901-2a:220-1); (2) the rousing of soldiers for war (ibid.:221-2); (3) the use of *rajaz* verses during an actual battle (ibid.:222); (4) rousing listeners to weeping and lamentation on certain religious occasions (ibid.:222-3); (5) on occasions of joy, such as festival days and marriages (here the use of both music and poetry are considered praiseworthy) (ibid.:223-8); (6) listening to music and poetry by lovers in order to arouse longing and love (that is, within marital relations) (ibid.:228-9); and (7) for the lovers of God (ibid.:229-35). It is Ghazali's description of this final category, however, which has relevance to the present discussion of sacred music in Islam.

Reflecting the theocentric attitude of the Sufi mystics described above, Ghazali asserts that everything which the lover of God beholds evokes the vision of God, for "he cannot look upon a thing but he sees in it the Almighty, for no sound strikes his ear but he hears it from Him and in Him". [29] Thus, all *Sama'* (here the noun is not specific and may connote both "listening" and the Sufi concert itself) but further strengthens his yearning (*shawq*) and love (*ishq*) of God. Audition also has a deeply cleansing, purifying and guiding effect on the soul, in turn inducing various types of ineffable visionary experiences (*mushahidat*, *mukashifat*), which "are the summation of what is sought by the lovers of God Almighty and the ultimate fruit of all pious works". These experiences are known only to those who have directly relished them through heart-savour (*dhawq*). [30] Discussing the fruits of *Sama'* within the context of Sufi contemplative states, the Proof of Islam underlines how the mystic "encounters in himself states which he had not encountered before he listened to the music". His encounter with such states, like the experience of music itself is, however, ultimately ineffable:

The cause of those states appearing in the heart through listening to music (*Sama'*) is a divine mystery (*sirr Allah*) found within the harmonious relationship of measured tones [of music] to the [human] spirits and in the spirits becoming overcome by these melodies and stirred by them-whether to longing, joy, grief, expansion or contraction. But the knowledge of the cause as to why spirits are affected through sounds is one of the mystical subtleties of the sciences of visionary experience [known to the Sufis]. (Ghazali n.d.:247; also cf. Macdonald 1901-2a:230)

Regarding the content of the poetry being sung in *Sama'*, Abu Hamid Ghazali underlines that it is the state of inner purity on the listener's part which is of importance in the first degree – since it is the listener's own spiritual disposition which determines the permissibility of the *Sama'* rather than the subject-matter of the poetry or song. Even the most erotic poetry can be applied to God, since all descriptions of the parts of the Beloved's body contain metaphysical as well as physical allusions; these only the pure in heart can discern. Ghazali writes (n.d.:249; Leonard Lewisohn; also cf. Macdonald 1901-2a:237-9):

As for amatory poetry (*al-nasib*), that is, love poetry with description of cheeks, temples, beauty of figure, stature and the other qualities of women: this calls for consideration. The sound view is that the composition and recitation of such poetry, with or without melody, is not legally forbidden (*haram*). Rather, it is up to the listener to see to it that he does not apply what he hears to a particular woman, and if

he does apply it that he apply it to one permitted to him, i.e. his wife or slave-girl; for if he apply it to a strange woman then he is a sinner by thus applying it to, and pondering upon, her. He who is characterised by such passion ought to put aside music and singing (*Sama* ') altogether. For he over whom such a passion reigns applies all he hears to that passion, whether the expression suits it or not; for what expression is there that cannot be applied to ideas by way of metaphorical usage?

– However, one whose heart is totally overcome by the love of God is reminded by the (poetic image of the) blackness of the hair on the temples of a similar thing, i.e. infidelity (*al-kufr*); by the brightness of the cheek, of the light of Faith; by the mention of consummation (*al-wisal*), of the meeting with God Almighty; by the mention of separation (*al-faraq*), of the veil which is [between him] and God Almighty while in the company of the outcast; by the mention of the rival (*al-raqib*) who disturbs the pleasure of union, of the hindrances presented by the world and its various corruptions that interrupt the continuity of his intimacy with God Almighty. And there is no need of fabricating farfetched analogies, deliberation, or taking time for calm consideration in such application; for the ideas (*al-ma'ani*) which dominate the heart weigh more heavily upon the understanding than the bare expressions which are heard. Thus, it is related of one of the [Sufi] Shaykhs, passing through a market, heard someone cry: “The good ones-ten for a grain!” [31] and was stricken with ecstasy (*al-wajd*). When he was asked about that experience, he explained: “When the good are [only] ten for a grain, then what is the value of evil?” And another of them was passing through a market when he heard a hawker cry, “O wild thyme!” (*Ya sa'taru barri*) and was smitten with ecstasy. When asked from whence had arisen his ecstasy, he replied, “I heard him as though he were saying, ‘Persevere and you'll see my benevolence!’ ” (*isa ' tarra barri*). And such experiences can even reach the point where ecstasy will overcome a Persian upon hearing verses in Arabic, for some Arabic words correspond to Persian words, so he understands from them another meaning. Thus, when someone once recited the Arabic hemistich: Naught at night has ever visited me (*wa ma zarani*) – but his fancy - a Persian man was seized with ecstasy upon hearing it. Asked what had induced his ecstasy, he said, “Ah! It was as though the poet had said in Persian *ma zarim*, ‘We are forsaken’;” - for the expression *zar* indicates being forsaken, so that he fancied that he was saying “We are all forsaken and on the verge of destruction” and was thereby stricken with fright imagining the peril of destruction in the Hereafter.

However, the ecstasy of one who is consumed by divine love is in proportion to his understanding, and his understanding is in proportion to his power of imagination, and what he imagines does not necessarily accord with the poet's intended meaning or language. Nonetheless-his ecstasy is totally true and genuine. Thus, it is entirely proper that one who fears the peril of the destruction in the next world should be disconcerted and that his limbs should tremble. [Furthermore] there is no great benefit to be gained by changing the substance of the expressions themselves.

