PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY
AND SPIRITUALITY

The way of tasawwuf

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It is commonly taught and accepted in the analytic and continental traditions that philosophy began and extended from a Greco-Roman heritage. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are lauded as philosopher-scientists who birthed the reign of rational thought. However, prior to the Greco-Roman emergence of rationalism, extensive philosophical, scientific and artistic bodies of knowledge were cultivated in Africa (such as The Maxims of Ptohhotep in Egypt, 25th Century BCE), Asia (Taoism in 5th Century BCE and The Vedic Period in 2nd Millennium BCE) and the Middle East (in the Sufi oral tradition). Sufism, while related to Islam in contemporary structures, is considered by its adherents to be the heart or root of religious and philosophical thought. For them, Sufism is born of a universal truth: that the heart itself is the key to all knowledge and transcendence. The heart is the ground upon which immanence occurs within the human soul. Without a single progenitor or figurehead, Sufism has been revealed in various forms and languages across time. Its central forms of communication rely on music, movement, poetry, natural sciences and fine arts (Burckhardt 2004; Blann 2005). Foundational to both early and later Sufi philosophy is the concept of tasawwuf or purity. The brothers and sisters of purity were known in pre-Islamic times as the hamniyya, Ekuanul Safa and later the Sahabi Safa (Khan 2014). Their specific, devotional practices grew out of the oral and early traditions which grouped philosophy, science, art and spirituality together into complete ‘life-ways’. For example, in Sufism, the fields of healing and medicine are related deeply to music, with a vast knowledge of tonalities and scales which remedy specific illnesses. Likewise, Sufism connects the sciences of astronomy and geology to music, insofar as the placement of stars and planets in relation to land forms creates known magnetic fields, where music and whirling have spontaneously occurred.

For the purposes of this paper, we will be focusing on tasawwuf as lived philosophy and embodied Sufi thought. Through particular focus on makam structures and whirling process, issues of practice and transculturalism are raised in relation to the spiritual purpose of tasawwuf, which is foundational to the perception and realisation of Sufi philosophies. As performance philosophers who seek to move beyond not only body–mind dualities but all manner of binaries, and who seek to articulate knowledges perceived and expressed in domains other than linear thought, the essay proposes that there is much we can take from the integrative, reciprocal principles of Sufism in our approach. This essay does not seek to define ‘original Islam’ as a philosophy, for that has already been done by countless Islamic
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scholars. Rather, it seeks to highlight the modes of knowing by experience and doing which are central to Sufism, and therefore the foundation or centre of later religious thought and philosophy. As knowing through doing remains central to advances in Performance Philosophy, we seek to foreground the idea that knowing by doing may contain the sacred within it and that by the inclusion of the sacred within the precepts of Performance Philosophy, wider dimensions of critique are enabled which allow ‘South and East’ knowledges of the more subtle aspects of ontology a place within the Western critical canon.

Sufi philosophy

In the view of perennialist scholarship,1 the Enlightenment was not a harbinger of reason, progress and harmony but rather the beginning of a period during which the sacred and the feminine as the interior mystical dimension of the sacred were systematically stripped out of thought, policy making and governance (Nasr 2008; Latifa 2014). However, the older ways of life which honoured the feminine (mystical) principle and tended to value life and its interdependent balance remain in living memory among Sufis across Central Asia and Anatolia. From the time of agriculture, a shift took place which has arguably led to the progressive emergence of a global mindset characterised by force and dominance (Guénon in Herlihy 2009). At our current juncture, contemplation of the sacred, the soul and the feminine is essential to our conversation, and here Sufism and Islam as a nested set of knowledges have much to offer.

