

Dervish: Program notes

Dervish is a fantasy on a 15th century Turkish *semai*, a dance used in the ceremonies of the priests in the Sufi sect of Islam known as "whirling dervishes". It begins with an improvisatory prelude based on my study of actual performances, which then leads into the *semai*. I have chosen to stay very close to the authentic material at the beginning of the piece because the musical choices made there are both highly sophisticated and quite different than what I as a western musician would make. The remainder of the piece is a free and largely rhythmic development of the opening material, leading to an intense climax. The *semai* is in 10/8 meter, which is subdivided into two units of 5 beats. Most of the piece is similarly organized in units of five beats.

The Sufis have long been considered unique, indeed heretical, by the "mainstream" Islamic hierarchies for many reasons. These include the sensuality of their rituals and, perhaps above all, their sense of the importance of music in religious practice. In the wake of the momentous events of 2001, these aspects of the Sufi tradition are more important than ever. The perversion of the Islamic tradition by puritanical and fanatical extremists can perhaps find an authentic counterbalance in the joyous spirituality of the dervishes.

Dervish was premiered by the Michigan Saxophone Quartet, led by Donald Sinta, in New York City and Philadelphia in February, 1999.

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