Although one who is overcome by love of a created being (*al-makhlūq*) ought to guard himself against music and singing (*Sama* ') in whatever type of expression it appears, one who is enthralled by love of the Almighty will not be disturbed by verbal expressions since they present no obstacle to his understanding of the [underlying] sublime and subtle ideas which flow through the stream of his noble aspiration.

This passage, clearly a *locus classicus* on the mystical use of poetry, [32] emphasises that it is the listener's state of mind – or rather the proper “tune” of his soul – which determines both the effect of the music and the content of the poetry. If such hermeneutics be criticised as “purely subjective... vague, indefinite,” as D.B. Macdonald (1901-2b:77, no. 1) argues, and the emotional conditions aroused be regarded as merely the product of “the hyperactivity of a set of neurovegetative functions,” as Rouget (1985:301) would persuade us, it should not be forgotten that it is a *mystical subject* who hears the voice of God in the hawker selling wild thyme and discerns the threat of His wrath in poetry

which to others is naught but a flight of poetic fancy at best and morbid fantasy at worst. Such a subject has also undergone the difficult discipline of observing, understanding and applying the spiritual preconditions of *Sama*'. It is for this reason that his ecstatic experiences are, as Ghazali states, "genuine and true;" they are only subjective to those who deny the validity of contemplative experience altogether or whose musical insensibility (or cultural anesthesia) makes them overlook the indissoluble union of poetry, music and the Sacred in Islamic culture.

Sa'di, in a chapter of his didactic poem *Bustan* devoted to spiritual intoxication, perhaps provides the best riposte to those who, interpreting such sacred music on the basis of either a secular aesthetics or from the bias of nomocentric theology, critique *Sama*' (1352 A.Hsh./1973:183; adapted from Wickens 1974:117):

I'll not say, brother, what is *Sama*'
Unless I know who may the listener be:
If from the Spirit's loft his soul-bird soar
The very Angel lags behind in flight;
But if he be a man of sport and play and jest
The demon grows in force within his chest.
The breeze of dawn tears apart the rose with grace
But wood the axe alone can split.
The world is full of passion, drunkenness and music
But in the mirror what can a blind man see?

Prophetic versus Poetic Audition

Ghazali provides numerous examples of mystics, scholars and even ordinary folk finding themselves seized by rapture (*wajd*) upon audition of the Qur'an (see Macdonald 1901-2b:732-8). *Sama*' may even cause death, he states:

One of the Sufis upon hearing the verse: "O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, well pleased and well-pleasing," (Qur'an LXXXIX: 27-8) besought the reciter to repeat it. He then remarked: "How often I incite my soul to 'Return!' yet it does not." Then constraining himself to ecstasy (*tawajjud*) he uttered a loud cry and his spirit departed. (Ghazali n.d.:262; cf. also Macdonald 1901-2b:736)

On the other hand, he also enumerates seven reasons why listening to poetry is more conducive to rapture than hearing the cantillation of the Qur'an, most of which are reducible to the fact that Muslims have become too habituated to reading, auditing or reciting the Qur'an to become stirred into further raptures by it. Replying to the question of why ecstasy should manifest itself upon audition to poetry but rarely proceeds from hearing the Qur'an, the direct word of God, Ghazali maintains the objective truth of the *Sama*' experience.

Ecstasy is Truth (*wajd al-haqq*). It springs from the abundance of the love of God Almighty and from sincere devotion and true longing (*sidq iradat wa'l-shawq*) to encounter Him. It may also be induced by audition to the Qur'an. One who is not stirred up by hearing the Qur'an is but absorbed in fondness for creation and love of what is created, as the saying of God Almighty indicates: "Verily in the remembrance of God hearts find serenity" (Qur'an XIII:28) and "[God has revealed the fairest of sayings, a scripture uniform in style where warnings are paired with promises, so that] the flesh of those who fear their Lord does creep, and their skins and hearts soften to the remembrance of God..." (Qur'an XXXIX: 23). Therefore, whatever one finds (*yujadu*) as a consequence of audition (*Sama*') by means of audition within the soul is all ecstasy (*wajd*). Such "serenity", "creeping of the flesh", awe and "softening of the heart" (which was referred to in the above passages) is itself *wajd*. (Ghazali n.d.:261 also cf. Macdonald 1901-2b:733)

However, the Qur'an has certain liturgical limitations due to its prearranged system of cantillation which only permit its use in a highly ritualised manner. One is not permitted, for instance, to set its verses to music. Thus, paradoxically, it is easier to gain access to the Sacred through the "profane" medium of poetry, since few people can "call attention to ideas that are remote through things that are near" (Ghazali n.d.:263; also cf. Macdonald 1901-2b:739-40). Furthermore, the language of poetry "has a power through poetic taste of making an impression on the soul, insofar as a pleasant voice with measure is not like a pleasant voice without measure; and measure is what is found in poetry as opposed to the verses of the Qur'an" (Ghazali n.d.:264; following closely Macdonald's translation, 1901- 2b:741-2). Improvisation in musical measure, poetic metre and vocal ornamentation, combined with the shortening and lengthening of syllables, is also permissible when singing poetry but forbidden during Qur'anic recitation. The very rhythms of poetry and especially its singing to instrumental accompaniment greatly stimulate the arousal of ecstasy. Now, since the conception which common folk harbour of such musical rhythms is that "they are but idle jest and sport", while "the select classes of educated folk (*al-khassa*) consider the form of such music itself as ridiculous" (Ghazali n.d.:264; Leonard Lewisohn), it is evident that association of the speech of God with poetic jest or musical "sport" may appear as an impious breach of courtesy. The final argument summoned up in defence of the use of poetry is adapted by Ghazali (n.d.:264-5; Leonard Lewisohn) from Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi's *Kitab al-Luma'*:

The Qur'an is the word of God and one of His qualities; and it is a truth which humanity cannot comprehend, because it is uncreated, and created qualities cannot comprehend it. If even a grain of its meaning and splendour were revealed to the human heart, it would shatter in awe and bewilderment.