The sacred – understood as anything pertaining to the creator and therefore all things – is foundational not only to tasawwuf but to all of original Islam. Here, we differentiate ‘original Islam’ from the natural proliferation of varieties over time in order to allow for a discussion of that which birthed tasawwuf and to which early Sufis – and the practices that evolved with them – aligned themselves. While many practitioners of religion in general (and Islam is no exception) have come to rely on rule for its own sake, it must be remembered that within Sufism, doctrine is considered an outgrowth of the sacred heart within religion, and a means by which to remind ourselves of this heart. The directive of religious action is unification with the divine, which in Islam is Allah. The Sufi perspective on Islam regards human life as an opportunity to grow ourselves in the image of Allah, who is understood as universal consciousness and love, and that to which, upon our deaths, we must return (Quran, Sura Tin 95:4 and Bakara 2:30). According to oral and written tradition, each person shapes the condition of the soul – and similar to Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism – it is the fire of earth with its paradox and duality by which we initiate our free will and draw ourselves near to that ultimate sacredness. The exoteric rules and doctrine of Islam have one purpose: to facilitate a whole society which lives in rhythms and decisions which allow individuals to align themselves to God as divine/unity consciousness (Schuon 1983).

Seyed Hossein Nasr (1997), a prolific scholar in the perennialist school, writes of the urgent need for contemporary human life-ways to (re-)connect to the sacred and (re-)form our ideals of social structures towards harmonious reciprocity. His thought stems from early critiques of Western philosophy and earlier writings in perennialist thought such as René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings, Jean-Louis Michon and Marco Pallis, among others. In perennialist thought, the concept of a living tradition underpins discourses in order to highlight the mechanisms by which thought is produced through the entirety of a civilisation. From a critical approach where tradition is at the centre, rather than excluded, differences between East and West, North and South become heightened. The problem of Eurogenetic philosophy and its self-centric European gaze is that a hierarchy is produced
whereby the rational and reductive positions of post-Enlightenment thought are raised to a superiority over the inclusive, holistic structures which position the interior modes of knowing as equal to the rational.

Perennialist scholar, Titus Burckhardt (2008), positions the tendency of the Western mind towards classification on the opposite end of a spectrum from Sufism, where there is a natural integration and coherence between body and mind. This is related to the concept of ‘an intellect of the heart’ aligned with the intellect of the mind. Equally, Sufism, while rooted in Islam, has at its base the older, oral aspect of living tradition which views expressions of religion as a ripening of forms consistent with phases of human existence (Blann 2005). In this manner, the heart – which is central to tasawwuf (or purity) – has been brought forward as the ‘seat of the soul’ (Nasr 2002) and the organ of perception upon which divine union and resulting knowledges take place. Here, the heart is understood both a physical organ in the body and the metaphysical organ of alchemy (Burckhardt 2008).

As the later parts of this essay will go on to discuss in more depth, it is the manner of access to the heart which is unique to tasawwuf. For us, tasawwuf is a form of knowing, a lived philosophy and a spiritual practice at once. The insights of tasawwuf can only be known by experience, or regular practice. Practitioners speak to the knowledges obtained through practice via symbolism and with words; however, these are never enough to fully transmit the knowledges themselves. Words simply act as a guide for those who would wish to seek the knowledge themselves. As a philosophy of purity, it is a lived philosophy, with practices grounded and seasoned in tradition.

Knowledges stemming from Sufism (esoteric experience) and Islam (exoteric regulation) are established and fulfilled within a living tradition composed of lived dimensions of practice. The living aspect speaks to continuity over time, not to a rigid set of rules but one where evolution and development occur through people’s lives, experiences and bodies both personal and collective. As a philosopher, William Chittick writes:

> the erudite European is led to see borrowings by one tradition from another where in fact there is only a coincidence of spiritual vision, and fundamental divergences where it is only a question of differences in perspective or in mode of expression. It is inevitable that such confusions should arise since a university training and bookish knowledge are in the West deemed sufficient authority for concerning oneself with things which in the East remain naturally reserved to those who are endowed with spiritual intuition and who devote themselves to the study of these things in virtue of a true affinity under the guidance of those who are the heirs of a living tradition.

*(Chittick in Burckhardt 2008, p. xiv)*

Thus, tasawwuf is related to a long, broad view of philosophy. The purpose of Sufi arts, which are tools for tasawwuf, is to bring the *murid* or student into direct experience of Allah and thus open doors of perception and knowing which are understood as accessible only through a deep, personal reciprocity with divine intelligence (Schuon 1984; Burckhardt 2004, 2008).

