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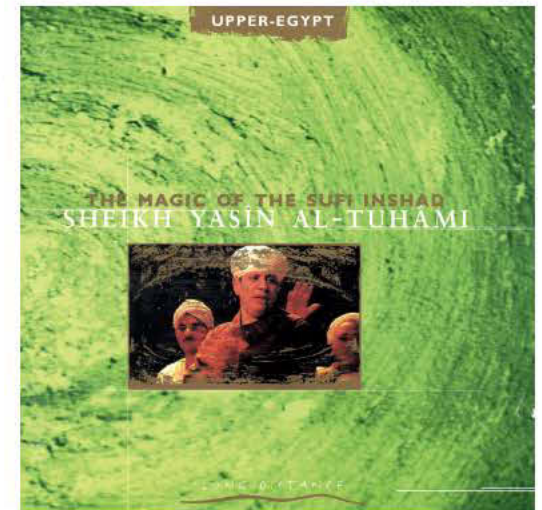
The Possibility and Necessity of Musical Ecstasy (*Tarab*) in the Mystic Sufi Chant of Egypt

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The aesthetic concept of *tarab* finds no ready translation from the Arabic. Narrowly defined, it refers both to musical ecstasy and to the traditional musical-poetic resources for producing it. *Tarab* also depends on consonant performer-listener interactions, in which experienced listeners express emotion through vocal exclamations and gestures; the performer in turn is both moved and directed by such feedback. Through this dynamic relationship, emotion is shared, exchanged, and amplified among participants. The harmonious relation between singer and poetry is also critical to *tarab*.

Tarab represented Arab music's aesthetic ideal up until the mid-20th century, after which it began to fade, a victim of musical modernization and Westernization. However, listeners often describe Sufi *inshâd* (mystical chant), as rich in *tarab*. Indeed, in its musical features and performative dynamics, Sufi music is reminiscent of older Arab music in which *tarab* prevailed.

In this paper I attempt to solve this puzzle: Why did Sufi music remain laden with *tarab*, while secular music became largely bereft? A structural explanation is located in the nature of Sufi worldviews, concepts, socio-spiritual organizations, and practices. A careful analysis shows how Sufism both facilitates and requires the harmonious socio-spiritual relationships among poet, singer, and listeners upon which *tarab* depends.



MERCREDI 13 AVRIL À 18 H

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