But sweet melodies concord with the natural humours (*al-ilhan al-tiyibba munasibat li-taba'*), and have a relation to these humours by way of [the soul's] natural pleasure (*al-huzuz*) rather than through its natural privilege and birthright (*al-huquq*). So poetry's relation [to the soul] pertains to such natural pleasures. Thus, when melodies and sounds are combined with the symbolic allusions and refined points (*al-isharat wa'l-lata'if*) [of poetry] they suit each other well since they are both nearer to the natural pleasures [of the soul] and seem lighter to the heart, because what is created is conjoined with the created. Thus, as long as our "humanity" remains and we enjoy mournful melodies and sweet sounds through our own qualities and natural pleasures, our receptivity and openness to contemplate the continuation of these pleasures through poetry is greater than our receptivity to the word of God, which is His Quality and Word, having begun in Him and to which to Him returns. [33]

It is for such reasons, in short, states Ghazali, that although a human heart may be passionately in love with God, "a strange verse of poetry will rouse the heart with more fervour than recitation of the Qur'an" (Ghazali n.d.:265; Leonard Lewisohn). Ultimately, the only road to divine rapture is through aesthetic pleasures which are preeminently human: music and poetry. Discussing the virtual preeminence of poetic over prophetic audition in the Sufi contemplative life, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi (1938:121-22; Arabic text) also underlines the positive effect which poetry's "harmonies" have on the soul:

When many melodic arrangements and spiritual harmonies – that is to say, music – are evoked within someone, his nature come to prefer them over all else. Thus, when a person listens to harmonious melodies which allude to those archetypal meanings relating to heart-savour and to the realities of divine Unity (*al-ma'ani al-dhawqiyya wa'l-haqa'iq al-tawhidiyya*), his whole being inclines to these things, each limb receiving its own individual delight. Hence, while the ear hearkens to the subtleties of the harmonies of the Infinite, the eye apprehends the harmonies of movement, the heart the subtleties of ideas, and reason (*‘aql*) knows rapture of the harmonies of the Infinite. [34]

In conclusion, in Persian Sufism poetry with musical accompaniment constitutes the main staple of the mystical soul. As St. Teresa of Avila pronounced, “Even the greatest contemplatives cannot bear to live without poetry”.

The Fruits of Audition

The creation of a specific liturgy composed of prayer, litanies, singing, music and sometimes dance known as *Sama*’, integrating music into the practice of meditation, is one of the most highly original aspects of the contemplative life in Islam. As we have seen, Sufi mystics ascended to the heights of contemplation saddling the steeds of two creative Arts: Poetry and Music. In each Sufi meeting house or *khanaqah* could be found singers (*qawwal*) and sometimes musicians (*mutrib*) as well who specialised in conducting these concerts of sacred music. Although the various spiritual preconditions, social organisation and the religio-aesthetic elements of *Sama*’ have been explored above, the specific purpose of the ceremony – to adore God and consequently actualise certain spiritual states and ecstatic consciousness (*wajd*) – demands further comment.

i. Ecstasy

What precisely is the concept and nature of the “ecstatic consciousness” obtained through *Sama*’? To answer this question, it will be useful for the following discussion to briefly examine the metaphysical implications of the etymology of the term for ecstasy in Sufism: *wajd*. This word, derived from the Arabic tri-literal root *wa-ja-da*, means both 1) “ecstasy and ardour”, as well as 2) “finding” and 3) “being”. Thus, the highest state of ecstasy is referred to as *wujud* or “existence” itself. Hence, the attainment of *wujud*, “realised ecstasy” (it is the abstract noun) is the supreme realisation of being as well, for, in the words of Abu’l-Husayn al-Darraji, “Ecstasy (*wajd*) signifies that which is found (*yujadu*) through *Sama*’” (cited by Ghazali n.d.:257; Macdonald 1901-2b:719). The fruit of *Sama*’ is both mystical and metaphysical, for it is at once both a psychology of rapture and an ontology of ecstasy.

Some scholars have endeavoured to establish an analogy between *wajd* and certain “trance” experiences such as the phenomenon of “possession” in shamanism (Rouget 1985:ch. 7). Although drawing analogies between trance states and *wajd* may be partially useful for the sake of comparison, it often leads to farfetched and barbarous assumptions about the *wajd* experience itself. [35] As described in the classical texts, the basic experience of *wajd* is that of a heightened egoless consciousness: “selflessness” (*bikhudi*) in the lexicon of the Persian Sufis. The subject who experiences *wajd* is temporarily absent from him or herself; it is indeed an extasis, an exit from self-existence and an entrance into egoless consciousness. Thus, Shibli (d. 334/945), describing *wajd*, said: “When I suppose that I have lost it, I find it and whenever I imagine that I have found it, I lose it.” Furthermore, he declared, “Ecstasy or ‘finding’ is the manifestation of the Existent One or ‘the Found’ (*mawjud*)” (Nurbakhsh 1984:182). Nuri (d. 295/907) likewise pronounced, “Finding is the losing of personal being in the Divinely Found or Existent One” (ibid.). The experience of *wajd* means, in short, the finding (*wajada*) of an existence transcending the consciousness of the finite ego – and it is that existence which the Sufis believe is Absolute Being Itself.

When describing the Sufi conception of this term containing such broad metaphysical resonances, I am reminded of Emerson's critique of Swedenborg's theory of symbolism. Swedenborg theorised that material objects were all signifiers of a universal meaning, and that each sensual thing “corresponded” to a spiritual notion. Although Emerson (1983:672) generally endorsed this hermeneutical approach to Nature, he condemned what he perceived as Swedenborg's “exclusively theological direction,” warning:

The central identity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being. In the transmission of heavenly waters, every hose fits every

hydrant. Nature avenges herself speedily on the hard pedantry that would chain her waves. She is no literalist. Everything must be taken genially, and we must be at the top of our condition, to understand anything rightly.