**Tasawwuf**

Tasawwuf and Sufism are one and the same. Both consider that, by way of experience, we come to perceive the intellect of the heart, as nuanced, self-articulated and creative of our very existence. In Sufism, transformation of the heart via the means of tasawwuf results in a purification and enlivening of the ‘subtle bodies’ of the human: first, the emotional and
mental bodies, but then also – and most importantly – purification of the soul. There are many layers of teachings about the heart in Sufism which we cannot address in depth here. However, it should be noted that tasawwuf without the heart at its centre would be devoid of purpose for Sufi practitioners. Where performance as such may share in matters of intentionality, generation of presences and experiences of transcendence (Fischer-Lichte 2007), it is the heart at the centre which is exceptional to Sufism. As such, the tradition cannot be divorced from its philosophy purely for study, the practice cannot be divorced from the knowledges it generates and expresses, and nor can the heart be divorced from the foundations of tasawwuf. ‘The most intimate centre of the heart is called the mystery, sirr, and this is the inapprehensible point in which the creature meets God’ (Burckhardt 2008, p. 86).

Tasawwuf, rather than being purely performative, is also generative in nature, which means that it produces the states it is intended to create within the student by a mutual actioning of practice and surrender. As Burckhardt writes, ‘The inner nature of the Sufi is not receptivity but pure act’ (2008, p. 11): the act of prayer, the act of fasting, the act of care, the act of dhikr and the act of whirling. The act here is a putting in motion of universal principles, not to be confused with outward acts but rather an intentionality in attitude that allows space for divine presence to emerge from the action. Even so, Sufi teachings suggest that all experiences of divine presence are gifts inasmuch as they come when they come. The Sufi murid releases themselves from expectation within the action.

Sufi practices such as dhikr, fasting, prayer, music and whirling seek to generate knowledges and intelligences of the heart in the subtle layers of the self. As Khan proposes:

> When a mystic speaks of self-knowledge this does not mean knowing how old one is, or how good one is or how bad, or how right or how wrong; it means knowing the other part of one’s being, that deeper, subtler aspect. It is upon the knowledge of that being that the fulfilment of life depends…One might ask, “How can one get closer to it?” The way that has been found by those who searched after the truth, those who sought after God, those who wished to analyze themselves, those who wished to sympathize with life in one single way, and that is the way of vibrations… The Hindus have called it mantra yoga; the Sufis have termed it wafiza. It is the power of the word that works upon each atom of the body....

(Khan 1983, pp. 43–44)

For Sufis, vibration is the basis and essence of rhythm. From rhythm comes movement, and it is the vibration which communicates and moves between inner and outer worlds. Rhythm is then the root of manifestation; it is how thought comes into being and how matter comes into form. Again Khan writes:

> The philosophy of form may be understood by the study of the process by which the unseen life manifests into the seen… the unseen, incomprehensible, and imperceptible life becomes gradually known, by becoming first audible and then visible; and this is the origin and only source of all form.

(1983, p. 32)

The philosophies of *tasawwuf*, based in rhythm as the foundational matrix of all life, are written in geometries, weavings and patterns, calligraphies, bodily movement, daily activity, notes and modes as well as thought. As such, thought is both at the beginning of expression – as perception of process, and at the end – as explicit oral or written language. We thus see a continuum from direct experience to expression in philosophical terms such as words.
The tools of tasawwuf, which shift vibration through breath, movement and sound, have been utilised across traditions and across time in various ways. Tasawwuf, as a Sufi set of modalities, shifts the vibration of the physical and subtle bodies towards remembrance of the divine. It is called remembrance as union with the divine is considered our natural state of being: one which we tend to forget but practice enables us to remember. The tools of tasawwuf differ in two ways from other performance practices which shift breath, movement and sound. First, their intention towards purification and union foregrounds the action; and second, the actions are held within a living tradition which guides and protects the murid, and which furthers the results of the action towards ever more subtle states. Tasawwuf is thus differentiated from performance upon the stage or mise-en-scene, where the states generated are for the benefit of an audience. The actions of tasawwuf are for the experience of the murid. The actions of tasawwuf are also aiming or pointing at a set of specifically spiritual experiences which are known, seasoned and passed across time through the living continuity of the tradition.