In the practice of audition to Sufi music/poetry, a similar phenomenon takes place, for “we must be at the top of our condition” to understand it rightly. Indeed, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (n.d.:253-7; Macdonald 1901-2b:705-18) devotes an entire section of his book on *Sama‘* to the different methods of understanding the poetry being sung, thus underlining the *intellectual* basis of ecstasy. [36] There is no such thing as an unconscious or irrational ecstasy, he asserts. The ecstatic first “understands”, and only then attains to the certainty of the ecstasy which “transcends understanding”. In the words of Abu Sa‘id b. al-‘Arabi (d. 341 A.H.) (cited by Ghazali n.d.:257; Leonard Lewisohn):

Ecstasy is lifting of the veil, contemplation of the All-Observant (*mushahida al-Raqib*), presence of understanding (*huzur al-fahm*), study of the Unseen Realm, converse with the soul’s transconscious (*muhaditha al-sirr*), and association with what one lacks. It consists in the annihilation and termination of “you” in respect to all you are.... Ecstasy is the first stage of the Elect: the fruit vouchsafed one through verified faith in the Unseen Realm (*tasdiq al-ghayb*). When directly experienced by the mystic through heart-savour (*dhawq*), its light illumines his heart and all doubt and uncertainty leave him.

Hence, the mystical subject consciously recognises the origin and end of his ecstasy; his transports may thus be better described as the objective fruits of a heightened consciousness rather than the subjective vagaries of a hyper-emotional imagination.

Further underlining this highly intellectual character of *Sama‘*, Ghazali maintains that everything one hears during *Sama‘* should be applied by the mystic to his own soul’s “dealings with God” (*mu‘amilat*); for it is mainly with these “dealings” with his Beloved that the mystic is concerned. “It is not required of the listener that he ruminates (*mura‘at*) over the purported meaning of the poet’s word, since every saying has various aspects and every rational person takes pleasure in appropriating a [different] meaning from it” (Ghazali n.d.:254; Leonard Lewisohn). In short, if indeed “every hose fits every hydrant” as Emerson claimed, the water of *wajd* should not be wasted, but rather consumed exclusively as “food for the spirit”.

This leads us to study the important therapeutic effect which *Sama‘* has upon the soul. Music causes sharpening of the attention, leading to a greater focus of both mind and body and a concentration of the external and inner senses. In fact, as Tusi explains (1938:123, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn), the remembrance of God (*dhikr*) during *Sama‘* operates like a sort of mystical “music therapy”:

When [by means of music] the various limbs of the body become properly collected, hatred and aversion is removed and concord (*hukm al-tawafuq*) appears. Discord and dissension (*al-tanafur*) belong to darkness whereas concord comes from Light-so when darkness is dispersed and light shines forth, one’s worldly affairs and the spiritual realities become uncovered with a clarity which a thousand efforts could not have accomplished.

It is relevant in this context to recall Shakespeare’s description of the therapeutic power of music in the Merchant of Venice where (V.I, 75-88) he remarks on the power of music to tame wild horses as well as to collect the wits. “A wild and wanton herd,” he writes:

...If they put hear perchance a trumpet sound,

Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze
By the sweet power of music. Therefore the poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and flood,
Since naught so stockish, hard, and full of rage
But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus;
Let no such man be trusted.

In an important passage on music in the fourth book of his *Mathnawi*, Rumi also describes the same therapeutic use of the Sufi concert, concluding (1925- 40:IV:vv. 742-5):

Sama' is the food of lovers;
The strands of dispersed imagination
 in it gain concentration.
The fantasies of the inner psyche in music find strength;
No, transcend strength, by the wail
 of the flute and horn, take form.

The idea that “music is the food of lovers” expressed by Rumi in the lines above, and the Platonic notion that “music is the food of love” (immortalised by Shakespeare in *Twelfth Night's* opening verse [37]), is one that often appears in Persian Sufi texts (cf. J. C. Bürgel 1988:89-118). Abu'l-Qasim Nasrabadi had noted that “Everything has its own food and the food of the spirit is *Sama'*” (Nurbakhsh 1984:189), and in this regard Ghazali quotes the anonymous saying of a Sufi that “*Sama'* is the sustenance of the spirits for the people of gnosis” (n.d.:257; Macdonald 1901-2b:719). The same notion is also described by Tusi (1938:133-4, Arabic text) when *Sama'* is said to be the “*al-ghadha al-ruhi*, spiritual nourishment” which “strengthens the heart and the inner nature”. It is a means to induce the descent of “spirit, light and life from the unseen world” (ibid: 162).

ii. Dance

One of the most neglected, least understood, yet most attractive aspects of *Sama'* – at least to a Western spectator unfamiliar with Islamic mysticism – is the physical movements of its participants, popularly known as “Sufi dance” (*raqs*). Nearly all the Sufis adduced numerous traditions supporting the legality of dancing in Islam, furnishing legal precedents in the Prophetic tradition (*hadith*) to justify the bodily movements of those who engaged in *Sama'*. Both Tusi and Ghazali (n.d., II, p. 244ff.; Macdonald 1901-2a:pp. 223-27), for example,

relate a story taken from the *Musnad* of Ahmad Hanbal in which Abyssinians were dancing and playing a tambourine in Prophet Muhammad's presence while chanting "Muhammad is an upright servant". The Prophet, who was present among the bystanders, asked them what their refrain was, and upon being informed, listened attentively and did nothing to stop their activity. Hence Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi (1938:133-4, Arabic text; Leonard Lewisohn) argues that:

This tradition clearly indicates the permissibility of being present at dancing and the permissibility of listening to the sound of the tambourine and singing. So if anyone says that dancing is forbidden, that is an acknowledgement from him that the Prophet was present at what is forbidden and confirmed others in what is forbidden. And if anyone finds this story disturbing then he is an infidel by general consent.

Tusi also relates several other stories portraying Prophet Muhammad as a central figure, standing by or commenting upon the singing or dancing of his followers, and cites the names of some eminent Companions of Prophet Muhammad such as Haritha, Abd Allah Ja'far (the brother of 'Ali who was later killed in the battle of Mu'ta), who practiced or participated in ceremonies resembling *Sama'* to buttress his arguments. Perhaps the most interesting story (again from the *Musnad* of Ahmad Hanbal) is one which emphasises the canonicity of dancing (*raqs*).

Zayd ibn Haritha, Prophet Muhammad's adopted son, along with 'Ali and his brother Ja'far stand in the Prophet's presence. The Prophet compliments each of them in turn, which causes them to leap with joy. Since leaping (the Arabic word is *hajala*) is part of dancing (*raqs*), then all of dancing must be considered allowable, the author argues. Ghazali (n.d., II, p. 267; Macdonald 1903:8-9) also uses the same tradition as a point of departure to justify the legality of *raqs* in the last part of his tract on the "Etiquette of *Sama'* and Ecstasy" in the *Ihya'ulum al-din*. "The fourth rule of good conduct during audition to music," he informs us

is that one should not rise up nor raise one's voice in weeping as long as one can restrain oneself. However, if one dance (*raqs*) or force weeping, that is allowable as long as one does not intend ostentation by it; for forcing weeping induces grief and dancing is a cause of joy and liveliness (*al-raqs sabab fi tahrik al-surur*). Therefore, the excitation of every allowable joy is permissible. If it were unlawful, 'A'isha would not have looked on at the Abyssinians with the Apostle of God while they were "leaping" (*wa hum yasfinun*).... And in a tradition it is said that he said to 'A'isha, "Would you like to look at the leaping of the Abyssinians (*zafana al-habashat*)?" Now, "leaping" (*al-zafana*) and "hopping" (*al-hajala*) are dancing (*al-raqs*) which occur due to joy or yearning (*shawq*). The precept which one must apply [in the Shari'a] to it [dancing] is the same rule which applies to that which stimulates it. If the delight therein is praiseworthy and the dancing strengthens that delight, then the dancing is praiseworthy.

Furthermore, the Qur'an attests that the purpose of its reminder to humankind is for Prophet Muhammad to "make clear to men what has been divinely revealed" (XVI:44), and had leaping—which is a form of dancing—belonged to the category of doubtful or harmful or irreligious acts, it would have been necessary for Prophet Muhammad to have said so. The Prophet's refusal to prohibit even his closest companions from leaping proves the legality of dancing, Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tusi (1938:84-5 English; 139-40, Arabic text) would persuade us. [38]

For both mystics cited above, dance is the very blossoming of ecstasy and ecstasy is both the cause of dance and the effect of music (cf. Rouget 1985:286). The most essential

contemplative element of the dance is that it must be genuine, resulting from an authentic ecstasy experienced by the listener. In Sufism there is no “dance” – in the modern sense of the word – apart from religious contemplation, for the sensual and the spiritual, the profane and the Sacred must first be firmly distinguished and separated. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's “third rule” of *Sama* ‘ which establishes that “none can savour the spiritual concert (*dhawq al-Sama* ‘) as long as their delight in sensual pleasure and passion (*huzuz, shawat*) endures” (n.d.:266; Macdonald 1903:3) underlines the essentially sacral basis of the Sufi concert.

Obviously, the same rules and manners (*adab*) which applies to one's comportment during ecstasy also control the etiquette of the dance. Dance is to be preceded by stillness of the limbs, for all movement is itself but the fruit of interior contemplation.

The third rule is that one should be attentive to what the speaker says, with full presence of heart (*hadir al-qalb*), not glancing about in every direction, guarding oneself from staring at the faces of the listeners and from observing what sort of ecstatic states they experience, but absorbed in oneself and in contemplation of one's own heart for whatever God in his mercy may vouchsafe one's innermost consciousness. One must keep oneself from any movement that would disturb the hearts of the Sufi brethren.

Externally, one should be at rest, remaining still in one's gestures, guarding oneself from coughing or yawning. Seated, one should keep one's head down like one absorbed in meditation and reflection within the heart, restraining oneself from hand-clapping (*al-tasfiq*) and dancing (*al-raqs*), or any other movements made in order to fake, simulate or artificially “act-out” [one's state]. Instead, one should remain silent during the intervals between the recitations, abstaining from conversation. Only then, if ecstasy overcome and move one without any self-volition, will one be absolved and not blamed because of it. But whenever one's volition returns, then [the rule is to] return to stillness and repose. (ibid.)

It is the stillness which rules, begins and terminates the dance, for there is nothing praiseworthy about dancing for its own sake. As Ghazali put it: “One shouldn't imagine that one who throws himself upon the ground in distress is more perfect in ecstasy than one who is still and does not agitate himself. Rather, often he who is still is more perfect in ecstasy than he who is in agitation” (Ghazali n.d.: 266-7; closely following Macdonald 1903:6), as the famous story about Junayd's not being swayed by music and poetry (*Sama* ‘) in the final years of his life demonstrates (ibid.):

Al-Junayd, in the beginning [of his progress on the Path] used to be moved through *Sama* ‘; then he came not to be moved and people spoke to him about this. He quoted: “And you see the hills you think as solid flying with the flight of clouds. Such is the might of God, who has perfected all things” (Qur'an XXVII:88). This points to the fact that while the heart may be agitated, soaring through the invisible world (*malakut*), the limbs may outwardly remain properly disciplined and unmoved.

Some Sufis, however, even went beyond advocating the superiority of stillness to movement during *Sama* ‘. Sari Saqati (d.871 CE), for instance, reportedly said, “One who cries out in ecstasy while in *Sama* ‘ must be so bereft of consciousness that if someone strikes him on the face with a sword, he will not feel the blow or the pain of the wound which is made” (Suhrawardi 1364 A.Hsh./1985:96). At this advanced degree, the *Sama* ‘ ceremony reaches such a climax within the mystic's heart that both immobile meditation and rapturous dance appear as incidental. The mystic's inner absorption is so total that music, prayer and dance dissolve in the ineffability of the musical experience itself.