In the next sections, music and whirling will be discussed – both as practices specific to the lived experiences of the authors and as tools of tasawwuf utilised within performance contexts.

**Performance philosophy in makam**

Another embodiment of performance philosophy within tasawwuf appears in the musical world of makam. Makam is a modal musical language extending from Western China as far as Morocco and the Balkans. The musical language of makam (Arabic: maqam; mugam in Central Asia) grew alongside Sufism across the same geographies and covers a similar time period historically. Makam music’s history in Anatolia is inextricably woven with that of tasawwuf, especially with the Mevlevi order formed after Mevlâna Jelaluddin Rûmî’s death (1273), which had substantial influence in both the Selçuk and Ottoman courts, up to the 20th century. At the beginning of Rûmî’s masterpiece, the Mesnevi, the human being is compared to an end-blown reed flute – the ney – which produces music of most exquisite beauty only when empty (of ego or lower self), waiting to be filled with divine breath (Rûmî 1995). Mevlâna states that the ney cries because it has been cut from its source, and longs to go back. Makam’s rhythmic counterpart, usul, comprises patterns combining ‘Dum’, ‘tek’, ‘kyâ’ and ‘hek’, which are in Ottoman manuscripts not represented linearly, but in circular form. For some Mevlevi Ayıns, the ‘Dum’ beginning each cycle is compared to Allah’s command at the beginning of the universe: ‘Be!’ (Baysal 2018). Usul cycles, which range from two beats to 128, show a philosophy of time as circular and spiralling in nature, unclosed and regenerative (i.e. eternal), mirroring the motions of the dervish in Mevlevi ritual, an utterly different perception to linear thought as described in the introduction.

As Denise Gill describes in *Melancholic Modalities* (Gill 2017), after the banning of tarikats such as the Melevies in Republican Turkey in 1925, the spirituality reflected in makam music largely went underground. However, Gill’s extensive interviews with makam music practitioners make clear that the intentions being embodied even in instrumental expressions include longing for a mystical, ultimate source; for death, for wedding with the Beloved, as well as nostalgia for a time when spirituality could exist more openly. Many aspects of makam are thus reflections of Sufi practice and philosophy.

Besides its cyclical nature and its longing for a divine source, another key reason makam retains a spiritual core is because its tuning remains closer to nature – to the overtone series and the pure 5ths and 3rds derived from this. Makam tuning has, especially in Turkey, remained closer to systems proposed millennia ago by Pythagoras, Ptolemy and al-Farabi – than the more recent, now seldom-questioned Western Equal Temperament tuning, which does away...
with pure overtonal intervals. Analogous to the layers of heart and intellect, and levels of self and Self described in Rumī (Chittick 1983), tuning in Turkish makam features three functioning levels: (1) resonant pure 5ths (Pythagorean), which provide frames for the tetrachords and pentachords constituting all makams; (2) one-koma alterations of Pythagorean degrees, which allows in the resonant pure 3rds of just intonation to create an exquisite, ‘softer’ embodiment of harmony, especially in makams such as Rast, Segâh, Hicaz and Hüzzam; (3) the movable ‘zones’ (bölge) of extremely expressive, variable and unstable pitch areas of the Uşşak family. This third layer bends, pulsates, slides and cries, enriching makam’s expressive universe to give it one of its most characteristic sounds, recalling the ‘burnt’ metaphor for spiritual maturation in sufism: ‘Hamdim, pistim, yandim. (I was raw, I cooked, and I burnt)’ (Mevlâna Rumī in Gill 2017). In makam music, it is especially these bölge that create this feeling of ‘burntness’. How exactly one sings or plays these highly culturally specific nuances is a subject of endless debate, and ultimately a matter of choice and aesthetic – indeed, divergences on interpretation of these bölge are often key components for distinguishing one musical style or school from another (Bayley and Reigle forthcoming 2020).

Another essential, yet rarely analysed element of makam music is its multi-dimensional timbral palette. The influence of Qu’ranic recitation, with its ‘rules’ for relative syllable length, including elongation of soft consonants such as ‘l’ and ‘n’ in the nasal cavity and similar nuances, helps create multi-dimensional timbral palettes within a single vocal line, or even between sustained vowels and ‘soft consonants’ (l, for example) of a single word (Nelson 2001). Makam music instrumentalists such as Tanburi Cemil Bey were profoundly influenced by Qur’anic reciters. The sound palette of makam music thus directly relates back to recitation, and is therefore the stuff of revelation: the Qu’ran is an essentially orally transmitted document (ibid.), whose content must be recited (sung) in order to have its full meaning comprehended. Recitation of the Qu’ran, is, then, a form of philosophy which must be embodied in sound to be understood, again bringing philosophy into practice.

Descriptions of makam music as ‘monophonic’, therefore, miss the inherent depth inherent in both its tuning and timbral soundscape, and depth of performative meaning. Instead, we can hear in makam a fluid, multi-dimensional sound aesthetic, shaped by pitch, subtlety of nuance and subtle timbral modulation. All of these are central to makam’s ability to convey spiritual states, and together with seyir (melodic shape) combine to manifest the hal (states of being), transmitted from one generation of musicians to the next, and to their listeners. It is thus evident that none of this transmission of the profoundest truths of the interrelated cultures of Qur’anic recitation, tasawwuf, or makam would be possible without performance.

**Movement and whirling**

Like music, movement is intrinsic to the way of tasawwuf. We can see this in the sway and pulse of dhikr and the bodily movements of the breath as well as in the whirling sema. Vibration in this way speaks, shows and expresses the truth of the heart. Such conversations may be obfuscated at the level of language and yet they are intricate, palpable and profound in their own circular, moving mode of expression. Whirling can only be known as an embodied form, for it is not just movement but a living breathing philosophy which must be encountered repeatedly and over time for its processes to become perceptible.

Whirling as a practice was utilised across the ancient world, by Zoroastrians, shamans of Central Asia, and is still currently a part of the Tibetan Five Times Rites. Dhikr, fasting and prayer, as methods of getting into contact with the subtle bodies and dimensions, have been part of the cultural landscape of Central Asia and Anatolia since before the times of
Islam (Sultanova 2011). Whirling itself came into popularity on a larger scale with Mevlana Jalulddin Rūmī, father of the Mevlevi Order of Sufis. Specific ceremonies for whirling, called *sema*, are enacted by the Mevlevi, Naqshabandi, Cerrahi, Qadiri and Bektashi orders as well as by the Alevi. The Ruhaniat Order from America also utilises whirling, as do many ‘New Age’ spiritual developments such as the work created and expounded by Osho.  

Whirling is a movement of rotation (like usul). It is both ancient and achievable by everybody as there is no fixed form which dictates that one must whirl fast or slow, with arms raised or low. The spheres of the planet rotate around the sun. Whorls of water and wind move life through the planet. Our blood rotates as it runs in spirals through our arteries and veins. It is the turning around of bones, muscles and intention upon an *axis mundae*. The term *axis mundae* has been used to denote that the physical axis of the human, the spine, is also representative and functionally in service to the axes of the material and spiritual worlds (McClure 2015). The actual movement of the whirling can be done in a number of ways: with two feet, with one foot that pushes, to the left and to the right, with arms raised and with arms in rest. What is central to all forms of whirling across the many diverse Sufi orders is the humbleness of the approach. For while all things spin, whirling is more than spinning. For Sufis, whirling is the heart cracking open. It is a meeting of the divine and the personal within a moment of time. Whirling is vulnerability grounded by trust. It is a moment where visual dominance fades and the senses reorganise to face inwards. Finally, whirling is a vibration which expresses fully in our bodies when a tenderness of heart is allowed and manifest. From the juxtaposition of action and surrender, effort and vulnerability, power and tenderness, the dynamic and transformative philosophies of *tasawwuf* arise.

Sefik Can, sheik of the Mevlevi Order in Turkey, writes:

> Whirling (*sema*) means listening to music, moving with the excitement induced by the music, and entering into ecstasy...whirling has different effects on people’s spirits. It enhances one’s love of God and produces many spiritual states. These states clean the vices in the heart and finally open the eye of the heart [...] This whirling is not the mere turning of the body. This whirling is turning with the heart, spirit, love, faith and with all one’s physical and spiritual existence.