Conclusion

The supreme verbal expression in the Persian language of the paradoxical nature of *Sama'* can be found in the ecstatic lyrics of the *Diwan-i Shams-i Tabriz* by Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose Order was to become known as the "Whirling Dervishes". "Under his guiding genius, music and dance," as Fritz Meier put it, "intermingled to create so indivisible a unity that the dances were performed as rituals in praise of God and as stimulants to an exalting experience of inner harmony" (Shiloah 1995:142). Thus, it is appropriate to bring this study to a close with a *ghazal* by Rumi (1976, IV:65, no. 1734; Leonard Lewisohn) describing the Sufi concert's startling therapeutic effect on the spirit: yet conveying to us a distant echo – in translation – of:

The Message of *Sama'*

Sama' – what's that? From lords of mystery
a missive dispatched to us – for hearts in enmity,
a note from them of calm serenity.

The blossoms bud from wisdom
winnowed in its pleasant breeze
and like a lovely chord, its plectrum strikes
in Being perforation.

Its music heralds dawn just as the crow
Of the Spirit-cock blazons morning's glow;
Its thrum beckons success
Like Mars's kettle-drum.
To sate the palate, its silvery sugar drips
Such strange sweet taste...What odd delight
the body senses from the player's pipe and lip!

Those million bitter scorpion griefs,
Behold here dealt a wretched death.
These thousand rounds of joy, look!
Are passed around without a cup.
Out of every niche another Jacob darts
Disturbed by scent of Joseph's shirt.

For if our soul's a puff of breath that's cast
By "I breathed in him My spirit," [39] it's fit

Such “breath” be food and wine as well.
On Judgement Day, they say, this horde of men
Shall turn to puffs of “breath,” who like the dead, when,
Thrilled to hear this call, vault up from sleep.
“Throw ashes on the head of any man who cares
And grieves, depressed,” they curse: “One untouched
By such a breath – he's less than death.”

For once the flesh and heart drink down
This wine by heaven sanctioned,
Forever banned from them are heat of grief
And snarling sorrows that can bite the heart.
And yet such supersensual loveliness
Is not to be described – a thousand eyes
Demand for it on loan, on loan!

Within you shines a moon
Where from the vault of heaven
The sun trumpets and declaims, “I am
 your humble servant!”
Like Moses, look within your breast;
Seek there that moon; gaze through the window there
And warmly cry “*Salam*”, greet that ray “Good-day”.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Saeed A. Durrani for inviting me to speak on the subject of mysticism and music in Islam at the conference which he convened on “Muhammad Iqbal and the Fine Arts: the heritage of Islamic creativity”, at the University of Birmingham, 14-15 October 1995, where an abbreviated version of the present paper was presented. Another version was presented as one of the “Calamus Summer Lectures” at the Warburg Institute in London, July 1996.

FOOTNOTES

1. For a summary overview of the entire gamut of themes found in the relevant Islamic traditions and in teachings of protagonists of the four great legal schools and the ideological debates which have evolved as a result, see Shiloah 1995:31-44.
2. Schimmel (1975:325) points out that “the intense love for music that the Mevlevis inherited from their master Jalaluddin has inspired many classical musicians and composers in the Ottoman

Empire. In fact, the best pieces of Turkish classical music, such as those by ‘Itri (17th century), were composed by artists who were either members of, or at least loosely connected with, the order.”

3. To cite but one example, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), who “clearly shared the view of most of the cultured elite of his time who realised that Sufism was the essence of Islam,” as Casewit (1985:182) points out, vindicated the value of mystical concerts (see Ibn Khaldun 1958, I:230-1). For a general account of the history of opposing viewpoints concerning audition, see Gribetz (1991:43-62).
4. For other verses cited in the Qu’ran which have been interpreted as relating to the permissibility and prohibition of music, see Roy Choudhury’s lengthy discussion (1957:57-65)
5. He is the author of the earliest known treatise in opposition to music, written in the 3rd/9th century: *Dhamm al-malahi*, from which one may deduce that *sama’* was semi-institutionalised in the 8th century CE.
6. However, such mystics more often than not either hailed from the Western lands of Islam, or belonged to the Naqshbandi Order (who were, doctrinally speaking, opposed to the practice); it is extremely rare to encounter Sufis in the Persian or Persianate world who opposed the practice as un-Islamic.
7. However, such arguments are based on theologico-cosmological principles which place “mystical *sama’* as a sub-class of a broader kind of *sama’* which has nothing to do with music” per se, as Shehadi (1995:159-62) has shown in his study of the Shaykh’s chapter on *Sama’* in the *Futuhāt*.
8. Evidence gleaned from the works of Mas’udi, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi and Abu Faraj Isfahani points to strong Persian influence in the development of music among Muslims during the period of the four “righteous” caliphs; cf. Roy Choudhury 1957:73-4; Graham 1988-9:22-7; Miller 1997:chs. 1-2).
9. On the central role of Persian Sufism in medieval Muslim thought, see Lewisohn 1993
10. This author, as Ahmad Mujahid has pointed out, must not be confused with Ahmad al-Ghazali, brother of the famous theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. See Ahmad Mujahid’s lengthy introduction to Tusi (1360 A.Hsh./1981), where he points out (pp. 19ff.) that the *Bawariq al-ilma’* could not have been composed by Ahmad Ghazali because (among other reasons) of poetry from later (13th century CE) authors which occur in the text.
11. For a general discussion of their musical theories, see Shiloah 1978; also cf. Bürgel 1988:ch. 4; for general information on their views on music, see Wright 1993:683); for an interesting discussion of the spiritual dimension of music among them, also cf. Shiloah 1980:170.
12. Massignon (1954:104-5) considered the *Sama’* ritual to be a kind of Muslim liturgy naturally evolved from the early Muslim practices of Qur’anic recitation (*qira’ah*) and communal sessions for recollection of God (*majalis al-dhikr*). Roy Choudhury (1957:56) also observes that “the entire culture of pre-Islamic Arabia centred round their pleasures, joys, poets, music, singing girls and musical stories.”
13. “The singing in secular life was known as *ghina’*, so that of religious life was termed *ta’bir*, i.e. an ‘interpreting’. Thus there came to Islam its approved religious music,” notes Farmer (1952:62). And as Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi points out: “The origin of singing and its source were clearly from the mother towns of the land of the Arabs, and they are Al-Medina, and Al-Ta’if, and Khaibar, and Wadi al-Qura, and Dumat al-Jandal, and Yamana. And these towns comprise the markets of the Arabs” (Farmer 1942:4). Also cf. During 1988:16-7.
14. “Whatever might have been the juristic decisions on particular incidents connected with music given by the Imams [Abu Hanifa; Malik; Shafi’i; Ahmad ibn Hanbal], their personal practices sufficiently illustrate that music under certain circumstances was treated as permissible” (Roy Choudhury 1957:80). See also Farmer 1942:23-5.

15. During (1993:277-87) points out that there is a subtle difference between the interpretation of *sama* ' by the initiated listener "attuned" to the invisible *dhikr* of the heart within the musician, and the profane listener's understanding of the musical and/or vocal performance itself.
16. The accomplished female Persian vocalist Parisa (1374 A.Hsh./1995:9) made this quite clear in a recent interview when she pointed out: "When we discuss Persian music or Persian mystical music and their different vocal or instrumental styles, what is of primary concern is the inner state (*halat-i duruni*) of the performer; that is, with what intention and purpose does he or she approach the music? What, then, is the purpose of such music? What is truly important for the artist is the mystical morality (*akhlaq-i 'arifana*) of the music. That is to say, if the musician or vocalist negates his or her own existence [before the Divine] and expresses a gnostic humility (*tawadu 'i 'arifana*), one can say that the type of music he or she performs is a *mystical music* ('*arifana*). It matters not if the musician play *tar* or *tanbur*, perform in a traditional Sufi *Khanaqah* or in a modern concert hall. Here, neither the place nor the instruments themselves have any particular value for their own sake." While Parisa's views, of course, on the "proper place" to perform music do not reflect the traditional Sufi attitude in this regard (see below) to the conditions of "right time" and "right place", they certainly demonstrate the close affiliation of Persian music to Sufism. Also cf. Corbin 1990:245-50.
17. Foremost among the classical treatises which contain chapters or subsections on *sama* ' and its rules and manners, should be mentioned the *Kitab al-Luma* ' of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988 CE); the *Ta'arruf* of Al-Kalabadhi (d. 995 CE); the *Risala* (Treatise on Sufism) by Abul-Qasim al-Qushayri of Nishapur (d.1072 CE); the *Kashf al-mahjub* of Hujwiri (d.1072 CE); the *Sad maydan* (One Hundred Fields) and *Manazil al-sa'irin* (Stages of the Wayfarers) of 'Abdu'llah Ansari of Herat (d. 1089 CE); the *Risalat al-quds* (Treatise on the Sacred) by Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 1210 CE) and the '*Awarif al-ma'arif* of Abu Hafs 'Umar Suhrawardi (d.1234 CE), not to mention the chapter on *sama* ' in *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revivification of the Science of Religion) of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali cited above. For a synopsis of the views of some of these manuals on *sama* ', see Robson's introduction to Tusi (1938:4-8).
18. "Silence and self-control" also constitute for Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (n.d.:266) the "third point of etiquette" in *sama* '.
19. It should be noted that in many modern-day Persian Sufi orders, such as the *Dhahabiyya*, *Qadariyya* and the *Ni'matu'llahiyya*, attendance at *Sama* ' is still strictly limited (except on public religious holidays when their ceremony is open to the masses) to dervishes initiated into the practices and customs of the *tariqah*.
20. "It is more desirable that beginners should not be allowed to attend musical concerts lest their natures become depraved" (Hujwiri 1976:430). And a century before Ghazali by Qushayri's teacher and father-in-law Shaykh Abu 'Ali Daqqaq (d.1016 CE) noted that *Sama* ' is prohibited for the common folk (*al-'awam*) because of the persistence of [the passions of] their carnal nature; permitted for ascetics for having realised their spiritual struggles (*li-husul mujahads atihim*) and allowable to Sufis because of their quickened hearts (*li-hiyat qulubihim*). (Cited by Hussaini 1983:113).
21. The Mongol rulers of Iran, for instance, from the reign of Abu Sa'id (1265-82 CE) onwards actively patronised Sufi *sama* ' ceremonies, and in India the musical concert became a common feature of most of the orders; see Lewisohn 1995:77.
22. As Ahmad (1969:143) points out: "Music is perhaps the only art in which something like a synthesis between the Muslim and Hindu artistic traditions was achieved, though not without a series of tensions." Also cf. Hussaini 1983: ch. 3; S. Rizvi 1941:331-40.
23. "*Sama* ' is permitted to the commoners (*awwam*), more permissible to disciples, but a required practice (*wajib*) for the Friends of God (*awliya' Allah*)" (Tusi 1360 A.Hsh./1981:9).
24. The word "music" is used only once by Tusi, and as Rouget points out (1985:256-7), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali deliberately avoids using the word *musiqi* in his book on the "Right Usages of