*(2011, pp. 204 and 205)*
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Can continue s, ‘That whirling and that harmony take you from yourself, and you also go to the beyond. When you feel all this outside the whirling, what would you have felt if you had participated in the whirling?’ (2011, p. 205). This highlights for us the necessity of embodied experience.

The semazen, one who dances the sema, is known as the one who stands at the door between worlds. This stance is a generative matrix, a humbling and submissive act, a process made manifest through physical and mental effort. Can such a stance be an art? Is there possibility for a spiritual basis to emerge in collective thought, for an articulation of esoteric philosophies in multifaceted expressions? It has been said by some that in the future, the whirling sema may be recognised as a form of art, a high art with a special purpose that is known and respected by many (Celebi 2009). It is precisely this sort of intercultural possibility where we find fruitful intersections between performance, philosophy and world philosophies and a valuable contribution to the canon of performance philosophy as a field.

Transcultural performance philosophy in 21st-century music and makam today

Today, a new performance philosophy is emerging that takes makam as one of its central elements onto a broader world stage: transcultural music. Transcultural musical practices create new music that draws with integrity from the idioms of more than one established tradition in their creation. Such practices often implicitly address, whether purely in more abstract ‘musical’ terms, or more openly, the host of questions and possibilities brought forth by the 21st-century phenomena of globalisation, cultures colliding, rapidly changing societal demographics, climate change and proximity of peoples to ‘others’ unlike themselves in most parts of the globe today. Conflicts between forms of modernism and ‘tradition’ may also be a part of this, as divisions between ‘high’ and ‘low’, commercial and non-commercial and so on. Many transculturally active musicians’ intentions relate to mitigating or healing the still-present effects of colonialism in post-colonial societies. Others may have no intention except a strong desire to ‘bridge’ across divides or demystify the ‘other’ (Brinner 2009). Far from being geographically or ethnically defined, transcultural (sometimes called ‘transtraditional’) music may even be attempted by musicians who have grown up in the same city, but live entirely different musical lives when not collaborating.8 The impetus itself may spring from a desire directly of musicians, or may be at the request of producers, festival directors or composers.

Makam music has become an integral part of such ‘inter-’ or ‘transcultural’ experiments within contemporary music, especially since around 2003. Ensembles such as Kudsi Erguner (France), Hezarfen Ensemble (Turkey), Atlas (Netherlands), Omnibus (Uzbekistan), along with composers such as Onur Türkmen, Michael Ellison, Artyom Kim and Jakhongir Shukur today have in common the desire to draw on makam as a major world tradition while spinning out new musical idioms that draw from multiple sources, commissioning and producing influential new works in the process. The aforementioned ensembles diversify the sounds and musical culture composers can draw on, give glimpses of new sonic worlds and combinations to be discovered, and are finding enthusiastic audiences in this ‘in between’ time excited by new aesthetic possibilities emerging from sometimes integrating, sometimes colliding performance philosophies. At stake is not only the evolving status of makam music worldwide, clearly enhanced by such efforts, but also the very definition of what ‘contemporary music’ means in the present time. This encompasses a vision that composers and practitioners of music around the world increasingly will have the experience and tools to create works inclusive of multiple traditions, drawn on as equally respected sources and practices.
In such a new and diverse area of activity (there is not one style but rather a multiplicity of possibilities), it is unknown before even a single project how the value or artistic results will be defined; indeed, it is questionable whether the ‘old’ standards of criticism and valuation even apply. Transcultural performance also raises a host of questions – who is its audience, are there multiple perspectives for appreciating such art – how can such creations achieve satisfactory unity or integrity; by whose standards are success or failure defined? Whatever the answers, it is clear that transcultural music opens a host of new, stimulating, aesthetic possibilities directly related to our time. What is also evident is that inter- and transcultural ‘free play of the imagination’ within the arts can begin to address wider societal issues of shifting identities where words often fail, sometimes seriously, often playfully. A transcultural performance philosophy which includes makam in relation to other contemporary music opens doors for not only aforementioned structural enrichments and hal, but also increased capacity for transcending the hegemonic monoculturalism that too often exists in ignorance of others equally valid still today, and reconnection to the heart.