Audition and Ecstasy” (*Kitab adab al-sama‘ y wa’l-wajd*). This is not because he was unfamiliar with the word: at the time of his composition of the *Ihya’* translation of Greek works into Arabic had been going on since the days of Harun al-Rashid (reg. 789-809 CE). It is rather because “the word *musiqi* denoted the rules or the art of music but not music itself as a product of that art” (ibid.:256). In Islamic Peripatetic philosophy *musiqi* denotes strictly the theory of music which is recognised to be of Greek origin; defined as the science of the composition of melodies (*ta’lif al-alhan*) (Wright 1993:681), it is contrasted to *ghina’*, song or musical practice. As a champion of orthodoxy and an outspoken enemy of Peripatetic philosophy, Ghazali obviously did not wish to associate himself with and thus perhaps become induced to defend, a profession as suspect in the eyes of the faith as that of the musician. Rogue’s (1985:257) summary of Ghazali’s position vis-a-vis *musiqi* also illuminates its relation to respectable *sama’*: From Ghazali’s point of view, which is essentially that of finding a moral justification for *sama’*, it is indispensable to make a distinction between what we might term “light” music and “serious” music. Only the latter is lawful. To confuse the two by using the same term to cover both would thus be aberrant. That which is lawful consisted of, first, the cantillation (*taghbir*) of the Qu’ran, of course; 2nd, sung poetry, on the condition that it’s sentiments and thoughts were sufficiently elevated; and 3rd, accompanied song, provided that the musical instruments utilised were permitted, which is to say instruments that were never associated with blameworthy musical practices. But this is not all. Another restriction must be added to these. It is permissible to hear only that which one hears when one is oneself in a certain state of inner purity. It is not only what is sung or played that counts; it is also the disposition of the listener. Heard with a pure heart, music can be lawful even though it would not be if one listened to it in a lascivious state of mind. This delimitation of the repertoire (Qu’ran, poetry, accompanied song), made all the stricter by a proviso applying to the listener’s own intention, is precisely what is conveyed by the word *sama’*. This conceptual patterning of reality to which it corresponds is comparable to no other, and certainly not to that of the word “music.”

25. An interesting discussion of the relation of the *mundus imaginalis* to music is also given by During (1989:576-85)
26. Lahiji (1371 A.Hsh./1992:531), describing the mystical significance of this Arabo-Persian word, states: “The *mutrib* is a person who, by means of his practice of singing and chanting (*khwanandigi va surud*) in memory of the drunkards, gives the adepts familiar with mystical ‘tasting’ and spiritual states the feeling of joy (*tarab*) and blessedness.”
27. This perception is what, in Ibn Arabi’s terminology, has been called “the 2nd audition” (*istama‘ al-thani*). As ‘Abdu’l-Karim al-Jili (d. 1403 CE) (1886, II, 57) describes it, the devotee “hears the summons (*mukhatibat*) of the Divine Names, Qualities and the [human] essences and responds to it as the subject of a Quality (*mawsuf*) responds to a Quality (*sifat*). ..Here the quality of audition [or ‘faculty of hearing’] becomes the devotee’s essential reality, neither borrowed nor derived from outside, so that he verifies the truth of this auditory revelation (*al-tajalli al-sami*).”
28. Hence Rouget’s observation that “music has the power of inducing trance only because it is a vehicle for words, and because these words are charged with meaning” (1985:300).
29. The following analysis is based on my own translation of Ghazali (n.d., 1:246-47); for another English translation, see Macdonald (1901-2a:229-30).
30. *Dhawq* is a key term in Abu Hamid al-Ghazali’s aesthetics and philosophy and was described elsewhere by him as “the most special characteristic of the highest Sufi mystics, and what is uniquely theirs, [this] can only be attained by taste, not by learning... [it is] like witnessing with one’s own eyes and taking in one’s own hands” (Ghazali 1969:35, 44). For further discussion of Ghazali’s conception of *dhawq*, see Ormsby 1991:142.
31. The weight of a grain of barley; apparently a fraction of a *dirham*
32. Macdonald (1901-2b:706-7) remarks on another passage along these same lines.

33. His view is similar to the neo-Platonic theory elaborated by Avicenna in his *Kitab al-shi'r* where, describing the harmony generated by poetry, he states that poetry's "harmony has an unquestionable effect on the soul, and each object has a harmony which suits it best in agreement with its profusion, its sweetness or its moderation; and by this influence the soul reproduces within itself sadness, anger or any other motion" (quoted in Cantarino 1975:137). A similar notion is advocated by Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi: "And the philosophers assert that musical notes (*nagham*) are a super-excellence (*fadl*) that remains over from speech, which the tongue is unable to extract. But nature expresses it through melodies (*alhan*), not by means of the repeated poetical feet (*taqti'*), but by the repeated musical phrase (*tarji'*). When it appears, the soul falls in love with it and the spirit sighs for it. And for that reason Plato says that one part of the soul should not be prevented from loving another" (Farmer 1942:7).
34. Robson's translation of this passage, although generally accurate, shows astounding disregard for conventional English usage and simplicity of expression. His translation of the Arabic phrase *al-munasibat al-naghamiyyat* as "the analogies which pertain to notes," for example, although literal, overlooks that these spiritual "analogies" refer in fact to the mystery of musical harmony itself, the very "concord of sweet sounds," which as Shakespeare says, constitutes "the food of love."
35. For instance, Rouget (1985:299) posits that *wajd* is purely a product of cultural conditioning, and proposes that *dhikr* should be understood as a kind of "excitatory trance" produced by "hyperactivity of the vocal cords in conjunction with overstimulation of the hearing system" which thus "modify the vascular and neurological balance of the encephalon," inducing "trance" (ibid.:301). Such grandiose biological reductionism, although perhaps comforting to the egocentric paranoia of our modern scientific mentality, does however ignore (=academic anesthesia?) the testimony of generations of Muslim mystics who, having experienced *wajd*, interpret their experience within the sacral framework of their own spiritual tradition.
36. "Know that the first degree in *sama'* (listening to music) is understanding (*fahm*) what is heard and then applying this to a meaning which occurs to the listener. The fruit of such understanding is ecstasy (*wajd*), and the fruit of ecstasy is physical movement of one's limbs" (Ghazali, n.d., 11:253; translation Lewisohn).
37. For the Platonic provenance of this phrase, cf. Erixymachus's discussion of cosmic love in Plato's *Symposium*: 186b-187d; and Ficino 1985:66-7.
38. Ghazali (n.d., II:267ff.) provides thorough-going proofs of its permissibility as well.
39. An allusion to the following passage in the Qur'an (XV:28-31): "And remember when thy Lord said unto the angels: 'Lo! I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay of black mud altered. So, when I have made him and have breathed into him of My Spirit, do ye fall down, prostrating yourself unto him. So the angels fell prostrate, all of them together. Save Iblis. He refused to be among the prostrate.'" Translation by M. Pickthall.