Conclusion

Tasawwuf, rooted in Islam but also bigger than Islam and inclusive of many truths from other mystical schools of thought and practice, has its own philosophies that are of vital importance to the intercultural and worlding projects of our era. In putting tasawwuf, Islam and performance philosophy in conversation with each other, it is hoped that openings may emerge not only in thought, but in practice through and with the arts. We remind the reader that transcultural efforts, which move beyond appropriation and through desire, offer a pathway where art and the divine might meet once again, as they have done in previous civilisations. The dimensions of knowledge opened by the particular study of tasawwuf find specific relevance to debates of both foundation and application, as practical means of engagement where intellect and knowledge move beyond classification into possibilities rich in difference, connectivity and divine inspiration. The care and respect which are necessary in encountering tasawwuf have been highlighted throughout this paper. Here, we remind the reader that encounters with the sacred are necessarily experiential. When the heart and mind come into reciprocity and resonance with each other, the synergistic intelligence which emerges is poignantly Sufi in nature and it is this poignancy of thought and experience which we offer to the field of performance philosophy as another way of knowing, of doing and of being in the world.

Tasawwuf is in itself a living, breathing philosophy. While its practices may be shared upon the performance stage, their true intent and direction are for the murid’s life. In opening the practices of tasawwuf to performance, the murid who is also a performer may grow in new directions and the fruits of their practice shared with a welcoming public. This is a crossover where performance and spiritual practice meet in the life of the murid, for the benefit of all. Thus, performance philosophy can embrace tasawwuf as a mode of knowing, a lived philosophy and a spiritual endeavour at once. This embrace is transcultural; it opens new thresholds and directions to philosophies of the West through discourse, practice and, where possible, sincere engagement.

Notes

1 The perennialist school of thought studies spirituality and religion from various world traditions, with a specific emphasis on Sufism by many of its proponents. Looking to the foundational truths across religions and systems, discourses embrace that which is universal in nature and specific in culture. The authors of this paper are from the traditionalist arm of perennialist thought.
2 While Sufism may encompass the beliefs, practices and dimensions of multiple religions, Tasawwuf is generally related to the Islamic expression of Sufism. In this regard, Sufism and Tasawwuf are one and the same, and hold the same truths; however, Sufism may extend itself into additional cultural manifestations.

3 The term ‘subtle body’ is used to denote aspects of the self which extend beyond the skin: the magnetic fields which extend through the emotional and mental fields into and across space, the spiritual body and aspects of the self known as the spirit and soul.

4 The suite of compositions comprising the musical accompaniment for Mevlevi Whirling.

5 Uşşak, Hüseyni, Hüzzam, Saba, Karşıgar – the makam structures most distinctive to music of this geography (Necdet Yaşar, in Signell 1976).

6 Şeb-i Arus is the yearly celebration of the passing of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rūmī, founder of the Mevlevi Order of Sufis. Sufis from around the world gather in Konya, Turkey, and wherever they are locally, to hold sema (whirling ceremony). The image shows the author, McClure, and her companions in sema in the style of Oruç Gûvenç, with several different orders practising together.

7 The author, Hannah McClure, trained with a Mevlevi Order in London and later connected to the work and legacy of Rhami Oruç Gûvenç in Turkey. Gûvenç’s work brought together the whirling forms, music and practices of many different Sufi orders to create an inclusive whirling sema which welcomes murids from every religion and part of the world.

8 For example, a ney player from the makam tradition, and a cello player from the Western orchestral tradition, who have both grown up in Istanbul.

9 A distinction is also to be made between intercultural or transcultural musicking, based on Ric Knowles’ (Knowles 2010) Theatre & Interculturalism, addressing a host of other adjectives applicable for any art form drawing more than one culture into its creative orbit. In brief, intercultural interaction involves the serious learning and apprehension of the forms, aesthetics and performance practices of some ‘other’ tradition or culture. Transcultural, as defined by the present author (Ellison 2016), means to draw extensively from more than one artistic tradition freely to create something new, using concretely recognisable performance elements (i.e. instruments, performance practices) of more than one culture in these new creations.
Quran. Religious text.